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The Discursive Construction of Ethnic Identities: The Case of Greek-Cypriot Students

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Abstract

This study examines how Greek-Cypriot students aged 12 to 18, an understudied group of students, construct their ethnic identity in a complex setting such as Cyprus and what motivates the students in the selection of ethnic identity labels. The choice to focus on students aged 12-18 was made on the hypothesis that young children, who did not experience the 1974 war in Cyprus, may have a different perception of ethnic identity in contrast to adults who are generationally closer to the war. Data are collected by means of interviews. A social constructionist approach is used for the analysis of ethnic identity construction. The results show that Greek-Cypriot students use the ethnic labels Greek, Greek-Cypriot, and Cypriot to construct their ethnic identities and they change and negotiate between these ethnic labels when talking about their identity. The students' choice of a specific ethnic label seems to be widely motivated by ideologies connected to politics, language, religion, and education.

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1. Introduction

The present study examines the sociolinguistic situation of the Greek-Cypriot community of Cyprus, the third largest island in the Mediterranean (Richter, 2010), where two forms of the same language are spoken: Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG), the official variety of Cyprus, and Greek-Cypriot (henceforth GC), the non-standard native variety of Greek-Cypriots. Cyprus is (politically and geographically) divided into two distinct communities, the Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot, as a result of the 1974 war. This study employs the term 'Greek-Cypriot' to refer to all Cypriots living in the Greek-speaking community of Cyprus because the term 'Cypriot' may also include 'Turkish-Cypriots', the citizens of the Turkish-Cypriot community of Cyprus. A close relationship exists between Cyprus and Greece and SMG is spoken in the Greek-Cypriot community. The prevailing language ideology in Cyprus is that GC is a dialect of SMG; this ideology is mainly transmitted by the educational system of Cyprus, in addition to the ideology that Greek-Cypriots are ethnically Greek (Arvaniti, 2006a).

This research is different from other studies on ethnic identity in Cyprus because it investigates specifically the ethnic identities of an underexamined group of Greek-Cypriot students, aged 12 to 18, and how they construct their ethnic identity in discourse. Research has been carried out on the issue of ethnic identity in Cyprus regarding the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot identities in particular (possibly due to the present political situation of Cyprus, namely, the North part of Cyprus being under Turkish occupation) and to a lesser extent, the Greek and Cypriot identities. Specifically, previous research on identity in Cyprus mainly involves studies on the construction of Greek and Turkish ethnicities in Cyprus (Pollis, 1996), Greek-Cypriots' narratives about the 1974 war (Papadakis, 1998), the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot identities (e.g., Spyrou, 2002, 2006) on children's perception of the 'Turk'), children's national and European identities (Ioannidou, 2004; Philippou, 2005) and university students' construction of linguistic and social identity (Papapavlou & Sophocleous, 2009). An overview of ethnic identity studies in Cyprus

suggests that the perception and construction of ethnic identity by Greek-Cypriots, and particularly by adolescent students aged 12 to 18, has not been the focus of previous studies in Cyprus. This age group may perceive and construct their ethnic identity differently from adults as they did not experience the 1974 war like their parents and grandparents did. As noted above, Greek-Cypriots live in a linguistically and politically complex context which possibly shapes the way they perceive themselves ethnically. To illustrate this, they are native speakers of both GC (a non-standard variety often associated with negative attitudes; Papapavlou, 1998) and SMG (which is also the official language of Greece) which is formally acquired through education from the age of six. The Greek language and identity are highly promoted to Greek-Cypriots through education. Simultaneously, Greek-Cypriots live in a country divided into two distinct communities and Turkish-Cypriots or Turks in general are represented in their minds as the 'enemy' (Spyrou, 2006). Therefore, the present study aims to answer the question of how diglossic speakers (in Ferguson's (1959) terms), in this case Greek-Cypriot adolescents, define themselves ethnically in a bicomunal and Greek-centred setting such as Cyprus.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Ethnic Identity and Ideologies in Cyprus

Research in Cyprus suggests that political and language ideologies influence language policy (and, consequently, education) and Greek-Cypriots' perception and construction of ethnic identities (e.g., Karoulla-Vrikki, 2007; Karyolemou, 2001, 2002). Previous research also suggests that although both Cypriot and Greek identities are significant for Greek-Cypriots, the Cypriot identity prevails over the Greek identity (Peristianis, 2006; Philippou, 2005). To begin with, political beliefs play a significant role in Cyprus as they are connected to the history of the island and its present situation (the division of the island). Specifically, the political and historical developments in Cyprus have placed Greek-Cypriots onto a continuum of two ideologies, Cyprocentrism, which considers the Cypriot identity as the ethnic identity in Cyprus, and Hellenocentrism, which considers the Greek identity as the ethnic identity in Cyprus

(Karoulla-Vrikki, 2007; see also Mavratsas, 1999; Papadakis, 1998). Language ideology also affects Cypriot language policy as the prevailing language ideology in Cyprus is that GC is a dialect of SMG and, consequently, that Cypriots are ethnically Greek (Arvaniti, 2006b). SMG is the official language of Cyprus and it is considered as the national language and as the main mechanism for defining ethnic identity in Cyprus (Goutsos & Karyolemou, 2004; Hadjioannou, Tsiplakou, & Kappler, 2011; Karyolemou, 2001). SMG has been regarded as a close link between Greek-Cypriots and their mother country Greece, and connected with the Greek ethnic identity (Ioannidou, 2009).

The Greek identity is associated with the Greek language and religion, while SMG is “the first and perhaps the most important component of Greek identity” and connects Cyprus with the rest of the Greek world (Ioannidou, 2009, pp. 126-127). This is illustrated in Philippou’s (2005) study on how ten-year-old Greek-Cypriot pupils construct social identities in discourse (Greek-Cypriot, Cypriot, Greek, Mediterranean, European, age, gender, religion, locality, pupil, child, and human). The results of her study showed that the pupils’ religious and national identities (that is, Cypriot, Greek-Cypriot, and Greek) were the most important. In their attempt to explain their Greek and Greek-Cypriot identity, pupils talked about common religion, language, customs and habits, common kinship and common bonds of blood with Greeks, and simultaneously expressed positive attitudes toward the Greek people and said that they considered Cyprus as a Greek island (Philippou, 2005). According to the Cypriot policy makers and to the curricula, the ethnic survival of Greek-Cypriots depends on the preservation of their Greek identity and particularly on the preservation of SMG (Ioannidou, 2009; see also Karoulla-Vrikki, 2007). As Ioannidou (2009) concludes, the policy in Cyprus is clearly based on ideological and national reasoning.

Hellenocentrism has influenced most of the main Cypriot institutions (such as the Cypriot state and judicial system, the Cypriot political parties, the Cypriot mass media, the Cypriot economic and financial system, the Cypriot church and educational system) which have been consequently ‘Hellenised’ (Mavratsas,

1999). ‘Hellenism’ is a term denoting the enduring unity of Greeks in time and space (Papadakis, 2003). An example of this is the primary and secondary educational system in Cyprus, which has until recently been a replica of the educational system of Greece and is considered as the crucial mechanism for the formation of a Greek ethnic identity in Cyprus (Mavratsas, 1999; see also Karoulla-Vrikki, 2007). Since the Greek identity and consciousness is promoted in Cyprus, the educational system of Cyprus is modelled after the Greek system and the Greek identity is transmitted to Greek-Cypriots through school and through the use of SMG. It seems that language and political ideologies are influential factors in institutions of power in Cyprus such as education; hence, children go to school and learn that SMG is the language of education, the media, religion, and politics and that Cypriots are ethnically Greek.

2.2. Various Approaches to Identity Analysis

From the social constructionist perspective, the study of identity and ethnic identity has taken various directions, and various approaches have been proposed aiming at a systematic discourse analysis of identity construction. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) for example proposed a framework based on five principles (emergence, positionality, indexicality, relationality, and partialness) for the analysis of identity as formed in linguistic interaction and considered identity in terms of its social practices. Moreover, De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak (1999, p. 154) suggest that “there is *no such thing as the one and only national identity* in an essentializing sense” (italics in the original) but that different identities are constructed in discourse according to context, namely, the social field, the situational setting of the discursive act and the topic of discussion. As “individual people change constantly in the course of their lives, be it physically, psychologically or socially”, the concept of identity denotes an element changeable through time and engaged in a process (Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl, & Liebhart, 1999, p. 11). In their study of Austrian nation and identity, De Cillia, Reisigl, and Wodak (1999, p. 149) examined how national sameness, uniqueness and difference are constructed in discourse and which linguistic devices and discursive strategies are used for these constructions; they suggest that their method

can be applied to other cases besides the construction of Austrian identity.

On the other hand, Meinhof and Galasinski (2005) suggest not considering linguistic mechanisms in terms of sameness, uniqueness, and so forth, as these categories may prejudge what the contextually relevant features of identity are in a concrete community. They maintain that there cannot be universal linguistic resources which construct identity (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005). The reason for this is that the discourse analysis of authentic language is “an interpretative, context-sensitive, qualitative reading of texts”, and it cannot be done in a mechanical way by ticking off instances of specific lexical or grammatical items as evidence of a particular set or sets of identities (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005, p. 16). Speakers’ linguistic resources in identity construction should not be decided in advance; what Meinhof and Galasinski (2005, pp.15-17) have called the “language of belonging” is the whole spectrum of language tools (including categories such as time and place) used to construct the speaker’s identity within the particular context. For these researchers, identities, whether ethnic, regional, or local, are context-bound; “language constructs ethnicity here and now, rather than universally or permanently” (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005, p. 18).

Although people invoke multiple identities where identity is a choice, the society (or the community or relatives) may also provide various identities for people, which do not necessarily agree with one another. This is what Meinhof and Galasinski (2005, pp. 10-11) call “imposition of identities”; that is, these identities are ideologically motivated. Considering identities to be flexible and changeable does not mean that they are haphazard, because “if discourse is social and subject to all kinds of social and cultural rules”, the same can be said of identities (Meinhof & Galasinski, 2005, p. 11). To relate this to the case of Cyprus, regardless of how Greek-Cypriots identify themselves, when completing an official application form they have to choose between given identities such as ‘Cypriot’ or ‘other nationality’, which is possibly due to the ideology that people born in Cyprus are Cypriot. In such cases, people cannot necessarily choose their (preferred) identity,

which may be the same as that offered, or it may be different such as Greek-Cypriot or Greek. However, these imposed identities are not constructed by people themselves in interaction but by society.

Following Meinhof and Galasinski’s (2005) view that the indicators of identity are multiple and varied, this study takes a bottom-up approach and does not assume a priori specific linguistic resources as identity indicators. This study adopts a social constructionist approach in the conviction that identities are flexible, context-driven, and constructed in discourse. The social constructionist theory regards discourse as an object of common exchange and “as an orientation to knowledge and to the character of psychological constructs, constructionism forms a significant challenge to conventional understandings” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266). Social constructionism considers gender for example as being interactionally accomplished, as an identity being negotiated and renegotiated constantly through linguistic exchange and social performance (Cerulo, 1997). That is, in the social constructionist approach, the researcher is interested in what kind of identity a speaker is trying to construct in performing a verbal act or in displaying a particular stance (Ochs, 1993). Generally, according to the post-modernist perspective, social structures, and consequently, social identities are not fixed objects which can be associated with linguistic objects; in fact, linguistic phenomena cannot be straightforwardly associated as they are very changeable and flexible (Gafaranga, 2005).

The reason for selecting this approach is that focusing on the whole language spectrum and not on specific categories will help avoid omitting something that could be useful for this study. In the social constructionist view, the way people understand the world is historically and culturally specific (Burr, 2003). The concepts and categories people use are the products of a particular culture and history. The notions of ‘children’ and ‘gender’, for example, have undergone significant changes within the timespan of the last fifty years or so; what was thought ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ in the past for children to do has changed (e.g., they have legal rights). Similarly, the categories of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ were questioned with regard to the debate of how to classify people after gender

reassignment surgery (Burr, 2003). For these reasons, this study investigates the ethnic identity of Greek-Cypriot students as they construct it in discourse and rejects the view that identity is assigned to individuals. In other words, instead of a brought-along identity (such as Zimmerman's (1998) transportable identities), I suggest viewing identities as constructed in discourse and, therefore, ideologically driven.

3. Methodology

This paper is part of a bigger study that uses a mixed methods approach and data are collected by means of classroom observations, interviews, questionnaires, and an experiment similar to the matched guise technique (Labov, 1966). The mixed methods approach has been selected in this study for triangulation purposes. The triangulation design involves gathering data from various sources, using various data collection methods and theories to strengthen the conclusions resulting from the data analysis and discussion of results (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). In this paper, I discuss the results obtained from the interviews. The 450 participants of this study were male and female students attending Greek-speaking state schools in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus, specifically high school and lyceum students. Six male and six female students were interviewed, four students from each age group (12, 15, and 18-year-old students). The students, who were unknown to the researcher before the beginning of the research, were selected according to three main criteria: age, nationality, and type of school. The data collection engaged three main age groups: 12, 15, and 18-year-old students. The students' nationality was (Greek-) Cypriot and they attended state schools in Cyprus where the language of instruction is SMG. The reason for focusing on students attending state schools is that the language of instruction in most private schools in Cyprus is English (Karoulla-Vrikki, 2007), whereas for the purposes of this research I needed students studying in Greek-speaking schools.

The interviews were conducted in Nicosia, outside the school setting, and specifically, in the interviewees' houses. The interview is often viewed as a core method in qualitative research (Richards, 2009) and can be defined as "a conversation with a purpose" (Burgess, 1997, p.

102). The type of interview used in this research was the semi-structured interview. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher has a clear picture of the topics that need to be covered and for this reason, an interview guide is used (Richards, 2009). As the interview was semi-structured, new questions and sub-themes were allowed to emerge and were discussed. In this project, the interview guide consisted of approximately 24 questions. The interviews were recorded, and the students were reassured that nobody would listen or have access to those recordings besides the researcher. The interviews lasted almost an hour for the group of 18-year-old students and 20 to 30 minutes for the groups of 12 and 15-year-old students; this is possibly due to the fact that the 18-year-old students seemed more relaxed and more confident in expressing themselves than the other two age groups.

The language used in the interviews was a mixture of both SMG and GC to make the interaction less formal and make the participants feel comfortable in expressing themselves. Otherwise, the use of SMG would possibly make the students pay attention to how they speak and not what they say. The interviews, which are qualitative data, were fully transcribed in SMG as GC has no official orthography and were translated into English using an approach faithful to meaning; that is, the purpose of the translation was to transfer the SMG data to English without changing the meaning of the sentences.

Ethics and trustworthiness are essential issues to consider when conducting quantitative and qualitative research (Dörnyei, 2007). The interviews involved personal contact and, therefore, the participants were treated with anonymity and confidentiality and were reassured that their personal details would remain anonymous and confidential. Also, for ethical reasons, informed consent was obtained from the parents whose children participated in the interviews before carrying out the research as most of the students were minors. For anonymity and confidentiality reasons, the names used in the interview extracts presented below are not the real names of the participants; next to each pseudonym, the age of each student is included.

4. Results

The interview had the form of an informal discussion and it started with a few questions unrelated to the research scope (such as about family and school) in order to allow the interviewees to relax, and proceeded with introductory questions such as “where do you come from?” or “what language do you speak?”. When students were asked to talk about their origin and nationality, most of them (7 out of 12) defined themselves as Cypriots and the motivating factors behind the choice of this label resides in the fact that they are of Cypriot origin, Cyprus is their place of residence and the language they speak is GC. This is illustrated in the following extract.

Extract 1

Interviewer: Where do you come from?

Maria (age 12): I am Cypriot as I was born in Cyprus and I speak Cypriot. My parents are also from Cyprus.

Interviewer: So, are the people born in Cyprus Cypriot?

Maria (age 12): Well, if their parents are also born in Cyprus, then yes.

A smaller number of interviewees (4 out of 12) defined themselves as “Greek-Cypriot”:

Extract 2

Interviewer: You said that you come from Cyprus. So, what is your nationality?

Elena (age 18): Greek-Cypriot. I am also Greek, not Greek, I feel Greek but I wasn't born in Greece in order to say yes I am. But I feel Greek and I believe that in Cyprus, Greeks came from Greece and the civilisation started.

Interviewer: Why do you consider yourself Greek-Cypriot? Why do you feel Greek?

Elena (age 18): Because I speak Greek, I have Greek education, I am Orthodox and Christian and I live in Cyprus.

In this extract, the student constructs her Greek-Cypriot identity. This example shows the kind of identity work that might be going on behind a specific choice of label. The choice of the label Greek-Cypriot seems to be motivated, as the student explains, by the fact that she is not Greek because she was not born in Greece but because she feels Greek. The negotiation between “Greek” and “Greek-Cypriot” at the beginning of Extract 2, “*Greek-Cypriot. I am*

also Greek, not Greek, I feel Greek”, suggests the identity work going on behind the student's choice of “Greek-Cypriot”. This is also evident in the student's construction of common values between Cyprus and Greece such as origin, language, religion, and education. Her construction of ethnic identity in relation to her religious identity (Orthodox) and her linguistic identity (a Greek speaker) reflects the relationality principle in which identity is a relational phenomenon (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Only one interviewee (out of the twelve interviewees) defined himself as “Greek” and rejected the term “Greek-Cypriot” as he argued that this is a new term introduced after Cyprus Independence (1960) devoid of historical credibility.

Extract 3

Marios (age 18): I consider myself Greek because “Greek-Cypriot” was introduced after Independence took place. Before the Independence, the term “Greek-Cypriot” did not exist. But I am not going to give my opinion on why Independence took place or why union (with Greece) did not take place. I consider myself Greek. I am integrated in the Greek nation, I believe in Orthodoxy, I speak Greek. And generally, my culture is Greek.

In this extract, the interviewee explicitly constructs in discourse his sense of “belonging” (as in Meinhof & Galasinski's (2005) terms) to the Greek nation; he defines himself as Greek through the construction of common values between Cyprus and Greece such as language, religion, and culture by emphasising the fact that he belongs, he is “integrated” to the Greek nation. The indexicality principle (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) emerges as the student constructs his identity with explicit reference to identity categories and labels (such as “Greek” and “Greek-Cypriot”). What seems to motivate the student's choice of label, namely, “Greek” and the rejection of other ethnic identity labels such as “Greek-Cypriot” is his political ideology. Namely, he is against Cyprus' Independence and in favour of a union with Greece, an ideology mainly held by the Cypriot right wing party. This shows that besides language ideology, which is a motivating factor for the choice of ethnic identity in both Extracts 2 and

3, political ideology also influences students' ethnic identity construction in Cyprus.

Moreover, students constructed their ethnic identities by creating three associations: that of language sameness between SMG and GC, of national sameness between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots, and of common values between Cyprus and Greece (such as language, origin, and religion). For most students, and particularly the 18-year-old interviewees, the language sameness in terms of form/structure between SMG and GC may have an ideological origin. The extract below illustrates this.

Extract 4

Interviewer: You said before that you speak Greek. What about the Cypriot dialect? Do you speak both?

Marios (age 18): In my opinion, these two (SMG and GC) are interconnected. You cannot split them. The one cannot exist without the other. There is the Greek language and the Cypriot dialect is based on the Greek language. It cannot, that is, you cannot remove the bases, the structures and just leave the surface. It will logically collapse.

In this extract, the interviewee constructs an ideological bond between SMG and GC. The indexicality principle (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) is reflected in stance taking; that is, the student constructs an ideological bond between SMG and GC, and thus, his linguistic identity, by maintaining that SMG and GC form one entity. The strength of this ideological bond is expressed by the use of the verbs "interconnected", "cannot split", "cannot exist", "cannot remove", and "will collapse". The personal pronoun "you" has an indexical function referring possibly to all Greek-Cypriots suggesting that they should not differentiate SMG and GC as they constitute the same variety. Also, the use of the personal pronoun "you" instead of "I" may imply that the student wishes to exclude himself from the actions of "splitting" and "removing" as for him the relationship, the connection between SMG and GC is a reality and he would not even consider differentiating the two.

According to some students, this ideological bond, which explains the language sameness between SMG and GC, is generally associated

with ethnicity and origin. That is to say, although some students acknowledged that Cyprus is not part of Greece but an independent state, most students reported considering that Cyprus and GC, as the other Greek islands and dialects (such as the Cretan), are part of Hellenism (*Marios 18*). 'Hellenism' is a term denoting the Greek nation in general, all over the world including Cypriots (Babinotis, 2008). In Cyprus, it is often used as the 'Cypriot Hellenism' such as in newspaper articles where its use may suggest a degree of nationalism toward Greece. This is illustrated in the extract below.

Extract 5

Interviewer: What is the relationship between Cyprus and Greece?

George (age 18): Cyprus is an independent state. We speak GC which is a dialect of SMG like the Cretan which is also a dialect of SMG.

Interviewer: OK, but Crete is a Greek island while Cyprus is independent. Is the relationship between Cyprus and Greece based on the use of the same official language, SMG?

George (age 18): As Greeks, we are Greeks, the mother country is Greece. We have its language with our characteristics. Language and religion are the two basic things which define a nation. We said before that the first inhabitants of Cyprus were the Achaeans and they left their mark here and we were Hellenised, we became Greek and we are integrated in the Greek nation. It's like the DNA.

In this extract, the interviewee constructs his ethnic identity and the ethnic identity of all Cypriots as Greek; this identity is constructed via indexicality by the use of the personal pronoun "we" (including himself and all Cypriots) and by the use of repetition and nationalistic expressions. Specifically, using repetition, "as Greeks, we are Greeks", the interviewee constructs the "Greekness" (the Greek aspect) of Cyprus which suggests that the relationship between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots is a relationship of national sameness. What seems to motivate the student's choice of the label Greek and its emphasis (repetition), is Cyprus' Greek origin, a fact constructed by most interviewees. In this case, sameness is national, which implies that the two countries, Cyprus and Greece, are ethnically similar. In addition, through this statement, the language

sameness between SMG and GC is evoked in the expression “its language (SMG) with our characteristics”.

The interviewee in Extract 5 also uses nationalistic expressions to construct the national sameness between Cyprus and Greece such as “mother country” (denoting that Greece is the mother country of Cyprus as SMG is the mother language of GC), “the Achaeans left their mark” (denoting the Greek origin of Cyprus), “we were Hellenised” and “DNA” (denoting the bond between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots, their common origin). To justify or explain this sameness, the interviewee constructs common values between Cyprus and Greece such as language (SMG), origin (the Achaeans), and religion (both countries are Orthodox). The relationality principle in this case emerges as relating linguistic identity to ethnic identity and to religious identity, suggesting that identity is a relational phenomenon (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Other students also construct a common identity between Cypriots and Greeks and their statements have nationalistic undertones such as the one below.

Extract 6

Anna (age 15): We have a common identity. Nobody can question this. This is proven through the centuries. The first inhabitants of Cyprus were the Achaeans. The Achaeans had come from Peloponnese and they were the first

people who inhabited Cyprus. The Greek roots of Cyprus emanate from antiquity. Nobody can doubt this and this is proven by the fact that we still speak Greek in Cyprus.

The use of the personal pronoun “we” in Extract 6 has an indexical function referring to both Greeks and Greek-Cypriots; the interviewee explains that the common identity/national sameness between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots is proven by the Greek origin of Cyprus (Achaeans) and by the present use of SMG in Cyprus. Nationalistic undertones emerge in this statement through the repetition of the expressions “nobody can question this”, “nobody can doubt this”, and the use of verbs such as “proven” and “emanate”. In addition, the interviewees’ statements in Extracts 2, 5, and 6 create the false conception that before the Greeks (Achaeans) came to Cyprus (bringing along with them civilization, as the students say) nobody else lived on the island. Since most students in the interviews emphasise the Greek origin of Cyprus, it can be assumed that this false conception is constructed at school, which, as stated in section 2.1, is the main mechanism promoting and cultivating the Greek language and identity.

Furthermore, having categorised themselves ethnically, the interviewees were asked to define the concepts of Greek, Cypriot, and Greek-Cypriot. Table 1 below summarises the definitions provided by the interviewees of this study:

Table 1
Students’ Definitions of Ethnic Labels

A Cypriot	is a Greek-Cypriot or a Turkish-Cypriot lives in Cyprus, has Cypriot parents, is a citizen of Cyprus speaks GC or SMG
A Greek	comes from Greece, has Greek parents, Greek origin is an Albanian-Greek or Pontic-Greek is Orthodox speaks and uses SMG (not GC) in all domains
A Greek-Cypriot	lives in Cyprus, has a Cypriot or Greek parent is Orthodox has Greek education, Greek history speaks SMG or both SMG and GC

Similarly to the extracts analysed above, Table 1 shows that students’ construction of the three ethnic identity labels are motivated by factors such as origin and place of residence, language use, religion, education, and history.

Specifically, in the interviewees’ reports the Cypriot identity is associated with Cyprus and includes Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, which suggests that students may consider Turkish-Cypriots as fellow citizens. The Greek

identity is associated with Greece and includes people with hyphenated identities such as Albanian-Greek, and the Greek-Cypriot identity with both Greek and Cypriot origins. In addition, some students associate the definition of these ethnic labels with language. The Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot identities are associated with speaking GC and SMG, whereas the Greek identity is associated with speaking SMG and “not GC”. Students may wish to emphasise that GC is a variety reserved for Greek-Cypriots and not Greeks, although language sameness between the two varieties emerges throughout the data analysis.

Extract 7

Paul (age 15): A Cypriot is someone who speaks GC but still, it is SMG.

These statements suggest that both varieties are part of Greek-Cypriots’ linguistic identity and through their use, students define themselves ethnically.

According to some students, ethnic self-definition may not always be associated with language, origin or place of residence; it can be a matter of preference, an individual choice.

Extract 8

Paul (age 15): A Greek-Cypriot is someone who wants to be both.

This suggests that Greek-Cypriots can choose the identity label they wish to have, either Cypriot or Greek-Cypriot. In general, according to the interviewees’ definitions presented in Table 1, 15, and 18-year-old students associated “Greek-Cypriot” with religious identity, history, education, language, and origin as these create an ideological bond between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots. For 12-year-old students, the label Greek-Cypriot is related to birthplace (parent from Greece or born in Greece) and language (speaker of SMG and GC). This suggests that for 15 and 18-year-old students, being Greek-Cypriot has more of an ideological dimension (associated with history, religion, and education) rather than actual origin or language spoken, as it is for younger students.

The construction of national sameness between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots also emerged when interviewees were asked how they feel in terms

of identity in various exchanges with Greeks. Specifically, they were asked whether they feel Greek in a friendly encounter with mainland Greeks and perceive the relationship between Greek-Cypriots and mainland Greeks as a “brotherly” one or whether they feel Cypriot and distance themselves from mainland Greeks (that is, by not identifying with them ethnically). Most interviewees reported that they identify themselves ethnically with Greeks when interacting with them and that they perceive this relationship as a brotherly one.

Extract 9

Marios (age 18): I feel that I am Greek too.

Some interviewees further stressed the bond between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots.

Extract 10

Anna (age 15): I basically feel more Greek because I feel that we have a lot in common with the Greeks. So, I wouldn’t try to show that I am Cypriot and stress it in some way.

However, when students were asked to state how they would react if a Greek says something negative about Cyprus or Greek-Cypriots, a disassociation process began. Namely, some interviewees report that they would react negatively if their Greek interlocutors said something negative about Cyprus, undervalued Cyprus or Greek-Cypriots, or tried to differentiate themselves from them, and they would not have a friendly stance toward Greeks. For example, a student stated:

Extract 11

Elena (age 18): Let’s say, if he/she considers that we are not the same and undervalues the fact that I am Cypriot, my Cypriot side will wake up.

These hypothetical comments of Greeks undervaluing Greek-Cypriots and not considering them as Greeks but only Cypriots suggest the different status prestige attached to SMG and GC and reveal a degree of insecurity (Labov, 2003) on the part of Greek-Cypriots about being Cypriots and speaking GC. Although these students had previously defined themselves as Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot by emphasising the bond between Cyprus and

Greece, language sameness, and national sameness, that GC is a dialect of Greek and so forth, they suddenly disassociate themselves from the Greek identity. In other words, on the one hand students associate themselves throughout the interview with the Greek identity, language, and nation, and on the other hand they distance themselves in a hypothetical context where Greeks do not consider Cypriots as ethnically similar. This example also shows that the ethnic identity of the students is changeable as they may define themselves as Cypriot in one context and Greek-Cypriot or Greek in another.

5. Concluding Remarks

This study examined how students use language to construct their ethnic identities within the conceptual framework of social constructionism. During the interviews, which had the form of an informal discussion, students' ethnic identities were negotiated and renegotiated and constructed in relation to other identities such as linguistic, religious, and cultural. These results are similar to Philippou's (2005) study not only in that students relate their ethnic identity to other identities but also in the way they emphasise the common religion, origin, language, customs, and habits with the Greeks.

Although most students identified themselves as Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot and to a lesser extent as Greek, the results suggest that Greek-Cypriots embrace all three ethnic identities, Cypriot, Greek, and Greek-Cypriot, and express positive feelings toward these identities. Therefore, I suggest that for Greek-Cypriots, ethnic identity consists of a continuum of identities where the Cypriot identity is at one end of the continuum, the Greek-Cypriot identity is in the middle, and the Greek identity is at the other end. Students switch among these identities according to the context of communication, which shows the fluidity of identity. This continuum is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

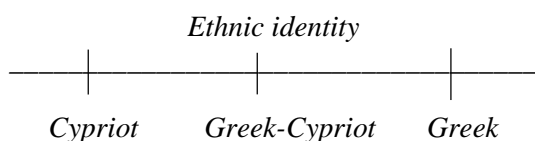


Figure 1
Ethnic Identity Continuum

The interview results showed that students constructed their ethnic identities by the use of elements that have an indexical function such as personal pronouns and ethnic labels, repetitions, nationalistic expressions, reference to origin, and history. Also, certain patterns arose from the students' interviews such as the construction of language sameness between SMG and GC, national sameness between Greeks and Greek-Cypriots, and of common values between Cyprus and Greece (such as language, origin, and religion). These patterns show the extent to which ethnic identity can be ideologically driven. Specifically, when students constructed their ethnic identities, 15 and 18-year-old students in particular, created these ideological bonds between Cyprus and Greece which seem to be connected to the ideologies promoted and developed by the educational system of Cyprus (as Karoulla-Vrikki (2007) also suggests). Besides the educational system of Cyprus, other factors influencing the students' construction of ethnic identity are the common religion between Cyprus and Greece (therefore, the Church in general) and their political ideologies (either right wing or left wing). Having established the factors associated with ideologies, I conclude that Greek-Cypriot students are influenced at a very young age by all these ideologies which affect and shape their construction of ethnic identities and consequently contribute to the construction of nationalism.

What is significant is that regardless of whether students consider themselves as Greek-Cypriot, Cypriot, or Greek, they nevertheless define their identities through the use not only of GC, which is their native variety, but also through the use of SMG. This suggests that although the native variety, GC, has great vitality within the Greek-Cypriot community, SMG also has a strong position in the language practices of Greek-Cypriot young population.

Although the scope of this research is rather small as it involves only one geographical area of Cyprus, it has, nevertheless, contributed to previous and current research by examining the ethnic identities of adolescent students and provided findings which can be compared to future research. This research also contributes to the general theory of identity as it shows the fluidity of identity and how this is affected by the history, politics, and ideologies of a

community. Further research on Greek-Cypriots' ethnic identity construction would give more insights on what might be motivating the choice of different ethnic labels between students as well as on what might be motivating the nationalism constructed in the discourse of some students, whether this is in favour of their Cypriot or Greek identity. Also, it would be interesting to carry out research regarding the context-situations in which Greek-Cypriots disassociate themselves from the Greek people as well as whether and/or when Greeks associate or disassociate themselves from Greek-Cypriots.

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Appendices

Original extracts in SMG

Extract 1

Interviewer: Από πού είσαι;

Maria (age 12): Είμαι Κύπρια επειδή γεννήθηκα στην Κύπρο και μιλώ κυπριακά. Οι γονείς μου είναι επίσης από την Κύπρο.

Interviewer: Άρα οι άνθρωποι που γεννιούνται στην Κύπρο είναι Κύπριοι;

Maria (age 12): Εμ, εάν οι γονείς τους είναι επίσης από την Κύπρο τότε ναι.

Extract 2

Interviewer: Είπες ότι κατάγες από την Κύπρο. Άρα ποια είναι η εθνικότητά σου;

Elena (age 18): Ελληνοκύπρια. Είμαι τζαι Ελληνίδα, όι Ελληνίδα, νιώθω Ελληνίδα απλά εν εγεννήθηκα στην Ελλάδα για να πω ναι ξέρεις είμαι. Αλλά νιώθω Ελληνίδα τζαι πιστεύω ότι στην Κύπρο, ήρταν οι Έλληνες που την Ελλάδα τζαι άρκεψεν ο πολιτισμός.

Interviewer: Γιατί θεωρείς τον εαυτό σου Ελληνοκύπριο; Γιατί νιώθεις Ελληνίδα;

Elena (age 18): Επειδή μιλώ ελληνικά, έχω ελληνική μόρφωση, είμαι ορθόδοξη τζαι χριστιανή τζαι μινίσκω στην Κύπρο.

Extract 3

Marios (age 18): Εγώ θεωρώ τον εαυτό μου Έλληνα γιατί το "Έλληνοκύπριος" εισάξαν το μετά που έγινε η ανεξαρτησία, πριν την ανεξαρτησία εν υπήρχεν ο όρος "Έλληνοκύπριο". Τωρά εν θα πω τη γνώμη μου γιατί έγινε η ανεξαρτησία ή γιατί εν έγινε η ένωση. Εγώ θεωρώ τον εαυτό μου Έλληνα. Είμαι ενταγμένος στο ελληνικό έθνος, πιστεύω στην ορθοδοξία, μιλώ ελληνικά. Τζαι γενικά η κουλτούρα μου έν ελληνική.

Extract 4

Interviewer: Είπες προηγουμένως ότι μιλάς ελληνικά. Η κυπριακή διάλεκτος; Μιλάς και τα δυο;

Marios (age 18): Κατά τη γνώμη μου έν'αλληλένδετα τούντα δυο. Εν γίνεται να τα χωρίσεις. Εν μπορεί να υπάρξει το ένα χωρίς το άλλο.. Υπάρχει η ελληνική γλώσσα και η κυπριακή διάλεκτος στηρίζεται πάνω στην ελληνική γλώσσα. Εν μπορεί, δηλαδή εν μπορείς να αφαιρέσεις τις βάσεις, τις δομές και να μείνει μόνο το πουπάνω. Εννά καταρρεύσει λογικά.

Extract 5

Interviewer: Ποια είναι η σχέση μεταξύ Κύπρου και Ελλάδας;

George (age 18): Η Κύπρος είναι ανεξάρτητο κράτος. Μιλούμε τα κυπριακά τα οποία είναι διάλεκτος των ελληνικών όπως τα κρητικά που είναι επίσης διάλεκτος των ελληνικών.

Interviewer: Εντάξει, αλλά η Κρήτη είναι ελληνικό νησί ενώ η Κύπρος είναι ανεξάρτητη. Η σχέση της Κύπρου και της Ελλάδας βασίζεται στη χρήση της ίδιας επίσημης γλώσσας, της ελληνική;

George (age 18): Σαν Έλληνες, είμαστε Έλληνες, η μητέρα πατρίδα εν η Ελλάδα που έχουμε τη γλώσσα της με τα δικά μας χαρακτηριστικά. Η γλώσσα τζαι η θρησκεία εν τα δυο βασικά πράγματα τα οποία καθορίζουν το έθνος. Είπαμεν πριν ότι οι πρώτοι κάτοικοι της Κύπρου ήταν οι Αχαιοί τζαι τζείνοι αφήκαν το στίγμα τους δαμαί τζαι εξελληνιστίκαμε, εγίναμεν Έλληνες τζαι είμαστε ενταγμένοι στο ελληνικόν έθνος. Σαν dna μπορώ να πω.

Extract 6

Anna (age 15): Έχουμε κοινή ταυτότητα. Εν μπορεί να το αμφισβητήσει κανένας τούτο. Τούτο αποδεικνύεται που μέσα στους αιώνες. Πρώτοι κάτοικοι της Κύπρου ήταν οι Αχαιοί. Οι Αχαιοί ήταν, επροέρχονταν που την Πελοπόννησο τζαι ήταν οι πρώτοι που εκατοικήσαν την Κύπρο. Οι ελληνικές ρίζες της Κύπρου πηγάζουν που την αρχαιότητα. Κανένας εν μπορεί να το αμφισβητήσει τούτο τζαι τούτον αποδεικνύεται με το ότι μιλούμε ακόμα ελληνικά στην Κύπρο.

Extract 7

Paul (age 15): Κύπριος είναι κάποιος που μιλά κυπριακά, αλλά πάλι είναι ελληνικά.

Extract 8

Paul (age 15): Ελληνοκύπριος είναι κάποιος που θέλει να είναι και τα δυο.

Extract 9

Marios (age 18): Νιώθω ότι είμαι και 'γω Έλληνας.

Extract 10

Anna (age 15): Βασικά νιώθω πιο Ελληνίδα επειδή νιώθω ότι έχουμε πολλά κοινά με τους Έλληνες. Άρα δεν θα προσπαθούσα να δείξω ότι είμαι Κύπρια και να το τονίσω με κάποιο τρόπο.

Extract 11

Elena (age 18): Ας πούμε, αν θεωρεί ότι δεν είμαστε το ίδιο και υποτιμήσει το ότι είμαι Κύπρια, η κυπριακή μου πλευρά θα ζυπνήσει.