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DOI:

[10.1093/applin/amv063](https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv063)

*Document Version*

Peer reviewed version

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*Citation for published version (APA):*

Charalambous, P., Charalambous, C., & Rampton, B. (2017). De-securitizing Turkish: Teaching the language of a former enemy, and intercultural language education. *APPLIED LINGUISTICS*, 800-823.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amv063>

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# **De-securitising Turkish: Teaching the language of a former enemy, and intercultural language education**

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2015

## **Abstract**

This paper explores the fit between orthodox ideas about intercultural language education and situations of acute insecurity. It describes the teaching of Turkish to Greek-Cypriots, introduced in 2003 by the Republic of Cyprus as part of a de-securitisation policy. Although these classes were optional, many students regarded Turks as enemies, and after documenting hostility itself as one motive for learning Turkish, we describe three teaching approaches used to deal with the powerful emotions that Turkish evoked: (a) focusing on the language as a code, shorn of any cultural association; (b) treating it as a local language; and (c) presenting it as a contemporary international language in a cosmopolitan ambience that potentially transcended the island-specific conflict. In this way, the Cypriot case calls mainstream language teaching assumptions into question: exclusively grammar-focused pedagogies display acute cultural sensitivity, and images of language in globalised world look radical and innovative. For intercultural language education more generally, it is the combination of language learning as a distinct cultural activity with the ideological plasticity of language itself that seems especially valuable.

Conflict certainly features in discussions of language teaching and intercultural communication, but the intensity of conflict generally falls short of violent warfare (MacDonald & O'Regan 2012:560). Indeed, after working in Gaza, Phipps suggests that a notion like "intercultural dialogue in its present dominant manifestation has run its course", unable to engage with questions like: "How do we teach people to think and to act under emergency conditions and to prepare for life in such situations? How do we get beyond an ethic of dialogic 'balance' or 'neutrality' in conditions of precarity and insecurity?" (2014:120). More generally, she suggests, "concepts which have arisen in contexts of relative peace and stability in Europe are not suited to conditions of conflict and siege" (2014:113).

In fact there is a contemporary literature on language teaching in current or recent contexts of violent conflict, and it does raise questions about the adequacy of prevailing ideas about intercultural language education. It is to this conflict-focused perspective that the present paper seeks to contribute, and to do so, it draws on a substantial ethnography of Turkish language teaching in Greek-Cypriot schools and adult institutes. In 2003, in the midst of the EU Accession process, the Republic of Cyprus introduced Turkish classes for Greek Cypriots as a gesture of good will towards Turkish Cypriots, after a long period of intense hostility. But students who opted to enrol were routinely accused by their peers of being 'traitors', and teachers developed a number of practices to circumvent the intense controversy that surrounded Turkish language learning. Against a background of this kind, the dynamics of familiar pedagogies such as 'grammar and translation' and 'communicative language teaching' look rather different, and in what follows, we describe three different approaches used by Greek-Cypriots teaching the language of the (former) enemy, glancing sideways at the discrepancies that emerge when we set them next to European language teaching orthodoxies. In addition, of course, acute hostility and a sense of physical threat can take different forms, affected by geo-political specifics. So it is also important to try to specify the type of precarity and insecurity involved in teaching Turkish to Greek Cypriots, and for this, we draw on research in International Relations on 'securitisation'.

We begin with a sketch of securitisation theory, and identify several different contexts in which language teaching is substantially affected by heightened insecurity, briefly summarising some of the features that recent and current studies of language education have revealed. With this rudimentary outline of different

kinds of widespread insecurity in place, we then describe the grounds for seeing these Turkish classes as part of a larger-scale *de*-securitisation process. After that, we move to our ethnography of different approaches, pulling out their heterodox implications for language teaching theory, and we conclude by noting the specific affordances of language learning as resource in peace education.

## 1. Securitisation as a perspective on language education

‘Securitisation’ is a notion initially developed within International Relations research by what has come to be known as the ‘Copenhagen School’ of security studies (Buzan & Wæver 2003; Emmers 2013). It refers to institutional processes in which threats to the very existence of the state and other bodies – ‘existential threats’ – are identified, and in response to this potential danger, issues are moved from the realm of ordinary politics into the realm of exceptional measures, where normal political rights and procedures are suspended. Throughout this process, discourse plays a crucial part, both in declaring a particular group, phenomenon or process to be an existential threat, and in persuading people that this warrants the introduction of special measures. In its earliest Copenhagen formulation, the theory of securitisation relied heavily on the speech act theory of Austin and Searle, but this limited model of communication has been extensively criticised (e.g. Stritzel 2007), and in an edited collection which seeks to replace this earlier ‘philosophical’ perspective with a more sociological and pragmatic account, there are references to Sapir, Goffman, Schegloff, Fairclough, Kress, Wetherell, Mey, Duranti and Goodwin (Balzacq 2011). Securitisation theory, in other words, has undergone something of a *socio*-linguistic and *linguistic anthropological* ‘turn’, and although Goldstein claims that “insights drawn from ethnographic research have not been systematically brought to bear on the theorisation of security” (2010:488), the pieces certainly seem to be in place for some linguistic ethnographies of securitisation.

If we turn now to language education, insecurity and warfare have always been very significant influences. Howatt’s *History of English Language Teaching* starts with 16<sup>th</sup> century Huguenots arriving as *refugees* from the counter-reformation (1984:Ch.2), and in the 1940s, the very term ‘applied linguistics’ sprung from the marriage of Bloomfield’s structuralism with language training in the American army (1984:265-9; also e.g. Kramsch 2005, Scollon & Scollon 2007). But detailed descriptions of security-oriented language pedagogy are relatively rare, so it is worth briefly identifying at least four rather different contexts in which security concerns are prominent, also sketching some of the findings on language teaching with which they have been associated.

First, in an exceptionally rich and multilayered anthropological account covering, *inter alia*, the tensions between government policy, schools, parents and students, conflicting theories of language and language pedagogy, and the marginalisation of first language speaking teachers, Uhlmann (2010, 2011) analyses the teaching of Arabic in Israel. Here, long-standing security perspectives dominate Arabic pedagogy, and military intelligence plays a central and open role both in extra-curricular and curricular activity, which, to a considerable degree, “revolves around preparing Jewish [secondary] students for their impending military service” (2010:297, 2011; also e.g. Mendel 2014). Uhlmann compares Arabic instruction with the teaching of English in Israel:

“English classes emphasize creative usage and cultural competency through such assignments as compositions and conversational exercises in order to develop and enhance the capacity of pupils to express themselves in the language. By comparison, both instruction and matriculation examinations in Arabic emphasize passive understanding and overvalue grammatical skills such as the conjugation of verbs and desinential inflection while undervaluing the capacity to construct meaningful sentences and express ideas” (2011:293)

Uhlmann speaks of the ‘Latinisation’ of Arabic – approaching it “as if it were a dead language like Latin, to be interpreted and understood but not necessarily creatively engaged with and idiomatically used” (2011:100; see also C. Charalambous 2009) – and he argues that this “reflects a constellation of forces and circumstances, ... the result of different stakeholders in the field of Arabic instruction— namely the security apparatus, teachers, and universities— pursuing their own specific interests in this field” (2011:101). So there is much more involved here than a set of old-fashioned teachers in urgent need of a contemporary communicative teaching update.

The second example turns the focus from an already heavily securitised setting like Israel to the process of increasing securitisation, growing into more generalised suspicion’ in everyday institutional life (Huysman

2014). In a carefully documented account of British public discourse from 2001 to 2014, Khan (2014) traces the ways in which English language teaching for adult immigrants seems to be changing from being a political issue to becoming a matter of national security, and he focuses on the introduction of language tests for citizenship as an instance of ‘exceptional securitisation’, following fast on urban riots in 2001. But beyond that, he argues that this commitment to special measures has permeated to other entry and settlement requirements, and may be affecting English language education as well.

In the third situation where security concerns affect language education, the processes described by Khan are *reversed*. In *de*-securitisation, issues, groups and processes are moved *out* of special measures back into the realm of ordinary political and civil affairs. In the Cypriot case described in the next section, the state introduced Turkish language teaching as a policy instrument during intense negotiations aimed at reunification of the island. With the onus on drawing closer, this might sound like a classic instance where intercultural language orthodoxies move to the fore, but even in this situation ‘Latinisation’ may sometimes seem the best way forward, as we shall shortly see.

Last and more locally, acute insecurity can influence language pedagogy in classes for migrants and their children, regardless of the level of securitisation in the host/receiving country itself. This is made clear in Karrebaek & Ghanchi’s interactional ethnography of a Farsi language school for children and adolescents of Iranian descent in Copenhagen (2014). Here, the dominant pedagogy again focused overwhelmingly on grammar and vocabulary, deliberately avoiding references to contemporary Iranian culture, but in this case, the purpose was to exclude anything that risked invoking and inflaming acute political divisions within the Danish Iranian community, divisions that themselves reached back to personal and political upheaval in their country of origin. In fact in many language classes with refugees from conflict zones and immigrants who have travelled by difficult routes, teachers are likely to respond in a broadly comparable way to the legacies of insecurity that their students bring with them, regardless of political relations in the host country at large (see eg. Cooke & Simpson 2008:37).

The four situations listed above shouldn’t be construed as a rigorous matrix for extrapolating different empirical possibilities (cf Liddicoat 2008:130). But the list *does* indicate that there is actually a plurality of situations where precarity may throw the ideas about language pedagogy formulated in peace and stability into question<sup>1</sup>, and in the instances above, it looks as though there certainly are situations where standard proposals about putting culture at the heart of language teaching could sound risky, ineffective and even culturally insensitive.

We should now turn to the more detailed empirical investigation of just one of the contexts where violent conflict affects language teaching.

## 2. Cyprus: From war and partition to de-securitisation

Turks have been viewed as a threat in Greek-Cypriot society since the advent of Greek and Turkish nationalist ideas in the island towards the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (eg. Bryant 2004; Papadakis 2005). In the 1950s and the 1960s, there was an escalation of interethnic violence between the Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, and this resulted in around 20,000 Turkish-Cypriots moving into ethnically pure enclaves in 1963. Subsequently, the war in 1974 had devastating consequences (dead and missing people, loss of property, dislocation), and since then the island has been *de facto* divided, following the forced relocation of around 196,000 Greek-Cypriots and 34,000 Turkish-Cypriots moving into, respectively, ethnically homogenized sectors in the south and north of the island (Canefe, 2002). With a suspension of all communication until 2003, this physical and cultural division has consolidated the two communities’ ‘ethnic estrangement’ (Bryant 2004: part 4), and this has also been reinforced by intensive projects of post-war nation-building on both parts of the divide. There has been a lack of violence in recent years, but in Greek-Cypriot society, the representation of Turks as the primary national ‘Other’ and as a security threat has been institutionalised, and hostility-perpetuating routines have been well documented in the media and public discussion (Adamides 2014), as well as in education (Christou 2007; Papadakis 2005, 2006; Makriyianni & Psaltis 2007).

Turks have also been constructed as a security threat in the philosophy and organization of the Greek-Cypriot education system. Even in 2004, after EU Accession and the introduction of Turkish language classes, the Ministry’s Annual Report opened its account of the public system with a reference to “the ... expansionist intentions of Turkey on the island” (Ministry of Education and Culture 2004: Section 2.1 [English version]), and this imagery recurs in educational discourse, both in and out of class (Papadakis 2006; C. Charalambous 2012; P. Charalambous 2010). Spyrou’s (2001, 2002) anthropological research showed that Greek-Cypriot children see Turks as the principal ethnic ‘Other’, and the work of Zembylas et al reveals that

these representations are usually associated with taught collective emotions of fear, trauma, anger and hatred (Zembylas 2009, Zembylas et al. 2014).

However, in 2003, the Republic of Cyprus engaged in intense preparations for accession to the European Union, and linked to this, there were negotiations between the two communities and other interested parties over the finalisation of the ‘Annan Plan’, a comprehensive UN proposal for re-unification that would resolve the political/constitutional issues known as ‘the Cyprus problem’. Hopes for a final settlement increased when in April 2003, the Turkish-Cypriot authorities decided to partially lift restrictions of movement across the buffer zone in Nicosia, permitting access between north and south for the first time for almost 30 years. In response, the (Greek-) Cypriot government announced a package of political measures ‘for Support to Turkish-Cypriots’, also often referred to as ‘Measures for Building Trust’. As well as issuing passports and certificates and allowing Turkish-Cypriot citizens access to hospitals and other civic and welfare provision, the package declared that Turkish language classes would be established in Greek-Cypriot public education: Turkish would be one of the Modern Foreign Language options for secondary school students and available free in afternoon classes for adults.

This package of measures can be viewed as a key *desecuritizing* act (Waever 1995; Buzan et al 1998), seeking to move Turkish-Cypriots from a state of exception and to reintegrate them into ordinary civil society. Within this, setting up Turkish classes can be seen as an emblematic gesture that endorses Turkish as an official language of the Republic, and as – in Balzacq’s later formulation – a ‘policy tool’ to help normalise inter-communal relations (2011:16; see also Author 3 2009).<sup>2</sup> However, just as with acts that securitize, de-securitising initiatives need to persuade their audience if they are to be successful. In situations like Cyprus where intense hostility has been routinised, institutionalised and still continues as an influential current in contemporary Cypriot discourse (Adamides 2011), attempts to de-securitize and end hostility can be often perceived as threatening, themselves provoking widespread enmity and suspicion.<sup>3</sup> It is precisely this dynamic that we set out to investigate in the account of Turkish language teaching that follows: teachers’ commitment to enacting desecuritisation policy in Turkish language classes (Ball, Maguire & Braun 2011), the resistance of many students socialised into Helleno-centric, anti-Turkish thinking, and the practices teachers developed to overcome this tension.

But before describing our findings, we must outline the empirical projects from which our data derive.

### **3. Two linguistic ethnographies of Turkish language learning**

Our data derive from two studies looking at Turkish language learning in Greek-Cypriot in secondary schools and adult afternoon classes. In the first – henceforth the ‘2006’ study – fieldwork took place in 2006-07, close to the initial introduction of Turkish language classes, while in the second (the ‘2012’ research), data was collected almost a decade after Turkish officially started in Greek-Cypriot secondary education.<sup>4</sup> The secondary students in both projects were 16-17 year olds, while the adult learners were aged between 30 and 60 in 2006 and 25 to 70 in 2012. Given the political sensitivity of the processes involved, as well as the relative lack of prior description, both projects were designed as linguistic ethnographies (Rampton 2007; Rampton, Maybin & Roberts 2014), combining analysis of interviews and classroom discourse with consideration of historical, socio-political and institutional dynamics. Methodologically, the 2012 study was designed along similar lines to the 2006 project (see C.Charalambous 2009, 2012), aiming to map both the continuities and the shifts observed since 2006 across different educational settings.<sup>5</sup> Data analysis involved 18 months of data processing, and at the time of writing, this has produced 14 thematic reports.<sup>6</sup> The two datasets are summarised in Table 1, and in this paper, we offer an overview of the pedagogic practices of all the teachers that we followed, drawing mostly from observational fieldnotes, interview data and questionnaires.

**Table 1:** Overview of the dataset

Fieldwork dates & project title:	2006-07: LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF THE 'OTHER'	2012-13: CROSSING LANGUAGES AND BORDERS
<b>SECONDARY SCHOOLS</b>		
<b>Classes observed and n. of participants</b>	1 teacher (Andreas), 3 classes, 52 students	2 teachers (Savvas, Stella) 6 classes, 101 students
<b>Classroom recordings</b>	13.5 hours	51 hours
<b>Classroom observations</b>	32 hours	78 hours
<b>Interviews</b>	21 students, 3 teachers	62 students, 2 teachers
<b>Other</b>	interviews with ministry officials	93 questionnaires
<b>ADULT INSTITUTIONS</b>		
<b>Classes observed and n. of participants</b>	1 teacher (Zina), 1 class, 6 students	2 teachers (Yannis, Stalo), 2 classes, 25 students
<b>Classroom recordings</b>	12 hours	34 hours
<b>Classroom observations</b>	21 hours	68 hours
<b>Interviews</b>	7 students, 1 teacher	15 students, 3 teachers
<b>Other</b>	-----	22 questionnaires

So what did all this reveal about language teaching and learning within the contested process of desecuritisation? It is worth beginning the account with evidence that attending Turkish classes was *not* of itself a sign of support for reconciliation.

#### 4. Description and analysis

##### 4.1 Hostility as a motive for learning Turkish

In heavily Hellenocentric Greek-Cypriot secondary education, learning Turkish was widely seen as transgressive, generating active and open opposition. Both in 2006 and 2012, students coming to Turkish classes reported being called 'traitors' or 'Turks', facing intensely negative reactions from peers and family members, and some students and teachers said they had to hide their Turkish books to avoid provoking aggression. On the other hand, hostility and language learning aren't intrinsically incompatible, as examples of language instruction for espionage and military security attest (see the case of Israel above). Prior to 2003 in the Republic of Cyprus, the police and intelligence services were a significant constituency for specialist Turkish language lessons, and when Turkish classes became more widely available in 2003, learning for security purposes remained a residual possibility, invoked by a number of informants both in 2006 and 2012.

In 2012, we conducted a short questionnaire survey of 93 secondary and 22 adult Turkish MFL students, and this offered the statement 'I wanted to learn the language of the enemy' among a number of possible motives for learning the language. Although half of the participants in both student groups did not select the statement as relevant in their case, a quarter (25% among the school students and 27% of the adults) ranked it among their top three reasons.<sup>7</sup> In our ethnographic observations and interviews, it tended to be students with

nationalist alignments who saw Turkish as an instrument for security and defence, and Nikos, a student from one of the 2012 classes, was a good example. Nikos held ultra-nationalist beliefs and was affiliated with an far-right political organization, but he was still a very keen learner of Turkish, chose advanced Turkish for the following year, and argued that instead of being just an option, Turkish should be a compulsory core course for everyone. As he explained in interview:

**Extract 1: Learning for military intelligence**

Nikos (male, aged 16) in interview with his friend (m.; 16 yrs) and Panayiota (female, 30s) (2012; translated & edited transcript)

ehm what I'm saying miss, is that it's the language of the enemy,  
that when you have knowledge of the language of the enemy  
you hold him in your hands,  
when you e:::rm, you can do to him whatever you want,  
becau:::se, why do the Turks learn Greek on the other side then?

Nikos aspired to a career in the military and talked about Turkish being useful for spying during war, for tricking and then attacking the Turkish enemy. Indeed, he said that alongside the case for 'bringing the two communities closer', this security line of reasoning ought to be incorporated into the official publicity for Turkish classes, because this would attract many more of the mainstream students who held nationalist views, putting Turkish in a stronger position in the highly competitive market of MFL options.

Outside a specifically military context, Turkish was also considered useful as a defensive resource in everyday encounters with Turkish-Cypriots. For example, Dinos, a secondary student in 2006, generally expressed leftish reconciliatory views but also talked about the need to "avoid being tricked by Turks/Turkish Cypriots", who "are spiteful but they are still our brothers". Arguments like this seemed to be adopted quite widely to justify learning Turkish to potentially critical family and friends:

**Extract 2: Protecting my country**

Fanos (male, aged 16) in interview with Panayiota (female, 30s) (2012; translated & edited transcript)

they tell us that this is the language of my enemy  
and I shouldn't learn it,  
that is, we shouldn't learn what our enemy has,  
but this is not treason,  
it's something- in essence I am protecting my country  
because if I know how to speak the language of the other  
I can both spy on him and understand him if he tells me something bad

Indeed, one of the Turkish language teachers interviewed in 2006 admitted that even he himself used a similar justification when students challenged him about becoming a Turkish language teacher:

sometimes the reply I give them is like the Pythia<sup>8</sup>,  
'whether you see them as friends or enemies you need to know their language'

That said, however, none of the Turkish teachers we encountered embraced tactical infiltration of the enemy as a central reason for learning the language, and this is hardly surprising given Turkish MFL's wider identity as a reconciliation policy tool, as well as in view of their individual biographies. So how did they deal with the ideological precariousness of teaching Turkish? We identified three broad approaches, drawing both on teachers' reflexive interview accounts of their pedagogic practice and on our classroom fieldnotes and recordings.

## 4.2 Approach 1: Treating Turkish as a code

The first approach sought to depoliticize Turkish learning by decontextualising the language and disconnecting it from Turkish people, from Turkish culture and from its political and emotional associations (C. Charalambous 2013, 2014). Instead, language was treated as a neutral lexico-grammatical code, and the teachers adopting this line systematically avoided any talk about the Turks or Cypriot politics in the

classroom. This was the commonest strategy in our dataset, observed in Andreas' secondary teaching in 2006 and in some of Stella's classes in 2012, as well as in Stalo's adult classes in 2012.<sup>9</sup> This strategy certainly could draw on a long tradition of treating language as a formal code in Cypriot MFL education, but in recent years, there has been increased emphasis on culture in Greek-Cypriot Modern Language curricula, and all three teachers were aware of the narrow view of language that they presented. In interview, they explained this approach as a way of dealing with the ideological controversies surrounding Turkish language learning, and indeed in a different class, Stella introduced more cultural elements.

Andreas (Mr A) was the most striking case (see C. Charalambous 2009, 2012, 2013, 2014 for more detail on his teaching), since he generally avoided even mentioning the work 'Turks' in his class, and consistently discouraged any talk that might be considered 'political'. He focused the lessons overwhelmingly on grammar and vocabulary exercises, and in interview, he said that he always tried to tell students that 'the Turkish language is not the Turk, it's a tool', and that 'we are here [only] to talk about the language'. Andreas certainly knew about communicative teaching and intercultural awareness, and he told us in interview that if the political situation in the island had been different, he could certainly think of much more communicative activities to do in class. But as long as there was still an illegal north-south dividing line in place, he didn't think that he could talk about inter-communal communication or implement communicative activities that presupposed contact between the two communities. Even so, on two occasions that we observed, he did try to incorporate some culture into his teaching, but even here, he avoided Turkishness by playing a Turkish language version of a Greek song in the first, and by talking about Muslim (and explicitly not Turkish) religious and cultural practices in the second (see C. Charalambous 2012 and 2014 for details). As a result, it was only away from the front-stage of classroom interaction that students engaged with politicised inter-ethnic relations, in classroom debates without the teacher and in whispered 'silly-talk'<sup>10</sup> (C. Charalambous 2012).

The teachers observed in 2012 seemed to be less cautious, but the emphasis on language structure and the suppression of the political connotations/indexicalities continued. Stella adopted this approach with four of the five secondary classes she taught, and this was confirmed by students in interview. These four classes involved 15-17 students each, and Stella often described them as rather 'immature' and generally 'indifferent' towards the subject. Unlike Andreas, Stella did occasionally talk about the Turkish-Cypriots in class and said that she tried to explain that Turkish-Cypriots were one thing while mainland Turks were another:

many times students don't like that, ((but))  
up to now I never had a problem with a teacher reporting something  
or the headteacher calling me or reporting me to the ministry

But in the lessons with these four classes that we observed (though not with the fifth), she avoided teaching about Turkish culture and carefully sidestepped any political discussions triggered by her students. When asked in interview, Stella said that introducing aspects of Turkish culture – by referring, for example, to Kemal Ataturk, to Victory Day celebrations<sup>11</sup> or to the poet Yunus Emre – was unthinkable in these classes, and she used terms like 'chaos' and 'mayhem' to describe what could happen when the students were 'not ready' and 'not fit' for anything other than 'matters of the language':

### **Extract 3: On not provoking the students**

Stella (f; 40s), Greek-Cypriot teacher of Turkish in interview with Panayiota (2012 translated & edited transcript)

Yiota: in the class, are there any additional challenges that Turkologists may face?

Stella: you have to be very careful about what you'll say because I tried once to say that Turkey is beautiful, and Istanbul, and they tried to tell me that I am defending Turkey in class, we have to be very careful about what we say so that students don't go out and say that we are doing propoganda in favour of Turkey and that we say the Turks are good and they do this and that, we have to be very careful and stay in matters of the language [...]

Yiota: so do you consciously restrict yourself to matters of language?

Stella: yes, you cannot talk, no

The code-centred approach to Turkish was also adopted by Stalo, a female teacher in her 30s, in her advanced adult class (level 6) in 2012. She was very thorough and methodical in her approach to grammar and usually introduced structural phenomena with formulae like ‘DI<sup>4</sup>K+possessive suffix+(n)+DA<sup>2</sup>N beri’, emphasising how useful these were for learning a ‘mathematical’ language with a ‘clear logic’ like Turkish.<sup>12</sup> When the class was observed studying Turkish proverbs and wishes, Stalo framed this as a ‘vocabulary activity’, and she also restricted herself to matters of grammar and lexis on the rare occasions when the class worked on potentially loaded material like national celebrations. During the time that we observed her classes, she never mentioned any personal experiences from her one-year stay in Istanbul, and she didn’t initiate any references to Turkish-Cypriots or the north side of the island, even though she knew that a number of students frequently crossed the border and had a lot of cultural experience from their interactions with Turkish-Cypriot friends. Conversely, when students themselves chose to share cultural expressions they’d picked up from their trips to the north side, or raised issues of shared etymology and history, Stalo refrained from taking part in class discussion unless it involved answering a language-related question. In interview, none of the students could recall any examples of politically sensitive discussion in class, and according to Eleni, a woman in her late 30s, Stalo’s lessons were ‘pure instruction...irrespective of the political issue’. All the political discussion that we witnessed occurred between students in more private circles and at the margins of the lesson (either before or after it). As a Jacky, a woman in her 60s, said:

**Extract 4:** Issues to avoid, and the risks to teachers

Jacky (female), advanced adult learner, in interview with Panayiota (2012; translated & edited transcript; Calibri font = speech in English)

Jacky: people have mixed opinions  
so if ((switches to Greek from English:))  
one starts saying one thing,  
the other saying another,  
they will argue,  
((back into English:)) this is the last thing that the teacher wants  
because she has to report to er::m to the manager of the school  
((a little later:))  
they don't want to lose their jobs...  
there are some people who go to the other side  
and some people who don't go to the ((other)) side  
there is somebody who tells you  
“I don't want to show my passport there”  
and I tell that somebody  
“but you show your passport, they don't stamp your passport”,  
“yes but they have me on their computer”  
so if there are people who are opposite  
and they ((the teachers)) are thinking there will be a misunderstanding,  
((switches to Greek:))  
“why should I go and see my house ((on the northern side))?  
I want to know my house the way I left it ((before partition))”,  
and these are things that you hear,  
but you don't hear these things in the class

Yiota: I see, not in the class

Jacky: not in the class, it’s outside

**4.3 Approach 2: Localising Turkish**

The second approach took the opposite path to the first: rather than emptying Turkish of its cultural associations, teachers presented Turkish as part of local Cypriot life. Although these teachers were sensitive to the risk of being too provocative, this approach could sometimes turn classrooms in spaces where tense interethnic relations were discussed, occasionally even being foregrounded. We observed this strategy in two of the adult classes, one in 2006 and the other in 2012, and it could also be found in one of Stella’s secondary classes, which she described as ‘exceptional’ and ‘adult-like’ (2012). In fact, all three of the teachers adopting this approach displayed signs of anti-nationalist sympathies – they were comfortable articulating a pro-

reconciliation stance in interview, and all mentioned that they had substantial contact with Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot people. Two of them, Zina and Yiannis, teachers in their 30s in the adult classes, also each had a non-Cypriot parent, hadn't grown up in Cyprus and had settled permanently in the country as young adults.

Zina was certainly alert to the potential for conflict in class when students had opposing views:

**Extract 5: Closing down on argument**

Zina (f; 30s), adult class teacher, in interview with Constadina (2006; translated & edited transcript)

I'm trying to teach them the language,  
I don't try to:: to change the:m,  
I don't have any relation to politics,  
I mean when we start a political discussion in the classroom  
we then cut it, I tell them  
"stop it guys because we are not going to end up anywhere"

Generally, however, Zina grounded Turkish squarely in Cyprus, and repeatedly presented everyday inter-ethnic contact as the main site for using the language. In fact, her lessons took place at an institution offering Greek classes to Turkish-Cypriot adults, so there was very good opportunities for all of the students to interact with members of the other community in the corridors before and after class, something which Zina certainly encouraged. She placed a lot of importance on students speaking the Turkish, and set up role-plays to practise everyday dialogues, getting some of the students to play Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot parts. She regularly encouraged them to take advantage of encounters with Turkish-Cypriots, and on two occasions she invited Turkish-Cypriot learners of Greek into the class to provide opportunities for conversation. During the lessons, she made the 'other side' present and visible through regular references to places, events and people in the northern part, with which she was familiar from her own friendships and frequent visits. So, for example, she gave directions to a Turkish-Cypriot bookshop with good textbooks, recommended a restaurant in the north with nice soups, and referred to Turkish-Cypriot friends from the bi-communal choir where she used to sing. As well as constructing inter-communal encounters as a part of everyday life, she also discussed Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot culture, referring to e.g. the swirling Dervishes, Muslim celebrations like Ramadan and Bayram, bazaar traditions in Turkey and Cyprus, and Turkish-Cypriot society compared to Turkey. She also kept the Cyprus problem itself in view. Instead of sidestepping or silencing the issue of troubled inter-communal relations, she initiated short discussions about property rights violations, about the regulations for travelling through the Turkish-Cypriot airport, about the visit of the Greek-Cypriot Archbishop to the Turkish-Cypriot Mufti etc.

Yiannis, one of the 2012 adult teachers, also recognised that discussing the Cyprus problem could be very difficult:

**Extract 6: On not talking about it too soon**

Yiannis (m; 30s; adult class teacher) in interview with Constadina (2012; translated & edited transcript)

the other person should want to discuss it first of all.  
So yes I do think that you have to be a little careful...  
(*but you can talk about it*) after a while yes,  
after a certain time passes,  
after we get to know each other,  
so that you won't be misunderstood,  
that your motives are not to change their opinion,  
but just to make a constructive discussion  
that perhaps would be useful to all of us

In fact, Yiannis dedicated a lot of class time to grammar teaching, but he also often used this as the point of departure for discussion of Turkish people, history and culture, pointing for example to situations where the students might hear a particular word being used, or following it up when a linguistic feature reminded him or a student of an anecdote or some cultural information. In addition, he talked openly about his experiences living in Turkey and his Turkish friends and ex-girlfriend, and he organised a group visit to the occupied northern part of Nicosia for the students. With students holding different political views about Turks and Turkish-Cypriots, these references could sometimes cause some trouble, and occasionally Yiannis had to close

the discussion down, declaring, for example, that “this is a big discussion... and here we are doing language and not politics”. But he was willing to share his explicitly anti-nationalist stance, and as he himself admitted, on some occasions he used more ‘diplomatic’ approaches to persuasion. So for example, he encouraged his students to visit Istanbul, but claimed to play on the city’s Greek identity as Constantinople to appeal to students’ nationalist sentiments.

The secondary school class which Stella described as exceptional and adult-like consisted of just six students (compared with usual 15+). These students were very motivated about learning Turkish and Stella also described them as ‘well read’ and ‘sensitized to politics and history’. In interview, they said that “during the lessons we mostly learn about the Turkish culture, not so much about the language”, and in one sequence of four classes, Stella showed a Greek documentary about Istanbul, which they really liked and which Stella supplemented with her own positive impressions of visiting the city. The students were comfortable discussing various interactions they had with Turkish-Cypriots at, for example, bi-communal meetings and activities, and they told Stella about encounters where they’d used Turkish with native speakers. Though to different degrees, all of the students expressed pro-reconciliation views and two of them openly identified themselves as active members of EDON, the leftist political youth organization. Overall, there seemed to be a good deal of ideological and personal proximity between students and teacher, and this also involved open rejection of nationalist perspectives. On several occasions, students criticised the way in which Turkish-Cypriots were constructed as threats, complained about how other students and teachers reacted negatively to their Turkish-learning, and described the official national historiography promoted in schools as a ‘distortion of history’.

None of these teachers took it for granted that their Greek-Cypriot students would immediately accept the possibility of communicating with Turkish speakers in everyday contexts. But they did succeed in establishing a classroom ethos in which engaging with Turkish-speaking people and culture was envisaged as legitimate local possibility, and they drew this into a good deal of their teaching.

#### 4.4 Approach 3: Cosmopolitanising Turkish

The third approach that we observed only emerged in the 2012 dataset, and it refigured Turkish as a contemporary language located in the broader context of a multilingual Europe and globalised modern world, just like any other European national language (cf Busch 2010). This approach was taken by only one of the secondary school teachers that we observed, Savvas (male, 40s), but he frequently aligned himself explicitly with a new 2010 curriculum document which repeatedly referred to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, and which opened with the following statements:

**Figure 1:** Opening paragraphs from the *Programme of Study for Foreign Languages 2010* (translated from Greek) [http://www.moec.gov.cy/analytika\\_programmata/nea-analytika-programmata/xenes\\_glosses\\_gymnasio\\_lykeio.pdf](http://www.moec.gov.cy/analytika_programmata/nea-analytika-programmata/xenes_glosses_gymnasio_lykeio.pdf)

##### **The promotion of multilingualism and the teaching of Turkish**

The ability to survive in an international and globalized environment and to respond to the challenges of everyday life (social and professional), while at the same time lifting the cultural barriers that prevent communication, is directly linked to the learning of modern foreign languages and cultures.

The knowledge of foreign languages is essential for the free movement of people and ideas between the countries of the European Union. In our era, characterized by rapid social changes, language learning is not only a learning objective but a way of life.

Aligning with this discourse, which located Turkish in a multilingual and transnational context, Savvas sought to extricate Turkish from ‘the Cyprus problem’, and three aspects of his teaching seemed to refashion the social connotations/indexical associations of Turkish and increase its appeal.

First, he tried to shift the indexical associations of Turkish by situating it as a significant resource in a multilingual Europe, bringing in other European languages from time to time. He sometimes used these to compare and contrast with Turkish - “what is *okul*? *school*? *ecole*? *scuola*? Do these ring a bell?” – or for stylistic effect, translated Turkish into languages other than Greek – “*başka sorular var mı? Any questions?*”; “*iyi hafta sonu, bon week-end*”. In addition Turkey featured alongside a collection of European nations in a lesson on countries, nationalities and languages:

**Extract 7: Turkey in Europe**

Savvas (male; 40s) and his secondary class (2012; Panayiota’s fieldnote; translated & edited transcript)

Savvas brought a set of plastic flags of European countries (including Turkey) to the class and asked students first to work in groups and to identify as many European countries as they could and then try to match each country with its flag. Then, the class went through the countries one by one, with Savvas introducing the Turkish vocabulary for each country’s name, nationality and language, also providing various bits of encyclopaedic information related to these countries.

*Impromptu* ‘plurilingualisations’ like these and references to different European countries and cultures created a cosmopolitan atmosphere in the classroom that transcended the usual distinctions between ‘us’ (L1) and ‘them’ (L2).

Second, Savvas established a distinctly non-traditional, liberal ethos in the classroom through his self-presentation and the relations he established with the students in his class. In interview, he explained that he wanted to create ‘joyful learning’ that induced ‘love’ of the language by making their experience of the lessons as enjoyable as possible, and in class, he came across as cool and relaxed, with a vibrant personality, a stylish dress-code, and a huge propensity for witty jokes that his students really seemed to appreciate. He was also at ease with teen culture and accepted what most other teachers would see as controversial or out of bounds – the students’ smoking habits, their love affairs, their style choices, and their involvement with popular transnational internet memes (*viz* ‘Harlem Shake’ in 2012). All this seemed to work well, because in interviews, the students were all very enthusiastic about these classes, stressing that this was because of the teacher, and some of them chose Turkish as an advanced course for the next year (6 hours a week), although they wanted to be sure that it would be Savvas taking the class. In fact, it was difficult persuading them to leave their Turkish lessons to come and be interviewed – they preferred to get out of subjects that they didn’t enjoy so much.

Third, Savvas appeared to reject overt nationalism in these lessons, but did so in a playful and non-dogmatic way. For example, he allowed classroom jokes with and about Nikos and his ultra-right affiliations (see Extract 1), and engaged him in friendly teasing himself, thereby constructing the latter’s political beliefs as a recognisable but minority position:

**Extract 8: Greece x 15**

Savvas in class with Nikos (m; 16) who is affiliated with the ultra-right, his friend Filippos (m; 16) who describes himself as having ‘very different views from Nikos’, and Filippos’ girlfriend Sofia (f; 16). Savvas has asked students to write as many European countries as they can remember in their notebooks, and he is walking around the classroom checking on their progress. (2012; translated & edited transcript)

SAVVAS: Nikos found 15  
Filippos: I imagine he wrote Greece 15 times  
Sofia: come on!

**Extract 9: Byzantine Istanbul**

Savvas in class with Nikos and Filippos (2012; translated & edited transcript)

SAVVAS: Did you know that Istanbul was Κωνσταντινούπολη ((*Constantinople*))  
Student: Where is it?  
Student: In Turkey  
SAVVAS: Nikos disagrees ((*to Nikos*)) I can tell from the way you smile,  
where is it Nikos?  
Filippos: In the Byzantine Empire  
Nikos: bravo!

In fact Savvas didn't entirely reject dominant Hellenocentric discourses, and he very occasionally 'othered' the Turks himself, as when for example, he told the students about Turks 'slaughtering' the Greek Patriarch in 1453 while advising them to visit Istanbul. More generally, however, Savvas projected a cosmopolitan multilingual persona that seemed to transcend local borders and the Cyprus problem, to reposition Turkish in a *post*-national world, and to create a safe and 'fun' space for learning that was almost beyond the question of reconciliation that had been centrally at stake in the de-securisation policies of 2003.

In our dataset, then, there were discernibly different approaches to dealing with the troubled indexical associations of Turkish: pedagogically, the language was (i) treated as a decontextualised code, (ii) situated in local activity, or (iii) recontextualised within a cosmopolitan ambience. Of course there were also a range of teaching practices that were shared across all of the classes that we have considered – question and answer sequences, linguistic correction, grammatical explanation etc – and the boundaries between the three approaches weren't absolute, since after all, even Andreas in 2006 referred to culture occasionally. In addition, the strategies' effectiveness was obviously influenced by contingencies like the teacher's experience and personality, their rapport with the class and so on, and indeed, we have not sought to systematically measure how successful each strategy was in actually developing the students' linguistic capabilities. Even so, the descriptions in this paper should be enough to allow us to ask: how does our understanding of these approaches in Cyprus compare with the ways in which they might be conceptualised "in contexts of relative peace and stability in Europe" (Phipps 2014:113).

## 5. Desecuritisation *versus* peace and stability as contexts for intercultural language teaching

In countries where there is a fair degree of domestic peace and stability, modern language teaching often seeks to broaden students' horizons, to address issues of identity and culture, and to promote communication with target language native speakers (in England, see e.g. DFE 2014:Paras 1 & 6). Accomplishing goals like these is of course far from straightforward (see e.g. Kramsch & Sullivan 1996; Kramsch 1998; Byram et al. 2002; Charalambous & Rampton 2012), even in England. But with Turkish as a foreign language in conflict-affected Cyprus, there is a good case for tuning to the Council of Europe's "open, dynamic and non-dogmatic" approach to foreign language teaching (2001:2.3.2), for recognising that the "wider social context...alone is able to give [language activities] their full meaning" (2001:2.1), and for accepting that the intercultural dimension presented a very considerable challenge, even though the need for it looks especially intense. In the secondary school classes we observed, simply recruiting the students to study Turkish was an achievement, and a shift from hostility to mere tolerance might be more realistic as a curriculum objective than growth in students' "understanding... and interest in people of other cultural origins whether in their own society, in geographically and politically related societies, or in distant and unfamiliar societies" (Byram & Risager 1999:4).

In mainstream discussions of foreign language pedagogy, it is often assumed that classes benefit from the introduction of everyday material from the real world of the target language (though see e.g. Kramsch 2012 for a critique). But with de-securitisation in Cyprus still at initial stages, Greek-Cypriot society was itself engaged in the highly contested process of negotiating whether and how to move Turkish issues *into* the realm of ordinary civic life, *out of* the exceptional measures required for an existential threat. So imagining oneself in the world of the target language seriously alarmed a lot of students, evoking visceral feelings of fear and national betrayal. It wasn't so difficult for people who already participated in (often leftist) discourses of reunification, or for adults in classes where teachers and students had built up trust and good will, but for secondary students who were still imbibing strong Hellenocentric messages in other parts of the school curriculum, the idea of 'authentic contexts for learning and using Turkish in Cyprus' would sound iconoclastic, and for both adult and secondary teachers, there were concerns about getting reported and losing their jobs.

Similarly, when cosmopolitan experience in a globalised environment features as the default imagery in language teaching materials, especially in English language teaching, it is often subjected to ideology critique and seen as promoting elitism and obscuring inequalities (eg. Guilherme 2007; MacDonald & O'Regan 2012). But in contrast, in the Cypriot data the introduction of a cosmopolitan atmosphere was rather radical, and constituted an innovative trajectory *past* the Cyprus problem, enacted by a teacher who was exceptionally dedicated, resourceful and accomplished.

So to address the question motivating this section: Yes, the example of Greek-Cypriots learning Turkish does force us to rethink the language education orthodoxies formulated in peace and stability. The omission

(or rather suppression) of culture in decontextualised grammar teaching can actually reflect acute cultural sensitivity, and actively orienting language learners to globalised consumer culture can stand as a counter-hegemonic innovation.

Venturing beyond the ethnographic relativisation offered in this answer, we can formulate *stronger* conclusions about intercultural language education by drawing attention to two phenomena that allowed the people in our data to come together and interact closely around a legacy of conflict in which they held deeply felt and often conflicting positions. First there was the *language learning project* itself. As a well-established, organised, long-term and potentially rewarding cultural activity that demands considerable investments of time and effort, the business of learning a language meant that all these people regularly shared a space where things Turkish were close at hand, inviting them into closer association if they wanted and were able. But at the same time, second, they were spared the need for confrontation by the *ideological plasticity and multivalence* of language.<sup>13</sup> Encapsulating a little crudely what we have seen of the Greek-Cypriot learners in this study, a lot of different people could engage with Turkish because it could be construed in different ways – as a potential weapon (4.1), as a neutral, even mathematical, code (4.2), as a feature of local life (4.3), and as a flavour of the cosmopolitan (4.4).

In the course of their participation in these classes, one might well hope that students' sense of the ideological meaning of Turkish could shift, and this list of indexical/connotational values might even be conceived as a rough scale of progress in the development of intercultural understanding, with students maybe venturing into these classes thinking of 4.1, getting interested in 4.2, and then starting to entertain either 4.3 or 4.4. But regardless of whether or not a scale like this is empirically sustainable, the data on Greek-Cypriots studying Turkish suggests that language learning may be particularly useful in the wider field of peace education, precisely *because* of its indexical multivalence. In a study of peace education projects involving Palestinians and Jews in Israel and Greek and Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus, Bekerman and Zembylas describe a series of activities in which generally well-disposed teachers from the opposing groups came together to consider rituals and narratives that were central to their ethno-religious groups. Their conclusions are generally pessimistic, and they conclude that “[t]he workings of essentialist meanings about collective memories are so deeply ingrained in a nation’s foundations and are cited so many times throughout many levels of society... that it is just too difficult to create openings” (Bekerman & Zembylas 2012:207). Instead, they suggest that the seeds of reconciliation lie in more routine and low-key interactional contact (2012:67,222), and in the bilingual Arabic-Hebrew school described by Bekerman, there is a sense in which simply having Palestinian and Jewish children and parents together in the same institution creates possibilities of change, regardless of the overarching terms in which this is rationalised or explained. Something of the same applies to learning the language of a former/recent enemy. It may be hard to get past the narratives of nation inscribed in official ceremonies, exemplary rituals or canonical texts, but a language can be interpreted as an object in different ways, disconnected from one trajectory or environment and recontextualised in others. And language classes bring people into the vicinity of otherness as a matter of routine, occupying their attention over periods of time that may be long enough to host gradual shifts in outlook. Of course, the outcomes are absolutely never guaranteed, but even so, language learning classes permit a non-committal proximity to former enemies that can make them a rather useful resource for peace education.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Indeed, the list here is itself incomplete. A more comprehensive accounts would also need to include language teaching and learning in e.g. refugee camps, where the insecurity may be far from past (cf Downey 2009).
- <sup>2</sup> All of the ministry officials interviewed in 2006 described these classes as a way of 'bringing the two communities closer, and they also regarded the communities potential familiarity with each other as a more significant outcome than proficiency in the new language. See C. Charalambous 2009, 2012.
- <sup>3</sup> Desecuritisation initiatives were (and still are) opposed by a range of powerful actors in a plurality of arenas (political parties, church leaders, media, national celebrations etc). Fierce reactions against the education objective of peaceful coexistence between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots introduced in 2008 are documented in e.g. Zembylas et al. 2011, C. Charalambous et al. 2014.
- <sup>4</sup> The first project was a doctoral study entitled *Learning the Language of 'the Other'*, funded by King's College London (C. Charalambous 2009). Fieldwork was conducted between September 2006-January 2007, and was located (a) in a Lyceum in Nicosia, mostly following one Turkish language teacher in two of his classes for the whole of the autumn term; and (b) in an adult institution, following one teacher in one of her classes. Data collection involved classroom observation and recordings, interviews with language learners, teachers, ministry officials etc. and the collection of related documents (textbooks, curricula and other government texts). The second project is entitled *Crossing Languages & Borders: Intercultural Language Education in a Conflict-troubled Context*, and is funded for three years by the Leverhulme Trust. Fieldwork was conducted between September 2012 and May 2013, in (a) three Lyceums (secondary schools) in different districts in Nicosia, following two teachers in six classes, and (b) in two adult institutions, following two teachers in two classes. In between these two projects, from 2010-2012, C. Charalambous and P. Charalambous worked together on projects researching peace education in Greek Cypriot schools (eg, Zembylas et al. 2014, P. Charalambous et al. 2014; C. Charalambous et al. 2013), so they have been closely focused on the issues of reconciliation in education for a sustained period.
- <sup>5</sup> Although the historical comparison is not yet fully completed, the most important shifts identified so far involve: the gradual fading of Greek-Cypriot expectations for the resolution of the political problem and the reunification of the island, following the failed negotiations after the Annan plan; changes in the policy and curriculum frameworks for the teaching of MFLs, moving to a stronger emphasis on multilingualism and intercultural communication; and progressive normalization of Turkish teaching in the Greek-Cypriot education system. Mindful of these shifts, the discussion of our findings indicates which study that particular pieces of data derive from, and where relevant, points to similarities and differences between the two phases.
- <sup>6</sup> Our analysis has been assisted by the qualitative software NVivo 9, and the resulting reports have so far included: ethnographic descriptions of classroom practices and pedagogies for all the classes in focus; interactional analyses of selected episodes; descriptions of the place of Turkish in the wider institutional culture; comparisons of discourses and practices in adolescent and adult classes; discussions of developments in policy, curriculum and the wider social setting over time; a preliminary quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data; and thematic analyses of participants' interview accounts, focusing on: motives and influences in their decisions to learn Turkish, perceptions of classroom practices, sites of encounters with Turkish speakers, perceptions of the Turks, and perceptions of the Cyprus problem.

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<sup>7</sup> In the questionnaire we provided 11 statements describing students' possible motivation for learning the language (drawing from the findings of the 2006 study), and we asked students to choose which statements were relevant in their case and then rank the selected statements according to their significance.

<sup>8</sup> The Pythia was the name given to any priestess serving at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, the most powerful and prestigious oracle during Ancient Greek times. According to the myth, the Pythia delivered Apollo-inspired enigmatic prophecies given in a state of frenzied trance, induced by vapours from a chasm below the temple or from chewing laurel leaves, which were then usually interpreted by male priesthood.

<sup>9</sup> We have not provided details about teachers' biographical backgrounds and their involvement with Turkish culture because they are a small professional group and might be identified by Greek-Cypriot audiences.

<sup>10</sup> With the term 'silly-talk' C. Charalambous 2012 refers to routine whispered talk between a certain group of boys in one of the classrooms she observed in 2006. This type of talk was usually performed on the radios that the boys wore, and involved jokes, stylizations, and reciting or playfully altering political slogans.

<sup>11</sup> A national holiday in Turkey celebrating the last battle against the Greek army in 1922 during the Turkish War of Independence.

<sup>12</sup> Such formulae are quite widely used in the teaching of Turkish.

<sup>13</sup> This is in fact often important in language education. In Northern Ireland, for example, O'Reilly describes how the Irish language learning was sustained by potentially conflicting ideologies of (a) resistance, (b) aesthetic heritage and (c) civil rights (1996), and even in England's National Curriculum, ideologically competing rationales – 'personal growth', 'cross-curricular', 'adult needs', 'cultural heritage', 'cultural analysis' – have featured simultaneously in promotion of the national standard language (Cox 1991).