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Language and belonging

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Language and belonging

Inaugural lecture by

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on the acceptance of her position as professor of

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Prof.dr. M. Terkourafi

Mr. Rector, Members of the Faculty Board, Your Excellency Mr. Ambassador, dear Colleagues, Friends,

I know the exact date I became an outsider. It was the 3rd of January, 1973. That was the day my mother boarded a plane with me as a six-week-old infant to travel from her native island of Cyprus to the island of Chios, where my father had been posted as an infantry officer in the Greek army. Despite being majority Greek-speaking islands, Cyprus and Chios belong to different countries: Cyprus is an independent Republic, while Chios is part of the Republic of Greece. Moreover, the community we were moving into was a tight-knit, 1970's semi-urban island community. These combined facts were enough to make me an outsider.

A few years later, growing up in the town of Herakleion in Crete, another Greek island, I had classmates whose last names ended in -άκης and who spent their weekends in the family village. My last name ended in -άφη (which inevitably led to it being "corrected" to *Terkouraki* more often than not) and I had no village to go to on weekends. It is no wonder that, as an ingenuous 6-year-old eager to belong, I claimed the location of our family friends' country home as my "village". (Unfortunately, the linguistic facts of my last name were not so easy to manipulate.)

I have been a cultural outsider all of my life. In fact, I do not think I have ever been a cultural insider. I have been called a native speaker of Cypriot Greek and asked to emulate a Cypriot accent for experimental purposes. I have been identified as a native of Crete in the centre of Athens. I have been told that I sound like an expat who learnt Greek as a second language while living in Greece. Most recently, I was told that my Greek no longer sounds native.

I find all this fascinating not because of what it says about me, but because of what we can learn from it about the linguistic processes that underlie these judgements. On what grounds do we identify someone as speaking the same language as us? What do we pay attention to, when we label someone a native speaker of this language or that language variety? In short, "what does it take to truly be 'one of us'" and what role does language play in this process?

That question was asked during a cross-national poll published in 2017 by the Pew Research Center, a non-partisan think-tank based in Washington DC (Pew Research Center, 2017). Fourteen and a half thousand people in 14 countries including ten European countries, Japan, Australia, Canada, and the US, answered questions about the importance of different factors for being considered truly a national of that land. The results are revealing - and of special interest to linguists.

Given a choice among birthplace, religion, customs and traditions, and language as determinants of national identity, majorities in all countries, ranging from 59 to 84 percent, responded that speaking the dominant language is "very important" to being considered truly a national of that land. This includes a median of 77 percent for Europe and majorities of 70 percent each in Japan and the U.S., 69 percent in Australia and 59 percent in Canada. Add to this those who think that speaking the national language is "somewhat important" and that figure rises to 97 percent for the ten EU countries surveyed. None of the other factors asked about achieved such unanimous results.

For comparison, customs and traditions were rated as "very important" to national identity by a minimum of 26 to a maximum of 68 percent of respondents; religion was rated as "very important" to national identity by as little as 7 percent in some countries to up to 54 percent in others; and birthplace ended up in fourth place, being rated as "very important" to national identity by a mere 8 percent in some countries to 52 percent in others. Only language was consistently rated by more than half of those surveyed in each of the fourteen countries as "very important" to truly being "one of us". This

is surprising: unlike one's birthplace, languages are routinely acquired, learnt, and sometimes forgotten, and many of us master more than one. How can something so chameleonic, so changeable as language, be the primary determinant of something so unchangeable, so seemingly ingrained as national identity?

The surprises do not end there. Although majorities in each of the 14 countries surveyed agreed that speaking the dominant language is "very important for truly being one of us", the country at the top of that list was the Netherlands, with 84 percent of respondents agreeing that speaking Dutch is "very important for being truly Dutch". This might come as a surprise to many who live here and experience the widespread use of English in all domains of life. How can 84 percent of Dutch people surveyed think that it is very important to speak the national language when their own daily linguistic practices go against this claim?

Several remarks are in order here. First, it is well known from sociolinguistic studies, such as Peter Trudgill's classic study of English in Norwich in the 1970's (Trudgill, 1974), that people's attitudes to language and their actual use of language are not one and the same (cf. Jaspaert & Kroon, 1988). People's awareness of their own linguistic practices can be limited and reports of those linguistic practices can be mediated by a concern about how others will perceive us; which is why self-reports, complemented by observation of actual language use, can be a great tool to investigate language ideologies but only secondarily language use itself.

Another pertinent remark is that an appreciation of a certain language or language variety as a vehicular code, one that can help secure better job prospects, does not preclude an appreciation of a different variety as the primary language of one's emotional identification and expression. As is also known from sociolinguistic research, such as Dennis Preston's studies of Americans' attitudes toward regional varieties of American English in the US (Preston, 2002), language attitudes are rarely monolithic: a variety judged as "smart" and "educated" can also be berated as "snobbish", while another variety, not necessarily associated with intellectual prowess, can generate feelings of friendliness and trust. Different varieties can be good for different things. Yet, that does not mean we can all switch seamlessly between them to our advantage. Our access to these varieties, the legitimacy of our choices to the gate-keeping gaze (or rather ears) of our listeners, and the local dynamics of each conversation, all constrain our choices.

Recent research has enriched this picture, by adding ease of understanding as a factor for liking an interlocutor (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016), believing, or accurately remembering what they say (Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2010; Lev-Ari & Keysar, 2012). Ease of understanding is malleable - exposure to an accent can rapidly improve our understanding of it - and depends on the listener as much as on the speaker and noise levels in the environment. These latest results can help us refine Preston's findings about attitudes to language varieties in the US by suggesting that which varieties language users find attractive and for what purposes can also depend on their respective points of departure: we are more likely to like, believe, or remember the speech of someone whose accent we find it easy to understand - which in turn depends on our prior exposure to that accent. Sociolinguists have talked for some time about the responsibility for being understood as a "communicative load" (Lippi-Green, 1997) that tends to be unequally distributed between standard and non-standard speakers: when standard and non-standard speakers talk to each other, the responsibility for being understood is disproportionately placed on the non-standard speaker. But if how easy someone is to understand also depends on who is doing the understanding, then listeners should also accept their share of the communicative load. It has now been demonstrated experimentally that the more we hear an accent, the better we understand it, and the more we like its bearer. These experimental findings suggest that allowing

non-standard-accented speech to be heard, especially in public quarters, without sanctioning it, can open paths toward greater societal harmony and integration.[1]

So far, my talk of different languages and language varieties may have created the impression that languages and language varieties are internally homogeneous and equally available to all members of the population. Nothing could be further from the truth. As has been known even before the advent of modern sociolinguistics in the second half of the twentieth century, languages are always in flux and the boundaries between them, if any, can shift as easily as border posts between countries - and for the same, non-linguistic reasons. This means that attitudes to languages such as English and Dutch are best understood as attitudes toward specific varieties of these languages. And whether someone considers the variety that they speak or that their interlocutor speaks as inside or outside the "dominant language" can vary depending on who is talking to whom, what they know about the other person, and what they are trying to accomplish in the moment. The situations of Cypriot Greek in Greece and in Cyprus, which I have spent a long time investigating (Terkourafi, 2007), and of Limburgish in the Netherlands (Thissen, 2018; Stengs, 2018) speak amply to this point. Regional languages or dialects? Outside or inside the language? The Dutch government and the Council for the Dutch Language and Letters have disagreed on this point (Council for the Dutch Language and Letters, 2001), and tensions run high each time it is raised for Cypriot Greek. By investigating the link between national identity and language through focusing on the "dominant language," surveys like the Pew Research Center study are only scratching the tip of the sociolinguistic iceberg.

Last but not least, national identities themselves may be changing. According to the results of the Pew Research Center study, a generation gap exists in all countries, with younger generations expressing more tempered views about the importance for national identity of any one factor - birthplace, religion, customs and traditions, and language - compared to their parents and grand-parents. This could be suggesting that, for at least some parts of the population, we are witnessing a shift toward a more relaxed view of national identities as potentially multiple, overlapping, and only one of many links in the chain of identities we all perform at different scales. On this view, national identities may even be co-created by speaker and addressee in particular interactional moments and be foregrounded in some interactions and backgrounded in others - much like linguistic identities themselves, highlighting the fit between the two.

In any case, the Pew Research Center study did not ask respondents to report on their own use of language, but rather whether they think speaking the dominant language is very important to being considered a true national of the land. And here, there are no two ways about it: 84 percent of Dutch respondents, more than in any other country, agreed with this statement. The Dutch sample consisted of 999 respondents and all provinces were proportionately represented in it.[2] What are we to make of this result, especially when viewed in the context of the Netherlands' widespread societal bilingualism, with 90 percent of Dutch people claiming to be conversant in English (European Commission, 2012), and the Netherlands ranking first among 80 countries worldwide in a 2017 survey of English language skills?[3]

***Our* language**

I think we can begin to unravel this linguistic Ariadne's thread if we heed a quote cited in another recent report, published under the title "Languages for the Netherlands" in February 2018 by the KNAW, the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (Royal Dutch Academy for Sciences, 2018). There, on page 9, we read:

> If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.

This quote - attributed to Nelson Mandela as an explanation for why, while in prison, he learnt Afrikaans, the language of his prison guards (Getchell et al., 1996: vi) - goes to the heart of the relationship between language and belonging and is applicable on so many levels to current discourses about multilingualism and national belonging. What is the difference between "a language we understand" and "*our* language"?

During data collection for my doctoral dissertation research in Cyprus, I found that people have different linguistic ways of getting things done depending on their socio-economic background and role in the situation (Terkourafi, 2002). For instance, when walking into a store as a customer for the first time, working-class people preferred to ask for goods by saying έχει *(+Noun Phrase)?*[4] meaning: 'Is there (some goods)?' equivalent to 'Est-ce-qu'il y a (quelque-chose)?', in French. On the other hand, middle-class customers in the same situation preferred έχετε *(+Noun Phrase)?* meaning: 'Do you-PLURAL have (some goods)?' that is, 'Est-ce que vous avez (quelque-chose)?' in French.

Both of these are asking about the availability of goods, and therefore perfectly good ways of requesting something when entering a store for the first time. However, the former uses the third singular, impersonal form of the verb "to have", έχει in Cypriot Greek, while the latter makes use of the so-called "polite plural" form, έχετε. As I showed in other research (Terkourafi, 2005a), the polite plural is not part of the native repertoire in Cyprus. Rather, it is adopted momentarily from the standard code - the Mainland norm of Modern Greek - when it is beneficial to do so, for instance in the presence of people from the Mainland or during public speech displays such as interviews on the radio and on television. In other words, the polite plural bears echoes of the High code in Cyprus's post-diglossic continuum (Tsiplakou et al., 2006), where varieties closer to the Mainland norm enjoy higher prestige than those local varieties farthest from it. Use of the polite plural, then, by middle-class customers serves as an immediate marker of distinction, a "badge" as I have called it, of their middle-class identity, to be "worn" when that identity is relevant. Displaying a middle-class identity can result in better treatment as a new customer entering a shop for the first time, making displays of social class relevant to this situation.

It's not that previous theories did not make predictions about the importance of context and of the social positioning of speaker and addressee in how people will adjust their speech. Accounting for speakers' choices in different social situations has been the goal of politeness theories ever since their inception in the 1970's. However, what cannot be adequately modelled in these previous frameworks is the detailed distribution of linguistic forms found in the Cypriot Greek data: the two complementary ways of requesting by working- and by middle-class customers in Cyprus, έχει*?* vs. έχετε*?*, are simply too close in terms of lexis (both use the verb "to have"), semantics (both are asking whether some goods are available), and syntax (both are interrogative sentences) for previous theories to distinguish between them. In fact, as ways of expressing the speaker's request for some goods, these two ways of requesting are equally indirect and fall under a strategy known as "negative politeness", so-called because it avoids imposing on the addressee (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Yet, within the local dynamics of language use in Cyprus, they are not interchangeable. The choice between them is meaningful to native speakers and they capitalize on this choice to project pertinent information about themselves in the situation. That is why I have proposed the term "qualitative indirectness" to capture the difference between them (Terkourafi, 2001).

Moreover, the preferences for these two different ways of requesting are not obvious to the naked eye. They are too subtle to be detected in a spoken corpus where language use from different contexts is presented in an undifferentiated manner. These preferences emerge only when linguistic expressions are examined against the background of specific situational contexts. I have called such contexts "minimal

contexts" (Terkourafi, 2005b) precisely because they retain only schematic information about interlocutors' genders, ages, social classes, and relationship in the situation but are stripped of all other specifics pertaining to the particular persons talking, such as whether they like each other or their history of previous interactions. The combination of linguistic forms such as έχετε? or έχει? with minimal contexts I have called a "frame" (Terkourafi, 2009).

Arguably, frames are also the first contexts in which we acquire language (Tomasello, 2000). When children learn ways of getting things done linguistically (how to ask for things, how to offer things, how to complain about things, or how to express gratitude for them), what they are learning, through observation of adults around them or through explicit instruction by them, is what to say when - that is, specific pairings of linguistic forms with the contexts in which these forms are used to achieve those ends. This kind of early childhood socialization ends up creating the kind of sociolinguistic habitus that Bourdieu (1990: 52) defined as "[s}ystems of durable, transposable dispositions," dispositions to make sense of our world in particular - socially and culturally specific - ways, which can further structure our future experiences through a process that Chuck Goodwin (1996) has described as "transparent vision" - meaning the intuitive grasping of reality as a series of events of a certain kind, which is actually socially crafted through and through.

These early childhood experiences become for us not just *a* way of understanding and acting in the world but *the* way of understanding and acting in the world - automatically rendering all other ways of doing the same thing noticeable, suspect, or just plain wrong. In any case, they are not *our* way of doing it. The evaluative link between what is familiar and what is good now becomes obvious. Certain linguistic ways of doing things are evaluated as polite not because of any inherent linguistic properties they might have, nor because of *what* they mean or how indirect they are, but because of *how* they mean: in the most familiar way, for us, in which these things are supposed to get done. In this way, familiar linguistic ways of getting things done do not so much as communicate the speaker's intention to respect our face as they provide evidence of the speaker's being "one of us" - someone who has been socialized with the same habits and who can therefore be expected to be like us in other respects as well.

Yet, despite their apparent self-evidence and indisputable correctness (to us), our ways of doing things are no more than socio-historically constituted ways of getting things linguistically done. As the example of the two ways of requesting as a new customer in Cypriot Greek demonstrates, the choice between 3rd singular έχει? and 2nd plural έχετε? acquires its full significance and becomes indexical of the speaker's social class only against the historical background of the interplay between Mainland and local Greek varieties on the island. Although to a native speaker of Cypriot Greek this way of getting things linguistically done may appear effortlessly and self-evidently polite, other ways of getting things done are imaginable (and found) in other parts of the world, often as close as the next neighborhood or the next town. And those ways are what is self-evident and correct to the inhabitants of those places. As a student of mine in Athens recently pointed out, Θα με πετάξετε ως το Σύνταγμα; is a common way of hailing a taxi in Athens, Greece; however, its closest counterpart in English (literally: 'Will you fly me to Syntagma square?') bears echoes of Frank Sinatra's 1964 hit "Fly me to the moon!"

I would like to argue that the difference between a "language we understand" and "our language" lies precisely in this - not in the ability to form grammatical sentences in that language (although, of course, that is part of it) but in the ability to read off of particular ways of putting things a host of information about how our interlocutor perceives the world and themself in it, how they construct their social categories and index them linguistically, information that would otherwise take days, or

perhaps a lifetime, to get across - precisely because it takes a lifetime of shared experiences to build. Herbert Clark has called this our ineffable common ground and has emphasized the importance of shared experience to get there. "Many of these experiences" he writes, "are ineffable. Others cannot understand them unless they have had them themselves. … These experiences are the ultimate inside information" (Clark, 1996: 110).

I have proposed the notion of conventionalization (Terkourafi, 2015) to capture this added layer of information we have about how frequently linguistic expressions are used to achieve particular goals in particular situations - frequency which ultimately leads to their evaluation as polite, as we have just seen. Conventionalization is a three-way relationship between an expression (a pairing of form and function), a speaker, and a minimal context of use. Since knowledge of frequency of use presupposes experience, which is subjective and may not be the same for everyone, conventionalization is a matter of degree and changes for different speakers and even for the same speaker over time. Thus, what remains universal in such an approach to linguistic politeness is not the repertoire of strategies or expressions used to achieve politeness, but rather the *process* by which this is done: for frequently experienced situations, we all have a toolkit of ready-made linguistic expressions which we use over and over again to get things done. Whether this toolkit is the same as that of our interlocutor depends on how similar our experiences are. The evaluation of our speech as polite by an interlocutor who shares a similar toolkit as ourselves falls out from our use of the 'right' (linguistic) tools, without needing to be separately communicated. This means that politeness is co-constructed: it does not depend just on what the speaker does, but also on the listener's ability to recognize what it is that the speaker is doing; and ability to recognize depends on shared experience. This ability to recognize what the speaker is doing is what links in situ evaluations of politeness with the broader socio-historical context of the interaction, what links the micro-level of speaker-listener exchanges with the macro-level of larger social categories such as age, gender, ethnicity, and class, which are themselves discursively constructed. The frame-based approach to politeness that I have proposed (Terkourafi, 2001) attempts precisely to capture this middle level between agency and structure, which sociologists have called the habitus, and which scholars of pragmatics view as intermediate between intention and convention and have termed "generalized conversational implicatures" (Levinson, 2000).

In ongoing experimental work with colleagues in Illinois (Terkourafi & Weissman, 2017), as well as here in Leiden (Terkourafi et al., 2018), we are finding that, not only the listener's ability to recognize what it is the speaker is doing but also how they feel toward the speaker, can affect their interpretation of what the speaker is saying, when multiple interpretations are possible in context. Listeners are prepared to be more charitable with speakers they feel positively predisposed toward, holding them less accountable to the exact words they utter, compared with speakers to whom they are negatively predisposed, whose words they scrutinize more closely. This suggests that there may be two different modes of pragmatic reasoning that listeners apply in understanding a speaker's utterance and that both of these modes of pragmatic reasoning are imbued with considerations of face and affect. A lot of work remains to be done but the results are intriguing.

Modeling pragmatic variation

If variation in politeness evaluations is the norm, then where does that leave us with respect to theory-building and modeling that variation? If pragmatic interpretations depend on context, background knowledge, intonation, and even liking, speaker intentions, and listener biases that cannot be measured or observed, is generalization possible at all? Or are we rather in the domain of Saussurean parole, the unpredictable use of language, where only post-facto explanation is possible, at best?

Dialectological studies that catalogued differences in word choice, pronunciation, or, occasionally, syntactic patterns in different geographical areas have been available since the late 19th century (Wenker, 1888-1923; Gilliéron & Edmont, 1902-1910). But such studies did not attempt to build the variation that they found into theoretical models of language or provide a theoretical explanation for it. The first such attempts were made by the American linguist Bill Labov in his seminal studies of Martha's Vineyard and New York City in the 1960's (Labov, 1963; Labov, 1966a). And while Labov's view of the speech community as a conglomerate of speakers unified in their (positive) evaluation of normative speech is being increasingly replaced by practice-based approaches, which treat speakers as unified in their use of language rather than their metalinguistic evaluation of it, his explanation of language change based on identity and identification claims in Martha's Vineyard remains as fresh and cutting-edge today as it was then (Cornips & De Rooij, 2018).

Through his detailed studies of the sociophonetics of New York speech, Labov offered us the first models of in-depth, quantitative analysis of spoken language. These analyses showed that, far from being random, language variation is structured and can be scientifically (including experimentally) studied. More than that, language variation is meaningful. To be meaningful, linguistic variants - the difference between -iŋ and -in in English, as in goiŋ vs. goin - must be two ways of saying the same thing. The meaning that linguistic variants carry is social: they do not alter the descriptive content of an utterance (the information it conveys about the world) but add information about the speaker. Crucially, this information may be conveyed above and beyond the intentions or control of the speaker, and it may even be beyond their awareness.

At about the same time as Labov, who started out as a historical linguist himself, sociologists like Harvey Sacks and Erving Goffman, taking a staunchly synchronic perspective, were uncovering structure not in individual words or sounds but in entire conversations. Language use, it was turning out, was far from the disorderly, unamenable free-for-all it had been made out to be. Of course, their efforts were not aimed at uncovering variation but rather commonalities in the ways conversations are structured across contexts and cultures. As such, rather than contributing to our knowledge about how speakers express their individuality (or, perhaps, how their individuality is expressed despite of them), studies in Conversation Analysis are increasingly viewed as a fertile ground where to seek generalizations about how communicative needs help shape the human ability for language. This is what Stephen Levinson has called the "human interaction engine" (Levinson, 2006).

Despite being revolutionary, Labov's conception of the linguistic variable as "two ways of saying the same thing" (Labov, 1966b) is also limiting. For it implicitly assumes that we all say the same things. More recent studies, such as Jenny Cheshire's detailed study of how young British English speakers talk about entities new to the addressee (Cheshire, 2005) (and Beatriz Lavandera's studies in the 1970's before that; Lavandera, 1978) suggest that speakers differ not just in the ways they talk about things but also in the things they talk about. We don't all signpost the same aspects of reality for our listeners to pay attention to, and we certainly don't all signpost them in the same way, either. This realization opens up the need for less restrictive, more versatile conceptions of language variation and new tools to study them.

The newly-named field of variational pragmatics attempts to describe how the same words may mean different things to people from different walks of life, and how people from different walks of life may mean or understand similar things by using different words. Correlating particular understandings with particular socio-economic, ethnic, gender, or religious backgrounds is, of course, exceedingly difficult since the understandings we are talking about are not open to observation. Defining the pragmatic variable - what are the equivalent things that people from different walks of

life may mean or understand - is, in this sense, the holy grail of variational pragmatics. Using the notion of procedural meaning developed within Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1986), I have proposed that rather than comparing "two ways of saying the same thing", in the case of pragmatic variation, we should be comparing "two ways of doing the same thing", where what remains "the same" is the process by which listeners put meanings together rather than the resulting meanings themselves (Terkourafi, 2011).

Questions for the future

Where does this all leave us with respect to language and belonging, the topic of this talk? What is the effect of our ability to handle multiple languages or language varieties simultaneously on feelings of belonging? Can the child who grows up multilingually develop the linguistic reflexes necessary to pass as a native speaker in all of her languages or does her native speaker status ultimately rest in the ears of her listeners, who might judge it differently every time? If "language is a home" (Kopidakis, 2000; Nguyen, 2018), is a person with many homes homeless? Or do we each create our own home, rather than choosing among the available ones, by developing attachments to the language varieties of our youngest years, whatever those varieties happen to be - seemingly homogeneous, multiple, or, increasingly, mixed? And what is the impact of these linguistic affiliations on language systems themselves? Languages with many accepted norms like English - and perhaps French, judging by the recent admission of French president Emmanuel Macron that "French has been emancipated from France"[5] - are characterized as pluricentric (Kloss, 1978; Clyne, 1992). Can we expect languages to become increasingly pluricentric, as more, and more diverse, groups of speakers are socialized in them from a young age and use them as resources to forge new, potentially post-national identities?

These are some of the big questions of sociolinguistics as it enters the second half of its first century. We have already come a long way from the urban dialectology studies of the 1960's, both methodologically and theoretically. We can help create yet more sophisticated understandings of languages, their histories of contact and change, their complex intertwining with authority and power, as well as with emotions and affect. In our increasingly interconnected world, people can be and are increasingly sensitized to issues of race and religion, and the necessity of racial and religious tolerance. Understanding linguistic tolerance and how to achieve this as a social and individual ideal without giving up the healthy psychological anchoring of "our language" is our next big challenge.

I am excited to be pursuing this rich socio-pragmatic agenda in Leiden, which has a long tradition in the study of language diversity and the study of rhetoric, as well as recognized strengths in the experimental study of human cognition and language. My research aims to build bridges across all of these areas. Furthermore, many of the issues I have raised concern us not only as linguists and scholars of languages but also as members of the academic community of our University involved in its daily administration. If interpretations differ systematically among people of different ethnic, religious, gender, and national backgrounds, then that is something the increasing diversity among our own population of students and academics means we must grapple with as an organization.

Words of thanks

During my formative years in Crete and later in Athens, I was lucky to be taught by a series of strong women, like in turn our daughter Maya is today. Through their passion and dedication, Βίνα Γεωργούντζου, Έλλη Σκαρβελάκη, Άννα Δετοράκη, Άλενα Rendzejova, and Χρυσή Παρθενιάδου-Φλώρου inspired my own love for teaching.

Some of my best teachers in the years that followed have been my students. Through their questions and the need to explain complex theoretical notions to them, I have come to understand these notions better myself. And through

their need for encouragement and support, I am constantly reminded that teaching is something we do with our heart and soul, and not just with our brains.

My first academic contact with the Netherlands was Michiel Leezenberg, whom I met during an International Pragmatics Association conference, while completing my PhD research under the guidance of Katarzyna Jaszczolt in Cambridge. I am glad that both he and Jef Verschueren, the founder of the International Pragmatics Association, are able to be with us today.

I met Ann Copestake as she was herself transferring from Stanford to Cambridge, where she is Professor of Computational Linguistics. Her early trust in me and my doctoral research gave me the impetus to pursue post-doctoral work and the possibility to do so also under her guidance at the Computer Lab in Cambridge.

It is during that time that I first crossed paths with Jonathan Culpeper, another major source of support and encouragement and probably one of the few people to have read my doctoral dissertation cover to cover. Jonathan has since become my trusted colleague, sabbatical host and co-author and I am especially happy that he and his wife, Elena Semino, are here today.

The University of Illinois was my academic home for over a decade. It is there that I had the opportunity to develop my research agenda in collaboration with scholars such as Jennifer Cole, Gary Dell, Hans Heinrich Hock, Jose Ignacio Hualde, and the late Braj and Yamuna Kachru, and where I obtained my tenure in 2012. Colleagues like Tania Ionin, Silvina Montrul and Rajeshwari Pandharipande remain good friends to this day. During my years in the States, I also had the good fortune to spend time with Bruce Fraser, Larry Horn, and Brian Joseph, all of whom proved to be constant sources of inspiration and support.

Since arriving in Leiden just over a year ago, I found warmth, guidance and support in many people. It is impossible to mention them all but I would like to briefly acknowledge Arie Verhagen, Lisa Cheng, Ton Van Haaften, and Niels Schiller, who are all helping, in their own ways, to make the new Chair of Sociolinguistics, of which I am the first holder, a success. Even before we arrived, Marlon van Leeuwen, Head of the Service Centre for International Staff, and Jaap Kamphuis, Programme Manager for International Studies, provided valuable information and support, easing our transition practically and academically. Among our new Leiden friends, special thanks are due to our two taalmaatjes, Irene and Sara, who with dedication and ingenuity bring Dutch into our home every week.

Linguistics is the reason I have met some of the most worthwhile and respected people in my life, and the above list is certainly not exhaustive. Yet tango is how I met my husband, Sharif. The decision to leave our home and life in the United States was not an easy one. But language and tango have something in common: it takes two…. When it comes to the relationship between language and belonging, the history of your mother language, Bengali, reminds us how deep the connection can go. আমি তোমায় খুব ভালোবাসি।

To my parents, Andreas and Aliki, you have been there for me every step of this long and winding road and I couldn't be more grateful that you are here today as well, exactly two weeks after dad's 80th birthday. What you might be less aware of is how much your own long and winding stories have shaped mine. For everything that you have done and everything that you continue to do, σας ευχαριστώ.

Our daughter Maya is too young to be in this room but she is not very far. What you, Maya, and all the children, stand for makes everything worthwhile.

Ik heb gezegd.

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Notes

1 During a recent opening monologue of his prime-time TV show, US comedian Jimmy Kimmel imitated mockingly the accent of first lady Melania Trump, the first naturalized US citizen to become first lady of the US.
The joke was widely criticized (http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-accents-language-xenophobia-melania-trump-0411-20180410-story.html; https://www.express.co.uk/life-style/life/945029/melania-trump-Donald-news-jimmy-kimmel) and Kimmel eventually issued a public apology (https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/jimmy-kimmel-sean-hannity-twitter-melania-trump-accent-lgbt-homophobic-a8296096.html).

2 Additional information received by the Pew Research Center (email dated 13 April 2018).

3 The EF English Proficiency Index: https://www.ef.com/__/~/media/centralefcom/epi/downloads/full-reports/v7/ef-epi-2017-english.pdf Accessed: 14 April 2018.

4 The question mark next to the Greek examples indicates rising intonation.

5 "Ambition for the French language and multilingualism" – Speech by M. Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic, at the Institut de France for International Francophonie Day, Paris, 20 March 2018. Available online at: https://zm.ambafrance.org/French-is-the-language-of-emancipation-says-President-Emmanuel-Macron.

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2002-2005	A.G. Leventis Postdoctoral Research Fellow, British School at Athens
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Language does not just carry information about the world around us. Our use of language also conveys information about who we are and how we see our place in the world. It does that through subtle choices about how to say what we want to say. These choices can be imperceptible and make little difference to what we are saying. But to those with a similar upbringing as ourselves, they can convey - without encoding it - a sense that we are alike, that we are part of the same group (linguistically) and therefore that we can be expected to be like them in other ways as well.

Marina Terkourafi's research on Cypriot Greek, the variety of Greek spoken on the island of Cyprus, over the past two decades has provided the first analyses of that variety within modern theories of linguistic pragmatics - the field of linguistics that deals with how utterances communicate more than the sum of the meanings of their words and the role of speakers and listeners in this process - and has served to expand the scope of pragmatic theories beyond the standard varieties of languages usually investigated.

This is important because the social meaning of linguistic expressions in non-standard language varieties often depends precisely on the non-standard nature of the variety and emerges in contradistinction to their meaning in the standard variety. As a result, research on the pragmatics of non-standard varieties has a lot to teach us about aspects of meaning that linguistic expressions carry above and beyond what they mean (semantically) and what speakers use them for (pragmatically).

Through a research agenda that has, over the years, expanded to other languages, such as English and Spanish, and more recently Dutch and Japanese, Terkourafi is interested in how speakers' choices in daily encounters reveal specific socio-cultural understandings which speakers themselves take for granted. Yet, it is the difference in such "taken for granted" understandings between speakers from different (national, ethnic, and so on) backgrounds that also makes the difference between "a language we understand" and "*our* language."

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