

Language Learning Under The Shadow of Conflict: Can Learning the Language of the Other Make an Impact?

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Abstract: The experience of learning a foreign language is an important part of developing intercultural awareness and competence and improving learner attitudes towards other cultures and peoples. In a number of unique language learning contexts, such as Cyprus and Israel, the language to be learnt is of a group traditionally perceived to be an enemy by the learners' native community. However, previous research conducted on learners in contexts of conflict has indicated that learning the language of the other community can have a number of positive outcomes in terms of learner attitudes and motivation. This study aims to add to this body of research by investigating whether language learning can have a positive impact on language learners with already existing negative attitudes towards the target language and its speakers. Findings of the study indicate that the experience of learning the language of the 'other' community can have a positive impact on learners' previously existing negative attitudes towards the target language speaking community and on their motivations to continue studying the target language in the future. Learner satisfaction with the quality of the language instruction program and teacher were also recorded to be influential in learner motivation levels.

Keywords: contexts of conflict, intercultural awareness, learner attitudes, learner motivation,

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INTRODUCTION

Learning foreign languages has a wide range of benefits for learners ranging from work and travel opportunities to information sharing. However, promoting foreign language learning has been one of the main aims of the Council of Europe for many years due to the potential beneficial effect of foreign language learning on intercultural competence and awareness (Beacco, Byram, Cavalli, Coste, Cuenat, Goullier, & Panthier, 2016). From the perspective of the Council of Europe, learners develop open proactive attitudes through the experience of learning foreign languages since "learning foreign languages is a direct and powerful way of experiencing otherness on a physical and emotional level" (Beacco & Byram, 2003, p. 3). The Council aims that through this acceptance of otherness gained from foreign language learning,

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learners may develop attitudes, beliefs, and values of respect and openness towards other cultures and their people and a willingness to suspend judgment and work with such people from different cultural backgrounds.

On the other hand, foreign language learning is a long process which entails profound personal commitment for many language learners. Thus, motivation, the desire to initiate and sustain foreign language learning, plays a key role in successful foreign language learning attempts and it is likely for this reason that foreign language motivation and the challenges of both increasing and also maintaining language learner motivation have been among the most well-researched factors in the field of foreign language learning and teaching (Ortega, 2013).

Research has also shown that foreign language motivation and its underlying orientations greatly depend on “who learns what in what milieu” (Clement & Kruidenier, 1983, p. 288). This is especially true in contexts of conflict in which language teaching and learning happens despite there being conflict between the speakers of the learners’ first language and the speakers of the target language. In a number of unique language learning contexts around the world, such as the teaching of Arabic to Israeli Hebrew-speakers in Israel and the teaching of Greek to Turkish Cypriots in Cyprus, language teaching takes place within such a context of long, and at times hot, conflict between the speakers of the first and target languages. Thus, researchers interested in foreign language motivation have been intrigued to investigate whether high motivation is even possible in such conflictual settings. Similarly, researchers interested in the potential beneficial effect of foreign language learning on intercultural acceptance have also been intrigued to see the effects of foreign language learning on intercultural relationships in contexts of conflict.

Research on foreign language learning in contexts of conflict

As a result of a number of studies conducted in Israel and Cyprus, we have some insights into foreign language learning in contexts of conflict between the speakers of the first and target languages. Some of the first studies on foreign language learning in contexts of conflict were conducted by a group of researchers in Israel who investigated foreign language motivation among Israeli Hebrew-speaking school children studying Arabic in Israel (e.g., Inbar, Donista-Schmidt, & Shohamy, 2001; Donista-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). Specifically, Donist-Schmidt, Inbar, and Shohamy (2004) focused on asking a group of 694 Hebrew-speaking fifth and sixth graders in Israeli schools why studying Spoken Arabic in schools in Israel is important. Of these 694 school-aged children, 539 had been studying Spoken Arabic since the

age of 9 while 153 of the school children had not studied Spoken Arabic before. The researchers found that students who had already begun to study Spoken Arabic brought up peace-oriented reasons for learning Arabic such as needing to know about the Arab culture in order to make peace between the two communities as well as pragmatically-oriented reasons such as the need of being able to communicate with Arabs, watching Arabic TV shows, or future job opportunities. On the other hand, the students who had not yet studied Spoken Arabic more often emphasized negative attitudes towards Arabs, their language and culture. For example, this group of participants brought up reasons to study Arabic such as being “surrounded” by Arabs, or in order to be able to fight the “enemy” (Donista-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004, p.223). Furthermore, Inbar, Donista-Schmidt, and Shohamy’s (2001) study indicated that students who had previously studied Arabic were more motivated to study the language in the future than were students who had previously not studied the language. Thus, based on the research conducted in Israel, it appears that actually studying the language of a group traditionally perceived to be an ‘enemy’ by learners’ native community can have a positive impact both on learners’ attitudes towards the target language-speaking community as well as their motivational intensity for learning the target language in spite of a history of conflict between the first and target language speaking communities.

Similarly, in Cyprus, Turkish Cypriots have recently begun to study the Greek language as an elective foreign language course in state secondary schools despite the fact that the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities in Cyprus have been effectively divided for the last six decades. Research conducted on the attitudes and motivation of these young Turkish Cypriots learning Greek has indicated that students studying Greek have more positive attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language, and culture (Tum & Kunt, 2021). Furthermore, the experience of studying Greek also appears to increase learners’ motivation to continue learning the language in the future. Thus, similar to the findings recorded in Israel, learning the language of a group traditionally regarded as an ‘enemy’ appears to have a positive impact both on learners’ attitudes towards the target language and its speakers and also on their motivation for learning the target language.

Aim of the current study

Yet, despite these important positive findings, one question which remains to be addressed is how learning the language of the ‘other’ community may change the attitudes of learners who already have a negative stance towards the target language-speaking community.

In other words, the current study mainly aims to investigate how – or if – target language study can improve already existing negative attitudes towards the target language and its speakers and culture. Thus, the current study investigates the experiences over a duration of six months of twelve Turkish Cypriot adults starting to learn Greek in Cyprus. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How does studying Greek affect Turkish Cypriots' negative attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language, and culture?

RQ2. How does studying Greek affect the foreign language motivation of Turkish Cypriots who have negative attitudes towards Greek Cypriots?

METHOD

Context of the study: The conflict in Cyprus

The relationship between the two main communities living on the island of Cyprus, the Greek Cypriots and the Turkish Cypriots, has never been a simple one and has often been mired by mistrust, communal unrest, and, at times, violence with some researchers tracing the inception of this ethnic conflict between the two communities back to the early twentieth century (e.g., Asmussen, 2004; Bryant, 2004). In modern history, Cyprus was part of the British Empire until 1960 when independence was granted after an anti-colonial armed struggle by the Greek Cypriots. According to the constitution of the newly established Republic of Cyprus, Cyprus was to be a bi-communal state made up of Greek Cypriots of Hellenic origin and Turkish Cypriots of mainland Turkish origin with Greek and Turkish being recognized as the official languages of the state to be used equally in all the functions of the state.

Regrettably, intercommunal violence flared as early as 1963 – only three years after the establishment of the new bi-communal republic – and continued during the period of 1963 to 1974. During these years, the two communities began to detach and concentrate in separate areas of the island as much as possible with intercommunal violence continuously increasing. This period of violence and turmoil culminated with a Turkish military operation to the island in the year of 1974, which is referred to as the *Turkish invasion* within the Greek Cypriot community and the *Peace Operation* among the Turkish Cypriot community (Charalambous & Rampton, 2010). After this military intervention, the island of Cyprus was effectively and totally divided into two separate parts with the Greek Cypriots displacing to the south of the island and the Turkish Cypriots to the north of the island. Following 1974, everyday ties

between the two communities were completely cut as an impassable border was drawn across the island, leading to a period of ethnic estrangement (Bryant, 2004) which lasted until the early 2000s.

In 2003, a significant shift occurred in the relationship between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities as border-crossings were allowed enabling Greek Cypriots to visit the northern part and Turkish Cypriots to cross to the southern part of the island for the first time in three decades. However, in spite of an initial resurgence of optimism after the beginning of border crossings, all efforts to resolve the issues between the island's two communities have continued to fail and today what has become to be known as "the Cyprus Problem" is no closer to being resolved with very little hope for a rapid solution in the foreseeable future.

Following the beginning of border crossings between the two sides in 2003, the Greek language began to be offered as an optional foreign language course in a number of Turkish Cypriot state secondary schools. Additionally, many municipalities, privately-owned language schools, and non-governmental organizations within the Turkish Cypriot community began to offer Greek language courses aimed at adult Turkish Cypriots. Importantly, many of the Greek language courses offered by Turkish Cypriot municipalities and non-governmental organizations were offered, and continue to be offered, at a small fee as these courses are generally not profit driven.

The participants and data collection procedure

A brief questionnaire consisting of ten Likert-scale items covering attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language, and culture was administered randomly to 83 Turkish Cypriots living in the Nicosia district of north Cyprus. From these 83 Turkish Cypriots, 23 of them either agreed or strongly agreed with each of the items reflecting a negative attitude towards Greek Cypriots, their language, and culture. These 23 Turkish Cypriots were then contacted individually via telephone and invited to participate in the current study which would entail them to participate in a Greek language course consisting of weekly 60 to 90 minute Greek language classes for a period of up to six months free of charge and to be interviewed a total of four times over this duration about their experiences as a Turkish Cypriot learning Greek. They were not informed that they had been selected to participate in the study based on their responses indicating negative attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language and culture. From the 23 potential candidates, twelve agreed to participate in the study. Their ages ranged

from 26 to 43. Seven of the participants were male while five were female. Importantly, none of them had any experience of studying Greek before the language course they would be attending as part of the current study. The participants were enrolled in one of three separate Greek language programs run by either municipalities or non-governmental organizations in north Cyprus and not informed about the identities of any other participants who may have been enrolled in the same language program.

Each of the participants was individually interviewed before the start of their respective Greek language program. This interview focused on the participants' attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, and why they believed learning Greek could be important for Turkish Cypriots. After this initial interview, the participants each began their respective Greek language course. Later, each participant was individually interviewed once at the end of the first month of their language program and once at the end of the third month after starting their Greek language program. These interviews focused on the participants' language learning experiences so far learning Greek. Finally, each of the participants was interviewed individually one last time at the end of the six-month duration. This final interview focused on the participants' attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language and culture, their reasons as to why it could be important for Turkish Cypriots to learn Greek, and their individual experiences studying the language over the last six months to compare any possible changes in attitudes and motivation. All of the interviews were conducted in Turkish, audio-recorded, and translated to English by the researcher. All translations were later verified by two experienced bilingual EFL teachers.

Data analysis

The interview data was analyzed through a thematic analysis with the general purpose of to “finding and marking the underlying ideas in the data, grouping similar information together, and relating different ideas and themes to one another” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 229). Hence, to identify and categorize the themes arising from the interview data, the researcher conducted a two-step thematic analysis.

The first step of the thematic analysis was conducted within a day of each conducted interview. During this step of the analysis, the interviews were first transcribed. Then, the interviewer closely listened to each interview while carefully reading the corresponding transcript repeatedly. During this first step of the analysis, the interviewer kept an open mind as much as possible while repeatedly listening to each interview since the aim was to generate as many themes as possible related to the participants' Greek language learning experiences.

Also during this stage of the analysis, the researcher identified and extracted quotations from the interview data in order to provide evidence for each theme engendered. These would also allow readers to make their own interpretations of the study's findings. Thus, the interview data was separated into parts, or themes, and names were given by the researcher to every category.

Later, during the second step of the thematic analysis, the themes mentioned above were compared to find as many common points among them. Each theme was carefully read while constantly being compared with other themes to identify similar points and commonalities. The researchers then grouped the identified commonalities under higher level umbrella terms which covered all of the themes within that group. In the findings section below, the themes identified by the researchers are presented. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identity of each participant.

FINDINGS

Participants' initial attitudes and motivation towards target language study

Before beginning their respective Greek language program, each participant was individually interviewed about their attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language and culture and also possible reasons as to why they believe Turkish Cypriots should learn Greek. At the beginning of each interview, the participants were asked about their current attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community and their opinions on the current relations between the two communities on the island. Each of the participants exhibited a negative stance towards the Greek Cypriot community in their responses, which in effect confirmed their negative responses to the questionnaire previously. To illustrate, Deniz offered:

"I don't really like Greek Cypriots. I don't think they respect Turkish Cypriots or view us as equals. The Greek Cypriots I have met often appear to be racist towards Turkish Cypriots. They don't seem to like us at all."

Similarly, Ozan and Demir offered respectively:

"I don't even like going to the south side of the island that much and feel relieved when I return to our side any time I do cross over. There are so many generations of hate between the two communities."

"I don't feel comfortable around Greek Cypriots. I feel uneasy when I am around them. I would say that I don't like Greek Cypriots even though I know that all people are not identical"

and there are of course good people among their community. It's just hard to overcome the initial reluctance that I have towards Greek Cypriots."

Later, the focus of the interview shifted to the underlying reasons of the participants' negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community. During this part of the interview, all of the participants brought up a strong sense of mistrust towards the Greek Cypriot community. In other words, each of the participants traced the root of their negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community to a lack of trust between the two sides, as can be seen in the interview quotation from Eda below:

"The reason I'm against Greek Cypriots is that I feel like I don't trust Greek Cypriots. That is why I don't believe we can live together in a united country because I don't trust them and I don't think they trust us either. Yes, there are Turkish Cypriots who have Greek Cypriot friends from the other side, but on the whole, especially people like me who were born after 1974, don't really know any Greek Cypriots, so how can I be expected to trust someone I don't know?"

In the interview extract above, Eda attributes the feelings of mistrust between the two sides to her not knowing or having any noteworthy contact with Greek Cypriots. Seven other of the participants also traced their feelings of mistrust to Greek Cypriots due to their lack of personal contact with Greek Cypriots. These participants explained that they found it increasingly difficult to build up trust towards another community when they have no personal direct relations with members of the other community despite the two communities being in close physical proximity, as can be seen in the comments of Çınar below:

"We don't really know each other. We say hello to each other and we smile at each other, but we do not know or trust each other. After so many years of mistrust and unfamiliarity and learning in schools that we are not to trust the other side and that we are enemies and we have such a long history of conflict. It just doesn't disappear when there is such a long history."

Towards the end of the interview extract above, Cınar brings up the second most frequently mentioned reason underlying the participants' negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community: the history of conflict between the two communities. Five of the twelve participants traced the root of their negative attitudes towards Greek Cypriots to the long history of conflict between the Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots. These participants explained how they believed that this accumulation of bad experiences has made the prospect of good relations between the two sides increasingly difficult. For example, Turel offered:

“My great grandfather and grandfather both fought during the war. My father also – even though he was just a teenager. Then, we moved to the north and were completely cut off from the Greek Cypriots. We would just hear on the news how we do not and cannot trust them and how they do not trust us. And this continued for years and years. Generations even. What can you expect?”

Finally, in the later stages of the initial interview, each participant was asked about whether they believe Turkish Cypriots should learn Greek and their reasons as to why they should or should not. Interestingly, despite their negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community, all of the participants were in agreement that Turkish Cypriots need to learn Greek in order to benefit from financial and job opportunities within the Greek Cypriot community. The participants’ own personal reasons for wanting to learn Greek themselves were also pragmatic in nature as can be seen in the comments of Eda below:

“Job opportunities on the Greek side (of the island) are much better than the job opportunities on our side. You can earn twice as much doing the same exact job on the Greek side. But you need to know Greek.”

Similarly, Cinar explained:

“I want to be able to work in the south. The working conditions and the pay are much better there. I wish I had had the opportunity to learn Greek at school. I could have been fluent by now and I would feel much more confident about working there.”

Thus, all of the participants appeared to be strongly motivated to learn Greek in order to reap the potential economic benefits within the Greek Cypriot community. It is also important to note that none of the participants mentioned any peace-oriented reasons for Turkish Cypriots to learn Greek.

Participants’ target language learning experiences

After the initial interview, the participants began their Greek language studies and continued with their program for six months. Over the duration of these six months, the participants were interviewed individually about their Greek language learning experiences a total of three times: first at the end of their first month in their respective Greek language programs, second at the end of three months of Greek language study, and lastly at the end of six months of Greek language study.

At the end of the first month, the participants reported generally positive language learning experiences. Although they found learning Greek challenging at times mostly due to the differences in letters between the Greek and Turkish alphabets, all of the participants reported being satisfied with the progress they had made over the first month of their language studies. For ten of the twelve participants, one of the most motivating experiences during this first month of Greek language study was beginning to be able to read street names, shop signs, labels, and packaging when visiting the south side of Cyprus as the participants began to gain familiarity with the Greek alphabet as can be seen in the comments of Turkes below:

“The thing I have enjoyed the most is that now I can read a lot of things when I go to the south. Even though I cannot understand most of it, I can still read it and I am beginning to recognize more and more words every week. I enjoy going to the south more now because it’s now also like an educational activity for me as I get to practice what I have been doing in class.”

The opportunity to practice the target language in everyday life while learning the language as part of a structured language study program appeared as one of the most frequently cited motivating factors throughout the duration of the study. Ten of the twelve participants reported that the opportunity of being able to apply what they had learnt in class immediately by crossing to the south of the island to be very motivating for them. For example, Ozan offered:

“In order to study for the course, I simply go to the south and try to use, read, or hear what I have learned in class recently. I think this is a great language learning situation and opportunity. When I was at school learning English or French, it was very different. When would I ever have got the opportunity to speak those languages outside of school? But with Greek, the more I learn, the more opportunities I get to practice the language.”

While these everyday real life experiences began with a focus on reading skills, as time progressed and the participants were again interviewed after three months of language study, the participants began to report the opportunities they had to practice their listening and speaking skills in Greek as they began to interact with Greek Cypriots. For five of the participants, these basic interactions with Greek Cypriots were reported as the first time they had had any meaningful experiences with a Greek Cypriot, as elaborated upon by Deniz below:

“I felt like it was the first time I had spoken with a Greek Cypriot. It was the first time I realized that the Greek Cypriot isn’t a character in a history textbook. They’re real people with

real lives like you and me who are just going about their daily lives facing problems and joys. It was a very meaningful experience.”

Similarly, Eda reported:

“Just being able to speak with Greek Cypriots is a very unique experience. It gives a face to an entity. An entity which previously had no face. They are people, just like us. I want to be able to speak Greek fluently one day so that I can feel relaxed and confident when I am among Greek Cypriots. I want to feel like I am still in my home country when I cross to the south.”

Before beginning their Greek language studies, financial and job opportunities were the only reasons brought up by the participants for Turkish Cypriots to learn Greek. However, during the interviews conducted after three months of language study, five of the participants began to mention a desire to be able to speak Greek fluently in order to be able to communicate with Greek Cypriots and increase their self-confidence when among Greek Cypriots. Importantly, as can be seen in both comments above, by being able to communicate and interact with Greek Cypriots, the participants explained how they had begun to recognize that Greek Cypriots were unique individuals similar to themselves. Thus, the participants’ perspective of the Greek Cypriot community began to change from a single entity which had been presented to them in history textbooks to an individual human being not much different than themselves. Also, it is important to note Eda’s desire to be able to speak Greek fluently to be able to feel at “home” when in the south of the island and how the participants’ reasons for learning Greek evolved throughout the duration of the study. As explained earlier, job opportunities were the only reason brought up as to why Turkish Cypriots should learn Greek during the first interview before the initiation of the participants’ Greek language studies.

During each of the interviews, the participants were also asked about their in-class Greek language learning experiences. On this topic, all of the participants agreed that their respective language teacher and the course program, materials and activities used during lessons played a pivotal role in their motivation for learning Greek. All of the participants had Turkish Cypriot Greek language teachers, which they found motivating in and within itself since they were able to see a Turkish Cypriot similar to themselves who had mastered the Greek language. All of the participants also noted that they were pleased with the enthusiasm and professionalism of their Greek language teachers, which they felt increased their own enthusiasm and dedication towards their Greek language studies. To illustrate, Suzan offered:

“I am enjoying my Greek lessons very much. My teacher is great and she brings tasks to class that help me learn and are generally fun to do. If I didn’t enjoy the classes, it would be really hard. I am really pleased with my teacher. She seems to be a very experienced teacher of Greek and enjoys what she does. I think that enjoying the class and having a good teacher are very important in making someone want to get up and go to class every week. The fact that she is Turkish Cypriot too is also important for me. It’s like having a role model. I want to be able to speak Greek like her one day.”

Similarly, Turkes offered:

“I am satisfied with the quality of the program. I think I have a good teacher and the materials she uses help me to learn Greek. She really gets us to stay focused and work hard.”

Participants’ ultimate attitudes and motivation towards target language study

Lastly, at the end of six months of Greek language study, the participants were again interviewed about their attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, their language and culture as well as possible reasons for Turkish Cypriot to learn Greek to see how, or if, their attitudes had changed since the first interview conducted at the start of their respective Greek language program.

When asked about their current attitudes towards Greek Cypriots, the participants’ mistrust towards the Greek Cypriot community which was brought up by all the participants in the initial interview was still prevalent in the responses of each of the participants. However, in this interview, 8 of the participants stressed that they believed by beginning to learn Greek, they had taken an important first step in questioning, and hopefully with time eventually overcoming, their feelings of mistrust towards Greek Cypriots. To illustrate, Turel offered:

“I still would say that I do not entirely trust the Greek Cypriot community. However, I have a much more positive outlook towards them today. Learning Greek has definitely made them seem more accessible to me. They are people just like us and I think being able to speak with them – even though I am still learning Greek and have a lot more to learn – has had a positive effect on my attitudes towards Greek Cypriots and whether we could ever solve the problems between our two communities.”

Similarly, Demir offered:

“I believe that learning their language has shown to me that there is potential for cooperation. We could learn to cooperate and work with each other. Right now, Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots are just coexisting in Cyprus. We are not living together. We are

not cooperating. We are not working together to solve problems that are important for all of us. We are just coexisting, breathing the same air on the same island. We need to work together and have experiences with each other and learning each other's language is the first step. Otherwise, there will never be trust."

In terms of their motivation towards Greek language study, all twelve of the participants stated that they would continue with their Greek language studies in their future lives. As for their reasons why Turkish Cypriots should learn Greek, benefiting from potential job opportunities was again the first reason cited by each of the participants (as it was in the initial interview at the beginning of the study). However, in this final interview, different reasons for Turkish Cypriots to learn Greek were also brought up as can be seen in the comments of the participants below. Specifically, more peace-oriented reasons for learning Greek were offered by seven of the participants when discussing their reasons for Turkish Cypriots to learn Greek, such as a desire to feel "at home" or "comfortable" when within the Greek Cypriot community. Below, Cinar elaborates upon why he believes learning Greek has become important for him as a Turkish Cypriot who has been studying the Greek language:

"Before beginning to learn Greek, I used to feel like a visitor or a tourist when I went to the south (of the island). However, knowing the language has made me feel like I'm still in my home country when I go to the south. It's just a different part of my home country. Like a different neighborhood of the same city."

Similarly, Ozan explained:

"Now that I can interact with Greek Cypriots, I can see that there are many similarities between our cultures. Maybe there once was a common Cypriot culture, but for both sides it evolved into the Turkish Cypriot culture and the Greek Cypriot culture after the war. But there are many common elements. There are some very different elements as well, but I think that's normal and a richness that I now get to experience more and more as I learn Greek."

DISCUSSION

One of the most noteworthy findings at the initial stages of the study was that despite the participants' negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community, they appeared motivated to study the language by pragmatic orientations such as potential job opportunities and career development. This finding is in contrast to findings of previous studies conducted on language learning contexts of conflict. For example, Hebrew-speaking language learners

learning Arabic in Israel often offered more conflict-oriented reasons for learning the target language such as being ‘surrounded’ by the Arabs or because Arabs were their enemies (e.g., Donista-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). This is to say that in previous studies, language learners’ negative attitudes towards the target language speaking community appeared to be directly reflected in their reasons and motivations for studying the target language. However, this did not appear to be the case in the current study, which may be in part due also to the fact that there has not been a hot conflict on the island since 1974. Although all of the participants reported strong feelings of mistrust towards the Greek Cypriot community at the start of the study, their desire to benefit from potential economic opportunities within the Greek Cypriot community was strong enough to initiate and initially maintain their Greek language studies.

As the study progressed, a strong motivating factor for the participants was the language learning opportunities that arose from being in close proximity with the target language speaking community. The fact that Turkish Cypriot Greek language learners were able to visit the Greek Cypriot community unfettered on a basis as regularly as the desired created a unique language learning opportunity for the participants of the study in which the learners had easy and ready access to the target language speaking community. Throughout the study, all of the participants elaborated upon the satisfaction they experienced while practicing their target language skills they had acquired from their language studies. Many of the participants reported how they felt motivated to study Greek more in order to have more opportunities to engage in more meaningful experiences within the Greek Cypriot community, an orientation of motivation that appears to be very integrative in nature regardless of the long history of conflict between the two communities. However, it is also important to note that the participants’ desired integration appeared to be more about the two communities building stronger relations rather than the individual integration of the participant into the Greek Cypriot community. In a similar vein, when describing their reasons for learning Greek in the later stages of the study, although pragmatically oriented reasons such as job opportunities were still mentioned by all of the participants, a much more peace-oriented reason - a desire for the whole island of Cyprus to be their homeland - was reported by seven of the participants.

These positive developments in participants’ attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community and hopes for a common future in Cyprus began to increasingly appear in that later stages of the study. By learning Greek, the participants reported their increasing interaction with Greek Cypriots, which in turn helped them to reevaluate their stance towards the Greek Cypriot

community. However, it is important to note that at the end of the study all of the participants confirmed that their feelings of mistrust towards the Greek Cypriot community still existed although as individuals they felt more open to opportunities of cooperation between the two sides of the island.

Previous research on language learning in contexts of conflict has highlighted the tremendous responsibility on teachers and curriculum developers in such contexts (e.g., Tum, Kunt, & Kunt, 2021; Donista-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004). In fact, in a previous study conducted on Hebrew speakers learning Arabic in Israel student satisfaction with the teacher, curriculum, and quality of Arabic instruction was found to be the best predictor of learner motivation (Inbar, Donista-Schmidt, & Shohamy, 2001). All of the participants in the current study reported being very satisfied with their Greek language teacher, curriculum, and language learning materials. Similar to previous findings, this overall satisfaction with the quality of the target language instruction and teachers was reported as one of the main reasons the participants continued with their target language study. Previous research on language learner motivation has indicated that situation-specific motives such as satisfaction with teaching methodology, classroom practices, and assessment can be just as important as having positive attitudes towards the target language (e.g., Nikolov, 2001). Thus, the role good language teachers can play in motivating their students to maintain their language learning efforts (McGroarty, 2001) appears to be perhaps even more important in contexts of conflict, especially bearing in mind the fact that more peace-oriented reasons for learning Greek began to increase in the later stages of the study.

CONCLUSIONS

Previous research on Turkish Cypriots learning Greek in Cyprus has indicated that the experience of learning Greek can have a positive impact on learners' attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community and on learners' motivation to study Greek in the future. The current study aimed to add to the existing literature on language learning in contexts of conflict by investigating whether learning Greek could have a positive impact on language learners if these language learners already had existing negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community.

The findings of the current study indicate that Turkish Cypriots with negative attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community can still be motivated to begin learning Greek due to pragmatic orientations such as increased job opportunities within the Greek Cypriot community

and opportunities for career development. Thus, the economic gap existing between the two sides of the island in favor of the Greek Cypriot community could actually be seen as an opportunity to promote Greek language learning within the Turkish Cypriot community; and thus, help overcome any resistance Turkish Cypriots may have to learning Greek due to the history of conflict between the two sides.

At the end of the six-month study, it was apparent that the experience of learning Greek appeared to have had a positive impact on Turkish Cypriots' attitudes towards the Greek Cypriot community as the participants reported being much more open to the idea of cooperation between the two sides thanks to their experiences interacting with Greek Cypriots they obtained after beginning to learn Greek which helped them begin to question their previous negative stance towards the Greek Cypriot community. However, for all participants trust issues still existed between the both communities. On the whole, it would be unrealistic to expect learning the language of the other community for a six-month period to immediately solve decades' worth of mistrust between the two sides. Importantly, however, the participants, all of whom had a clear negative stance towards the Greek Cypriot community at the start of the study, reported being more open to the idea of cooperation between the two sides and the concept of a common homeland became an important motivational orientation at the end of six months of Greek language study.

Although pragmatic reasons for learning Greek such as increased job opportunities remained to be the main reason for their motivation to learn Greek, at the end of the study seven of the twelve participants began to trace their motivation for learning Greek to more peace-oriented reasons such as sharing a common homeland and the importance of cooperation between the two communities towards the later stages of the study. This change in orientations can also be considered as another piece of evidence for the positive impact foreign language learning may have on intercultural awareness and acceptance.

As satisfaction with the quality of language instruction was pointed out as being very important by all the participants in the current study, there is much that can be done to ensure high quality Greek language instruction within the Turkish Cypriot community. Currently, the Greek language is only offered by a limited number of middle schools and high schools within the Turkish Cypriot community. This means that the majority of Turkish Cypriot adolescents do not have the opportunity to study the Greek language despite research indicating the attitudes towards other communities and peoples are generally formed during these years (e.g., Cairns,

1996; Bar-Tal, 1996). Thus, when the potential benefits of learning Greek in terms of conflict resolution noted in this study are considered, it could be recommended that Turkish Cypriot educational authorities consider offering Greek as a foreign language course in a larger number of Turkish Cypriot schools. Additionally, as noted before, Greek language courses are currently offered to adult Turkish Cypriots by a number of municipalities and non-governmental organizations throughout the Turkish Cypriot community. As satisfaction with language instruction is considered to be one of the best determining factors in language learner motivation, it is also recommended that educational authorities within the Turkish Cypriot community consider prioritizing the teaching of Greek to Turkish Cypriot adult learners and provide teacher training opportunities and infrastructural support to Greek language teachers whenever needed.

It is also important to note that the current study focuses on only one side of the puzzle of the Cyprus conflict in that all of the participants were Turkish Cypriots learning Greek in Cyprus. It would also be beneficial to see similar studies conducted with Greek Cypriots learning Turkish in Cyprus and how this may or may not affect Greek Cypriots attitudes towards the Turkish Cypriot community. This is especially true when we keep in mind that potential job opportunities within the Greek Cypriot community were the initial main source of motivation for learning Greek of the Turkish Cypriots in the current study. For all of the participants in the current study, it was the prospect of economic benefit that motivated them to begin and sustain their language learning efforts, especially in the early stages of their language studies. More peace-oriented reasons for Turkish Cypriots to learn Greek in Cyprus began to appear much later. Due to the economic disparity between the two sides in the favor of the Greek Cypriots, it is unlikely that Greek Cypriots would be motivated to begin learning Turkish for pragmatic reasons such as potential employment or career advancement. Thus, a similar study within the Greek Cypriot community would be very enlightening and might reveal new orientations which did not appear in the current study.

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