

Belonging in Context: The case of the Turkish Cypriot community in London

Ayten Alibaba | University of Warwick

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Home, Sense of Belonging, Language practice, Linguistic landscapes

This paper focuses on the concepts of home, identity and belonging in modern diasporas and reports on preliminary data from an ongoing project with the Turkish Cypriot community in North London, UK. We discuss the construction of *Cypriotness* in naturally occurring data from everyday contexts and problematize the limitations of traditional dichotomies such as home/host, foreign/local, here/there.

Belonging has been associated with fixed categories in early literature, however more recently it is understood as dynamic and fluid, claimed, granted and resisted in interaction. Belonging is related to membership and attachment to imagined categories such as nationality, ethnicity or diasporic community and it typically denotes a group identity. Negotiating access to a group is subject to being accepted as 'one of us' and we pay special attention here to the process of fitting in. We argue that this process is political and the newcomer is the one who is expected to fit it. However, this takes different meanings as our participants settle to the new home.

We understand home as material and socially constructed, a hub that brings together people who self identify as family or friends. In this context we are interested in the relationship between identity and belonging and focusing in particular on how it is indexed in the space of the participants. Our data includes interactions collected in the participants' homes as well as community centres and other spaces associated with the community in London. We pay special attention to meanings associated with *Cypriotness* in this context. We draw on data from five Turkish Cypriot participants and discuss the ways in which belonging is indexed in interaction. We discuss different positions the interactants take in constructing self and other in informal interaction and autobiographical narratives elicited through interviews. We compare and contrast this with observation data where the focus is on the linguistic landscape and symbols of belonging in the participants' various spaces and in the broader space of Haringey, Enfield and Islington boroughs where most of them are located. We take an ethnographically informed perspective and provide an insight into the dynamic nature of identities and the role of linguistic repertoire that emerge in the data.

The preliminary analysis indicates that belonging is indexed indirectly through the multiple and often contradictory positions the interactants claim in different contexts. *Cypriotness* is

associated with ways of being and living projected to an imagined community, which transcends national borders and connects past and future with reference to the participants' trajectories. We close the paper by going back to the politics of belonging and the inequality of fitting in and we provide directions for further studies on modern diasporas.