

## Chapter 5: “Language” as a resource for positioning

Why start an analysis of identification and belonging by investigating how the languages spoken in a community are evaluated and used as resources for positioning? Beyond linguists’ disciplinary preoccupation with language-related topics (use, perception, competence, attitudes, evaluations...), the present research offers two further convincing reasons. The first is the close relationship between language (use) and identification, as elaborated in Chapter 3. The second emerges here from a particular feature, namely the perceived mismatch between the Turkish variety spoken by the Urum Greek members of the community, and their Orthodox Christian religious affiliation, in an area where **TURKISH**<sup>1</sup> is linked to **ISLAM**, whereas **GREEK** is linked to **(ORTHODOX) CHRISTIANITY**. Interactional elaborations on language competence, language use within the family, and language evaluations, thus take us straight to the heart of what is going on in the community in terms of identification, boundary (un)making, and the transformations of the last 25 years. The choice, therefore, is also a narrative one: I start from the most apparent question of national affiliation, because it is so closely linked to language (and ancestry, and religion, depending on the circumstances) in the frame of the modern nation state. The different power relations some of my consultants’ experienced in Georgia and Greece makes the investigation of discourses around **LANGUAGE** especially fruitful.

Before I proceed, a word on *attitudes*, since much of the analysis in this part is concerned with what traditionally would fall under the header *language attitudes*. Positivist traditions from Katz / Stotland (1959) onward tend to conceptualize attitudes as comprised of three interacting components: *cognitive*, *evaluative*, *conative* (action oriented). Attitudes serve specific functions (Deprez / Persoons, 1987; Garrett, 2010), and are understood as stable over time and therefore accessible to scientific examination (Garrett, 2010, p. 20).

There are two immediate objections to this approach. Firstly, it is still not quite clear how these three components interact, even though some find-

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1 As introduced in Chapter 1, categories emerging in the analysis as relevant and methods used frequently by consultants are set in **SMALL CAPS** throughout the analysis. Note that this does not comprise my reference to my consultants, including labeling them as Urum Greeks and Pontic Greeks.

ings suggest that cognitive and affective (evaluative) components are more closely linked to one another than to the behavioral component (Garrett, 2010). Indeed, research on language use rather consistently finds a mismatch between professed and observable language use and/or perceptive competence. One early striking investigation of such a mismatch led to insights about how language varieties are used by speakers to position themselves (Le Page / Tabouret-Keller, 1985). This “inconsistency” between evaluation and behavior should lead to “confusion and doubt” (Deprez / Persoons, 1987, p. 127) on part of such an “imbalanced” consultant – which is not borne out empirically.<sup>2</sup> Arendt (2011) therefore proposes to distinguish between *linguistic behavior*, *reaction to linguistic perception*, and *expression of language attitude* and to take these three together as *language attitude*. Helpfully, this approach does not task metacommunicative expressions of language attitudes with explaining linguistic behavior. One would instead need to examine all three components to get at the “real” language attitude “behind” them (Arendt, 2011, p. 138). While this may help us grasp the mismatch between attitude expression and linguistic behavior, it does not yet explain how they are related.

Secondly, the purported stability of attitudes to language was by the late 1980s shown to be questionable, if not untenable (Potter / Wetherell, 1987), sharing some of the theoretical difficulties dogging views of personal identification as stable or at some point “finalized” (cf. Chapter 3). The conceptual problem remains even if attitudes are only attributed a “degree of stability” (Garrett, 2010, p. 20): how can one distinguish empirically between an evaluation leading to action, and a more “stable” attitude (over what period of time? in the face of how many challenges?)? And how do inconsistencies fit into the picture? Is inconsistency between “attitude” and behavior on its own enough to disqualify it from being an “attitude”? None of this is to say that research into language attitude might not be a productive endeavor once these and other conceptual ambiguities are resolved.<sup>3</sup>

To clarify my approach: instead of grappling with hard-to-define notions of attitudes, I will examine how my consultants interactively deal with the *communicative problems* (Hausendorf, 2000) that appear when speaking

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2 Cf. Garrett (2010) for more examples that are not language related, including the dental check-up which many of us would only too happily find excuses for, the cognitive imperative on its advisability notwithstanding.

3 Cf. Soukup (2014) for an ambitious approach taking attitudes as produced in interaction and accessible to both quantitative and qualitative research, as opposed to Potter/Whetherell’s (1987) solely qualitative approach.

about languages. This involves investigating how and precisely what categories are established, how they are filled, how they are evaluated and how my consultants link them to other categories they make relevant for their identification and belonging, how these may have changed over time, and how they are used in boundary work. In keeping with the approach developed in the previous Chapters, I will be examining not only the evaluations but also the larger societal contexts on which consultants draw, the *interactive devices* used in speaking about LANGUAGE, and how they are used to position consultants and their community in their spatial, temporal, and social contexts.

In the terms of coupling and decoupling (Karafillidis 2009, 2010; cf. Chapter 3), this Chapter focuses on the former, exploring what consultants make relevant for identification and belonging. Of course, by stipulating the terms of belonging, those who do not comply are excluded. While the excerpts in this Chapter offer rich insights into processes of boundary-making, I will in many cases only hint at them in the analysis and will focus on the “cultural stuff they enclose” in Barth’s (1969) dictum. Chapter 7 will then focus more specifically on how these boundaries are drawn.

The individual Sections will deal with the heritage varieties Urum and Pontic Greek (A.), with Standard Modern Greek (B.), and with Russian and Georgian (C.). In each Section, I will first outline the competence consultants claim in the respective language before exploring how they speak about them, evaluate them, and use them as a resource to position themselves and their community. Perhaps the most important finding is that consultants vary in whether they consider LANGUAGE to be a central category-bound predicate, i.e. whether it is necessary to speak a certain language to be able to claim membership in said category, or whether they instead perceive LANGUAGE as a more marginal MEANS OF COMMUNICATION. In the latter case, centrality is usually given to RELIGION and/OR ANCESTRY.

### A. *Heritage varieties*

There are two varieties spoken in Georgia’s Greek community that can be analyzed as heritage varieties. One of them is what linguists have chosen to call *Caucasian Urum*, a Turkish variety linked closely to Anatolian Turkish (Skopeteas, 2014), spoken as heritage variety in the rural areas of Ts’alk’a and Tetrits’q’aro as well as in Tbilisi. The other is the Greek variety *Pontic Greek* spoken in rural Ach’ara, Tetrits’q’aro, the village of Tsikhisjvari and

historically in three villages in Ts’alk’a as well as the sea side city of Batumi. For the purpose of the present study, I will consider as *heritage variety* those varieties that members of the community used in their family and everyday interactions at the time they left the Ottoman Empire. This definition excludes Russian, which became the language of inter-ethnic communication at the latest during the Soviet Union, as well as Georgian, which for some (mostly urban) families is slowly becoming the family language. It also excludes Standard Modern Greek, which in some cases is conceptualized as *rodnoy yazyk* the “native language” of GREEKS but has no proven history as a long-term family language in Georgia’s Greek community.<sup>4</sup>

In this Section, I will first explore consultants’ self-assessed competence in their respective heritage variety and whether they pass it on to their children (I.) and then investigate how they speak about and evaluate the two varieties (II.). Section III. summarizes the findings, focusing on the interactive methods consultants use to talk about and evaluate both varieties.

## I. Competence and everyday language use

The first point of departure is to examine more closely what consultants say about their own competence in their respective heritage variety, and whether and where they use this variety in their everyday communications. Importantly, I did not carry out any type of assessment test. The following relies on how consultants assess themselves and their community in our semi-structured interview conversations. Furthermore, in terms of everyday language use, I also rely on my observations from living with an Urum Greek family in 2010 and 2013 and observing everyday routine interactions while spending time in the villages. Given the absence of any large-scale studies on this community, the following investigation should be seen as exploratory.

Table 5.1 shows self-assessed language competence.<sup>5</sup> Note that consultants claiming proficiency in either heritage variety also indicate speaking it at

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4 It is widely attested for minority languages in the post-Soviet space that consultants give as *rodnoy yazyk* not their strongest language or the one they speak at home but the language that is seen as pertaining to their national or ethnic affiliation (Grenoble, 2003, pp. 28-31). This is discussed for the Greek community in the Northern Caucasus in Zoumpalidis (2012, 2013).

5 If consultants had not explicated their language competences previously, I usually introduced the topic by asking *na kakikh yazykakh vy govorite* “which languages do you speak?”

Table 5.1: Self-assessed competence in the respective heritage variety

	competent		no/little comp.		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Urum rural</b>	12	100	0	0	12	100
<b>Urum urban</b>	8	72.7	3	27.3	11	100
<b>Pontic rural</b>	16	100	0	0	16	100
<b>Pontic urban</b>	4	40	6	60	10	100
<b>Total</b>	40	81.6	9	18.4	49	100

least in the family (in urban contexts) or in routine daily interactions outside the home (in rural contexts). The above-mentioned periods of taking part in family and village life suggest that consultants probably did not greatly exaggerate their language competence and use. Note also that the difference between rural and urban spaces for both heritage varieties points to differences between these spaces, which will be addressed later in this Chapter.<sup>6</sup> Crucially, while it does look as if urban Urum Greeks had or reported a higher proficiency in their heritage variety than their urban Pontic Greek counterparts, this cannot be generalized to the whole community, as the sample size is simply too small. What we can confirm based on this table is that both heritage varieties are still widely spoken in Georgia's rural areas.

Table 5.2 shows responses, from consultants who are competent in their respective heritage variety, to the question of whether they transfer(ed) their heritage variety to their children (or imagine doing so in the future, in the case of consultants who did not have children at the time of the interview).<sup>7</sup> Apart from the fact that more Pontic Greek consultants did not answer that question, what becomes apparent is that more competent Urum speakers state that they have not, are not, or will not be transferring Urum to their

6 The difference between rural and urban spaces that we begin to see here is also widely attested in studies on language change (Nordberg, 1994; Vandekerckhove, 2010).

The specific context of internal migration to rural Kvemo Kartli, especially Ts'alk'a, will be the topic of analysis in Chapter 7.

7 In most interviews, this was covered in the conversation following the question *c kem vy govorite na etikh yazykakh* "with whom do you speak these languages?" In case consultants did not bring up their children themselves, I would usually ask *i s detmi* "and with (your) children?" If they did not have children, I would usually ask *budete li vy govorit' na* [heritage variety] *s vashimi detmi* "will you speak in [heritage variety] with your children?"

Table 5.2: Transfer of respective heritage variety to children (competent speakers)

	yes		no		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Urum rural</b>	9	66.6	2	16.6	2	16.6	12	100
<b>Urum urban</b>	6	75	1	12.5	1	12.5	8	100
<b>Pontic rural</b>	12	75	0	0	4	25	16	100
<b>Pontic urban</b>	2	50	0	0	2	50	4	100
<b>Total</b>	29	72.5	3	7.5	8	20	40	100

children. For two of them – AM in Tbilisi and IK in Ts’alk’a – pragmatic considerations of how useful a language will be for their children play an important role. Both concede that their children will probably pick up at least some Urum: IK’s hypothetical children by growing up in rural Ts’alk’a and AM’s children are attested to have a solid passive grasp on the language in the interview with her husband MA. In their reasoning, we already see one pervasive line of conceptualizing and talking about LANGUAGE, namely as a MEANS OF COMMUNICATION that can be more or less useful, depending on its spread and status. This view also permeates the evaluation of other languages spoken in the community, as we will see below. It is furthermore attested as a driver of language change and loss in other (post-)Soviet small speaker communities (Grenoble, 2003; Pavlenko, 2008).

Summing up, both heritage varieties are widely spoken, especially in the rural communities and transferred with surprising frequency to the next generation, even by our younger consultants.<sup>8</sup> The well-known formula of language loss over three generations where grandparents are competent speakers, parents speak it with their parents but not with their children, and children have at best a passive competence appears not to be borne out extensively in Georgia’s Greek community – or at least not by our consultants,

8 Note that neither Eleni Sideri’s nor my own consultants reported awkwardness in speaking either heritage variety in the family. Sideri reports difficulties when consultants were forced to label themselves: “Awkward moments arose when they had to define their ‘mother tongue’ in strict terms and they felt that this definition would express their national and political allegiance” (Sideri, 2006, p. 176).

and/or not yet.<sup>9</sup> These varieties appear to be afforded a measure of importance, although not one without complications, as the next Section will show.

## II. Speaking about and evaluating the heritage varieties

This Section is structured as follows: I will first summarize how consultants label the varieties they speak and, secondly, how they respond to the very direct question of whether their respective heritage variety is important to them personally. Section 1. will explore the narrative of Urum Greeks being forced to choose between keeping their language or their religion and choosing the latter, establishing RELIGION as the central category-bound predicate for being GREEK. Section 2. will examine how consultants speak about and evaluate the respective other heritage variety. Sections 3. and 4. will then investigate how consultants speak about and evaluate their own heritage language.

For Urum Greek consultants, their heritage variety is predominantly labeled as “Turkish” (12 speakers), and comes in various nuances of LANGUAGENESS, mostly as a *dialekt* ‘dialect’ or *narechie* ‘vernacular’, and PURITY, mostly *ne chisto* ‘not pure’. Seven consultants refer to it as “Urum” mostly after I have used that label first, or after more exposure to our wider documentation and research endeavors. EC makes this etic labeling very clear when she refers to it as: *urum kak vy govorite* “Urum as you say” (EC, 0:43:28). This underscores the potentially (problematic) groupness building capacity of what outsiders do “academically” with/for a community. Staying with the potential mismatch of etic and emic categories, two consultants refer to their heritage variety as *pontiyskiy* “Pontic”. This shows once more that for these consultants the geographical area of origin – the Pontos – is what labels their heritage variety rather than its language family. This is also a claim to the unity of the Greek community (“we’re all Pontic Greeks”) and a reminder that outsiders’ (linguistic) categories might not be the ones relevant to the community.<sup>10</sup> It is only once labeled as an *inostranny yazyk* “a foreign

9 On the scale developed by Lewis / Simons (2010) of the *ethnologue* (Eberhard et al., 2019) and based on my non-representative interviews, the community would thus be placed on the threshold between “vigorous” and “threatened”, corresponding to the transition from “safe” to “vulnerable” on the UNESCO scale (cf. Moseley 2010).

10 For a striking example from a very different context, namely the Guatemalan Highlands, cf. Vallentin (2019).

Table 5.3: Personal importance of heritage variety

	yes		no		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Urum rural</b>	5	41.7	6	50	1	8.3	12	100
<b>Urum urban</b>	8	72.7	0	0	3	27.3	11	100
<b>Pontic rural</b>	11	68.8	0	0	5	31.2	16	100
<b>Pontic urban</b>	4	40	1	10	5	50	10	100
<b>Total</b>	28	57.2	7	14.3	14	28.5	49	100

language” (VE, 0:23:00), pointing towards the perception of difficulties and the mythical forced choice between language and religion (cf. Section 1.).

Speakers of both heritage varieties refer to their respective variety as *nash/svoi* (*yazyk/dialekt*) “our/own (language/dialect)” – emphasizing a habitual closeness and perhaps also how constitutive these varieties are for their everyday interactions. It does not seem particularly juxtaposed to other varieties that are not *svoi/nash*, suggesting that its identificatory potential is realized more to express belonging than to draw boundaries. Interestingly, among the Urum Greeks, *nash* and its variants is used more frequently by urban than rural consultants, pointing again to a difference in how the identificatory potential of this variety is perceived.<sup>11</sup>

Pontic Greek consultants label their heritage variety *grecheskiy* ‘Greek’, *pontiyskiy* ‘Pontic’, or *etot grecheskiy* ‘this Greek’. The demonstrative in the latter underlines the perception that this is somehow a special kind of Greek, different from the unmarked and thereby “standard Greek”. Note that many consultants use the terms *grecheskiy* and *pontiyskiy* interchangeably – at least until I ask them whether they also speak SMG.

Table 5.3 shows how consultants answer the question *i govorit’ na* [heritage variety] – *eto vazhno dlya vas?* “and is speaking [heritage variety] important to you?” Again, more Pontic Greek than Urum Greek consultants do not answer this question. Of those who do answer, most consultants state that speaking their heritage variety is important to them. Only in rural Ts’alk’a, a surprisingly large number of Urum Greek consultants answer negatively. The one urban Pontic Greek consultant who does not afford her heritage variety

11 Note that this does not preclude a strong feeling of belonging to that community, perhaps best traced through the frequent reference to members of the in-group through the use of *nashi* (*greki*) “our (Greeks)” in all interviews.



much personal importance is KP, who has the above-mentioned pragmatic approach to languages: she is fluent in six languages (Pontic Greek, SMG, Russian, Georgian, English, Turkish) and establishes them as being mostly MEANS OF COMMUNICATION (KP, 0:32:52).

In addition to showing how consultants speak about their heritage varieties and analyzing how they use them as a resource for identification, the following Sections aim to determine what leads rural Urum Greeks to talk so differently about their heritage variety (which they speak well and pass on to their children) than urban Urum Greeks and Pontic Greeks in general. I will argue that this is at least partly due to challenges to their self-identification as GREEKS, arising from the socio-political context in Ts'alk'a which forces them to position themselves differently, and to problematize their heritage language in the interview situation.

First, however, I will look at some evaluations that are shared across both linguistic communities and across both rural and urban spaces. Many consultants evaluate their respective heritage variety as a highly valued family language<sup>12</sup> that is also useful in a number of ways. Being useful usually has to do with their heritage variety's closeness to either standard Turkish or other Turkic languages, or SMG in the case of Pontic Greek. Outside of Ts'alk'a, Georgian Greeks also talk about their respective heritage varieties in terms of maintaining the link to their ancestors, and express normative beliefs about "keeping one's language", as in the following excerpt:

(1) One should speak one's language (ND, 0:12:04-0:12:11)

- 1 ND: *vot lyuboy chelovek dolzhen (-) znat' svoiy yazyk (-) lyuboy*  
 well any person should to\_know own language any  
 2 *chelovek*  
 person  
 'Well, any person should know their own language, any person'

In expressing a normative belief, ND, a 59-year-old Urum Greek male consultant from Tbilisi, also voices the belief that for every person there is (at least) one language that is somehow linked to them. Without making it explicit, the fact that he voices this belief in relation to Urum allows the inference that this particular ownership of a language is transferred through ancestry. Since ancestry takes this central role in transferring belonging, it is not so surprising that ND does not consider competence in SMG to be a necessary

12 AK (0:28:27-0:28:24), for instance, explains how it is "impossible to forget" the heritage language: *potomu chto tebya roditeli vospitali na etom yazyke s pelënok* "because your parents raised you in this language from your diapers".

characteristic of a GREEK person (ND, 0:12:29, cf. the discussion of SMG in Section B.).

### 1. The “Choice” between language and religion

How did the Urum Greeks come to speak the Turkish variety linguists decided to call *Urum*? While this was not the first question that came to my mind as an outsider from Germany (assimilation over time due to trade relations and/or living in proximity to Turkish-speaking communities appears to be a plausible contender, cf. Chapter 1; Eloeva 1994; Sideri 2006), this turns out to be an important topic for my consultants. Although I never asked why Urum Greeks (used to) speak this variety, almost half of our consultants raise this issue at some point in the interview, either in passing or elaborately.<sup>13</sup>

This story can be told in at least two ways: from a mostly Urum Greek perspective, at some time during Ottoman rule the TURKS gave them the choice of exchanging their (Pontic) Greek language (which they purportedly spoke at that time) for Turkish, or giving up their Orthodox Christian faith and converting to Islam. Because religion was so important to them (the implication being that this is still the case today), they chose to keep their faith and change their language. Some consultants strongly imply or even explicitly state that the Pontic Greeks may have given up their religion to keep the Pontic Greek language (IL, VD, OK).<sup>14</sup> In most other cases, this implication is entirely absent and the narrative is used solely to explain the divergent language use among Urum Greeks. The other way of telling the story of forced choice tends to come from a Pontic Greek perspective, sometimes suggesting that a person who changes their language might also consider changing their faith (OA, 1:01:00, states this very explicitly). The other position holds that since the threat of losing one’s faith is no longer relevant, Urum Greeks should consider changing “back” to “Greek”, or at least speak Russian or Georgian but not the “language of the enemy” (IP, 0:57:44-1:00:00, cf. also Section 2. below).

Different reasons are given as to why Pontic Greeks did not lose their language: this forced choice was their reason to flee to Georgia (NP, 0:02:47),

13 This narrative is also told to Sideri (2006, p. 151); Zoumpalidis (2012, 2014) refers to it as “a popular myth” for the Greek community in the Northern Caucasus.

14 *i my dazhe sami greki schitali chto mY na mnogo pravoslavnee chem vot kotorye yazyk ostavili* “and we, even Greeks themselves, considered that wE are much more Orthodox than those who kept the language” (OK, 0:5:51).

General Paskevich<sup>15</sup> saved the Pontic Greeks but not the Urum Greeks from this choice (IS, 0:29:49), or they somehow managed to keep both language and religion in the face of adversity (IP, AK) – presumably through exceptional bravery but this is never stated explicitly.<sup>16</sup> Based on historical and ethnographic knowledge it is highly implausible that the ancestors of the Greek community in Georgia today were ever predominantly anything but Orthodox Christians (cf. Chapter 2).

There are cases where Pontic Greeks tell this story and praise Urum Greeks for having kept their faith – which in their eyes distinguishes them from Georgian Muslims in Ach’ara who kept the Georgian language but converted to Islam (AT, 0:21:11). In the same vein, perhaps the strongest reproach Urum Greeks in Ts’alk’a make against Georgian Muslim internal migrants from Ach’ara is that they kept the Georgian language but lost the Christian faith over the centuries of Ottoman rule. This becomes very clear in the following excerpt from the interview with DP, a 31-year-old Urum Greek woman living in a small village in Ts’alk’a with her husband FP:

(2) We only lost our language (DP, FP 0:20:02-0:20:49)

- 1 CH: *i na kakikh yazykakh vy govorite* (2)  
and on which languages you speak\_2PL
- 2 DP: *gruzinskiy tozhe znaem*  
Georgian also know\_we
- 3 FP: *[my veru ne poteryali yazyk poteryali]*  
we faith not lost\_PL language lost\_PL
- 4 CH: *[(laughs)] [mhm]*
- 5 NL: *[da]*  
yes
- 6 FP: *[v turtsii]*  
in Turkey
- 7 DP: *[my my ran’she] chto v turtsii byli nashi kogda tu\_eti turki*  
we we before that in Turkey were ours when Tu\_these Turks
- 8 *poymali*  
caught\_PL
- 9 CH: *da*  
yes

15 Paskevich is credited also by some of my consultants for helping Christians leave the Ottoman Empire, cf. Fonton (1840) and Chapter 2.

16 Fotiadis (1998, p. 63) plausibly suggests that geographical conditions played a role, with the majority of Greeks who preserved the Pontic Greek variety living in the more mountainous regions on the Southeastern coast of the Black Sea.

- 10 DP: *nashikh*  
ours
- 11 CH: [*da*]  
yes
- 12 NL: [*da*]  
yes
- 13 DP: *oni skazali (-) vera ili yazyk (-)*  
they said\_PL faith or language
- 14 CH: [*da*]  
yes
- 15 NL: [hm]
- 16 DP: *adzharov tozhe oni poyma[li]*  
Ach’arian also they caught\_PL
- 17 CH: [mhm]
- 18 DP: *(-) adzhary (-) veru poteryali*  
Ach’arians faith lost\_PL
- 19 NL: mhm
- 20 CH: [mhm]
- 21 DP: *yazyk derzhali [a] my net my veru ne der\_ ne poteryali*  
language kept\_PL but we not we faith not kep\_ not lost\_PL
- 22 NL: [*da*]  
yes
- 23 DP: [*tol’ko*] *yazyk poteryali*  
only language lost\_PL
- 24 CH: mhm
- 25 DP: *vera u nas (sho) grecheskiy vera idët*  
faith at us Greek faith goes
- 26 CH: *da*  
yes
- 27 DP: *khristianskiy vera u nas*  
Christian faith at us
- 28 NL: [*da*]  
yes
- 29 CH: [hm]
- 30 DP: *a adzhary net oni [veru poteryali tol’ko] yazyk oni*  
and Ach’arians not they faith lost\_PL only language they
- 31 *vzyali*  
took\_PL
- 32 CH: [hm hm] mhm
- 33 NL: [mhm]
- 34 DP: [*po-*] *gruzinski razgovorivayut*  
in\_Georgian talk\_they
- 35 NL: [*da (-)*]  
yes

- 36 CH: *[da (-)]*  
yes
- 37 FP: *chto ran'she e: khristiany byli eti [adzhary]*  
what earlier Christians were these Ach'arians
- 38 DP: *[oni ran'she] [ran'she]*  
they before before
- 39 NL: *[oni da]*  
they yes
- 40 DP: *ran'she gruz[iny byli] ran'she*  
before Georgians were before
- 41 CH: *[ran'she]*  
before
- 42 NL: *da oni ran'she*  
yes they before
- 43 DP: *kak nashikh poymali tak ikh poymali*  
as ours caught\_PL so they caught\_PL
- 44 NL: *to zhe samoe bylo [kak u grekov (xxx)]*  
that again same was as at Greeks
- 45 DP: *[da (-) prosto oni veru] poteryali*  
yes only they faith lost\_PL
- 1 CH: and which languages do you speak?
- 2 DP: we also know Georgian
- 3 FP: we didn't lose the faith, we lost the language
- 4 CH: [((laughs))] [mhm]
- 5 NL: yes
- 6 FP: [in Turkey]
- 7 DP: [we, earlier] when ours were in Turkey, these Turks caught
- 9 CH: yes
- 10 DP: our people
- 11 CH: [yes]
- 12 NL: [yes]
- 13 DP: they said faith or language
- 14 CH: [yes]
- 15 NL: [hm]
- 16 DP: Ach'arians too they [caught]
- 17 CH: [mhm]
- 18 DP: Ach'arians lost their faith
- 19 NL: mhm
- 20 CH: [mhm]
- 21 DP: they kept the language, but we didn't, our faith we didn't kee\_ we didn't
- 22 lose
- 22 NL: [yes]
- 23 DP: [only] the language we lost

- 24 CH: mhm  
25 DP: our faith (sho) we have the Greek faith  
26 CH: yes  
27 DP: we have a Christian faith  
28 NL: [yes]  
29 CH: [mhm]  
30 DP: but Ach’arians don’t, they lost the faith, they only took the language  
32 CH: [hm hm] mhm  
33 NL: [mhm]  
34 DP: [they] speak Georgian  
35 NL: [yes]  
36 CH: [yes]  
37 FP: so before they were Christians, these [Ach’arians?]  
38 DP: [they before] [before]  
39 NL: [yes they]  
40 DP: before they [were Georgians] before  
41 CH: [before]  
42 NL: yes, before they  
43 DP: like they caught ours, they also caught them  
44 NL: it was exactly the same [as for the Greeks (xxx)]  
45 DP: [yes, only that they] lost their faith

Before this excerpt, DP asked me about the languages I speak. An elderly lady enters the kitchen and briefly changes the topic, asking whether I was married and had children. I bring our joint attention back to the topics I had planned for the interview and ask them about their language competence (line 1). DP picks up the thread of my not speaking any Georgian and (a little triumphantly) states that they also speak Georgian (2), which I acknowledge by laughing (4).

Interestingly, the question about their language competence – which for me was one of ticking boxes, expressing my deep admiration for my usually multilingual interlocutors, before then moving on to how they evaluate the many languages they speak – is no ordinary or “easy” question for FP. Rather than listing the languages he speaks competently (Urum and Russian),<sup>17</sup> he explains how they did not lose their faith but their language “in Turkey”, i.e. when their ancestors were living in the Ottoman Empire (3-6). DP elaborates this story, and in doing so points out the main difference she perceives between “Christian” GREEKS and “Muslim” ACH’ARIANS, between people who care about their religion (GREEKS) and those who cared more about their language than their religious affiliation (ACH’ARIANS). She narrates how “in

17 Since he converses with NL and myself in Russian and with DP, their children and other guests in Urum, it is contextually clear that he speaks at least these two languages.

Turkey” *eti turki poykali nashikh* “these Turks caught our people” (7-10) and put the fatal question before them: *vera ili yazyk* “faith or language” (13). Her husband’s earlier contribution (3-6) having set the stage, there is no chance NL or myself might come to the wrong conclusions half-way through her story. This allows DP to start her comparison (16-23) by slowly and pointedly<sup>18</sup> elaborating on the choice she attributes to the ACH’ARIANS: to keep the language and lose the faith (16-21). In lines 21-23 she then contrasts this with her in-group’s choice of not losing faith but *tol’ko* “only” the language. Again, LANGUAGE is portrayed as a somehow more optional feature of belonging, whereas RELIGION appears to be at its core – at least for the in-group.<sup>19</sup>

DP goes on to explain which faith she attributes to her in-group: *grecheskiy vera* [sic!] the “Greek faith” (25), and more generally *khristianskiy vera* [sic!] “Christian faith” (27). Especially in the Georgian context, it is striking that she uses the categories GREEK and CHRISTIAN rather than the often used *pravoslavnyy* ‘rightly believing’ “Orthodox”. What is even more remarkable is that the national category GREEK appears to be inextricable from the religious category CHRISTIAN. This link becomes even stronger further on: in lines 30-34, she repeats her ascription of choices to the ACH’ARIAN out-group: they lost the faith and “took” the language, which she finally specifies: *po-gruzinski razgovarivayut* “they speak Georgian” (34).

This, in turn, surprises her husband, who requests clarification on whether “these Ach’arians” were really “Christians” at some point in the past (37). One key to understanding much that goes on in Ts’alk’a can be found in DP’s utterance in line 40, where she states that ACH’ARIANS *ran’she gruziny byli* “were Georgians before”. Again, a national category – GEORGIAN – is so closely linked with a religious one – CHRISTIANITY – that if a perceived collective is not CHRISTIAN anymore, they either cease to be GEORGIAN or their GEORGIANNES would have to be extensively argued for. In line 43, DP

18 She speaks slowly in this sequence, with many pauses (13, 18), making time for and requesting supportive backchannel behavior from Nika Loladze and myself.

19 This perfectly corresponds with how she answers the question about the personal importance of her heritage variety: *vazhno ne vazhno eto yazyk [...] da chto delat’* “important, not important, it’s a language [...] yes, what to do?” (DP, 0:24:07), and her answer to the question whether SMG is important to her: *my i tak greki ne obyazatel’no chtoby znali ne znali etot yazyk glavnoe chto khristianye glavnoe chto veru derzhim eto (glavnyy) (x)* “we’re Greeks anyway, it’s not necessary that we would know or not know that language, the main thing is that we’re Christians, the main thing is that we keep the faith, that’s (important)” (DP, 0:26:04).

once more compares the two groups’ “capture” and portrays these experiences as identical, is supported in this description by NL (44), and finally repeats it a third time, emphasizing once more that ACH’ARIANS lost their faith in making their choice (45), before we go back to discussing their language competence and use.

The categories juxtaposed in this excerpt relate (quasi-)national and religious ones. First, we have the contextually clear categorization of the in-group as GREEK, which is opposed to the quasi-national category ACH’ARIANS. Both of these categories are then confronted with a (quasi-)national and religious power, namely the TURKS, who have the power to put a choice to them and enforce its realization. What is not said – because it is clear in this context – is that the category TURKS comprises a national<sup>20</sup> and a religious element, namely ISLAM. Note that neither here nor in the excerpt as a whole is “Islam” explicitly mentioned as a religious category<sup>21</sup> – apparently it is so salient that it does not have to be named. Here we may extend the concept of *omnirelevance* borrowed from Ethnomethodology and Membership Categorization Analysis where it refers to a device ordering the roles of the immediate participants of an ongoing interaction – participants in a group-therapy session, say (cf. Sacks, 1992). In the present context, an omnirelevant device is also capable of ordering categories beyond the immediate context of the interaction. In excerpt 2 and in many instances throughout the corpus, the relationship between ISLAM and CHRISTIANITY, and the nationalities associated with these religious categories very clearly fit Sacks’ definition:

Things may be going along, the device isn’t being used; at some point something happens which makes it appropriate, and it’s used. And when it’s used, it’s the controlling device, i.e., there is no way of excluding its operation when relevant. (Sacks, 1992, p. 314)

Thinking about religion as an omnirelevant device helps understand not only the ease with which (quasi-)national categories are linked with religious ones, but also how they can become so closely linked that one loses the national affiliation to GEORGIA if one exchanges CHRISTIANITY for ISLAM. Crucially,

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20 Note that while the Ottoman Empire was indeed historically followed by the (very much nationalizing) Turkish nation state, it was clearly not a national enterprise at the time these narrations are set (Barkey, 2008; İçduygu et al., 2008; Mackridge, 2009) (cf. Chapter 2).

21 And “Muslims” only twice in the whole interview, even though the boundary DP and FP constantly draw and strengthen is the one between ISLAM and CHRISTIANITY (cf. Chapter 7).



however, changing one's language use does not change the national category (cf. Chapter 7).

Thus, the narrative of one's ancestors being forced to choose between their language and their religion serves a number of conversational purposes. Firstly, it offers a common explanation for language use that is perceived to be somehow "deviant". As we will see in Sections B. and C. of this Chapter, SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY through *my ne vinovaty* "we're not guilty" is an interactive device primarily used to excuse "shortcomings": speaking a Turkish variety, not speaking SMG, and/or speaking Georgian only poorly. Secondly, the in-group is positioned as a RESILIENT<sup>22</sup> and faithful CHRISTIAN community, even in the face of adverse conditions. They are therefore "good Greeks", since national and religious categories are perceived as inseparable. In a nutshell, this is DP and FP's claim to being GREEK. Thirdly, the ACH'ARIAN out-group is portrayed as having made a different, inferior choice of language over religion. They are thereby positioned not only as a "threat" through the behavior attributed to them in the present (as in the many other stories told about them, cf. Chapter 7), but the narrative traces a sense of wrong-doing all the way back to a time when the ancestors of both "groups" had to make a choice – and ACH'ARIANS chose LANGUAGE over "Christian virtue". Fourthly, if speaking the Georgian language is not seen as enough link ACH'ARIAN to the Georgian national category, and if "we" "only lost the language" (excerpt 2, line 22), LANGUAGE cannot be a very important indicator of belonging to any collective. Instead it appears to be conceptualized (at least by parts of the community, not by others, cf. Section B.) as somehow more MARGINAL to belonging than RELIGION. While excerpt 2 is a particularly poignant example of this narration, remember that the story was either explicitly told or alluded to, without being asked, in about half of the interviews with both Pontic and Urum Greeks. And while the differentiation between Ts'alk'ian GREEKS and ACH'ARIANS is not always constituted by telling this particular story, religious differences play a crucial role in establishing these categories and drawing a firm boundary between them (cf. Chapter 7).

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22 RESILIENCE is a category-bound predicate that we will encounter again throughout this book, especially in Chapter 6.

## 2. Speaking about the respective other heritage variety

In this Section I will investigate how consultants speak about and evaluate the heritage variety that is not or was not spoken by them or their families. Strikingly, although none of my consultants is a competent speaker of the respective other heritage variety, consultants do attribute (some) competence in the other heritage language to their parents or grandparents,<sup>23</sup> or more generally to the time when there were still three Pontic Greek villages in the Ts’alk’a region before the emigration in the 1990s. This lack of language competence is primarily explained by a lack of contact (at least since the early 90s), by Urum Greeks acquiring SMG rather than Pontic Greek in Greece, and by Pontic Greeks not having much use for a Turkish variety spoken nowhere else.

Consultants with a background of Urum as heritage variety evaluate Pontic Greek positively overall. It is seen as being somehow related to SMG, either in terms of LINGUISTIC PROXIMITY (whether as closely or very distantly related), in terms of AGE (older than SMG), or in terms of PURITY. The latter can mean either that Pontic Greek is an “impure” version of SMG (EA, 0:15:20), or conversely that Pontic Greek is “older” and therefore somehow “more properly Greek” (AM, 0:33:35). Some consultants with a Pontic Greek-speaking background share this evaluation (cf. Section 3.). On the other hand, as seen in positions from the previous Section, “having kept the language” – which in this view is indicated by speaking Pontic Greek today – might be evaluated negatively in terms of religious loyalty.

Consultants with a background of Pontic Greek as heritage variety do not usually evaluate Urum as a heritage variety “worthy” of a Greek community (SM, 0:22:08). As we have seen, however, this might not prevent them from admiring the Urum Greek community for their “bravery” in having kept their Orthodox faith in the face of adversity. Usually, this negative evaluation rests on equating Urum with TURKISH, although many Urum Greek consultants do as well. This category evokes negative evaluations that are not linked to the language *per se* but to other characteristics and practices ascribed to it. The following indicative example is from IP, a 61-year-old, Pontic Greek, university-educated shop keeper in a small, mostly Pontic Greek village in Western Georgia, and his best friend TV, who is Georgian and is said to speak Pontic at the same level of competence as his Pontic Greek neighbors.

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23 Interestingly, none of my consultants in the oldest age bracket claim this competence for themselves.

The two friends state that they converse either in Pontic Greek, Russian or Georgian.<sup>24</sup>

Before the excerpt, I ask whether they see any differences between “Greeks here” (in the village) and “Greeks in Ts’alk’a”, apart from the different heritage languages. IP explains that he feels a little “colder” towards the (Urum) Greeks from Ts’alk’a due to the *yazykovoy bar’er* “linguistic barrier”.

(3) They speak Turkish in Greece (IP 0:57:10-0:58:20)

- 1 IP: *u menya est' dvo'yurodnye brat'ya dvo'yurodnyy brat*  
at me is once\_removed brothers once\_removed brother
- 2 *tsalkinskogo proiskhozhdeniya*  
Ts'alk'ian origin
- 3 CH: *da*  
yes
- 4 IP: *materi u nas e sēstry (1) i tam vstrechayutsya govoryat*  
mothers at us sisters and there meet\_they speak\_they
- 5 *po-turetski (1.7) nu (1) nu kak-by tak istoricheskiy tak*  
Turkish well well somehow so historically so
- 6 *poluchilos' chto eto yazyk kak-by vrazheskiy [°h]*  
turned\_out that this language somehow hostile
- 7 CH: [hm]
- 8 IP: *(-) kotoryy unichtozhil vsë nashe*  
who destroyed\_M everything ours
- 9 TV: *kho da da*  
yes yes yes
- 10 IP: *vsyu gretsiyu (-)*  
whole Greece
- 11 CH: hm
- 12 IP: *dovelo do (2) nu kogda-to gretsiya chto-to [eshchë]*  
led\_N to well sometime Greece something more
- 13 CH: [hm]
- 14 IP: *v istorii chto-to sh: chto-to ot sebya predstavlyala*  
in history something something from self represented\_F
- 15 NL: hm
- 16 IP: *oni eë prevratili (-) v rukhlyad'*  
they her turned\_into\_PL in junk
- 17 CH: hm (1.5)

24 IP speaks Georgian with no accent, and so well that when we first met, Nika Loladze took this to be his first language, and was very surprised when IP offered himself as a potential Greek consultant.

- 18 IP: *oni turki-zhe eto sdelali chetyresto let pod igom turtsii*  
they Turks this did\_PL four\_hundred years under yoke Turkey
- 19 *byli vot poslednie*  
were\_PL here last
- 20 NL: mhm
- 21 IP: *kogda oni osvo\_v tysyachu vosem'sot shestdesyatom godu*  
when they free\_ in thousand eight\_hundred sixtieth year
- 22 *oni osvobodilis' v pyatdesyatom ili kakom godu (1) vot (-) oni*  
they freed\_PL in fiftieth or which year well they
- 23 *tam poekhali eti tsalkinskie i tam razgovarivayut po-turetski*  
there went\_PL these Ts'alk'ians and there speak\_they in\_Turkish
- 24 CH: hm (1.3)
- 25 IP: *a: govori na drugom yazyke ru\_russkiy znaesh'*  
talk\_2SG on other language Ru\_Russian know\_2SG
- 26 *russkoyazychnym byl zdes' [e stol'ko]*  
Russian-speaking was\_M here so\_many
- 27 TV: *[vsyu zhizn']*  
whole life
- 28 CH: [hm]
- 29 NL: [hm]
- 30 IP: *poltora veka*  
one\_and\_a\_half century
- 31 CH: hm
- 32 IP: *i tam vsë ravno po-turetski govoryat*  
and there all equal in\_Turkish speak\_they
- 33 TV: *znachit eto ego (rodnoy yazyk)*  
means this his (native language)
- 34 IP: *ya ne znayu*  
I not know\_I
- 35 TV: *naprashivaetsya (—)*  
suggests\_itself
- 36 IP: *ne znayu vot v etom otnoshenii kakuyu-to*  
not know\_I well in this regard some\_kind\_of
- 37 TV: *ya nikogda natsionalistom [ne byl no vsë-taki]*  
I never nationalist not was\_M but nevertheless
- 38 IP: *[otchuzhdënnost'] [chuvstvuyu]*  
alienation feel\_I
- 39 CH: *[da]*  
yes
- 40 IP: *nu (-) obidno dazhe*  
well offensive even
- 1 IP: I have cousins, a cousin from Ts'alk'a
- 3 CH: yes

- 4 IP: our mothers are sisters, and when they meet there, they speak Turkish,  
 5 well, well somehow, it's historical that it so happened that this  
 6 language is somehow the enemy's  
 7 CH: hm  
 8 IP: who destroyed everything that was ours  
 9 TV: yes, yes, yes  
 10 IP: all of Greece  
 11 CH: hm  
 12 IP: it led to, well, at some point Greece something [more]  
 13 CH: [hm]  
 14 IP: in history, something, stood for something  
 15 NL: hm  
 16 IP: they turned her<sup>25</sup> into trash  
 17 CH: hm  
 18 IP: it's the Turks who did this, four hundred years they were under the  
 19 Turkish yoke, well, the last  
 20 NL: mhm  
 21 IP: when they, in 1860 they were freed, in the fiftieth or whichever year,  
 22 well they went there, these Ts'alk'ians and speak Turkish there  
 24 CH: hm  
 25 IP: speak in another language, you know Russian, here was  
 26 Russian-speaking [for so many]  
 27 TV: [whole life]  
 28 CH: [hm]  
 29 NL: [hm]  
 30 IP: one and a half centuries  
 31 CH: hm  
 32 IP: but there they speak Turkish anyway  
 33 TV: that means it's his native language  
 34 IP: I don't know  
 35 TV: it suggests itself  
 36 IP: I don't know, well, with regards to this  
 37 TV: I was never a nationalist [but still]  
 38 IP: [there's some kind of alienation] [I feel]  
 39 CH: [yes]  
 40 IP: well, I find it even offensive

IP starts by explaining that he has family ties to Ts'alk'a in the form of his cousin in lines 1-4, thereby assuring us that his knowledge is first-hand, and therefore (more) credible. He then ascribes a certain behavior to this out-group – which includes some of his relatives – namely that they speak Turkish *tam* “there”, which in the context of the conversation so far refers to

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25 *eë* ‘her’ refers to Greece.

Greece (4). In lines 5-6 he begins to explain why this might be problematic: for “historical reasons” it so happened that this language pertains to “the enemy”. This “enemy” is named as *turki* “the Turks” explicitly only much later (18) but in the context of the interview and having spoken already for almost an hour about the Greek community in Georgia, the reference is clear. He goes on to explain that this “enemy” *unichtozhil vsë nashe* “destroyed everything of ours” (8), even “all of Greece” (10) and turned “Greece”, which at some point in history had “stood for something” into “junk” (12-16). In line 18, he finally refers to the perpetrators of this downfall and explains how their ancestors were for four hundred years *pod igom turtsii* “under Turkey’s yoke”<sup>26</sup>, again (as did DP) using TURKEY as a stand-in for the Ottoman Empire.<sup>27</sup> He then approximates the date when Greece “was freed” (21-22) and repeats his reproach, that *eti tsalkinskie* “these Ts’alk’ians” went “there”, the reference again being Greece, and speak “Turkish” “there” (22-23).

The implication of IP’s brief history lesson is that it might be better not to speak “the enemy’s language” in a place that, like Greece, has undergone a long history of “oppression” and where, therefore, that language might not elicit positive feelings. The repeated ascription of this behavior shows IP to be rather incredulous at what he perceives to be a lack of sensitivity. He therefore proceeds to address an imaginary member of the TS’ALK’IAN community directly, employing the generalizing second person singular, and telling this generalized addressee to speak in a different language – possibly any different language – reminding his addressee that “you know Russian” (25). Apparently, having lived for a long time in an area where Russian is the language of inter-ethnic communication makes it the most plausible language of choice. As he attempts to illustrate how long *zdes’* “here” has been *russkoyazychniy* “Russian-speaking” (25-26), he is supported by his friend TV, who specifies that this has been the case for their “whole life” (27). IP then specifies that it has been even longer: *poltora veka* “a century and a half” (30), i.e. the whole time he knows Greeks to have lived in the territory of today’s Georgia. Following IP’s third repetition of TS’ALK’IANS speaking TURKISH “there” (32), TV offers an explanation, namely that this could be *ego (rodnoy yazyk)* “his (native language)” (33). This is quite a harsh insult in the context of the post-Soviet space, where *rodnoy yazyk* was taken to be the

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26 This is a key phrase very regularly used by my consultants when describing their ancestors’ life under Ottoman rule – and Greek history more generally.

27 Similarly, GREECE is often referred to in the corpus as contiguous with ancient Greece and/or the Byzantine Empire.

language of the “nationality” or *narod* “people” one belonged to rather than the strongest language one spoke or the language one grew up with (Grenoble 2003, cf. Chapter 2). Hence, if TURKISH were their *rodnoy yazyk*, they could not be considered GREEKS but would have to be categorized as TURKS. IP distances himself from this strong accusation by claiming ignorance (34), TV presses on by stating that this interpretation suggested itself (35). After IP distances himself a second time (36), TV clarifies that he was never a nationalist (37),<sup>28</sup> positioning himself as someone who does not easily draw such conclusions, thus lending greater weight to his statement. IP carefully approaches his own evaluation of the behavior he ascribes to the TS’ALK’IANS by saying that he feels *kakuyu-to otchuzhdënnost’* “some kind of alienation” (36-38), before evaluating this language use as *obidno dazhe* “offensive even” (40).

IP’s argument, then, is mostly historical. Because he, and GREEKS in Greece according to him, associate the Turkish language with atrocities perpetrated by the TURKS over a very long period of time, it is unacceptable to speak this language as a GREEK person, especially in Greece. This is even worse if the person in question has recourse to another language, in this case Russian. And he suggests that the Urum Greek community *eti tsalkinskie* “these Ts’alk’ians” do not have just some competence but a very comprehensive, habitual and strong link to the Russian language.

Note that the sentiment which IP eloquently and directly expresses here is shared by some, but not all, of his Pontic Greek community members (three other consultants apart from IP explicitly). Numbers are difficult to come by, as the question I asked usually centers on whether there are “differences apart from the language”. This is to say, I never asked them to evaluate the other heritage language directly – also because I was very conscious of my role in perhaps inadvertently strengthening the perception of differences and boundaries.

### 3. Speaking about Pontic Greek

When it comes to speaking about Pontic Greek as heritage variety, some Pontic Greek consultants do this through characterizing it as older, and

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28 This is borne out by how TV positions himself throughout our conversation. I read his contribution here in terms of intense support for his friend, who is our main interview partner. This does not make the allegation any less strong, of course.

sometimes therefore as somehow more “authentically” Greek than SMG. This corresponds to many Urum Greek consultants’ evaluation of Pontic Greek, as discussed above. I will now turn to another excerpt of the interview with IP. He ends his narrative of “how the Greeks came to Georgia” by concluding that they now live happily in Georgia in a village with Georgian neighbors to whom he attributes a competence in Pontic Greek almost at his level. Together, IP and TV introduce a differentiation between *pontiyskiy* “Pontic” and *ellinskiy* “Hellenic” (SMG), and his Georgian neighbor recounts how he was categorized as *pontiets* “Pontic” in Greece because he was a competent speaker of this language.

(4) Pontic Greek (IP, 0:07:27-0:08:14)

- 1 IP: *kto vladel etim yazykom my nazvali etot yazyk*  
who possessed\_M this language we named\_PL this language
- 2 *nazvali pontiyskim yazykom [eto staro-grecheskiy yazyk]*  
named\_PL Pontic language this old-Greek language
- 3 TV: *[nu v smysle tak i est' eto ot starogo ostalos']*  
well in sense so and is this from old stayed
- 4 CH: *da (-)*  
yes
- 5 IP: *staro-grecheskiy kotoryy °h a: s drevnim grecheskim imeet*  
old-Greek which with ancient Greek has
- 6 *bol'she*  
more
- 7 CH: *mhm*
- 8 IP: *svyaz'*  
connection
- 9 NL: *da*  
yes
- 10 IP: *chem [novogrecheskiy]*  
than new\_Greek
- 11 NL: *[chem ellinskiy da da]*  
than Hellenic yes yes
- 12 CH: *da*  
yes
- 13 IP: *etot yazyk ne razvilsya*  
this language not developed\_M
- 14 CH: *hm*
- 15 TV: *[yazyk vizantiyskom slovom tak skazhu]*  
language Byzantian word so will\_say\_I
- 16 IP: *[ostalsya po-staromu]*  
stayed\_M old\_way



- 17 CH: [hm]
- 18 IP: [po-staromu] etomu: stilyu skazhem  
old\_way this style will\_say\_we
- 19 CH: [hm]
- 20 IP: [kak] upotreblyalos' °h e: tysyachu let tomu [nazad]  
how used\_N thousand years this ago
- 21 NL: [da]  
yes
- 22 IP: bol'she skhozhe [chem] s novogrecheskoy  
more similar than with new-Greek
- 23 CH: [hm]
- 24 NL: da  
yes
- 25 IP: °h nu novogrecheskij on (-) tozhe my ponimali [skazhem]  
well new-Greek he also we understood\_PL will\_say\_we
- 26 schët]  
account
- 27 CH: [hm]
- 28 NL: [mhm]
- 29 IP: i mot vsë bo\_me\_me mnogie [slova ochen']  
and all many words very
- 30 TV: [nu osnova yazyk] [odna]  
well base language one
- 31 NL: [da]  
yes
- 32 CH: [da]  
yes
- 33 IP: [odinakogo] korni vsë odinakogo °h nu stil' razgovora drugoy  
same roots all same well style of\_speech other
- 34 CH: [hm]
- 35 NL: [da]  
yes
- 36 IP: my eshchë prikhvatili s soboy (—) °h v zapase slov (-)  
we more grabbed\_PL with self in reserve words
- 37 russkie gruzinskie  
Russian Georgian
- 38 NL: ((chuckles)) [turetskie da]  
Turkish yes
- 39 TV: [turetskie]  
Turkish
- 40 IP: [turetskie] i vot adzhapsandal  
Turkish and well Ajapsandali

- 1 IP: those who knew this language, we called it, we called this language  
2 Pontic language [it’s the old Greek language]  
3 TV: [well, in the sense that how it is, it stayed from the old times]  
4 CH: yes  
5 IP: old Greek, which with ancient Greek as a closer  
7 CH: mhm  
8 IP: connection  
9 NL: yes  
10 IP: than [Modern Greek]  
11 NL: [than Hellenic, yes, yes]  
12 CH: yes  
13 IP: this language did not develop  
14 CH: hm  
15 TV: [language with Byzantine words, is how I call it]  
16 IP: [it stayed in the old way]  
17 CH: [hm]  
18 IP: [in the old] style, let’s say  
19 CH: [hm]  
20 IP: [how] it was used a thousand years ago  
21 NL: [yes]  
22 IP: more similar [than] with Modern Greek  
23 CH: [hm]  
24 NL: yes  
25 IP: well, Modern Greek we also understood, [let’s say]  
27 CH: [hm]  
28 NL: [mhm]  
29 IP: (roughly),<sup>29</sup> everything, many [words are very]  
30 TV: [well, the foundation of the language] [is the same]  
31 NL: [yes]  
32 CH: [yes]  
33 IP: [the same] roots, everything is the same, well the style of speech is  
34 different  
34 CH: [hm]  
35 NL: [yes]  
36 IP: we also grabbed us some words into our stock, Russian, Georgian  
38 NL: ((chuckles)) [Turkish yes]  
39 TV: [Turkish]

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29 This *schët i mot* appears to be a case of playful partial reduplication, that in this corpus is usually used in more transparent forms like *kartoshka-markoshka* (*kartoshka* ‘potato’) or *kafe-mafe* (*kafe* ‘café’). In this context, this particular form is used to indicate that the in-group “roughly” understands “the gist” of what is being said in SMG. The base form *schët i mot* has so far proven obscure to native speakers of Russian, Georgian, Turkish and SMG. On reduplication cf. Rubino (2013); Stolz et al. (2015).

40 IP: [Turkish] and so, it's Ajapsandali

IP starts by explaining how this variety came to be labeled *pontiyskiy* “Pontic”: by those speaking it deciding to refer to it in this way (line 1). Importantly, this is a self-chosen label, rather than one imposed from outside – for instance, as we shall see in Chapter 7, by the societal majority in Greece where this naming of membership categories is by no means uncontested or free of (perceived and real) discrimination. Being able to choose a name for one’s language is a sign of confidence, and one that sets Pontic and Urum Greeks apart. IP then explains that it is, in fact, *staro-grecheskiy* “old Greek” (2). TV chimes in affirmatively and clarifies that it has stayed “the old way” (3). IP goes on to voice the fairly common claim that PONTIC, this *staro-grecheskiy*, is more closely connected *s drevnim grecheskim* “with ancient Greek” than MODERN GREEK (5-9). NL supports him, referring to SMG with *ellinskiy*, the label earlier introduced by our consultants. Note that the comparison is between Pontic and SMG, not between “ancient Greek” and SMG, i.e. it is about which variety is closest to the prestigious ANCIENT GREEK, rather than which variety Pontic is closest to. The latter comparison is introduced afterwards by saying that the Pontic language had *ne razvilsya* “not developed” but stayed *po-staromu* “the old way” (13-16). TV supports this by connecting PONTIC with “Byzantine” times (15). IP demonstrates quite how old the “style” of PONTIC is by stating that it is still used *kak upotrebyalos’ tysyachu let tomu nazad* “how it was used a thousand years ago” (18-20), before comparing “Ancient” and “Modern” Greek and concluding that PONTIC is closer to the former (22).

This does not stand in the way of their access to “Modern Greece”, however, as they “understood [Modern Greek] as well” (25). TV reminds us that *osnova yazyk odna* “the foundation of the language is the same” (30) and IP goes on to explain where he sees similarities and differences: *korni vsë odinakogo* “the roots are the same”, but *stil’ razgovora drugoy* “the style of speech is different” (33). The difference is thus somehow dissolved into a matter of style rather than substance – while the claim to antiquity remains. Another – more humorous – difference is that *my eshchë prikhatili s soboy* “we also grabbed us” loanwords from other languages (36): Russian and Georgian, which NL acknowledges with a chuckle and all three Georgian citizens chime in together to add “Turkish” (38-40). IP then delivers his final verdict *i vot adzhapsandal* “so, it’s Ajapsandali” (40) – a tasty Georgian stew with

“everything” thrown in.<sup>30</sup> By employing an image so commonly used in Georgia, he also positions himself as a knowledgeable participant in this larger social context and thereby also as BELONGING TO GEORGIA. It is very common for a member of Georgia’s Greek community to position themselves as BELONGING TO GEORGIA in this way, as we shall see below.

Overall, IP uses the classification of his heritage language to position his community (and himself) quite clearly in historical and linguistic terms as belonging multiply. We are still in the first 10 minutes of the interview, IP has just told us how his community came to be living in Georgia and then proceeds to elaborate on the language they speak to spell out their web of belonging. Firstly, PONTIC is linked to antiquity – and to Byzantium in TV’s contribution – by being closer to ANCIENT GREEK than can be said for SMG. Implicitly, this links its speakers to the ancient Greek civilization, the foundation of CULTURE itself, as some consultants remind us.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, by being able to understand SMG and by speaking a language that shares “the same roots”, IP links his community inseparably to contemporary Greece. Thirdly, through their history of linguistic incorporation he positions the community as rooted in a particular historical narrative that involves the linguistic influences of the Ottoman Empire (Turkish incorporations), the Soviet Union (Russian incorporations), and finally contemporary Georgia. This final link is made particularly strong by displaying a Georgian incorporation and at the same time not drawing up a new image but instead using a conventionalized Georgian one in the conventional way. In the tradition of Le Page / Tabouret-Keller (1985), this is a very explicit act of identification.

Unlike those consultants who consider their heritage language Urum to be somehow “problematic”, IP fully “owns” both the heritage language and the communal history of speaking and changing it, and uses both as a powerful resource in positioning his community.

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30 Note that this is not an instance of *code switching* but rather of *code mixing* in the sense used by Zinkhahn Rhobodes (2016), since IP uses Russian inflectional morphology rather than the Georgian nominative suffix -i.

31 Ten consultants do this very explicitly (regardless of heritage language or place of residence), without me ever asking about it. This corresponds interestingly to notions in Georgian national discourse that imagine Georgians as “the oldest Europeans” (cf. Maisuradze, 2018).

## 4. Urum as a “Problematic” heritage variety

From the discussion so far, Pontic Greek appears to be a heritage variety that consultants take to be linked fairly straightforwardly to their self-identification as GREEK. This does not appear to hold for Urum as a heritage variety, however. In addition to the discussions in the previous Sections, three points deserve to be examined in more detail. The first is how consultants place Urum and other varieties in a hierarchical order of languages and varieties, both in terms of LANGUAGENESS and USEFULNESS. We will come back to these qualities when discussing other varieties spoken in the community. The second point concerns how linguistic and religious categories are made relevant for identification (as GREEK or GEORGIAN) and how this question relates to struggles of belonging in Ts’alk’a, especially regarding the very palpable questions of local land ownership (rights). The third point is the difference between evaluations of Urum in urban Tbilisi and rural Ts’alk’a, apparent in Table 5.3.

First, then, I will take a detailed look at how categorizing the the heritage variety is done. MP is a 34-year-old taxi driver, who was born in Ts’alk’a and has lived there all his life. His Georgian wife<sup>32</sup> has learnt Russian and some Urum. They speak Georgian with their small children, but MP hopes his children will pick up both Urum and Russian as they grow up. In the 30 minutes previous to this excerpt, everybody involved in the interview has referred to his heritage variety as “Turkish” repeatedly. I have also called it *urum-dili* “Urum language” in Turkish/Urum, which MP repeats and then everybody chuckles (MP, 0:30:35). After this, his answer to the question of the heritage variety’s personal importance is a little surprising:

## (5) Establishing hierarchies (MP, 0:32:19-0:33:07)

- 1 CH: *i govorit’ na (-) turetskom urum eto vazhno dlya vas*  
and to\_speak on Turkish Urum this important for you
- 2 MP: *hm (3) na turetskom vazhno mne govorit’ li*  
on Turkish important me to\_speak whether
- 3 CH: [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm]

32 She migrated from Ach’ara and converted from Islam to Orthodox Christianity, we are told later. To MP, marrying a Muslim was not a problem at all, she had to be “re-baptized” however, in order to have their children baptized (MP, 0:38:00). This is a reminder that Ts’alk’ian Greeks do not all share the same views on who exactly the out-group is, and how clear-cut and durable a boundary has to be drawn (cf. Chapter 7).

- 5 MP: *net konechno*  
no of\_course
- 6 CH: ((chuckles)) po\_
- 7 MP: *a chto vazhnogo* (—) [*<< smiling > eto ne moy yazyk >*]  
and what important this not my language
- 8 ((chuckles))]
- 9 CH: [((chuckles))] (-) *h eto urum-dili* (-) *ne vazhno dlya vas*  
this Urum-Dili not important for you
- 10 MP: *no eto ne urum-dili* (—) *eto ne grecheskiy yazyk* (1)  
but this not Urum-Dili this not Greek language
- 11 NL: e:
- 12 MP: *urum eto grek*  
Urum is Greek
- 13 CH: [*da*]  
yes
- 14 NL: [*da*] *my nazyvaem urum-dili etot e dialekt e:: chto vy govorite*  
yes we name\_we Urum-Dili this dialect that you speak\_2PL
- 15 *po-turetski eto karsinskiy dialekt*  
Turkish this Karsian dialect
- 16 MP: *eto ne (yazyk) eto*  
this not language this
- 17 NL: *chto greki govoryat*  
what Greeks say\_they
- 18 MP: [*da eto n eto ne grecheskiy yazyk*]  
yes this this not Greek language
- 19 CH: [((chuckles))] *da*  
yes
- 20 NL: [*da da da*]  
yes yes yes
- 21 MP: [*dazhe eto ne pontiyskiy yazyk*]  
even this not Pontic language
- 1 CH: and is it important to you to speak Turkish Urum?
- 2 MP: whether it’s important to me to speak Turkish?
- 3 CH: [mhm]
- 4 NL: [mhm]
- 5 MP: of course not
- 6 CH: ((chuckles)) wh\_
- 7 MP: so what’s important (about it) – it’s not my language
- 9 CH: this Urum-Dili is not important to you?
- 10 MP: but this isn’t Urum-Dili, it’s not Greek language
- 11 NL: e:
- 12 MP: Urum means Greek

- 13 CH: yes  
 14 NL: yes, we call Urum-Dili this dialect, how you speak Turkish, this  
 15 Karsian dialect  
 16 MP: it's not a language, it's  
 17 NL: that Greeks speak  
 18 MP: yes, that's not, it's not Greek language  
 19 CH: [((chuckles))] yes  
 20 NL: [yes, yes, yes]  
 21 MP: it's not even the Pontic language

MP very slowly and deliberately first clarifies whether he understood the question correctly (line 2), before stating *net konechno* “of course not” (5) – which in the context of the previous conversation only follows for him as unsurprising. I show surprise by chuckling and starting to ask why (6), MP adds the rhetorical and slightly confrontational *a chto vazhnogo* “what’s important (about it)”, before adding that he does not consider TURKISH to be his language (7). He acknowledges the effect of surprise by uttering this smilingly and laughing a little afterwards (7-8), showing himself to be enjoying the confusion. I align myself with this by chuckling, and then try again, asking whether this *urum-dili* is not important to him (9). Already having introduced “Urum-Dili” before and in the first question (line 1), this appears like an attempt to reference something like “that language you speak in your community” rather than TURKISH, which was unsuccessful in getting said reference before. MP, however, clarifies the reference by stating that this language *eto ne urum-dili* “is not Urum-Dili” because *eto ne grecheskiy yazyk* “it’s not (the/a) Greek language” (10), and finally *urum eto grek* “Urum means Greek” (12). So far, then, TURKISH is not “his language” and it is also not “Urum-Dili” because that would make it a Greek language – which Turkish, quite rightly from a linguistic point of view, is not.

NL attempts to clarify that “we”, the outsiders, use *urum-dili* differently, using it instead to refer to *etot dialekt chto vy govorite po-turetski eto karsinskiy dialekt* “this dialect, how you speak Turkish, this Karsian dialect” (14-15).<sup>33</sup> The heritage variety is thus labeled a “dialect” for the first (and only) time in the interview in NL’s search for a way to reference “how you speak Turkish”, which ends in him giving the geographical origin of the variety spoken as “Karsian” (from Kars). MP retorts that “this is not a language” (16). NL does not give up his attempt to find a way to refer to the variety spoken in the community with *chto greki govoryat* “that Greeks speak” (17). MP

33 “Karsian dialect” is the label another consultant (ME) had used in our interview with her a few days earlier.

is unconvinced and repeats that this is not a Greek language (18), which I acknowledge by chuckling and agreeing (19). MP then moves to his final verdict on his heritage variety: *dazhe eto ne pontiyskiy yazyk* “it’s not even (the/a) Pontic language” (21), which NL aligns himself with by agreeing repeatedly (20). NL’s attempt at clarifying what “we” mean by *urum-dili*, then, allows MP to evaluate his heritage variety as “not a language” (16), “not a Greek language” (18), and finally “not a Pontic language” (21).

Thus, MP establishes a hierarchy that poses the variety spoken at the very bottom as “not my language”, “not a language”, “not a Greek language”, and culminates in “not even Pontic”. The first verdict is perhaps the strongest, denying the variety which he speaks both importance and ownership – it stays somehow MARGINAL. Note how this contrasts with him wanting to teach it to his children. It appears to be the question of (personal) *importance* that establishes a different frame for evaluating his heritage variety, and thereby triggers a different evaluation. Urum “not being a language” takes up NL’s classification as a “dialect”, it not being a “Greek language” his previous clarification what *urum* refers to. The final verdict “it’s not even (the/a) Pontic language” is interesting, as it places the different varieties in relation to each other. The emerging hierarchy poses GREEK (in this context SMG) as the CORRECT language to use for GREEKS, with PONTIC being the second best option for those GREEKS who do not have access to SMG. PONTIC is therefore still linked to being GREEK, which cannot be said for the heritage variety, which turns out to be not a language for a GREEK person to speak and to refer to as “mine”.<sup>34</sup>

A similar rejection of Urum as a VALUABLE variety is found in the interview with IK, a 28-year-old university-educated employee of the district administration. He also refers to his heritage variety as a DIALECT and *kak-by ne polnotsenny yazyk* “somehow not a full-fledged language” – which is the reason he gives for not wanting to speak it very much (IK, 0:43:58).<sup>35</sup> He does not merely evaluate the heritage variety as lacking in terms of LANGUAGE-GENESS. Instead, he rates it in terms of its USEFULNESS, which he discounts: even in his own family he can speak and be understood in other languages (Russian and Georgian). Furthermore, he perceives it as being so different from Turkish, that it would not serve him much as a communicative device in Turkey or Azerbaijan (0:42:45-0:44:33). Again, this dismissal follows the question of personal importance. IK also states that he has nothing against

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34 On labeling this variety (Caucasian) Urum for academic purposes, see Chapter 1.

35 This corresponds with his comparison of Georgian and Russian in excerpt 13 below.



the variety as such and that while he will not teach it to his children due to its “uselessness”, he is not against them learning it. Given the linguistic situation in rural Ts’alk’a, they are very likely to acquire at least some Urum. The point here is that Urum is evaluated as lacking in terms of both *LANGUAGE*NESS and *USEFULNESS* for some consultants in rural Ts’alk’a, who do not evaluate it as “personally important”.

The second point, regarding linguistic and religious categories, has already come up in excerpt 2, where DP explains how the difference between *GREEKS* and *ACH’ARIANS* is that the former gave up “only” their language (thereby staying *GREEK*), whereas the latter gave up their religion and in her eyes thereby lost their affiliation with the category *GEORGIAN*, despite having kept the language associated with that category. Another strong excerpt comes from the interview with EM, a 65-year-old, Urum Greek retired surgical nurse living in Ts’alk’a (excerpt 30, EM, 0:39:33-0:40:01), which I will analyze in more detail in Chapter 7. EM very clearly expresses her feeling of “being treated unfairly” by “having to speak” the “un-Christian” and therefore somehow “wrong” language, while *MUSLIM ACH’ARIANS* are “allowed” to speak the *CHRISTIAN LANGUAGE* Georgian.

Finally, we need to look at the different evaluations of Urum as a heritage variety in rural and urban spaces. However, it is important to remember that Urum is by no means a problematic heritage variety for all consultants, as another glance at table 5.3 will remind us. So far, I have focused on the evaluations of those six consultants in Ts’alk’a who do not take Urum to be “important” to them personally. These cases show how speaking a *TURKISH* variety might be established as problematic for a *GREEK* community – as well as how consultants deal with these potential challenges to their (self-)identification. In contrast, excerpt 1 stresses the importance of the heritage variety, as do speakers who evaluate Urum as a link to their ancestors and their community, as being useful in numerous ways, or as rooting them in Ts’alk’a (for the latter: DL, 0:39:11). So for the majority of Urum Greek consultants, the relation to Urum as a heritage variety is positive and unproblematic. This is in line with their high levels of competence, their speaking the language at least in the family if they are competent speakers, and with passing it on to their children and even to their non-native Urum-speaking spouses. This is particularly striking in the case of LP and MP in Ts’alk’a, who do not see Urum as “personally important” to them.

Nevertheless, there are obvious differences between rural and urban spaces in evaluating the “personal importance” of Urum as heritage variety. The question seems to trigger positionings that differ between urban competent

Urum speakers and their rural counterparts. One interpretation would be that for the urban Greek consultants the heritage language evokes feelings of belonging and rootedness, especially in terms of family relations (both dead and alive), while neither their being GREEK nor their belonging to Georgia is usually challenged in their everyday interactions.<sup>36</sup> There might also be a perception of Urum being a lesser used variety and therefore somehow special to them, their families and their community. It is also possible that, in the context of documentation efforts undertaken by project members, they perceive this language as being what makes them of interest to me; in this light, positive evaluation and stress on its importance for belonging might be viewed as a “good position to take”.

Quite differently, in Ts’alk’a the documentation project was not as well known at the time of the interviews. More importantly, the language is an integral part of rural Greek consultants’ everyday life and interactions, not only within the immediate family. This might not make it feel like an “endangered” language. Nevertheless, it is in Ts’alk’a that their being GREEK is challenged due to their language use, even as their belonging to Georgia is challenged due to the “accusers” being “real Georgians”. The latter is, as we have seen, questioned by some rural Greek consultants on religious grounds. I will discuss Ts’alk’a and the boundaries drawn there in detail in Chapter 7.

Finally, it is safe to assume that both rural and urban Urum Greek consultants either have first-hand experience of discrimination in Greece related to their speaking a TURKISH language, or have heard of such discrimination via stories of (close) family members or friends (cf. Chapter 7). These experiences possibly add to the struggle for economic survival, belonging and recognition of (self-)identification in Ts’alk’a in a way that makes at least some consultants lack the aplomb with which IP, for example, positions himself and his community in a Pontic village (cf. excerpt 4).

### III. Preliminary summary

The main finding here is that for such a small community, a high number of consultants still claim competence in their respective heritage variety and that competent speakers pass these languages on to their offspring. This is

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36 While there are narratives of discrimination experienced for not speaking Georgian in public during Gamsakhurdia’s presidency, as in excerpt 20 (cf. Chapter 6), these are invariably about speaking Russian in public, never about Urum (or Pontic Greek).

in contrast to what Zoumpalidis (2012) reports regarding declining heritage variety use in the Northern Caucasus. In terms of positioning the speaker and their community, historical narratives are used to show “how things came to be the way they are”. Excerpt 4 shows this for Pontic Greek, as do Sections 1. and 2. for both heritage varieties. Importantly, it appears that Urum has more potential to be problematized as a heritage variety than Pontic Greek, by both heritage speakers and people with no family history of speaking that language – although Pontic Greek is also problematized by some Urum Greek consultants.

In-group members problematize Urum only in Ts’alk’a, which I take to be largely a factor of the very different social context. Because of the continuing challenge to their self-identification in Ts’alk’a (and in Greece), GREEKS have to position themselves and the language they speak differently. They cannot simply treat it as the language of their ancestors, to be valued and cherished. As Sideri (2006) also observes, it is not a problem to *speak* Urum and to pass it on to one’s children, or to speak about this variety linking individuals to their community and – in Ts’alk’a – their place of residence. It becomes problematic, however, when outsiders either challenge their being GREEK, i.e. turn their language use into something “deviant”, or as interviewers ask a question about “importance”, which is apparently interpreted as linking heritage variety to national identity. The latter might not be a “strong” or direct challenge, but it appears that some consultants in Ts’alk’a still interpret it as questioning how to fill the category GREEK. Overall, we can see here how larger discourses of what matters for identification (in this case communal boundary work in the Ts’alk’a region) influence how consultants can make use of the languages they speak as a resource in positioning themselves – or else how they are something they have to negotiate in the daily struggle over (self-)identification and belonging (cf. Chapter 7).

On the level of interactive devices employed by speakers, four main ways of doing identification and belonging emerge. The first is to evaluate a variety regarding its USEFULNESS and LANGUAGESS and to then put effort into having one’s children learn a variety that ranks highly in both. The second is to understand a language as indicative of social belonging: for heritage varieties this might be in historical, communal (ancestral), or religious terms. This might force one to deal with “mismatches” if, for example, a language is perceived to stand for a particular religion that one does not want to be associated with. One way of coming to terms with this is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY, for instance through narrating how this situation came to be. Narration is the third device. It may be used broadly to establish the historical trajectory of

one’s community, or to explain a perceived “mismatch” between category membership and language use. The fourth device, finally, is to perceive a particular variety as a link to spatial belonging, rooting a speaker and her community in a particular village, city, region, country or an even larger and less tangible space – the “post-Soviet” one, for example. All four methods will come up again in more detail throughout the analysis.

## B. *Standard Modern Greek*

Investigating how consultants make use of Standard Modern Greek as a resource for positioning themselves as GREEK is a particularly interesting case, since without this language one cannot identify as GREEK in contemporary Greece (Hionidou 2012; Kaurinkoski 2010; Sideri 2006, cf. also Chapters 2 and 7). It is also a challenging case, since far from all members of the community are competent speakers of this language, something consultants have to come to terms with in our interview conversations. In speaking about SMG, consultants follow three broad lines of argument: first, they may wholeheartedly embrace the notion that SMG is an integral part of being GREEK, which I will discuss in Section II.. Second, they may discount the identificatory potential of SMG and highlight ancestry and religion (Section III.). Or, third, they may evaluate competence in SMG as “desirable”, thus reconciling their evaluation of SMG as important with the language situation within the community (Section IV.).<sup>37</sup>

First, however, I will in the next Section ground these conceptualizations in some numbers about competence in SMG and consultants’ evaluations of its importance.

### I. Competence in SMG and evaluating its importance

Table 5.4 summarizes my consultants’ self-assessment of language competence in SMG.<sup>38</sup> As with the heritage varieties, I did not carry out any type of assessment test. Crucially, just over a third of both Urum (34.8%) and Pontic Greeks (38.5%) state high levels of competence, roughly a third state

37 I have explored the first two lines of argumentation in Höfler (2016), the third in Höfler (2018a).

38 In this Section, I rely extensively on the statistical analysis published in two papers on evaluating SMG (Höfler, 2016, 2018a).

Table 5.4: Self-assessed language competence in SMG

	competent		some comp.		little comp.		no comp.		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Urum</b>	8	34.8	1	4.3	8	34.8	6	26.1	23	100
<b>Pontic</b>	10	38.5	5	19.2	2	7.7	9	34.6	26	100
<b>Total</b>	18	36.7	6	12.2	10	20.4	15	30.6	49	100

little to some competence and the final third no competence whatsoever. The difference between both communities is only noticeable in the range from “little competence” (34.8% Urum vs. 7.7% Pontic) to “some competence” (4.3% Urum vs. 12.2% Pontic), which I will conflate in the following analysis. It may appear surprising that so many Pontic Greek consultants assert their incompetence in SMG, as these two varieties are not mutually unintelligible *per se*. As has become apparent in excerpt 4 above, both varieties are, however, perceived to be different enough to warrant being defined as different LANGUAGES in the community. In addition, Pontic Greek consultants who claim incompetence in SMG may either lack the exposure to SMG that would be necessary to realize the proximity of both varieties, or they may not be competent speakers of Pontic Greek themselves. The latter may be especially true for Pontic Greek consultants in urban settings (recall Table 5.1). A final point is that (heritage) speakers of Pontic Greek are not exempt from discrimination in Greece based on their less-than-flawless competence in SMG (cf. Chapter 7).

The potential split between rural and urban spaces, which became apparent in evaluating Urum as heritage language (cf. Section A.) is not so pronounced in terms of competence in SMG. Again, consultants in rural Ts’alk’a profess slightly higher levels of competence (5 out of 12 or 41.7%) than their urban counterparts (3 out of 11 or 27.3%). For Pontic Greeks, competence in SMG is given as almost equal across rural and urban contexts: 6 out of 16 consultants (37.5%) assess themselves as competent speakers in rural areas, and 4 out of 10 in the urban settings of Tbilisi and Batumi.

Age correlates with competence in SMG, as becomes evident from a comparison of Tables 5.4 and 5.5. Recall that “competence”, “some competence” and “no competence” in SMG are distributed fairly equally in the sample overall. In relation to age, this is true for the category “some competence” but not for the other two. The youngest cohort – consultants under 30 years of

Table 5.5: Age and self-assessed language competence in SMG

	competent		some competence		no competence		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Under 30</b>	5	50	3	30	2	20	10	100
<b>30-55</b>	9	40.9	8	36.4	5	22.7	22	100
<b>Over 55</b>	4	23.5	5	29.4	8	47.1	17	100
<b>Total</b>	18	36.7	16	32.7	15	30.6	49	100

age – have the highest level of competence at 50%, with levels of competence declining with age. This distribution is similar to what Zoumpalidis (2013, p. 240) reports for the Greek community in the Northern Caucasus. In light of general patterns of language change, this is an indication that language competence is shifting. As we will see in Section C., language use in the community is so complex that it is very dubitable that the Greek community in Georgia will ever speak SMG as a widespread family language. Note also that a comparison of the results in Table 5.1 with Table 5.4 shows that levels of competence in the respective heritage variety are self-assessed to be much higher overall than in SMG. Interestingly, consultants’ level of education does not correlate with competence in SMG: of the 18 competent speakers, exactly half went to university, which corresponds with education levels in the sample as a whole.<sup>39</sup> Neither does gender predict competence in SMG.

The next question is whether competence in SMG is perceived to be an important feature of being GREEK by Georgian Greek consultants – as it is by the societal majority in Greece. The question I asked to establish this was *nuzhno li govorit’ po-grecheski chtoby schitat’ sebya grekom?* “is it necessary to speak Greek in order to consider oneself Greek?” Having usually just discussed potential differences between SMG and Pontic Greek as well as the situation in Greece where relevant, the possibility of consultants taking this question to refer to Pontic Greek rather than SMG is minimal.

Table 5.6 shows how consultants answered that question. Importantly, the clear “yes” or “no” answers include consultants who elaborated on the ques-

39 Overall, our consultants’ level of education is very high in comparison to the last census of the Georgian population as a whole (Geostat, 2016). Note that this is in line with consultants’ self-understanding of their community as very well educated, certainly until the end of the Soviet Union.

40 First published in Höfler (2016, p. 220).

Table 5.6: Is competence in SMG necessary in order to consider oneself Greek?<sup>40</sup>

	yes		desirable		no		no answer		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Urum</b>	4	17.4	8	34.8	10	43.5	1	4.2	23	100
<b>Pontic</b>	10	38.5	3	11.4	10	38.5	3	11.4	26	100
<b>Total</b>	14	28.6	11	22.3	20	40.7	4	8.2	49	100

tion for some time and in this process “talked themselves” to a clear answer, even if they may have started out rather unclearly. As I have argued in Höfler (2016, 2018a), the category “desirable” arises from an open examination of the data (cf. Glaser / Strauss, 2007). Rather than representing the “middle point” between “yes” and “no”, something else is at stake here, namely articulating a certain degree of unsettlement, which I discuss in Section IV. below.

Looking at the results in Table 5.6, a surprisingly high number of both Pontic and Urum Greeks (10 each, 40.7% of the sample) negate a link between being GREEK and competence in SMG. There is a difference between Urum and Pontic heritage variety speakers: For Urum Greeks, the category “desirable” is much higher (34.8% of Urum Greek consultants vs. 11.4% of Pontic Greek consultants). Pontic Greeks apparently found it easier to arrive at a clear “yes” or “no” answer (both at 38.5%). Interestingly, all four “yes” answers by Urum Greeks were given in rural Ts’alk’a. It is also notable that for two of them (incidentally the two consultants without competence in SMG) evaluating SMG as important coincides with negative evaluations of their heritage variety Urum.<sup>41</sup> For the first time in the analysis so far, this split in evaluation between rural and urban settings is shared by Pontic Greek consultants, with half of rural Pontic Greek consultants considering competence in SMG to be important, compared to only 2 out of 10 urban Pontic Greek consultants.

41 For different reasons, however: as discussed in Section A., for EM the “mismatch” between CHRISTIANITY and TURKISH plays a role, whereas for IK considerations of USEFULNESS are more important.

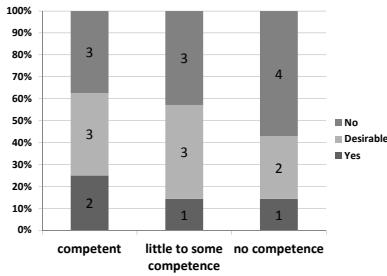


Figure 5.1: Urum Greeks: Competence in and evaluation of the necessity of competence in SMG.

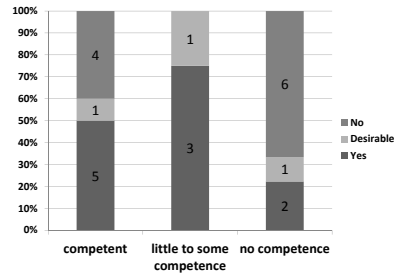


Figure 5.2: Pontic Greeks: Competence in and evaluation of the necessity of competence in SMG.

Figures 5.1 and 5.2 show the distribution of competence in relation to whether SMG is seen to be important for Greekness.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, while in the answers of Pontic Greek consultants there is a slight correlation between a consultant’s own competence and the evaluation of SMG as important for being GREEK, for Urum Greeks the speaker’s own competence apparently had no influence on how they answered that question. In line with this, age does not play a role here. So, while younger Georgian Greeks are overall more likely to speak SMG well, they are not more likely to consider this competence important for belonging to their community. Neither do older consultants consider this competence to be more important, regardless of their own competence.<sup>43</sup> Taken together with the high number of speakers evaluating competence in SMG as “desirable”, this distribution might point to something other than slowly changing patterns of competence within the community. I will argue in Section IV. that we might be witnessing a community shifting their evaluation as a whole in response to the challenges posed to their self-identification as GREEK in contemporary Greece. This challenge might still be felt strongly by those who stayed in Georgia due to numerous and close contacts with their emigrated relatives and friends,

42 Both were first published in (Höfler, 2016, p. 222). The 4 instances of “no answer” have been omitted from the figures.

43 This is different to what Zoumpalidis (2013, p. 240) reports for the Northern Caucasus, where his older consultants were less likely to be competent speakers of SMG but more likely to attribute high importance to this competence.



and explains why personal experience of migration<sup>44</sup> is also not a factor predicting the evaluation.

Summing up, age plays a role in predicting competence in SMG, whereas heritage variety, settlement space and education do not. The community is divided in terms of whether this competence would be important for being GREEK, with many disagreeing. Neither competence nor age correlate with this evaluation. However, speakers of both heritage languages living in rural areas are more likely to answer this question affirmatively.

## II. Tracing belonging through competence

This is the first of three Sections investigating how consultants speak about evaluating SMG as (un)important for their own and their community's being GREEK. Intriguingly, arguments framed as “objective facts” or “facts of nature” are given as strongly for as against considering competence in SMG essential for being GREEK. This can be best explained by linking these lines of argument to broader discourses on the prerequisites for belonging to any national category. Contemporary citizens of Georgia have discursive access to two ideal types of framing national belonging: the “imperial” type, which preceded the modern nation state and traced belonging through religious affiliation and ancestry, and the “modern” type, associated with contemporary nation states, wherein religious and ancestral ties are not always prerequisite and language plays a much greater role, especially in everyday interactions.<sup>45</sup> As outlined in Chapter 2, the latter dominates discourses on belonging in contemporary Greece (Hionidou, 2012; Kaurinkoski, 2010; Sideri, 2006) and is also present in contemporary Georgia (Suny, 1994). In Georgia, however, tracing national belonging through religious affiliation, especially one

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44 21 consultants (43%) professed personal experience of some type of migration, including seasonal labor migration.

45 Most current theoretical approaches to nations and nationalism connect the emergence of the modern nation state with the emergence of a standardized national language that serves both as an “administrative vernacular” (Anderson, 1991, p. 41) and as a unifying symbol for the (young) nation (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983). These processes have played a major role in shaping language policies in the post-Soviet space, as discussed *inter alia* in Feldman (2000); Hogan-Brun (2006); Korth (2005); Pavlenko (2008). Globalization and post-modernity pose great challenges to this concept of the nation state, yet discourses about national affiliation – at least in Europe, including Georgia – remain steeped in “modern” narratives and exigencies.

that involves the Byzantine Empire, is still a powerful discursive resource (Fuchslocher, 2010).<sup>46</sup>

Let us now examine how AL argues for LANGUAGE as important for national belonging. AL is a Pontic Greek woman in her late 50s who is a competent speaker of SMG and lives in a small village in rural Tetrīts’q’aro. She was unemployed at the time of the interview, having previously been employed in the local administration.

(6) No belonging without language (AL, 0:19:26-0:19:46)<sup>47</sup>

- 1 CH: *obyazatel’no li govorit’ po-grecheski chtoby schitat’*  
 necessary whether to\_speak the\_Greek\_way so\_that to\_consider
- 2 *sebya grekom (—)*  
 self Greek
- 3 AL: *°h chtoby sebya schitat’ h° toy natsii ne tol’ko [grekom]*  
 so\_that self to\_consider of\_that nation not only Greek
- 4 CH: [mhm]
- 5 AL: *[gruzin]om russk[im] obyazatel’no nado znat’ yazyk*  
 Georgian Russian necessarily must to\_know language
- 6 NL: [hm]
- 7 CH: [mhm]
- 8 NL: [hm]
- 9 AL: *ya tak schitayu h° bez yazyka ty ne n: ty ne etoy*  
 I so consider\_I without language you not you not of\_that
- 10 *natsii*  
 nation
- 11 NL: hm
- 12 AL: *°hh da (1) nuzhen yazyk*  
 yes needed language
- 
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to consider oneself Greek?
- 3 AL: in order to consider oneself of that nation, not only [Greek]
- 4 CH: [mhm]
- 5 AL: [Georgi]an or Russ[ian] it is necessary to know the language
- 6 NL: [hm]
- 7 CH: [mhm]
- 8 NL: [hm]
- 9 AL: I think that without language you’re not, you’re not a part of that nation
- 11 NL: hm
- 12 AL: yes, language is necessary

46 That this is also a contested discourse can be seen in Ts’alk’a (cf. Section A. and Chapter 7).

47 Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2016, p. 224f.).

In excerpt 6 AL very clearly, and without signs of hesitation or efforts at mitigation, states that she considers LANGUAGE to be a vital component of belonging to any national category. Extending the scope of her argument beyond the realm of being GREEK, she further lists “Georgian or Russian” (5) as examples, thereby alluding to a general rule of how national affiliation works. In lines 9-10 she delivers her verdict, slightly hedged by restricting her statement to the sphere of her personal consideration (*ya tak schitayu* “that’s how I see it”), that *bez yazyka* “without language” *ty ne etoy natsii* “you’re not part of that nation”. She closes her contribution by answering the question I posed (in line 1) with a calm *da (1) nuzhen yazyk* “yes, language is necessary” (12).

Most consultants arguing for a close link between language competence and national belonging do this in a similarly clear and unmitigated way. Given the discursive prevalence of the modern nation state in Europe, this is also perhaps not the most interesting case, as the discourse linking national affiliation with the use of a particular (standardized) language has become so pervasive. What is interesting, though, is how consultants arguing for this principle deal with their own and/or their community’s linguistic “shortcoming”. Two closely connected lines of reasoning come up in the corpus: firstly, consultants might mention their own efforts to “remedy” the situation on a personal level by investing time in learning the language and keeping their level of competence as high as possible. This might happen either by taking classes in SMG that could be provided by the *Greek Federation of Georgia* (AT, ED) or at university level, where some consultants decided to specialize in Greek philology (VD). The second stance would be to deplore the lack of Greek language education in Georgia and cite historical reasons for why Greeks in Georgia do not speak Greek (IK, EM). The responsibility for this “shortcoming” is thereby shifted to forces beyond the community, like state provisions for minority schooling. This communicative device of SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY away from the speaker and/or their community is even more widespread in arguing for the category “desirable”, as we will see in Section IV.. It is also a common account for why Georgian Greeks may not be proficient speakers of Georgian, as discussed in Section C..

Interestingly, none of the ten consultants arguing for the close connection between competence in SMG and national belonging explicitly draw the conclusion that parts of their community could or should not be considered “properly” GREEK.

### III. “We are born Greeks”: Tracing belonging through ancestry and religion

The other very clear line of reasoning takes LANGUAGE to be something rather MARGINAL and not a fundamental part of belonging. In this line of argument, ancestry and/or religion, official documentation like passports, or the consultant’s self-identification may provide the crucial link to their being GREEK.<sup>48</sup> In this view, LANGUAGE might be conceived of as a MEANS OF COMMUNICATION instead of, as above, a MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION. The former is prominent especially when consultants tell me that it is important to speak as many languages as possible regardless of the specific languages, or display the already-introduced attitude of evaluating languages in terms of their USEFULNESS.

I will address, in turn, each of the ways in which consultants foreground features of belonging not connected with LANGUAGE. The first, and perhaps the strongest, argument is ancestry. Thus, EC, a 37-year-old, Urum Greek housewife who speaks SMG and lives in Tbilisi, very clearly states why she self-identifies as GREEK: *greki my rozhdaemsya* “we are born Greeks” (EC, 0:47:20). Similarly, SC, a 71-year-old, Urum Greek retired police officer lives seasonally in both Greece and Georgia, and is competent in SMG, but denies a close connection between LANGUAGE and national affiliation.<sup>49</sup> He dismisses my question whether his heritage language, Urum, is important to him by drawing on the proverb that every language one speaks makes one worth the equivalent of one monolingual individual. In this, the specific languages spoken are not as important as their sum total, and he proudly tells me *ya shest’ chelovek* “I’m [worth] six people” (SC, 0:46:30-0:46:47). I go on to ask whether competence in SMG is important in order to consider oneself Greek. He dismisses that notion by explaining that he knows many Greeks in Russia who do not speak SMG, making the Georgian Greeks less of an exception. He adds that it would not be a problem in Greece either, since the Greek government provided Greek language courses for post-Soviet Greek

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48 Another reason is given by two Pontic Greek women in Batumi (NA and LV), who argue that the language of the PLACE one inhabits is paramount. I explore this reasoning in detail in Section C. of this Chapter.

49 He might be read as a “textbook example” of a person from his generation, with a successful career in the Soviet Union and little reason to question values commonly attributed to (citizens of) the Soviet Union. This is also apparent in how he constructs the Soviet Union as a FAMILY in excerpt 19 discussed in Chapter 6.

immigrants, thus preparing them for life in Greece (SC, 0:46:47-0:47:13).  
He concludes:

(7) You have to be born Greek (SC, 0:47:14-0:47:50)

- 1 SC: *tak chto: eto ne problema °h (—) lyuboy (-) ne znaya svoy*  
so that this not problem anybody not knowing own
- 2 *rodnoy yazyk eto ne znachit chto on dopustim ne russkiy*  
native language this not means that he suppose\_we not Russian
- 3 *[ili]*  
or
- 4 CH: [mhm]
- 5 SC: *ne grek ili on ne gruzin (1.5) gruzin gruzin ne ne*  
not Greek or he not Georgian Georgian Georgian not not
- 6 *obyazatel'no znat' yazyk*  
obligatorily to\_know language
- 7 CH: *mhm (1) khorosho (6)*  
good
- 8 SC: *a chtoby gordit'sya (-) chto nado delat' znaete (-)*  
and so\_that to\_be\_proud what necessary to\_do know\_2PL
- 9 *chtoby gordit'sya gor[dost' znaete chtoby gordit'sya]*  
so\_that to\_be\_proud pride know\_2PL so\_that to\_be\_proud
- 10 CH: [hm hm]
- 11 SC: *chto nado delat' znaete (1)*  
what necessary to\_do know\_2PL
- 12 CH: *net*  
no
- 13 SC: *nado grekom rodit'sya [((chuckles))]*  
necessary as\_Greek be\_born
- 14 CH: [((chuckles))]
- 15 NL: [((chuckles))]
- 
- 1 SC: so it's not a problem, if anybody doesn't know his native language, it  
2 doesn't mean that he, let's say, isn't Russian [or]
- 4 CH: [mhm]
- 5 SC: Greek or he's not Georgian, a Georgian is a Georgian, it's not  
6 obligatory to know the language
- 7 CH: mhm (1) alright (6)
- 8 SC: but in order to be proud, you know what you have to do? in order to be  
9 proud? you know pri[de? in order to be proud]
- 10 CH: [hm hm]
- 11 SC: you know what you have to do? (1)
- 12 CH: no?
- 13 SC: you have to be born Greek! [((chuckles))]

14 CH: [(chuckles)]

15 NL: [(chuckles)]

In excerpt 7, SC concludes his preceding explanation by first stating that based on the examples he gave (Greeks in Russia not speaking SMG, the Greek government providing language courses), not knowing *svoy rodnoy yazyk* “one’s native language” does not mean that a person would cease to be “Russian, Greek or Georgian” (1-6). The adjective *rodnoy* “native” is used here in the (post-)Soviet way, referring to the language associated with the national category one was born into, rather than one’s strongest language (cf. Chapter 2, Grenoble 2003). Even though there are apparently linguistic categories associated with these national categories, competence in the respective language is not obligatory to retain or prove this national affiliation: *gruzin gruzin ne ne obyazatel’no znat’ yazyk* “a Georgian is a Georgian, it’s not obligatory to know the language” (5-6). I agree (7), and after a substantial pause of six full seconds, SC returns to the question of NATIONALITY, which for him is apparently linked with “pride”, asking whether his addressees know what one would have to do *chtoby gordit’sya* “in order to be proud” (8-9). This seems to be so important to him, that he, knowing I have a less-than-fluent grasp on Russian, explicitly asks to make sure I understand the word *gordost’* ‘pride’ (9). Having ensured my full comprehension and attention with this build-up, he repeats his question (9-11) and waits for my negation (12). Only then does he deliver the punch-line of his joke: *nado grekom rodit’sya* “you have to be born Greek” (13), which achieves the desired effect, with all three of us laughing. This joking emphasis on national affiliation *qua* birth is even more surprising and thereby “funnier” in the context of the whole interview, since SC has always stressed that NATIONALITY is not a category he pays much attention to, nor considers a relevant and reliable predictor of someone’s personality.

Closely connected to this emphasis on ancestry for national affiliation is the Soviet way of recording nationality in internal passports. This practice further served to set NATIONALITY as a hereditary category unencumbered by “marginal” characteristics like linguistic competence.<sup>50</sup> IS, a Pontic Greek competent SMG speaker and farmer in rural Tetrits’q’aro, is the only consultant who refers to this explicitly when asked about the importance of SMG for being GREEK. He answers that his documents are fully sufficient to identify

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50 For an analysis of the nationalizing impact of Soviet passport policies, cf. Arel (2003); Brubaker (1996); Slezkine (1994); Suny (1993) and the discussion in Chapter 2.

him as GREEK (IS, 0:34:33).<sup>51</sup> A similar notion, if not explicitly stated, may underpin TS' *yazyk voobshche ne imeet znachenie* "language has no meaning whatsoever" (TS, 0:14:16).

As I have discussed in Chapter 2, the Soviet passport policy retained the national categories that were used by preceding Empires (in this case the Ottoman and Russian Empires), while "emptying" them of at least some of their content – e.g. religion – for at least some people. This may be why some consultants encounter argumentative difficulties when answering the question of whether competence in SMG is a prerequisite for being GREEK. Like NB in excerpt 8 below, they are sure they belong, but lack the calm and the conviction displayed by consultants arguing for both positions in the excerpts above (6 and 7), who needed no further rationale to justify their belonging.<sup>52</sup>

For NB, reconciling her incompetence in SMG with considering herself undoubtedly GREEK seems to require some conversational effort. She is a university-educated, Urum Greek woman in her late 20s, and at the time of the interview lives in Tbilisi and looks after her two small children.

(8) I'm Greek in my soul (NB, 0:40:09-0:40:42)<sup>53</sup>

- 1 CH: *e nuzhno (-) em: govorit' (-) po-grechski (-) em chtoby byt'*  
 must to\_speak the\_Greek\_way so\_that to\_be
- 2 *grek (1) chto ty думаеш' (-)*  
 Greek\_M what you think\_2SG
- 3 NB: *net ne obyazatel'no (-)*  
 no not necessarily
- 4 CH: *ne obyazatel'no (-)*  
 not necessarily
- 5 NB: *ty m: (-) ya i tak grechanka [ya v dushe]*  
 you I and so Greek\_F I in soul
- 6 CH: *[da]*  
 yes
- 7 NB: *grechanka*  
 Greek\_F
- 8 CH: *mhm*

51 A similar reliance on official documents for reassurance of national affiliation became important for Georgian Greek immigrants to Greece (cf. Chapter 7).

52 As discussed in Section D., this may also be because SMG is not afforded much importance unless an outsider asks about it.

53 Text in Georgian is marked with (kat) at the beginning of the turn. Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2016, p. 225ff.).

- 9 NB: *a esli ya ne znayu grecheskogo yazyka eto ne znachit chto ya*  
and if I not know\_I Greek language this not means that I  
10 *ne grechanka*  
not Greek\_F  
11 CH: mhm  
12 NB: *ya lyublyu i gretsiyu i grekov i pontitsev ya vsekh lyublyu*  
I love\_I and Greece and Greeks and Pontics I all love\_I  
13 CH: [mhm]  
14 NB: *[ya grech]anka v dushe tak chto mne ne nado (-) ne*  
I Greek\_F in soul so that me not necessary not  
15 *obyazatel'no znat' grecheskiy chtoby (-) vot ty nemka da*  
obligatory to\_know Greek so\_that here you German\_F yes  
16 CH: [mhm]  
17 NB: *[esli ty ne] znaesh' nemetskogo (-) chto ty ne nemka*  
if you not know\_2SG German what you not German\_F  
18 *poluchaetsya*  
turns\_out  
19 CH: *[((chuckles)) da]*  
yes  
20 NB: *[ty zhe nemka vsë] ty znaesh' chto ty nem[ka]*  
you same German\_F all you know\_2SG that you German\_F  
21 CH: [mhm]  
22 NB (kat): *morcha*  
finished

- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to be Greek, what do you think?  
3 NB: no, not necessarily  
4 CH: not necessarily  
5 NB: I'm Greek even so, [I'm in my soul]  
6 CH: [yes]  
7 NB: Greek  
8 CH: mhm  
9 NB: and if I don't know Greek, it doesn't mean that I'm not Greek  
11 CH: mhm  
12 NB: I love Greece, Greeks and Pontics, I love them all  
13 CH: [mhm]  
14 NB: I'm Greek in my soul and that's why I don't need to know Greek, like,  
15 you're German, right?  
16 CH: [mhm]  
17 NB: [if you didn't] speak German would you then not be German?  
19 CH: [((chuckles)) yes]  
20 NB: [you're still German, that's all,] you know that you're Ger[man]  
21 CH: [mhm]  
22 NB (kat): that's all



NB first very clearly negates the question (3) before she starts to defend her being GREEK with or without competence in SMG in line 5.<sup>54</sup> She locates being GREEK within herself, more specifically *v dushe* “in (my) soul” (5). It thereby turns into an essential part of her, unaffected by her language competence, which she states clearly in lines 9-10 and repeats in 14-15. Before the repetition, she expresses her love for Greece and Greeks both in Greece and abroad (12). She explicitly refers to the Greeks not residing in Greece with *pontitsev* “Pontics”, which includes those living in Georgia, as this is the label she generally uses for members of her own community. Through this emotional declaration, she shows that being GREEK is not only an essential part of herself but that she also has the “correct” feelings that are thereby established as the central attribute for category membership and contribute to this “Greek core”.

In the following part of her argument, she switches attention away from herself and uses my own national affiliation as an example to prove her point. That she firstly re-establishes my Germanness, which she is very much aware of as we had known each other for some time before the interview, really brings this affiliation to the foreground of the conversation and thereby our joint attention (15). Her rhetorical question whether I would somehow suddenly lose this affiliation if I did not speak German (17-18) is thus even stronger and readily acknowledged by me with a chuckle. She first closes this sequence with *ty zhe nemka vsë* “you’re still German, that’s all” (20), with *vsë* ‘everything’ “that’s all” functioning very much as the endpoint of her argument, similarly to an English speaker using *period* to signal their attempt to end a discussion. She strengthens this endpoint even further by first appealing to my knowledge about my belonging (20) and finally closing the topic by switching to Georgian with *morcha* ‘finished’ “that’s all” (22). This is the only time in the interview that she switches to Georgian when talking to me. So, she not only repeats the closing element *vsë*, she repeats it in a language that is highly marked in this context.<sup>55</sup> In establishing a GENERAL RULE for her evaluation that language competence is not central to national affiliation, NB thus draws on the resources afforded by the interview context –

54 Her first defense *ya i tak grechanka* “I’m Greek anyway” is a line other consultants use as well, notably DP (0:26:05).

55 She is very aware of my Georgian competence (or rather my lack thereof at the time of the interview) and during the interview uses Georgian only when talking to her husband and children, thereby making Russian the “interview language” and Georgian the “non-interview language” for our conversation.

my national affiliation – to show that this rule applies not only in her specific case but more generally.

The final way to discount linguistic competence relies on RELIGION as identifier, as discussed in exploring evaluations of the heritage languages (Section A.), boundaries in Ts’alk’a (Chapter 7), and specifically in the analysis of excerpt 2. Unsurprisingly, DP draws on RELIGION again when I pose the question of SMG’s importance for being GREEK: *my i tak greki ne obyazatel’no chtoby znali ne znali etot yazyk glavnoe chto khristiany glavnoe chto veru derzhim eto (glavnoe) (x)* “we’re Greeks anyway, it’s not necessary that we know or don’t know that language, the main thing is that we’re Christians, the main thing is that we keep the faith, that’s (important)” (DP, 0:26:04).

As discussed above, consultants arguing for a close link between competence in SMG and being GREEK refer to a generally valid rule according to which national affiliation is inexorably tied to competence in the LANGUAGE linked to this national category. In denying that competence in SMG has any importance for being GREEK, consultants rely on a different set of GENERAL RULES that define belonging: ANCESTRY (whether recorded in official documentation or not) and RELIGION provide links perceived to be somehow verifiable. NB, who at the time of the interview does not make use of either category as a resource for positioning herself as GREEK, uses her own “correct” feelings as a resource for claiming belonging to the category GREEK. She also establishes a contextually relevant rule of how national affiliation works by adducing me as an example and generalizing from this.

#### IV. Competence “Desirable” – uncertain evaluations

The third answer, that competence in SMG would be DESIRABLE, relates how consultants reconcile believing LANGUAGE to be an important factor in national affiliation with their own “shortcoming” in terms of competence in SMG. This category is very different from either viewing LANGUAGE as a central attribute of category membership or conversely evaluating it as MARGINAL to belonging. Consultants in this third group either express uncertainty on how to evaluate this issue, or voice a preference for the first option while taking into account – and sometimes explaining – their own and/or their community’s perceived shortcoming when evaluated in this light.

The main argumentative method employed in order to communicatively come to terms with this complexity is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY to socio-

historical context, whether distant or more recent (6 of 11 consultants). The former centers on their ancestors having lived in the Ottoman Empire, the latter mostly on the education system in Georgia.<sup>56</sup> ME, a 51-year-old manager in the local district administration in Ts'alk'a, thus explains her ancestors' not speaking SMG by referring to the political situation in the Ottoman Empire: *u nikh takoe obstoyatel'stvo bylo v tot moment* "that were their circumstances at that moment" (ME, 0:49:32). She states very clearly that this should not be held against them or be taken to imply that they are not GREEK: *nashi predki ne vinovaty byli chto oni ne znali yazyka °h no eto ne znachit chto oni ne byli grekami* "it wasn't our ancestors' fault that they didn't know the language, but it doesn't mean that they weren't Greek" (ME, 0:49:26). She then locates being GREEK *v dushe* "in the soul" (ME, 0:49:43), like NB in excerpt 8, and goes on to say that one can learn any language one wishes to (ME, 0:50:02-0:50:10). Again, LANGUAGE is seen as somehow MARGINAL, something which can be learnt or lost and which does not affect national affiliation in any way. SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY is a pervasive argumentative device, used to excuse all manner of perceived shortcomings, especially linguistic ones, within the community (cf. Section D.).

Two other lines of argumentation are used: OK makes the place of residence relevant, claiming that speaking the Georgian language is much more important if one lives in Georgia (OK, 0:58:47). AK also uses SC's proverb about the advantages of speaking many languages, and sees SMG as one of many desirable languages (AK, 0:26:38). A similar line is taken by MI, a 19-year-old Urum Greek living in Tbilisi and studying towards her BA in Greek studies at the time of the interview. She ascribes "untenable" positions to unspecified others, from which she then proceeds to distance herself:

(9) It's not so serious (MI, 0:35:40-0:36:09)<sup>57</sup>

- 1 CH: *nuzhno li govorit' po-grechski chtoby schitat' grekom*  
 must whether\_to\_speak\_in\_Greek so\_that to\_consider Greek\_M  
 2 (1.5)
- 3 MI: *m:: net (-) [ya ne schitayu chto eto ochen' tak °h] ob" yazatel'no*  
 no I not consider\_I that this very so necessarily  
 4 *chtoby e [m]*  
 so\_that

56 Note that this latter reason is also used to explain some Georgian Greeks' only very basic Georgian skills, even though responsibility is in this case transferred to the Soviet Union (cf. Section C.).

57 Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2018a).

- 5 CH: [(chuckles)]
- 6 NL: [hm]
- 7 MI: *nu esli ty grechanka ty dol'zhna znat' grecheskiy °h*  
well if you Greek\_F you should\_F to\_know Greek
- 8 MI (kat): *nu anu: (-) q'opila egeti raghats ro utkviat [magram]*  
well or was such thing that said\_they but
- 9 *seriozulad ara*  
seriously not
- 10 CH: [hm]
- 11 NL: hm
- 12 MI (kat): *magram kho utkviat kholme egre magram nu ekhla*  
but yes said\_they sometimes so but well now
- 13 NL (kat): *shen rogor tvli tviton*  
you how think\_2SG self
- 14 MI (kat): *me tviton a\_ar vtvli (—) m.: (-) unda vitso\_ unda*  
me self not think\_I must would\_kno\_ must
- 15 *vitsode k'aia ro vitsode magram ese ara [radgan*  
would\_know\_I good\_is that would\_know\_I but so no because
- 16 *berdzeni var ras hkvia ar vitsi kartuli]*  
Greek am what called not know\_I Georgian
- 17 NL: [mhm mhm]
- 18 MI (kat): *da ese k'at'egoriulad ara magram °h ekhla mometsa*  
and so categorically not but now is\_given\_to\_me
- 19 *sashualeba da ekhla vsts'avlob ar aris [problema amaze]*  
opportunity and now learn\_I not is problem this\_about
- 20 NL: [hm]
- 21 MI (kat): *°h chemtvisats ara akvs dzaan iseti seriozuli dat'virtva da °h ar*  
me\_for\_too not has very such serious meaning and not
- 22 *mivichnev ro radgan berdzeni var rat'o ar vitsi da [isa]*  
consider\_I that as Greek am why not know\_I and that
- 23 NL (kat): *[mara k'argi] ikneboda ro itso[de kho]*  
but good would\_be that would\_know\_2SG yes
- 24 MI (kat): *[k'i k'argi] ikneboda ro m.: vtsa'vlob [da] << smiling >*  
yes good would\_be that learn\_I and
- 25 *vitsode>*  
would\_know\_I
- 26 NL: [hm]
- 27 MI (kat): *[k'i]*  
yes
- 28 NL: [hm]
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to consider (oneself) Greek?
- 3 MI: no [I don't think that is very] necessary in order to [m]
- 5 CH: [(chuckles)]

- 6 NL: [hm]  
 7 MI: well, if you're Greek you should know Greek  
 8 MI (kat): well, there were cases where they said that [but] not seriously  
 10 CH: [hm]  
 11 NL: hm  
 12 MI (kat): but yeah, they have said things like that sometimes but, well, now  
 13 NL (kat): how do you think personally?  
 14 MI (kat): I personally don't think I must know, it would be good to know but  
 15 not like [because I'm Greek, what's it, I don't speak Georgian]  
 17 NL: [mhm mhm]  
 18 MI (kat): and not so categorically/strictly, but now I have the opportunity and  
 19 I learn it, it's not [a problem]  
 20 NL: [hm]  
 21 MI (kat): for me it's not so important and I don't think that because I'm  
 22 Greek, how can I not know it and all [that]  
 23 NL (kat): [but] it would be good [to know, right?]  
 24 MI (kat): [yes] it would be good that I would learn it [and] that I would know  
 25 it  
 26 NL (kat): [hm]  
 27 MI (kat): [yes]  
 28 NL (kat): [hm]

MI starts her answer in line 3 with a number of hesitating moves, ranging from (filled) pauses to lexical mitigations: she reduces the scope of her answer to her personal considerations (*ya ne schitayu* “I don't think”), thereby claiming nothing like a “general” scope for her answer and hedging her “not necessarily” even further: *ochen' tak ob' yazatel' no* ‘very necessary’. In line 7 she then gives an uncharacteristically straight answer that appears to echo normative-deontic statements from the community: *nu esli ty grechanka ty dol' zhna znat' grecheskiy* “well, if you're Greek, you should know Greek”. She then switches to Georgian (8-9) to explain how this is what “they used to say” but how they were not being *seriozulad* “seriously”. This switch is only half marked: Throughout the interview I had asked the main questions in Russian and in her answers she would at some point switch to Georgian as that is the language she felt more comfortable with. Even so, it is remarkable that she delivers this first “community statement” still in Russian and only afterwards switches to Georgian.

In line 12 she repeats the back and forth between stating a clearer *magram kho utkviat kholme egre* “but they did say this sometimes” and wanting to qualify it with further hedges *magram nu ekhla* ‘but well now’, when NL steps in to ask what she personally thinks (13). In line 14 she continues hesitatingly, starting to say that for her it would be good to know Greek

(15) and then distances herself from another, unhesitatingly carried, strong “community statement” (15-16), namely that because she is Greek she does not – in the sense of should not – know Georgian. That she probably does not ascribe this statement to her own community but to other minorities in Georgia will be discussed in more detail below. Speaking SMG, then, *k’ aia* “is good” (15), but she distances herself from positioning herself overly *k’ at’ egoriulad* “categorically” (18), as that would be a position limiting the number of languages “a Greek” should know apart from Greek. Being given the opportunity to learn SMG is, however, also not “a problem” for her (18-19). She then repeats, yet again, that for her personally it is not so important (21) that she should speak SMG (22). Interestingly, *radgan berdzeni var rat’ o ar vitsi* “as I’m Greek why do I not know it?” again echoes the first “community position” according to which belonging and LANGUAGE go hand in hand. NL again clarifies that it is desirable that she speaks SMG (23), which she smilingly affirms (24).

Overall, MI positions herself at a distance from what she portrays as being the “community line” on the question: That a Greek person should speak SMG (7, 22) and not Georgian (15-16). She thereby positions herself outside of what she perceives to be perhaps an “outdated” way of positioning oneself that equates – exclusive – language competence with belonging, by being more cosmopolitan and taking opportunities that present themselves, but not putting more emphasis on SMG than “necessary”. That a GREEK should not speak Georgian is, in fact, a position that none of our consultants held and will be discussed in Section C. below. Whether MI here alludes to a position that is so outdated that nobody would claim it or whether this has to do with a native Georgian taking part in the interviews is hard to say. From the overall positions and perspectives related by consultants of the Georgian Greek community, however, it seems highly unlikely that a substantial part of the community would hold such a view. On the contrary, one common interactional method is to underline how speaking many languages is positive. A more likely interpretation is that she is citing positions presumed to be held by members of the Armenian and Azerbaijani minorities – over which there is a substantial political and mediatized debate in Georgia (Nilsson / Popjanevski, 2009; Wheatley, 2009). It is this stance which she perceives as a stark and unwarranted exaggeration of the “community position” from which she distances herself. Her position here is actually in line with that of many Georgian Greek consultants who in certain contexts portray themselves as “better minorities” in terms of “integration”, political allegiance to the Georgian state, etc.

The following excerpt 10 reveals an even greater uncertainty as to how exactly the ideal that equates language competence with national belonging might fit into the specific Georgian Greek context. In light of consultants' age not correlating with how they answer the question about the importance of SMG for being GREEK, this might point to an analysis of shifting evaluations within the community more generally, i.e. without younger community members leading the innovation. Among the factors aiding this shift, the most relevant is probably the non-recognition experienced by emigrating community members in Greece and Cyprus.<sup>58</sup>

Excerpt 10 again shows how a consultant without clear “factual reasons” for his position – i.e. “objective facts” – interactively strives to establish it on a foundation that will be convincing enough in the interview context. Since we tried to align and agree with our consultants as much as possible, making a point “convincing enough” in the interview may not have been very difficult whatsoever. Consultants did not know this from the start, however, and their reaction to some questions lead me to argue that they sometimes perceived them on a continuum from “non-threatening” to “threatening”.<sup>59</sup> The following excerpt from the interview with MA, a 53-year-old, unemployed, Urum Greek man from Tbilisi, is a case in which a consultant appears to perceive the question as slightly more threatening.

(10) Do I stop being Greek? (MA, 0:35:40-0:36:09)<sup>60</sup>

- 1 CH: *em °h nuzhno li govorit' po-grechski chtoby stat'*  
           must whether\_to\_speak Greek so\_that to\_become
- 2 *grech\_*  
 Grech
- 3 VM: *grekom*  
 Greek\_M
- 4 CH: *grekom*  
 Greek\_M

58 Consultants do not need to have personally endured these negative experiences for them to be relevant. As Tilly (2004) elaborates, the narratives established on either side of a boundary about the boundary and “the Others” are powerful by themselves. This assumption is borne out in the interviews when consultants relate their own, or their relatives' and friends' experiences of being excluded.

59 Cf. excerpt 2, where the question about DP and FP's language competencies in general is answered by explaining how the responsibility for their speaking Urum lies with the Ottoman Empire.

60 Excerpt and analysis adapted from Höfler (2018a).

- 5 MA: *net (chto znachit grek) nu esli ya ne znayu grecheskogo*  
no what means Greek\_M well if I not know\_I Greek
- 6 *yazyka chto ya ne perestayu byt' grekom [chto li]*  
language what I not cease\_I to\_be Greek\_M what whether
- 7 NL: [hm]
- 8 CH: *((laughs)) sprashivayu [[[laughs]]]*  
ask\_I
- 9 MA: *[net net konechno] ne obyazatel'no no zhelatel'no ya eshchë raz*  
no no of\_course not nessessary but desirable I another time
- 10 *govoryu*  
say\_I
- 11 CH: mhm
- 12 MA: *takogo vot chto e:: (-) postavlyu k stenke i rass[trelyayu za to*  
such here that will\_put\_I at wall and will\_shoot\_I for this
- 13 *chto ty ne znaesh']*  
that you not know\_2SG
- 14 NL: *[((chuckles))]*
- 15 MA: *svoego yazyka net konechno no (—) nu eto normal'no esli*  
own language no of\_course but well this normal if
- 16 *[chelovek] znaet svoj yazyk vot i vsë (-)*  
person\_m knows own language here and all
- 17 CH: *[mhm] da*  
yes
- 18 MA: *naverno*  
probably
- 19 CH: *da da*  
yes yes
- 1 CH: is it necessary to speak Greek in order to be Grech\_
- 3 VM: Greek
- 4 CH: Greek
- 5 MA: no (what do you mean by Greek), well, if I don't know the Greek
- 6 language, what, I stop being Greek [or what?]
- 7 NL: [hm]
- 8 CH: *((laughs)) I'm asking [[[laughs]]]*
- 9 MA: [no, of course not], it's not necessary but desirable, I repeat
- 11 CH: mhm
- 12 MA: of course I won't put you against the wall and sho[ot you because you
- 13 don't know]
- 14 NL: *[((chuckles))]*
- 15 MA: your language, of course not, but, well, it's normal if a [person] knows
- 16 their language, that's all
- 17 CH: [mhm] yes
- 18 MA: I guess



19 CH: yes, yes

In excerpt 10 MA oscillates between humorous exaggerations that ridicule the question posed and the idea that each person has “their language”. He first questions my definition of “Greek” with *chto znachit grek* “what do you mean by Greek” (5), thereby questioning my authority to define what it means to be GREEK. He then poses the rhetorical question whether he would stop being Greek if he stopped speaking the language (5-6). The answer is foreclosed: of course, in this view, one does not stop belonging to a particular national collective by losing something as MARGINAL as a language. Up to this point, MA appears to follow the second line of argument introduced above, with language not being evaluated as necessary for belonging and even somehow MARGINAL to belonging. The exaggerated negation of the question is so strong, that there is no interactive way in which I could insist on the question and still save my own and MA’s face – which I acknowledge in line 8 by laughter and the mitigating *sprashivayu* “I’m asking” (cf. Brown / Levinson 1987). In line 9, MA first clearly negates the question with *net konechno* “of course not”, which he then balances by bringing in *zhelatel’no* ‘desirable’. With *ya eshchë raz govoryu* “I say again” (9-10) MA refers back to a similar statement he has made when answering the question about the importance of his heritage language Urum with *ne vazhno no zhelatel’no* “not important but desirable” (MA, 0:32:12). He then proceeds with an exaggerated image (12-15) by asserting that he would not put an imaginary interlocutor, whom he addresses in the second person singular, against the wall and shoot them for not knowing *svoego yazyka* ‘own language’ “your language” (15). Language competence, then, is “of course not” a matter of life and death warranting measures reminiscent of martial law. The strength of this exaggeration is visible in NL’s reaction, as he starts to chuckle halfway through the description of these actions (14) (cf. Holmes / Marra 2002).

*Svoego yazyka* already signals that there is something like an essential language pertaining to every person – even if not speaking it is not “a matter of life and death”. This assertion is made stronger in the following (15-16) with MA stating that a person would *normal’no* ‘normally’ have competence in *svoy yazyk* ‘own language’ “their language”. So there is not only something like a “natural” language pertaining to a person, it is also “normal”, i.e. to be expected, that they should be a competent speaker of it. This is further driven home by the closing phrase in 14: *vot i vsë* “that’s it”. After this closure, it would take some interactive effort on the part of the interviewer to reopen this particular topic and I show no signs of wishing to do so,

but agree instead (17). MA’s argumentation here is in contrast to the two humorous exaggerations, and fits much better with the “modern” discursive strand introduced in Section II.. In these lines (15-16), there is exactly one language and (national) community to which each person belongs and thus competence in that language is the norm and necessary. Intriguingly, MA does not finish after his closure (16) and my affirmation, but reopens the topic by qualifying the closure itself with *naverno* ‘probably’ (18). So, positioning himself in the “modern” discourse where language competence indicates belonging is not his final verdict and the discussion remains open. In a way, then, MA is not only torn between this ideal and the realities of language competencies he experiences in his community (he, his wife and his mother speak only some SMG), he is also torn between this ideal holding at all and the “imperial” discursive strand that traces belonging through religious affiliation and ancestry.

Comparing excerpts 9 and 10, MA appears to be somewhat uncertain as to how exactly competence in both his heritage language and SMG combine with his national affiliation – and reacts quite strongly to my returning to the subject. MI, on the other hand, establishes for herself an argumentative line that solidly confirms the choices she has made about her own language competences and defends them against “community positions” that nobody in the community may actually hold.

## V. Preliminary summary

Exploring the position of SMG in Georgia’s Greek community, the most intriguing finding is that consultants’ personal level of competence in SMG does not necessarily correlate with whether or not they evaluate competence in this language to be important for GREEK category membership. In the following, I will summarize what has emerged so far about the interactive methods consultants use when relating their evaluations of SMG in the interviews. These methods will come up again in the analysis of Georgian and Russian in the following Section and will finally allow an explication of how consultants relate the five languages spoken across the community in a complex network in Section D..

The most striking device is the allusion to or explicit establishment of some GENERAL RULE about whether and how language competence and national affiliation are to be linked. Such a generalization goes beyond the particular case under discussion and makes Georgia’s Greek community less “special”

and more “normal” in “how things work”. This is used to evaluate LANGUAGE both as ESSENTIAL for national affiliation or as MARGINAL to it. Following the first line, consultants may draw on discourses of the modern nation state, which relies on being narrated in terms of the uniformity of its people and their language, the unity of its territory, and common symbols (Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm / Ranger, 1983; Suny, 2001). Consultants arguing that language use is MARGINAL rely on discourses underscoring their ANCESTRY and/or RELIGION, both of which may be strengthened discursively by referring to official documentation. Notably, consultants are usually unwavering – at least for the duration of the interviews – in their position on whether or not LANGUAGE is important for belonging. DP, for instance, who argues strongly for RELIGION providing the most important link to her being GREEK and who does not consider her heritage language Urum to be important in this context, also later discounts the identificatory potential of SMG, referring again to the importance of RELIGION.

More interactional work is required if consultants are unsure in which discourse to position themselves (like MA in excerpt 10), or when they take the first position but either lack the required competence in SMG themselves or are aware that community members lack it. In these cases, consultants may deflect the question by emphasizing the benefits of speaking many languages, which ties in with considerations of USEFULNESS, as introduced in Section A.. Another method used is to SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY for the perceived “shortcoming” to actors outside the community – the Ottoman Empire or the school system in (post-)Soviet Georgia – rendering the speaker and/or their community *ne vinovaty* “not guilty”. This is also commonly used in speaking about Urum (cf. Section A.) and will come up again when consultants explain the relationship between their language competence in Russian and Georgian.

Further to the discourses on national belonging already introduced, a final point to consider is the fact that SMG is only one language in a web of at least five potentially meaningful languages in the Georgian context. Especially for those consultants not envisioning a life in Greece, it may therefore be more relevant to underscore their belonging as citizens of Georgia, which I investigate in the following Section.

C. *Shifting languages of (official) communication: Russian and Georgian*

Russian and Georgian have a complex history as official languages in Georgia, often perceived to stand for diverging and sometimes opposed political allegiances.<sup>61</sup> Both languages are commonly spoken in the community and I did not specifically ask consultants to evaluate them in any way. Initially, this was done in order to leave more time for questions not obviously related to using LANGUAGE as a resource for positioning. Intriguingly, however, many consultants started to elaborate on the personal and communal importance of GEORGIAN, sometimes before I even asked about their language use. Elaborating on Georgian in more detail serves three purposes here: firstly, it accounts for how consultants make Georgian relevant. Secondly, it furthers an understanding of how community members position and give meaning to all the languages they speak in relation to each other, rather than dwelling only on those I was initially interested in. Thirdly, it serves as a necessary counterpoint to the focus on boundary work and difference by emphasizing the shared experiences and obligations necessary for belonging.

Discussing Russian and Georgian together in this Section accommodates the experience and perception of these languages being related in diachronic and synchronic terms. Georgian is seen as having “taken over” as official language in all domains, most visibly with the educational reform of 2005 and with the arrival of internal migrants from Georgian-speaking areas to Ts’alk’a (cf. Chapters 2 and 7). At the same time, being competent speakers of Georgian gives many of my consultants the possibility to position themselves as “good citizens of Georgia”.

I will first examine my consultants’ self-assessed competence in Georgian and Russian (I.). I then explore how consultants speak about Russian (II.), how Russian and Georgian are compared (III.), and lastly how Georgian is used to position consultants and their community as BELONGING TO GEORGIA (IV.).

I. Competence and everyday language use

As exemplified by the conversation leading up to excerpt 4, many Pontic Greek consultants emphasize their experience of living in close-knit village

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61 This is reflected for instance in 19-year-old MI referring to the Soviet period as *am rusul periodshi* “in this Russian time” (MI, 0:11:29).

Table 5.7: Self-assessed competence in Georgian

	competent		some competence		no competence		total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Urum rural</b>	8	66.7	3	25	1	8.3	12	100
<b>Urum urban</b>	10	90.9	1	9.1	0	0	11	100
<b>Pontic rural</b>	12	75	3	18.8	1	6.3	16	100
<b>Pontic urban</b>	7	70	1	10	2	20	10	100
<b>Total</b>	37	75.5	8	16.3	4	8.2	49	100

communities in which Georgians speak Pontic Greek and *vice versa*. In light of this, it may be surprising that according to Table 5.7 not all rural Pontic Greek consultants profess a high level of Georgian competence. This disparity results from the statements of four Pontic Greek consultants living in the rural region of Tetrts'q'aro in Kvemo Kartli, who claim little to no competence in Georgian, whereas the very close relationships are emphasized in rural Samtskhe-Javakheti and Ach'ara.<sup>62</sup> The district of Ts'alk'a, where rural Urum Greeks live, is also located in Kvemo Kartli. This region is geographically quite secluded; it has a history of high linguistic diversity, and Russian was used there as the language of inter-ethnic and official communication during the Soviet period.<sup>63</sup> As regards Urum Greeks in the district of Ts'alk'a, their self-assessed competence in 2013 is much higher than the percentage (8.5%) reported by Wheatley (2009, p. 8) for national minorities living in the district.<sup>64</sup>

62 Note also that there are very remote and inaccessible regions in Ach'ara, which is where many internal migrants to Ts'alk'a come from. The villages inhabited mainly by Georgian Greeks are within very easy reach of the city Batumi and the town Kobuleti, though.

63 Note that GA, the only rural Urum Greek consultant who states no competence in Georgian, had at the time of the interview only recently returned from Cyprus where he had been living since 1997, i.e. before the educational reform of 2005 kick-started more extensive "Georgianization". The two urban Pontic Greeks stating no competence in Georgian are outliers, both in terms of still speaking Pontic Greek and in their not speaking Georgian.

64 Wheatley does not list Azerbaijanis, Armenians and Greeks separately, however, which might explain the difference. Census data similarly do not distinguish between the national minorities in terms of their language competence, nor do they list numbers of competent speakers for languages other than Georgian (Geostat, 2016).

I do not include a table on self-assessed competence in Russian since only two consultants do not profess high competence in this language. One of them is VD, a 21-year-old university student who had grown up mostly in Greece and had only fairly recently returned to Georgia for her studies, and who explains that the languages she speaks in her family are Georgian and SMG. The other exception, NA, is a 39-year-old professional working at the local TV-station. She professes the smallest linguistic repertoire in this sample, namely Georgian and “some” Russian competence and speaks neither the heritage variety Pontic nor SMG. Her explanation for this revolves around claiming “no talent” for learning languages (NA, 0:26:25).

Even though such a large number of consultants claim to be competent Russian speakers, four chose to conduct the interview entirely in Georgian. They thereby established that they were more comfortable giving an interview to outsiders in Georgian than in Russian. In another interview, I asked the questions in Russian and MI usually started her answer in Russian but switched fairly quickly to Georgian (cf. excerpt 9 for an illustration), or answered immediately in Georgian. Code-switching between Russian and Georgian occurred, with varying frequency, in most other interviews with consultants who also speak Georgian.

Since the educational reform that made Georgian a compulsory and intensively taught language in all schools had happened less than ten years prior to our interviews, it is instructive to assess how it has affected my consultants’ school career. Unfortunately, I only managed to collect this information in about half of the interviews. Russian as the sole language of instruction is in the lead again (14), which is not surprising given the extensive Russification and the possibilities of Russian language education in the Soviet Union, especially for minorities (cf. Grenoble 2003; Kirkwood 1989; Korth 2005; Kreindler 1989, cf. also Chapter 2). Only two younger (MI, 19; MC, 34) Urum Greek consultants completed their education, including university, solely in Georgian. Seven consultants report a mixture of both languages. This could be a Georgian kindergarten and a Russian school (NB), or schooling in Russian but university in Georgian (ED). Only one consultant cited difficulties in Georgian as a reason for not pursuing higher education (EC).

One question I asked aimed at tracing the importance of the languages in which consultants stated they were competent: *kakoy yazyk samyy glavnyy dlya vas (seychas)* “Which language is most important to you (now)?” I did not press consultants to choose only one language or to elaborate on their choice. Georgian comes out on top here, followed by Russian, the heritage varieties and finally SMG. In explaining their choice, consultants make use

of all the argumentative devices we have already encountered, and in some cases extend them, as we will see in the following Sections.

## II. Speaking about Russian

The Russian language, as a topic, was addressed somewhat rarely in the interviews. Considering that Russian was in most cases the interview language, and is widely spoken both in the community and in Georgia as a whole, this is not entirely surprising: precisely because Russian is so pervasive, speaking about it might be considered as “stating the obvious”. Still, consultants do make it relevant in our conversations in two broad ways: they may evaluate Russian either in terms of their EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT to it, which is frequently linked to their own competence in the language; or in terms of its (international) USEFULNESS and thereby also as a resource allowing them to position themselves both as COSMOPOLITAN and at least in some cases as somehow (emotionally) close to the Soviet Union.

Consultants emphasizing their emotional attachment may do this exuberantly like IK in excerpt 13 in Section III. below. It can also be more matter-of-factly like GA, who had just returned from working in Cyprus. He first explains to me that his competence in SMG does not matter much to him personally (GA, 0:14:49-0:15:05) and concludes:

(11) My Russian (GA, 0:15:06)

- 1 GA: *dlya menya vazhnyy chto (1) svoy russkiy yazyk mogu skazat'*  
for me important what own Russian language can\_I to say  
'What's important to me? My Russian language, I can say'

GA is not a man of many words (at 26 minutes, the interview was one of the shortest), yet the fact that he refers to Russian as *svoy russkiy yazyk* “my Russian language” underscores his emotional attachment. Another method of rooting the importance of Russian in the person of the speaker is for consultants to elaborate on their proficiency. Consultants evaluated a high level of competence in Russian positively (AT, LV), and explained feeling comfortable due to their high level of competence in Russian, in some cases even telling me how proud they are of their skills (EV).

Moving to considerations of USEFULNESS, the ubiquitous “the more languages the better” argument also appears in evaluating Russian (KP, IS). The USEFULNESS of Russian is usually highlighted in referring to its potential as *lingua franca*. IS explains how in Kvemo Kartli rural Pontic and Urum

Greeks resorted to Russian, in order to communicate effectively and circumvent the difficulties posed by their speaking different heritage languages (IS, 0:30:49-0:31:07).<sup>65</sup>

SC and his friend FD in Ts’alk’a remind us of the Soviet “brotherhood”<sup>66</sup> and the continuing importance of Russian as an international language. This excerpt immediately follows excerpt 7, which I analyzed in Section B. above.

(12) Russian connects nations (SC, 0:47:50-0:48:26)<sup>67</sup>

- 1 CH: °h i kakoy yazyk samyy glavnyy dlya vas (1)  
and which language most main for you\_2PL
- 2 SC: russkiy  
Russian
- 3 CH: [russkiy]  
Russian
- 4 NL: [russkiy]  
Russian
- 5 SC: da (1.5) samyy glavnyy yazyk russkiy  
yes most main language Russian
- 6 CH: hm (1) khorosho (-)  
well
- 7 SC: ne tol’ko dlya menya a (1) v postsovetskom prostranstve  
not only for me but in post-Soviet space
- 8 gosudarstva chto byli vezde russkiy yazyk  
states what were everywhere Russian language
- 9 CH: mhm
- 10 FD: nu eto kak vot kak vot kak angliiskiy [((incomprehensible 1.5))]  
well this as here as here as English
- 11 SC: [svyazyvayushchiy yazyk e narod][y]  
connecting language nations
- 12 CH: [da]  
yes
- 13 FD: v postsovetskom (-) etot gru\_e russkiy byl mezhdunarodnyy  
in post-Soviet this Geo\_ Russian was international
- 14 [vse]  
everybody

65 IS is the only consultant who explicitly mentions how Urum and Pontic Greeks in Kvemo Kartli (encompassing the regions Ts’alk’a and Tetrits’q’aro) solved the communicative challenge of communicating with the “other Greeks”.

66 Indeed, *my kak bratya zhili* “we lived like brothers” is one of the most often heard characterizations of the Soviet Union by older consultants (cf. Chapter 6).

67 In Höfler (2019) I discuss this excerpt as an example of how Soviet traces are made relevant in the interviews.



- 15 CH: [mhm]  
16 FD: *vot seychas tozhe (-) priedet iz germanii dopustim v gruziyu*  
here now also comes from Germany suppose\_we to Georgia  
17 *on po-russki govorit*  
he Russian speaks  
18 SC: [da]  
yes  
19 CH: [mhm] da (-)  
yes  
20 FD: *kto-to vot e.: negr priedet on tozhe po-russki govorit (1)*  
someone here Negro comes he also Russian speaks  
21 SC: *russkiy*  
Russian
- 1 CH: and which language is most important to you?  
2 SC: Russian  
3 CH: [Russian]  
4 NL: [Russian]  
5 SC: yes, the most important language is Russian  
6 CH: hm, alright  
7 SC: not only to me but in the post-Soviet space the existing states  
8 everywhere were Russian speaking  
9 CH: mhm  
10 FD: well, it's just like English [(incomprehensible 1.5)]  
11 SC: [the language connecting nation][s]  
12 CH: [yes]  
13 FD: in the post-Soviet (space) this Geo\_ Russian was international  
14 everybody  
15 CH: [mhm]  
16 FD: now as well, let's say someone comes from Germany to Georgia, he  
17 speaks Russian  
18 SC: [yes]  
19 CH: [mhm] yes  
20 FD: someone, well, a Black guy comes, he also speaks Russian  
21 SC: Russian

SC answers my question (1) calmly with *russkiy* “Russian” (2), which Nika Loladze and I echo (3-4). SC repeats his answer in a full sentence (5). Notably, he does not take up the link to his personal situation or emotions which I had introduced with *dlya vas* “for you”, and to which the answering pair would have been *dlya menya* “for me”. His answer is thereby not restricted to this sphere, but rather references a more general hierarchy of “important languages”. This he makes explicit in lines 7-8, when he clarifies that Russian

is important *ne tol’ko dlya menya* “not only to me” but in the post-Soviet space as a whole, as *vezde* “everywhere” Russian was spoken. FD chimes in supportively, searches for an example and finally compares Russian to English (10). SC goes on to define Russian as a language “connecting nations” (11), thereby establishing a space of shared commonality exceeding mere possibilities of communication. This space is much larger than SC’s own community or any of the individual successor states of the Soviet Union, including Georgia. In creating a community of communication geographically congruent with the Soviet Union, SC positions himself squarely within the Soviet discourse of creating a Soviet community that supersedes national ones (cf. Chapter 2).<sup>68</sup>

FD explains that *russskiy byl mezhdunarodnyy* “Russian was international” (13) with a slight slip of the tongue, when he starts to say *gru\_* “Geo\_” (target is *gruzinskiy* ‘Georgian’), before correcting himself to *russskiy*. The first example he gives for this still being the case *seychas* “now” uses a national affiliation present in the interview, namely my being German (16-17). His second attempt at explicating this “general rule” is to construct an “even more unlikely” example: a black person would also speak Russian when coming to Georgia (20). Here, as in other instances in the corpus, a consultant adduces a person perceived to be phenotypically “very different” in order to construct an “extraordinary” example. The implication is that if the characteristic (action) in question also holds for someone so “extravagantly different”, it must be “generally true”. This is the first but by no means last instance in the analysis of consultants establishing an *extreme case* in the sense used by Pomerantz (1986).<sup>69</sup>

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68 This analysis is supported by SC lamenting the breakup of the SOVIET FAMILY while the Georgian government “changes so often it doesn’t know what to do” (SC, 0:17:08) as discussed in excerpt 19 in the next Chapter.

69 This is not the only example where skin color is used in this way without overtly racist intention, as far as that is possible when using a label that is understood in so many other parts of the world to be so clearly racist. Precisely because it is used to mark an “extraordinary exception” that helps establish a GENERAL RULE, leaving it out would unduly gloss over consultants’ sense-making. In presenting the analysis I chose to deal with this by transcribing the words as they were uttered (*negr*), giving the direct translation ‘Negro’ in the gloss line, and putting this as “black guy” in my idiomatic translation and commentary, since this appears to be closest to the intended target meaning. Furthermore, in Russian *chërnyy* ‘black’ is in fact a racist slur that is commonly used in pejorative references to “black haired people” of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

SC finally closes the explanation of their joint elaboration by repeating *russkiy* (21), without commenting on FD's contribution, which in many cases in the interview had included very clear disagreement and lecturing FD. Overall, Russian is established in this excerpt as a UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE that "everybody" speaks (FD) and as the SOVIET LANGUAGE that has not lost its importance or validity – at least not to SC and FD. In excerpt 12, Georgian plays a role only in FD's slip of the tongue. This is to be expected, since Russian is constructed as the UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE, which does not need to be compared to other languages apart from English. Russian is thus placed on the top of a hierarchy of languages, ranked by importance. And of course, it is the interviewer who introduced the concept of hierarchically ordered languages in the first place, by asking about the "most important language".

### III. Comparing Russian and Georgian

When consultants compare Russian to another language, it is compared to Georgian, with the exception of the excerpt just analyzed. This indicates that these two languages are the important ones when comparing widely used languages. While consultants often evaluate Georgian to be pivotal for their BELONGING TO GEORGIA – mostly without elaborating on Russian at all – the relationship is at least sometimes portrayed to be complex. Perhaps the most elaborated way of doing this is shown in the following excerpt from the interview with IK.

(13) Russian is more interesting to me (IK, 0:46:16-0:46:58)

- 1 CH: *°h i kakoy yazyk samyy glavnyy dlya vas (-) seychas (-)*  
and which language most main for you\_2PL now
- 2 IK: *gruzinskiy (-)*  
Georgian
- 3 CH: *gruzinskiy*  
Georgian
- 4 IK: *da*  
yes
- 5 CH: hm
- 6 IK: *gruzinskiy i ya lyublyu ochen' russkiy yazyk*  
Georgian and I love\_I very Russian language
- 7 CH: [mhm]
- 8 NL: [mhm]
- 9 IK: *dlya menya on ochen' bogaty i interesnyy [yazyk]*  
for me he very rich and interesting language

- 10 CH: [mhm]  
11 NL: *da*  
yes  
12 CH: *da*  
yes  
13 IK: *ya rad chto ya znayu russkiy yazyk khorosho*  
I glad that I know\_I Russian language well  
14 CH: ((chuckles))  
15 IK: *ya chitayus' ch\_ch\_ chital seychas*  
I read\_I read\_M now  
16 CH: mhm  
17 IK: *tak davno ne netu vremeni chitat'*  
so long not is\_not time to\_read  
18 NL: [hm]  
19 IK: [<sup>o</sup>h] *vsegda na russkom ya knigi [potomu chto] mne bolee*  
always in Russian I books because that me more  
20 *interesno*  
interesting  
21 CH: [mhm]  
22 NL: mhm  
23 IK: *ka\_chem na gruzinskom potomu chto [gruzinskiy] eto ne ne*  
than on Georgian because that Georgian this not not  
24 *ochen' bogatyy yazyk*  
very rich language  
25 NL: [*da*] hm  
yes  
26 IK: *no dlya menya vazhno znat' [e] gruzinskiy yazyk <sup>o</sup>h eta*  
but for me important\_to\_know Georgian language this  
27 *moya rodina i vsegda budet moey rodinoy ne kakaya ne*  
my homeland and always will\_be my homeland not such not  
28 *gretsiya*  
Greece  
29 CH: [mhm] hm  
30 IK: *ne drugye strany da [ya] zdes' zhivu znayu yazyk i ya*  
not other countries yes I here live\_I know\_I language and I  
31 CH: [hm] hm  
32 IK: *tol'ko znaya etot yazyk mogu v zhizni chego-to [dobit'sya]*  
only knowing this language can\_I in life something to\_achieve  
33 CH: [mhm]  
34 NL: [mhm]
- 1 CH: and which language is most important for you now?  
2 IK: Georgian  
3 CH: Georgian

- 4 IK: yes  
5 CH: hm  
6 IK: Georgian and I love Russian very much  
7 CH: [mhm]  
8 NL: [mhm]  
9 IK: for me it's a very rich and interesting language  
10 CH: [mhm]  
11 NL: yes  
12 CH: yes  
13 IK: I'm glad that I know the Russian language well  
14 CH: ((chuckles))  
15 IK: I read, I was reading just now  
16 CH: mhm  
17 IK: for such a long time there's no time to read  
18 NL: [hm]  
19 IK: [°h] I always in Russian, I (read) books [because] to me it's more  
20 interesting  
21 CH: [mhm]  
22 NL: mhm  
23 IK: than in Georgian, because [Georgian] is not, not a very rich language  
25 NL: [yes] hm  
26 IK: but for me it's important to know [e] the Georgian language, this is my  
27 homeland and it will always be my homeland, not such a, not Greece  
29 CH: [mhm] hm  
30 IK: not other countries, right, [I] live here, I know the language and  
31 CH: [hm] hm  
32 IK: only knowing this language can I achieve something in this [life]  
33 CH: [mhm]  
34 NL: [mhm]

IK clearly and calmly answers my question with *gruzinskiy* “Georgian” (2) and after I repeat it (3) confirms it (4). Instead of changing the subject, he repeats his statement and also declares his love for the Russian language (6). In line 9, he explains that this is because Russian is an *ochen' bogatyy i interesnyy yazyk* “a very rich and interesting language”. *Bogatyy* ‘rich’ here refers to a voluminous lexicon, something not only IK appreciates about Russian, but part of a larger discourse in Georgia and beyond of evaluating a language’s ELABORATION. Perhaps in contrast to having expressed a certain level of shame for his incompetence in SMG in the conversation preceding this excerpt, he expresses great joy about speaking Russian well (13). He proceeds to present himself as someone who is an avid reader, albeit pressed for time (15-17), and then states that he reads *vsegda na russkom* “always in Russian” (19). In giving his reason *potomu chto mne bolee interesno*

*chem na gruzinskom* “because to me it’s more interesting than in Georgian” (19-23), he reintroduces Georgian again and begins his comparison of the two languages. In this process, we learn that being an “interesting language” results from being a “rich language”, since Georgian compares unfavourably as “less interesting” with Russian in being *ne ochen’ bogatyy yazyk* “not a very rich language” (22-23). NL’s agreement here (24) may not simply be a matter of accommodating our consultant, since I had previously heard him argue similarly, indicating the prevalence of this discourse.

Having thus ranked Russian higher in terms of its literary corpus and potential than Georgian and thereby shown himself to be someone educated in matters of literature, IK returns to the question of “importance”. Interestingly, he does not start with the mundane diagnosis of Georgian as necessary for his professional progress, but with his emotional attachment to Georgia as *moya rodina* “my homeland” (26-27). He proceeds to insist that this will stay this way *vsegda* “always”, with neither Greece nor *drugye strany* “other countries” ever being able to replace Georgia in this emotional contrast of belonging (26-28). This strengthens statements he had made earlier about not wanting to emigrate to Greece or anywhere else despite his dual Georgian and Greek citizenship. In lines 30-32 he delivers his final verdict: he lives *zdes’* “here”, he speaks the language and this language is crucial for the possibility *v zhizni chego-to dobits’ya* “to achieve something in life” (32). In his elaboration, Georgian is not simply a USEFUL LANGUAGE, but much more importantly a NECESSARY LANGUAGE, crucial for professional success.

Overall, IK creates a dichotomy between his aesthetically- and intellectually-motivated “love” for the Russian language and his “down to earth” belonging, rooted in a particular (national) territory and linked to the Georgian language for the sake of professional success. Both languages are thereby positioned as excelling in very different spheres of life, at least in the context of excerpt 13. It is important to bear in mind that in other moments of the interview, IK positions Russian as a very mundane everyday language he comfortably speaks in all family and community contexts. In these instances, it is presented as a more or less profane language of (inter-ethnic) communication accessible not only to educated and literate persons. He does, however, very clearly distinguish himself throughout the interview from those community members who depend on physical labor for their livelihoods.<sup>70</sup>

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70 This is, in fact, the strongest reason he gives for not having emigrated to Greece: that he could not imagine himself doing physical labor, for instance in the construction industry, like so many Georgian Greek emigrants.

#### IV. Speaking about Georgian

IK is not alone in talking about the importance of Georgian for his belonging to Georgia. Interestingly, establishing Georgian as a USEFUL LANGUAGE is not a method often used, apart from the aforementioned device that evaluates language competence in terms of “the more the better” (AT, KP). Instead, Georgian is spoken about in ways that underline its potential to belong to Georgia. As for IK in excerpt 13, competence in Georgian is perceived to be NECESSARY such that consultants who lack it feel the need to explain their “shortcoming” – once again by SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY to actors located outside of the consultant’s and their community’s influence.

For many consultants, GEORGIAN links them to Georgia in three closely connected ways: it roots them, spatially, in the national territory of Georgia; it links them, socially, as citizens to the Georgian nation state; and it connects them, temporally, to that nation state’s relatively recent independence. One excerpt linking PLACE and LANGUAGE comes from MP. When asked which language is most important to him, he answers *gruzinskiy* ‘Georgian’ and adds:

(14) This is my country (MP, 0:34:30)

- 1 MP: *ya v gruzii zhivu eta moya strana gruzinskiy khochu znat*  
I in Georgia live\_I this my country Georgian want\_I to\_know  
'I live in Georgia, this is my country, I want to speak Georgian'

MP explains “wanting to know Georgian” by linking the Georgian national territory with the state’s national language. Living in Georgia, which he considers to be more than just a “country of residence”, namely *moya strana* “my country”, thus puts him in the position of wanting to learn that language. Note that by referring to living *v gruzii* “in Georgia” with a spatial preposition, he references the Georgian national territory and thereby the Georgian nation state, rather than any other spatial entity such as his village, district or the like. In stating his belonging to the Georgian national sphere, his spatial belonging through living somewhere is broadened to encompass his belonging socially to the Georgian nation state as its citizen. Living on a certain national territory, then, implies being a member of the corresponding nation state – an understanding shared by all consultants who talk about Georgian being important to them, evidenced in how they make this relationship relevant.<sup>71</sup>

71 Note that consultants frequently reference more local spaces too. This is particularly true in rural areas, and when talking about the conflicts in Ts’alk’a, which were

This conceptualization of the citizenship-related (i.e. social) implications of living in a certain national territory is not at all obvious in the Georgian context, given its “frozen” territorial conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and where especially the Azerbaijani and Armenian minorities are almost continuously suspected of harboring irredentist plans (cf. Nilsson / Popjanevski, 2009; Wheatley, 2009). Nor is this obvious in the broader post-Soviet realm, with Latvia and Estonia, for instance, granting citizenship to members of their sizable Russian-speaking minority only after proof of comparatively high competence in the new official language (cf. Hogan-Brun, 2005; Popova, 2016). The fact that these statements are made in the interviews as a matter of course and framed as nothing out of the ordinary indicates that this feeling of belonging to the Georgian nation state is not perceived as under question either from within or outside the community.<sup>72</sup> This is not to say that their BELONGING TO GEORGIA is so safely undisputed that one need not speak about it, either in terms of its historical development (cf. Chapter 6) or when it is in fact challenged in rural Ts’alk’a (cf. Chapter 7).

Note that although MP “wants” to learn the Georgian language, he does not state any “obligation” to do so. A consultant who does foreground the OBLIGATION related to citizenship is DL, a 27-year-old university-educated Urum Greek woman living in Ts’alk’a, who to her dismay does not speak Georgian on what she would consider an adequate level of competence. Excerpt 15 immediately follows DL’s explanations as to why she as a Greek woman considers it to be necessary to speak SMG, which she ends with *ya schitayu* “I consider” (DL, 0:39:43). She goes on:

(15) I’m obliged to speak Georgian (DL, 0:39:44-0:39:55)

- 1 DL: *takzhe schitayu chto mne nuzhno govorit’ i na gruzinskom*  
 also count\_I that me necessary to\_talk and on Georgian  
 2 *potomu chto ya grazhdanka gruzii i ya ObyAzana seychas ya*  
 because that I citizen\_F of\_Georgia and I obliged\_F now I  
 3 *schitayu sebya obyazannoy govorit’ na gruzinskom prosto ‘h*  
 count\_I self obliged\_F to\_speak on Georgian simply  
 4 *obstoyatel’sтва v kakoy-to moment ne tak slozhilis’*  
 circumstances in some moment not so unfolded\_PL

factually conflicts about land and which are discussed in terms of “having the right” to the land and being rooted in a particular place, cf. Chapter 7.

72 This is very much in line with SC’s first reaction to my question about discrimination on ethnic grounds in contemporary Georgia: *nas net* “us not” (SC, 0:55:44), which again points to the perception of the Greek minority being somehow different from other minorities.



'I also consider that it's necessary for me to also speak Georgian, because I'm a Georgian citizen and I'm obliged, I now consider myself obliged to speak Georgian, only the circumstances at the time didn't unfold like this'

DL infers her "obligation" to speak Georgian from her Georgian citizenship (1-2), which "obliges" her to speak Georgian (2-3). Importantly, her emphasis *ya ObyAzana seychas* "I'm OblIged now" (2) not only underscores the very high level of obligation through a prosodic cue, it also explicitly refers to the obligation's temporal dimension. That is, during the Soviet Union this obligation did not exist, even though the territory most of our consultants and their direct ancestors lived on was considered to be "Georgian" territory already by the Russian Empire and in the Soviet Union (cf. Chapter 2).<sup>73</sup> The OBLIGATION to speak Georgian only arose after Georgia became an independent nation state – and perhaps only after the *Rose Revolution* in late 2003 after which secluded regions fell under government control, ahead of the 2005 educational reform.

DL is by no means the only consultant explicating that command of the Georgian language is a contemporary necessity, and an evaluation she wholeheartedly supports. IP, for instance, also traces the changing obligations from Russian to Georgian in a temporal way from the Soviet Union to contemporary Georgia (IP, 0:13:50-0:14:47). He, too, evaluates this positively with the normative conclusion: *i tak i dol'zhno byt'* "and this is how it should be" (IP, 0:14:28). Portraying themselves as competent in the official state language and evaluating this as a necessary prerequisite for belonging to the Georgian nation state, many consultants underscore that they "do what needs to be done" in order to belong and are therefore to be appreciated as GOOD CITIZENS.

Since I did not ask consultants to specifically evaluate Georgian at all, those who do not link competence in Georgian to their allegiance to the Georgian nation state – because LANGUAGE for them is not necessary for belonging, for instance – did not have to position themselves in this respect. Consultants who do consider GEORGIAN to be necessary for their belonging to the Georgian nation state, but who lack the competence this view demands, used the interactive method of SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY.

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73 In Ach'ara, this generalization does not hold, as both Ach'ara and Abkhazia were categorized as *Autonomous Regions* within the Georgian SSR with greater regional autonomy.

It may be argued that DL, in excerpt 15, is deploying a “soft” version of this method, when she explains how circumstances have somehow kept her from attaining the level of competence she deems to be adequate (lines 3-4).<sup>74</sup> VE, a 77-year-old Urum Greek woman living in Tbilisi, who was born and raised in Ts’alk’a, transfers this responsibility even further away from herself or her community to some unspecified (governmental) authority: *my ne vinovaty a pochemu oni nam razreshili russskiy yazyk izuchali* (23:58-24:03) “we’re not guilty, but why did they allow us to learn the Russian language?” Most other consultants who regret that either they or their community do not speak better Georgian also deplore the Soviet school system, which allotted only one weekly Georgian lesson to non-Georgian schools. This is a topic on which the community is strongly united: we were told about *odin urok v nedele* “one class per week” by Pontic as well as Urum Greek consultants in both rural and urban settings. This is either achieved in the “softer” version by citing unfavorable circumstances, like DL above, or else by finding someone or “the system” more directly at fault. In either case, *my/oni ne vinovaty* “we/they are not guilty” remains the bottom line, whether or not the guilty party is explicitly named.

#### D. Discussion

At the beginning of this Chapter, I set out to unravel how consultants use the languages they speak as a resource for positioning themselves and their community, and thereby for relating themselves to other social, spatial or temporal categories they perceive to be relevant. After exploring the languages spoken, I will now pull the emerging strands together into a more coherent picture. I will look more closely at three features of the corpus: the discourses consultants explicitly or implicitly draw on, the methodical devices they make use of in communicating their position, and finally how this positions them socially, spatially and temporally.

First, however, let us recall the numbers of consultants who claim proficiency in the heritage varieties Urum or Pontic Greek, SMG, Russian, and Georgian. Comparing competence levels in the languages most commonly

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74 She later talks about “being ashamed” after she heard a Chinese trader speaking Georgian more fluently than herself – her national language, as she reminds us, not his (DL, 0:56:28).

spoken in the community,<sup>75</sup> Russian clearly takes the lead with only two consultants not considering themselves to be competent speakers (95.9% competent). Both heritage varieties taken together come in second, with 40 speakers (81.6%) stating high competence. Importantly, both heritage varieties are not only still spoken, but also passed on to the next generation, even by our younger consultants. Georgian does not fare so badly given the seclusion of rural areas until quite recently and the fairly high average age of our consultants (cf. Chapter 4), with 36 competent speakers (75.5%). Standard Modern Greek is the least spoken relevant language in the corpus, with 18 competent speakers (36.7%).<sup>76</sup>

While some speakers clearly deplore the fact that they and/or their community do not speak SMG, numerically it is the least important language that I explicitly asked about. In this light, some instances of less-than-clear lines of argument suggest that this language was made relevant by the interviewer rather than the consultant, forcing the latter to come up with coherent explanations for something not immediately relevant to their everyday life. Furthermore, that SMG was least often labeled “most important” on a personal level points to its low everyday relevance for most consultants. For some speakers, however, it is inarguably very relevant, as evidenced by the more emotional excerpts discussed in Section B.. The question of how important LANGUAGE is for identification and belonging brings us to the larger discourses consultants draw on, the first feature I will explore.

There are two broad discourses on what is relevant for national or ethnic affiliation: what I have termed the “imperial” discourse, which sees LANGUAGE as somehow MARGINAL; and the discourse of the “modern nation state”, for which LANGUAGE is one of the defining elements. For the former, belonging is based primarily on ANCESTRY – be it documented in official papers or not – and RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION. For self-identifying members of Georgia’s Greek community, this discourse has retained its relevance for centuries – during their experiences as subjects and citizens of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, as well as the Soviet Union – and still resonates in contemporary Georgia (cf. Chapter 2). Apart from the communal oral tradition underscoring RELIGIOUS RESILIENCE in the face of adversity (cf. Section A.), this discourse has been perpetuated by practices of taxation based on religious affiliation

75 English, for example, was mentioned so rarely that I discount it here, although it served occasionally to position some of its five competent speakers as particularly “cosmopolitan”.

76 Similar numbers for Russian, Georgian and SMG are reported by Sella-Mazi / Moisiidi (2011), who only interviewed competent Urum speakers.

in the Ottoman Empire (cf. Barkey, 2008; İçduygu et al., 2008; Mackridge, 2009); being documented as GREEK both in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union (cf. Arel, 2003; Sideri, 2006); and being recognized as such by the independent Georgian nation state, which – similarly to Georgia’s Greek community – closely links its national narrative to Byzantium (cf. Fuchslocher, 2010). In this view, then, the language one speaks is not related to one’s ethno-national affiliation, as argued in excerpt 7.

The discourse around the “modern nation state”, on the other hand, relies on LANGUAGE for shaping the nation and defining who its members are (cf. Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 1983; Weber, 1976). This discourse is very pervasive in contemporary Greece (cf. Hionidou, 2012; Kaurinkoski, 2010; Sideri, 2006), with the symbolism of the NATIONAL LANGUAGE being perhaps one of the reasons it took the Greek nation state from 1880 to 1976 to settle on what is now termed *Standard Modern Greek* as its official language (cf. Mackridge, 2009). Many consultants were made quite painfully aware of this “discourse of purity” (Sideri, 2006, p. 52) when they or their relatives and friends emigrated to Greece (cf. Chapter 7). In contemporary Georgia, the situation is a little more complex: as mentioned above, the national narrative is closely linked to Byzantium and Christian minorities’ links to Byzantium are respected.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, the Georgian language, along with Orthodox Christianity, is the one identifying element that serves as a resource for presenting a “coherent” narrative extending through the ages (cf. Smith et al., 1998; Suny, 1994). In the Georgian context, then, consultants may draw on both discourses as a resource for positioning their community. On a more abstract level, in the “imperial” discourse language is understood as a MEANS OF COMMUNICATION, whereas the modern nation state views it as a crucial MEANS OF IDENTIFICATION.

In everyday life and the interview context these discourses are not usually as neatly differentiated as in the above outline. Some consultants accommodate for that by pointing out the general DESIRABILITY of competence in a language which they or others associate with a particular national affiliation. They might also simply evade the question and emphasize time and again the general USEFULNESS of speaking many languages, using the argumentative line one could summarize as “the more the better”. This has been foregrounded with regards to all the languages spoken by the community,

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77 While not wanting to suggest a mono-causal explanation, this might be one of the reasons Georgia’s Greek minority has had little trouble in aligning themselves as citizens with the Georgian nation state.

and brings us to the next feature: the interactive methods consultants use to argue for their points, and to position themselves and their community in the interview and these larger contexts.

Broadly speaking, three interactive methods have come up so far: ESTABLISHING HIERARCHIES of languages and/or varieties based on different features, ESTABLISHING A GENERAL RULE for the point one wants to argue, and SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY away from oneself or the community. Hierarchies are mainly established in one of two ways. The first is to rank varieties in terms of their LANGUAGENESS. The scale, as argued for by my consultants, places DIALECTS at the bottom and ranks NATIONAL LANGUAGES higher up. “Dialects” may be further ranked based on their perceived ADEQUACY for a person self-identifying as being GREEK. In excerpt 5, this places Urum at the very bottom, followed by Pontic Greek and SMG as the ADEQUATE language for a GREEK person to speak. A different approach is taken in excerpt 4 by IP, who establishes a hierarchy of ANTIQUITY that understands his heritage language, Pontic Greek, as closer to “ancient Greek” than to “modern Greek” and thereby somehow more pristine. Further, national languages are also not immune to hierarchies, pertaining to their linguistic ELABORATION. This is most explicit in excerpt 13, in which IK ranks Russian higher than Georgian in comparing their literary ELABORATION.

In the same excerpt he also ranks both languages in terms of their USEFULNESS, with Georgian emerging as not merely useful to speak in contemporary Georgia, but as a NECESSARY LANGUAGE with regards to professional success. In this evaluation, he is joined by all consultants who speak about Georgian as an important language. Georgian is thus positioned higher than USEFUL LANGUAGES in the hierarchy, while the unanimity suggests that this purported NECESSITY enables consultants to position themselves and their community as loyal citizens of the Georgian nation state. All other languages spoken in the community have been defined as USEFUL LANGUAGES by different consultants: the heritage varieties in making it easier to communicate with speakers of Turkic languages or SMG respectively, SMG for communication and jobs in Greece, Russian for the (post-)Soviet sphere and internationally. This does not preclude them from being ranked in terms of their USEFULNESS, however. Here again, the heritage variety Urum is ranked lowest, for instance by IK who even discounts its USEFULNESS as a family language, a position that for him could be filled by Russian.

The second method consultants use is to either state a GENERAL RULE or to construct one, usually starting from their own experiences or the immediate context of the interview. Instances of the former appear in excerpts 6 and 7,

where AL and SC argue whether or not competence in SMG is a prerequisite for being GREEK. While AL aligns herself with the “modern” discursive line, SC holds in the “imperial” tradition that language is a characteristic MARGINAL to national belonging. Note that in both excerpts consultants also adduce examples strengthening their case, in both instances citing the same nationalities to argue, respectively, for and against the necessity of competence in the national language of the state in question. Examples are used in both cases to corroborate consultants’ initial statements. In other instances, consultants argue inversely, starting from their own experiences or the interview context to illustrate a GENERAL RULE, which is not always then explicitly stated. Illustrative examples include excerpt 8, where NB argues for her GREEKNESS being rooted in her person rather than in her language competence, and adduces the nationality of the interviewer as “proof”, and excerpt 12, in which FD establishes Russian as a truly INTERNATIONAL language by constructing an example intended to be “far-fetched”.

The third important method is used by consultants who SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY away from themselves and/or their community for failing to comply with some norm that is perceived as stipulating competence in a certain language as a condition for category membership. Thus, Urum is defined by some consultants as a somehow “problematic” heritage, blaming adverse historical circumstances for its present use in the community. These same circumstances are made responsible for the community’s perceived lack of competence in SMG by those consultants who see national affiliation as linked to competence in the language associated with that nation. A third context in which this device is used is when communicatively coming to terms with perceived personal and/or community “failures” once Georgian is established as a NECESSARY LANGUAGE for a citizen of the Georgian nation state. In this third scenario, consultants might SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY to historical circumstances, as for the other two languages. They might also SHIFT RESPONSIBILITY more specifically to an education system that did not provide them with the means to comply with their duties as citizens of contemporary Georgia. Either way, responsibility for the perceived “failure” is shifted to external forces more powerful than consultants or their community.

The final feature I want to explore concerns the social, spatial and temporal dimensions of the discourses and interactive methods discussed so far. In terms of belonging socially, consultants make relevant their belonging to their community (in many cases not divided by their heritage varieties); the wider Greek (diasporic) national community; and, as citizens of Georgia, to the Georgian nation state. In terms of language use, the latter is established

through stating the NECESSITY of the Georgian language for forming part of that nation state. As discussed above, being GREEK may either be framed in terms of ANCESTRY and RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, excluding LANGUAGE from the list of “necessary features”, or it may be viewed as a fundamental part of being GREEK. Particularly in Ts’alk’a, RELIGION and LANGUAGE are sometimes played off against each other as the central attributes of national category membership, as exemplified in excerpt 2.

The spaces invoked are closely linked to the social categories: the Georgian national territory is referred to when speaking about the importance of Georgian. SMG is mostly linked to Greece – and in many cases rejected as “unimportant” for someone who does not plan to leave Georgia permanently. Geographically more localized practices of shared languages are emphasized especially in smaller rural communities. In Ach’ara and Samtskhe-Javakheti, we are told that villagers speak both Pontic Greek and Georgian on the same level irrespective of their nationality, for instance leading up to excerpt 4. In Ts’alk’a, Urum is seen by some as indexing a person’s belonging to the region (DL, 0:39:11). Russian, finally, is frequently established as referencing belonging to the (post-)Soviet space, as in excerpt 12.

Referencing the (post-)Soviet sphere points to a certain time period that has left its complex traces. While Urum is seen as a sometimes “problematic” tidemark as per Green (2009), a trace accounted for in narratives of subjugation and displacement, the prevalence of speaking Russian is a trace perceived in many ways as more benign, one to which many of the (especially but not only) older consultants still feel an emotional attachment. This trace appears to be “problematic” mostly in the context of blaming schooling in Russian for limiting the competence now necessary in the Georgian language. Thus many consultants felt unjustly “left out” of the now dominant discourse demanding that GEORGIAN CITIZENS speak the Georgian language. Similarly, Georgian and SMG may both be viewed as “newer” traces, with Georgian being more deeply ingrained within Georgia’s Greek community through everyday necessity and the wish to form part of the contemporary Georgian nation state.

