

Multilingualism in Cyprus: Perceptions of Majority and Minority/Immigrant Speakers

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Language ideologies, attitudes, emotions, beliefs, linguistic behaviour, ethnic markers, community membership and identities in multilingual settings are intertwined (Cummins, 2015; Heller and McLaughlin, 2017; Pérez-Izaguirre and Cenoz, 2020). Successful societal membership is associated with psychosocial adaptation, hybrid identity, selective acculturation or biculturalism, the adjustment of an individual to new psychological and social conditions (Schwartz et al., 2014; Leszczensky et al., 2019; Boland, 2020). Individual's identity is related to the sense of belonging, integration, engagement in the current space (Chimienti et al., 2019). Self-identity is fluid and flexible, it comprises individual and collective identity, habitus, or unconscious identity, agency and reflexivity, which is re-evaluated and adjusted throughout the life trajectory of a migrant and is connected to citizenship and solidarity (Lizardo, 2017). According to Portes et al. (2016), there are culturalist and structuralist approaches to the integration of the immigrant/minority groups into the mainstream society, which focus on cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic assimilation.

This study investigated the perceptions of majority and minority/immigrant speakers of multilingualism in Cyprus. The participants of our study were 30 Cypriot Greek speakers and 30 second-generation immigrants in Cyprus with various L1 background: Russian, Georgian, Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Romanian, English, Arabic and minority speakers of Armenian (age range: 18-27). The data was collected via written questionnaires and in-depth oral semi-structured interviews as well as observations with a focus on linguistic interaction patterns and material culture at home. We also implemented an in-depth ethnographic landscape analysis of visible semiotic signs in public space, trying to interpret their indexicality and deeper layers of meaning (Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert and Maly, 2014) in relation to multilingualism situation in the country.

The analysis of the data showed that minority speakers and second-generation immigrants have hybrid language and cultural identity, perceptions regarding citizenship, inclusion and belonging. They try to assimilate to the target society, but at the same time they have a strong link the community of residence, with their L1 country, their heritage or home language. The participants also have hybrid language practice as they use mixed/multiple languages at home and outside. Overall, they have a positive attitude towards multilingualism and multilingual landscape in Cyprus.

The majority speakers also have a favourable view on multilingualism in Cyprus, though they admit that there is a difference between younger and older generation of CG population regarding the acceptance/discrimination of "foreign" influence in Cyprus as the former tend to be "more open-minded". Their attitudes depend on immigrant/minority language(s) status, socio-economic factors, level of the majority language proficiency. English as an international language and lingua franca has an important role in their linguistic repertoires. English-CG code-switching/mixing is a common phenomenon, especially in on-line and off-line communication of young generation of Cypriots.

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