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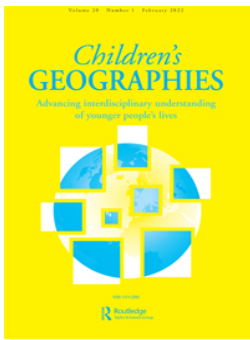
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# Intergenerational language practices, linguistic capital and place: the case of Greek-Cypriot Migrant Families in the UK

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine changing heritage language practices across multiple generations of Greek-Cypriot migrants in the United Kingdom. It is now well established that language serves as one of the key markers of ethnic identity in migrant families. As a result, migrant communities often strive to transmit and maintain the heritage language among successive generations. However, less is known about the ways in which later-generations experience and practice heritage languages, particularly child members of families, and how this affects the development of the ethnic identity and feelings of belonging. Evidence from in-depth interviews with three generations of Greek-Cypriot families living in the UK is used to address this gap. In doing so, the relationship between language and intergenerationality is traced to examine how linguistic capital is transmitted, transformed and negotiated between generations and across space. Findings indicate that language proficiency and learning present both challenges and opportunities for members of migrant families and that these differ by generation.

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## KEYWORDS

Heritage language; linguistic capital; intergenerationality; Greek-Cypriot; migrant families

## Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that migration has important implications for the formation of individuals' senses of identity and belonging (Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen 2008; Moskal and Sime 2015; Jones and Lewis 2019). While initial work in this area focused on the experiences of adults, a growing body of literature has explored the experiences of children and the effects of migration and mobility on contemporary childhood and youth identities (Morales 2016). In particular, attention has been paid to the experiences of children growing up in transnational families and the opportunities and challenges they face (Sánchez 2007). These children grow up surrounded by a hybrid mix of social and cultural norms, one of the most important of which is language.

Language has long been viewed as a marker of ethnic and national identity (Song 2012) and linguistic capital (Yosso 2005) can be utilised by members of migrant families to legitimise belonging and to provide opportunities for social mobility (Erel 2010). Yet, research has also shown that migrant children may find themselves pulled between the competing demands for linguistic competency made by wider society, as well as demands for linguistic preservation made by the ethnic community and extended family (Moskal and Sime 2015). Thus, the relationship between language and identity is continuously renegotiated and redefined across time and space (Song 2012).

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In this paper, we use the idea of intergenerationality to analyse how three generations of Greek-Cypriots experience and practise their heritage language in the UK. We investigate parental decision-making processes regarding language transmission and the motivations behind these decisions. In doing so, we trace the relationship between language and intergenerationality to examine the transmission, transformation and negotiation of linguistic capital between generations. Particular attention is paid to the experiences of third-generation migrants – many of whom are children – and the role that language plays in the formation of their senses of identity and belonging.

## Language practices, linguistic capital and intergenerationality

An ability to speak a heritage language provides a way for ethnic groups to remain distinct in migration contexts. Language also confers cultural, economic and social capital (Bourdieu 1986) and so plays an important role in shaping migrants' occupational and social mobility (Erel 2010), as well as their social status. Language is so significant in this regard that the importance of linguistic capital has been recognised in its own right. Linguistic capital is defined by Yosso (2005, 78) as 'intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style.'

Linguistic capital allows ethnic identity to be performed; transnational relationships to be maintained (Rumbaut 2002; Morales 2016) and opens opportunities for different learning experiences of individuals (Desforges and Jones 2001). As such, the ability to speak another language opens opportunities to develop social and economic capital within local ethnic networks and, significantly, across transnational communities (Erel and Ryan 2019). Many migrant families are keen, therefore, to maintain these forms of linguistic capital (Harvey and Mallman 2019).

Place plays an important role in the development and transmission of linguistic capital, which can be validated in particular social and spatial contexts. The idea of 'prestigious languages' (Kahane 1986) recognises that dominant languages reflect social and political norms and provide greater benefits and opportunities to their speakers (Becker-Cavallin and Knoll 2021). An inability to speak a prestigious language will devalue a migrant's cultural capital. However, migrant parents often view the heritage language as a form of cultural capital and strive to maintain it by using it in the home and enrolling their children in language schools (Morales 2016). Language schools and ethnic churches have been identified as important places where children can develop linguistic capital, and as a result, where ethnic identities are cultivated and reproduced (Goulbourne et al. 2010). Similarly, Leung (2004) argues that overseas Chinese language schools are an important tool for the construction and maintenance of Chinese culture by offering a place where collective memory and nostalgia are experienced. These institutions not only play an important part in the creation, maintenance and negotiation of ethnic identities, but also in the creation of translocal spaces that link ethnic communities and practices in different parts of the world (Kallis, Yarwood, and Tyrrell 2019).

In public places, children often become cultural brokers or translators for parents and grandparents in the new language and culture, resulting in traditional roles and hierarchies being challenged (Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido 2003). The term 'Third Culture Kids' has been coined to describe these young people who grow up traversing linguistic and cultural borders on a daily basis (Kwon 2019). They may also play a key part in enabling their families to accumulate forms of cultural capital recognised by receiving contexts (Devine 2009). Portes and Hao (2002) further suggest that a simultaneous mastery of both a prestigious and minority language represents a significant achievement among migrant youths and can have positive effects.

Language, space and identities are, therefore, mutually constituted (Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen 2008) and, significantly, children are often the key agents through which this is negotiated. The agency these young people develop is particularly significant in determining their linguistic decisions. Migrant children produce places through specific hegemonic languages

(Tyrrell, Guijarro-Fuentes, and Blandon 2014; Moskal and Sime 2015; Sime and Pietka-Nykaza 2015) – creating ‘distinct norms or regimes that regulate communicative practices and encounters between different linguistic performances’ (Moskal and Sime 2015, 10). Children may also experience a conflict of loyalties as they struggle to balance the demands of school to prioritise English in public and pressure from parents to maintain the heritage language of/in the home. Research suggests that older children in migrant families have the greatest agentive abilities and the linguistic negotiations that occur between family members play an important role in establishing new family roles and relationships (Fogle and King 2013).

Yet, while much has been written about the experiences of the children of migrant parents, less is known about the role and experience of *their* children. It is unclear whether young people in second- or third-generations have the same agency in the development of linguistic capital. It might be speculated that they are the beneficiaries of the cultural and linguistic capital developed by their parents and grandparents, especially regarding the use of dominant, official languages. Equally, it might also be assumed that the linguistic capital is lessened as opportunities and knowledge to speak their parents’ language are diminished. In either case, children and the places in which they use, or don’t use, a particular language are key to maintaining and transmitting cultural capital.

In this paper we examine the significance of intergenerationality to the production and transmission of linguistic capital. The idea of intergenerationality recognises how social identities are produced via interactions between different age groups and generations (Edmunds and Turner 2002), as well as the relational significance of age (Hopkins and Pain 2007). Consequently, it recognises the significance of different generational positions as sites and spaces where cultural values are changed, maintained and negotiated (Punch 2020). Intergenerationality therefore provides a useful framework for examining changing everyday practices within migrant families and, significantly, to emphasise the agency of children and parents in these relationships. Doing so responds to calls that have been made by writers in this journal for age and generation to receive greater recognition as important social variables (Alanen 2020; Punch 2020).

We draw on the language practices of three generations of Greek-Cypriot families living in the UK to examine two key issues. First, and more broadly, we examine how forms of linguistic capital change across time and place and the ways in which this is converted to social and economic capital by different generations of families. Second, we focus on the role of childhood in these transformations. Intergenerational perspectives allow us to examine how the experiences of children inform their own behaviours as parents and, in turn, how this influences a new generation of children. By paying attention to the shifting experiences and perspectives of different generations, we consider how language and intergenerationality help us understand how cultural capital is transmitted, negotiated and revalidated between generations.

## The study

### Context

Cyprus has always been a country of emigration and, as a former colony, many Cypriots have migrated to the UK (Teerling 2011). Estimations of the number of Cypriots living in the UK vary greatly; however, the National Federation of Cypriots in the UK claims to represent more than 300,000 Britons of Cypriot ancestry.<sup>1</sup> While early migration to the UK began in the 1930s, the bulk of migration took place during the 1950s and 1960s as individuals migrated to obtain better wages and stable jobs (King, Christou, and Teerling 2011). It is important to note that Cyprus is characterised as a place of ethnic division and its political history is closely linked to that of Greece. Therefore, the identity positions of individuals are often dependent on which political ideology they affiliate with.<sup>2</sup>

Early migrants were usually of low economic status and spoke the Greek-Cypriot dialect, with only a basic knowledge of Standard Modern Greek (as spoken in mainland Greece) and English

(Karatsareas 2019). Subsequent generations of migrants were exposed to the Greek-Cypriot Dialect in the home environment and had the opportunity to learn Standard Modern Greek at Greek Schools run by the Greek-Cypriot Education Mission and the Greek Orthodox Church (Gardner-Chloros, McEntee-Atalianis, and Finnis 2005). For the first-generation of migrants (born in Cyprus and migrated to the UK as late adolescents or adults), English is a second language, which they learned after migration. The second-generation (born in the UK to at least one Cyprus-born parent) and their children – the third-generation – are both fluid in English, having acquired it either from birth at home or when they began attending mainstream British schools (Karatsareas 2019). In a study of 274 individuals of Greek-Cypriot descent living in London and attending Greek School (most of whom were second- or third-generation), nearly 90% claimed to be bilingual in English and Cypriot Greek (Papapavlou and Pavlou 2001). Nevertheless, there are concerns among Greek-Cypriot communities in both Cyprus and the UK that the use of both the Greek-Cypriot Dialect and Standard Modern Greek will die out among future generations of Greek-Cypriot families in the UK (Gardner-Chloros, McEntee-Atalianis, and Finnis 2005).

To date, studies on the linguistic practices of this ethnic group have been limited to those living in London, which is a ‘top-scale’ city (Schiller and Caglar 2009) with a wide range of places and institutions developed specifically to allow engagement in Greek-Cypriot culture, including churches, schools, community centres, shops selling Greek/Cypriot foodstuffs, as well as access to Greek/Cypriot media forms. In this paper, we build on this work by focusing on a ‘down-scale’ city where there is a smaller Greek-Cypriot community and fewer of these places. While the general migrant population in the city is growing, it is low in comparison to other UK cities—figures from the 2011 Census suggest that only 7% of residents were born outside of the UK (compared to 13% for the UK as a whole) and so it is not as diverse.

## Method

The current study took place in a large provincial city in England with a relatively low population of Greek-Cypriots. Cypriots first moved to the city in 1935 and, according to Census data, there were 250 Cypriot-born individuals living there in 2011. However, members of the Greek Orthodox Church and Greek School committees in the city suggest there are 400–500 individuals of Greek-Cypriot descent. The following discussion is based on findings from 48 qualitative interviews with members of 14 families, which took place from June 2014 until October 2015. Qualitative interviews were conducted with members of three generations of Greek-Cypriot families, 15 of whom were children at the time of interview (Table 1). Most families had been living in the UK for several decades after first-generation members travelled over from Cyprus in the 1950s and 1960s, although there was one large family who had migrated more recently. There was an even spread between second- and third-generation participants; however, only seven first-generation participants took part in a formal interview. Several participants were part of mixed couples and in some instances, their partners contributed to interview discussions.

The sample includes both middle- and working-class individuals and, as one may expect among a migrant community, reflects a general trend of occupational and social mobility that emerged over the generations. As the following sections show, linguistic capital played an important role in enabling this mobility. Many individuals, particularly the first-generation, (had) worked in the

**Table 1.** Participant details.

	First-generation	Second-generation	Third-generation
Number of participants	7	19	20
Age range	64–81 years old	Late 20s to early 50s	5–38 years old
Number of females	5	9	16
Number of males	2	10	4

catering industry, often in family businesses. However, several of the second-generation had attended university and worked as professionals, while others worked in the service sector. Participants were contacted using snowballing methods initiated by personal acquaintances of the researcher and through contacts made at the local Greek School and Church. All participants were given a choice as to whether the interview was conducted in Greek or English, with an interpreter used for the former. Narrative interviews were conducted with adult participants and they were asked to recount their life stories, which yielded rich and detailed accounts of their pasts and presents (Lieblich, Rivka, and Tamar 1998).

The interviews with children (aged 5–16 years) were more structured and they were also given the opportunity to take part in some drawing activities beforehand if they wished. Specifically, they were asked to draw a 'family and friendship diagram' and they were encouraged to talk whilst they were drawing, which revealed rich and interesting information. The drawings were then used as a starting point to trigger discussions in the interviews (Schafer and Yarwood 2008). Additional questions were asked about relationships with family members and friends, holidays to Cyprus and attendance at church and other Greek ceremonies. As part of these discussions, children were also asked about their use of the Greek language and their views on the Greek School, which most (but not all) of them attended. The school taught Standard Modern Greek and was run mainly by members of the church. It was well attended by young members of the community, aged from five years up to their late teens. Young people would usually attend one evening a week and also on a Saturday morning, with older students working towards achieving their Greek General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) and/or A Level.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts and research diary notes were analysed using an 'open coding' process that allowed themes and relationships to emerge from the data. The following sections present these data: first, the experiences of the first-generation on arrival in the UK are discussed and their subsequent decision-making processes around language transmission. The impact of these decisions on the experiences of the second-generation is described, before, in turn, considering their own experiences as parents and their perspectives on language use. The final discussion section explores the perspectives of the third-generation, particularly with regard to their experiences at the local Greek School.

## Findings

### *From the first-generation to the second*

It is important to understand the early migration experiences of the first-generation, and particularly their language experiences, to gain an insight into their decision-making processes around language transmission as they became parents. Most members of the first-generation migrated to the UK when in their late teens and early twenties and cited their lack of knowledge of the English language as the main challenge they faced upon arrival:

Only thing I was, not annoyed, but upset because I didn't understand the language, obviously is not the people's fault, it's my fault because I didn't know the language. (Theodora, first-generation, age 69)

Obviously the language, darling, the language was the barrier, I just didn't want people to talk to me because I didn't know what to say, if it's right or wrong . . . . (Xanthe, first-generation, age 64)

Theodora and Xanthe were some of the later migrants to arrive in the study city, migrating in the early 1970s; however, there were still few local services available to them in terms of language classes and support groups when they arrived. In some cases, this made it harder to participate in daily life (Erel and Ryan 2019) and, as Xanthe observes, created a barrier between themselves and other individuals. This was largely because they lacked the cultural resources – in particular the linguistic capital – recognised by formal institutions in the UK (Blackledge 2001). Most participants worked alongside other Cypriots when they first migrated and continued to speak Greek in the workplace-



highlighting the importance of ethnic linguistic capital. However, this offered them few opportunities to learn the English language and to gain the form of linguistic capital which would be recognised by wider society. Over time, in order to access essential services and, as they began to have children who attended English-speaking schools, the first-generation slowly began to learn English – some did so reluctantly, whilst others saw this as an opportunity.

As they learnt English, members of the first-generation continued to speak Greek in the space of the home. Their use of the language often reflected a desire for normative belonging in an unfamiliar space, i.e. as migrants in Britain (Tyrrell, Guijarro-Fuentes, and Blandon 2014). They also viewed the homeland language (alongside the Greek Orthodox religion) as key in the maintenance of the Greek-Cypriot identity. This reflects a more essentialised view of national identity, which is constructed in more narrow and exclusionary ways (Mavroudi 2020). An essentialised view privileges narrow versions of national identity that usually involve speaking the heritage language to a good standard and holding onto this through time and space.

The first-generation established a Greek Church and School in the city so that their religion and language could be passed on to later-generations. These widened the spaces in which the heritage language was spoken, meaning its use was not just confined to the private space of the home and that it could be used more freely in these public spaces. Their establishment also created an opportunity for members to validate their cultural resources, in particular the heritage language and Greek Orthodox religion, as capital (see also Erel 2010). These practices acquire different meanings in different contexts; while they may not necessarily have been valued in wider society at the time, their significance was emphasised within the church and school, providing them with validation.

Most of the first-generation spoke to their children in Greek and raised them to speak Greek as their first language. Often this was a necessity, as parents were unable to speak English themselves, however for some, particularly those who had married an English spouse, deciding which language to speak to their children in was a difficult one, as they were torn between maintaining the heritage language, but also the desire for their children to be competent in the English language. Theodora recalls a conversation she had with a doctor after the birth of her first son:

When I had Elias and I visited a doctor [...] the doctor said to me ‘do you want them to learn your language?’ I said ‘yes of course I want them to learn my language.’ She said ‘this is the time you have to start to speak to them in Greek because at home, they’re watching television- English; you going out, people speak in English; they going to school, it’s English; your husband is English. If you don’t speak to them in Greek they are not going to learn.’ She gave me very good advice, that English doctor, [...] - when you’re young you don’t understand these things, but when you get older you think ‘oh, why I haven’t done that?’ And it’s another language, it’s a free language to learn. (First-generation, age 69)

This conversation gave Theodora the confidence and affirmation that she was doing the right thing by speaking to her children in Greek, but also emphasises the daily practice of English language use and the many places it is spoken. As Song (2012) observes, parents’ choice of language acquisition strategies often take into account what linguistic and social capital would be best for their children. Like the Polish mothers in Moskal’s (2016) study, Theodora was aware of the importance of the English language for her children’s education and prospects, yet she did not want them to abandon the heritage language. Theodora felt it was natural that her children would learn Greek – illustrated when she said ‘of course’ she wanted them to learn it – as it was such a key part of her identity and something she wanted to be kept alive among later-generations. Like other members of the first-generation, Theodora initially migrated to the UK with hopes of one day returning to Cyprus, therefore great emphasis continued to be placed on the Greek language.

This process of parental decision-making raises questions about the agency of children; at this early stage they seemed to have little agency and the language they learnt was dependent on parental choice. The following section explores the influence of first-generation parents’ decisions on their children’s linguistic experiences.



### *The second-generation and language use*

Some members of the second-generation spoke about the impact of speaking Greek as their first language in great detail. When interviewed, Theodora's sons revealed that they had begun nursery with little knowledge of the English language, yet this was not a problem for them as they quickly learned the language. Their account contrasted with those of the other members of the second-generation, however, who felt that being raised to speak Greek was not such a positive thing:

When I was young, before I started primary school, my parents used to speak to me in Greek, the problem was, when I started [...] pre-school, I didn't understand any English! [...] The funny thing was, the schools in those days, no one really picked up on it, they just thought I was being quiet or just being a bit naughty and just ignoring what the teachers were saying, I didn't understand a word. But they only figured it out when I was probably about five, when I started primary school- in the first six months they were wondering why is this boy not- there's something wrong with this boy. Then they realised I couldn't speak any English! Because my parents made the big mistake of- it's good that they were speaking to me in Greek because that was their main language- but the mistake was, we were in England, we went to an English school and there's no point in me speaking Greek to the kids when they don't understand. (Deo, second-generation, age 48)

Deo's account was typical of second-generation participants regarding the challenges they faced when beginning school with little or no prior knowledge of the English language, particularly when both their parents were from Cyprus. The second-generations' experience in this regard is similar to those of migrant children arriving in the UK with their families in more recent times and research suggests that one of the defining features of the initiatory period of a migrant newcomer's experience in a new school is unfamiliarity (linguistic, cultural, interpersonal, institutional, etc.) (Moskal 2016; Evans and Liu 2018). As a result, these children face overwhelming pressure to integrate quickly into the new language of the school system (Moskal 2016). They often possess a strong desire to acquire English fluency because of an awareness of the lack of cultural currency or recognition of their native language in the classroom (Devine 2009). Additionally, Deo began school in the 1970s- a time when the numbers of migrants in the study city were much lower than they are today and there were fewer local services available in terms of language classes and support groups (Sime and Pietka-Nykaza 2015).

A few members of the second-generation had not spoken Greek as their first language, usually because one of their parents had been born in England. They did not recount facing the same challenges when starting school, however, conversely, some individuals described how they had felt the need to learn Greek when they were teenagers. In these instances, proficiency in the Greek language offered individuals an opportunity to build economic capital through working in shops and restaurants with other Cypriots. Additionally, these contrasting accounts draw attention to the significance of language in structuring the everyday spaces of home, school and work (Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen 2008).

They also highlight a need for analysis to be sensitive to temporal and spatial dynamics in 'highlighting the fractures, hierarchies and exclusions in specific fields' (Erel and Ryan 2019, 247). While the proficiency of some second-generation children in the Greek language enabled them to communicate with their parents and family members at home, they then felt 'out of place' (Cresswell 1996) at school, as their linguistic competencies did not fit the norms and expectations of this particular setting and they lacked the requisite cultural capital required to succeed. Similar to the way their parents struggled to engage with wider organisations and institutions, the second-generation also struggled to converse with their peers and teachers at school. For other members of the second-generation, the workplace became an important place where they could learn the heritage language later in life, subsequently acquiring an additional cultural resource that was validated in this particular place.

These early experiences of the second-generation impacted them in different ways with important repercussions for the decisions they made when they became parents themselves. The second-generation parents who had negative memories of their inability to speak or understand English did

not want to repeat this experience with their own children. Their accounts of the unfamiliarity and anxiety they experienced when starting school – heightened by finding themselves within a foreign linguistic environment – meant that most second-generation parents chose to speak to their children predominantly in English at home (cf. Evans and Liu 2018). Second-generation parents gave much thought to this decision; however, their experiences had provided them with a better understanding of the social and cultural milieu of wider society in the UK. Subsequently, they wanted their children to learn English as this was seen as the form of linguistic capital required to succeed in mainstream school (Blackledge 2001). This thinking supports Erel's assertion that members of migrant families 'actively constitute their cultural capital to fit in with the ethnically dominant culture of the society of residence' (2010, 643-644). Later-generation parents were also more open to their children developing more outward and inclusionary ethnic identities (Mavroudi 2020), which included embracing other languages beyond the heritage language.

In order to strengthen cultural capital between generations, many parents sent their children to the local Greek School. Greek School became an important place not just for language learning, but also a place where their children could learn about their Cypriot heritage and feel part of the local ethnic community. Learning the language generated linguistic and social capital:

The reason why we have the Greek Church, we have the Greek School here is because we want to sort of [...] keep it alive in the Greek community for the kids as well [...] it's more of a community thing than anything else [...]. The reason why I send my [daughter] to [Greek] School is a couple of reasons really. It's for the community, so she gets to know all the Greek community and so that she doesn't forget where her grandparents or one half of her grandparents have come from, so she needs to learn that history ... it's a good thing for them to know. (Deo, second-generation, age 48)

Deo wanted his daughter to attend the Greek School both to learn the Greek language, but also to encourage her to feel part of the ethnic community in the city. Despite raising their children to speak English as their first language, parents still saw the heritage language as an important cultural resource and viewed bilingualism as an asset (see also Becker-Cavallin and Knoll 2021). Attending organisations like the school and church can contribute to the development of alternative forms of social and cultural capital among migrant communities, as individuals are able to build social bonds and connections while also developing their religious and cultural knowledge (Goulbourne et al. 2010). Thus, they are important translocal spaces which provide important links to Cyprus through the performance of shared practices (see Kallis, Yarwood, and Tyrrell 2019; 2020). The Greek School and Church were particularly significant to many families in the study city as, being located in a 'down-scale' city, they were the only formal institutions developed specifically for the ethnic community.

Some second-generation parents chose not to send their children to Greek School, as they wanted to keep a distance from the ethnic community in the city and/or because of the school's close association with the church, which they did not believe in. However, most of these parents still attempted to teach their children Greek at home. The transmission of the Greek language was viewed as a significant way of enabling family relations with grandparents and relatives in Cyprus:

We've also got a baby sister [...] we speak Greek at home so she can speak to our family if we ever go back [to Cyprus] and then she can also learn English as well. (Katherine, third-generation, age 16)

As well as enabling family relations, heritage language proficiency was viewed as an important investment in children's cultural capital as parents believed their children's bilingualism could open up valuable educational and career opportunities (see also Erel and Ryan 2019).

These accounts illustrate the complex range of factors and emotions that influence parental language practices and choices and the motivations behind these (Tyrrell, Guijarro-Fuentes, and Blandon 2014). These parents were negotiating cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in both the English and Greek languages and this was sometimes complicated further when their partners

came from another ethnic group. The following section explores the perspectives of the third-generation regarding their language use.

### *The third-generation and language use*

Children were often unaware of the negotiations their parents made when deciding which languages to teach them. However, the members of the third-generation who could not speak Greek and did not attend the Greek School all expressed their disappointment at this and observed that they would have liked to participate. Eight-year-old Tania was particularly disappointed that she was not able to learn Greek in order to converse with other family members:

- Researcher: You've never been to Greek school have you?  
 Tania: No  
 Researcher: Would you like to go?  
 Tania: Yeh  
 Researcher: Do you think it's important to learn Greek?  
 Tania: Yeh because it's my family and I won't understand what they're talking about so I would like to learn what they're saying, not that I would like to talk about things [...] that grown-ups talk about, but I would like to know what they're saying, it might be something about me, I'm curious

Proficiency in heritage languages is often seen as an important form of linguistic capital, which enables communication between migrant family members and is necessary for participation across generations (Morales 2016). Here, Tania expresses her resentment that she is unable to understand conversations held in Greek between adult members of the family. Although Tania and others learnt the odd word or phrase in Greek from their parents and grandparents, their inability to converse more fluently formed an imaginary boundary between themselves and other family members. This occurred both in the UK and during holidays to Greece and Cyprus. The quote from Tania also draws attention to the commonly perceived separation of child and adult worlds (Jones 2008). Tania's desire to learn the heritage language highlights how the meaning of ethnically specific resources – in this case the language – changes across generations (Erel 2010); the heritage language was something that allowed Tania's mother to converse with family members, yet created a barrier between herself and her teachers and peers when beginning school in the UK. For Tania, use of the heritage language created a barrier between herself and some family members; however, her lack of understanding sparked feelings of curiosity and intrigue.

The young people who were more proficient in the Greek language confirmed that this was a useful resource that enabled them to communicate with family members – particularly those living in Cyprus – who had little or no understanding of the English language. Most of them had been on holidays to Cyprus and held positive associations with the country, although sometimes these appeared to be idealised notions (Wessendorf 2007), which were centred around trips to the beach and indulging in watermelon and ice-cream. However, their ability to speak Greek was important, even when they were not fluent, as this facilitated their involvement with family members and locals who lived there. The language as a cultural resource was validated during these times and converted into capital as a result. A couple of the younger children could not comprehend a visit to the country where they were unable to speak the language:

- If you don't learn Greek, if we wanna go to Cyprus when we're grown up older [...] we won't be able to go in any town because we can't speak Greek. (Eleanor, third-generation, age 7)

Although Eleanor's fears were likely to be unjustified, her thoughts highlight the transnational perspective that many of these young people developed (Morales 2016) and their desire to participate in life in Cyprus. Some of the young people even discussed moving there to live or work, rather than just visiting on holiday. Thus, several of the young people valued the education they received at the Greek School as they felt it would facilitate their ability to participate in society in Cyprus in the

future. Again, this evidences not only the social and cultural capital afforded by bilingualism, but also the economic capital, as young people saw bilingualism as providing opportunities to live and work abroad (Erel and Ryan 2019). It also shows how transnational space is important to these young people- they maintained both real and imagined connections to Cyprus and these connections were facilitated by the ability to speak the heritage language.

Interestingly, none of the children spoke about their education at the Greek School or their proficiency in the Greek language being recognised as a skill or resource by their mainstream school in the UK until they were taking their Greek GCSE and A Level exams. This reflects a wider shift in UK society as mainstream schools increasingly help to facilitate the examination of minority languages as a GCSE or A Level subject – often in conjunction with complementary schools. Erel (2010, 656) suggests that this illustrates how, over time, heritage languages ‘may increasingly become established not as a ‘lack’ but as a resource to be turned into cultural capital’.

However, as Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen (2008) observe, schools are made up of two spaces: ‘the formal adult controlled space of the classroom; and the informal peer spaces outside of lesson time’ (p.382). Although the young people’s ability to speak Greek was not often recognised in the formal monolingual space of the English classroom, their linguistic abilities appeared to be mobilised in positive ways in informal peer group spaces, with non-Cypriot friends wanting to learn the language too:

My friend wants me to teach her Greek because [...] she thinks it’s really interesting to be able to speak two languages. (Flora, third-generation, age 10)

In this sense, the heritage language becomes a form of linguistic capital that the young people can utilise as a means of further connecting with their peers who are not from Cypriot families. The newly arrived migrant children in Evans and Liu’s study (2018) similarly expressed how their early exchanges with schoolmates consisted of attempts to teach them words from their heritage language. Our research shows that these requests are not limited to newly arrived migrant children and are also experienced by those who have grown up in the UK. However, these exchanges were still viewed as a mutually satisfying experience for those involved as well as an effective mode of bonding. Indeed the bilingualism of the young people appeared to be viewed as exotic and unusual among their peers in the study city – particularly as they were often the only child of Cypriot heritage in their class or year group – and some of the young people enjoyed the interest that their Cypriot-ness created.

## Conclusion

This paper has used the concept of intergenerationality to show how heritage language is practised over three generations of families. It has shown how both the childhood and migratory experiences of individuals influence the decisions they make as parents about whether and how to teach their children the heritage language. We have illustrated both the challenges and opportunities afforded by language proficiency and learning and how these are different for each generation. We have also shown how the spaces of language changed between generations.

Most of the first-generation migrated to the UK with little to no understanding of the English language, yet they learnt it so they could better engage with wider institutions and services. Members of the second-generation also learnt English when attending mainstream school and their childhood experiences played a central role in influencing the decisions they made later in life about transmitting the heritage language to their own children. They were keen that their children were proficient in the English language when attending school in the UK, but saw their use of the heritage language as important in maintaining relations with grandparents and other family members, as well as offering an opportunity to gain qualifications and live and work abroad. Although the second-generation did not have much agency as children in choosing which languages they would learn and when, once they were fluent in both English and

Greek, they were able to exert agency in deciding which language to use and in which spaces. When they became parents, they were able to determine their own agency as transmitters of the heritage language.

These findings draw attention to the concept of cultural capital and how it is transmitted, negotiated and revalidated between generations. Through linguistic capital, cultural capital is converted to economic capital; linguistic capital in the form of the heritage language is largely seen as important in maintaining ethnic and cultural norms and values by earlier generations, whilst later-generations are able to convert this form of linguistic capital into economic capital which has potential to widen their future prospects. This is a very subtle shift; however, it shows that, despite fears among some communities that heritage languages will die out by the third-generation, it still holds value- but just in different ways.

The spaces of language also changed between generations; while the first-generation continued to use the heritage language in the space of the home – and in the Greek School and Church as an extension of this - subsequent generations took a more flexible approach to their language use, and switched between Greek and English depending on the social context. For all generations though, connections to Cyprus – both real for first-generation members, and sometimes more imagined for later-generations – remained important. It is because of these connections that they wished to speak the heritage language.

Our study has also drawn attention to the challenges faced in maintaining heritage languages in a down-scale city; where there is less diversity, children from migrant families are seen as more 'different' or 'exotic' in mainstream school. This was a particular challenge for members of the second-generation who had to adapt and learn the English language to be able to succeed in this setting. Yet, the proficiency of the third-generation in the English language proffered them more choice and flexibility, and they could choose to emphasise their Cypriot identity as and when they pleased.

Our research points to the need for language to play a more central role in geographical debates around identity and familial relationships among migrant family members. It has shown the importance of intergenerationality to understanding language transmission, and while there is work which explores the significance of space and different places to language use (Valentine, Sporton, and Bang Nielsen 2008) future work needs to pay careful attention to the way in which different capitals, including linguistic capital, are converted and validated in different spaces. The experiences of children and young people in schools is particularly important (Allan and Jørgensen 2020), as this has a profound impact on their sense of self and the subsequent decisions they make in life. Our findings are also important for education policy and school practices in England. They point to the importance of teachers' understanding and awareness of heritage language use and the diverse linguistic needs of migrant families – not just for recent migrants – but also for those who have been settled for many years.

## Notes

1. This total includes those of both Turkish-Cypriot and Greek-Cypriot origin.
2. Only one participant in the study made reference to the political histories of the two countries when making the point that he was Greek and not Greek-Cypriot or Cypriot. All other participants identified as Greek-Cypriot.

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