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19 European immigrant languages

Penelope Gardner-Chloros

Introduction

The presence of a separate chapter on European immigrant languages in this volume should be seen as a measure of the ever-growing importance of Europe in Britain's affairs. In the absence, however, of any directly relevant Census information or comprehensive surveys on European languages in the UK, the brief to write a chapter on these languages posed several challenges. Two significant issues are, firstly, the use and significance of European languages among the existing population, and secondly the question of the – probably increasing – impact of languages of European immigration on the domestic picture in the future. In the last part of the chapter, I briefly discuss some linguistic aspects of the European immigrant groups and in particular of one of the largest groups, the Greek Cypriots, so as to give an idea of the sociolinguistic developments which can occur over several generations in an immigrant setting.

Which Europe?

The issues mentioned above beg the preliminary question as to which languages should be counted as European, and therefore of the appropriate definition of Europe. The broadest definition one might take would be the Member States of the Council of Europe, numbering forty-three and spanning the continent from the North Cape to Gibraltar and from Ireland to Vladivostok. Such a number would be to say the least unwieldy, especially taking into account the internal multilingualism of many of these states. A more practical definition is that of the European Union (EU). One of the main reasons for taking the EU as a unit of reference for the purposes of this chapter is that it embodies a set of rules among which

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is freedom of movement, and the right for member state nationals to settle and work in any of the EU countries. Beyond the economic inter-relationship, there is therefore a clear expectation that a certain number of nationals of the new member states will settle in the UK, which is bound to have some impact on the existing linguistic picture.

On 1 May 2004, the EU enlarged from fifteen to twenty-five member states.[1] EU membership is not, of course, the only reason for people to move from one European country to another. Some of the eastern European states, for instance, have long-standing historic links with the UK, for example Poland, in spite of the fact that until the Velvet Revolution, it gave its citizens the reverse of freedom of movement. Some 'excluded' groups, such as Kurds or Romanians, may also be present in relatively significant numbers, whether they are detained in the UK, asylum seekers or simply here illegally. To take a comparison, Turkish and Moroccan immigrants have had a significant impact on the linguistic picture in Germany and the Netherlands, although their presence is due to specific recruitment drives which were nothing to do with the EU (see the papers in Extra & Verhoeven 1993).

A referendum held in 2004 in Cyprus came down against the northern part of Cyprus, Turkish-speaking and illegally occupied since 1974 by Turkey, joining the EU as part of a single unit with the Greek-speaking south. Turkey had been anxious that an agreement should be reached that would allow this, as Turkey's own projected membership is tied up with this issue. Norway and Switzerland both decided by referendum against membership, and Iceland has never been a candidate. Along with Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania are also next in line to join. In the meantime, the current enlargement brings the number of official languages in the EU from eleven to twenty, with the prospect of Turkish, Bulgarian and Romanian following on soon. Fears have been expressed that there will also be a huge influx of illegal immigrants and asylum seekers entering the EU through those of the new member states which have borders with non-EU countries such as Albania or Russia.

Which language for Europe?

On one level, linguistic policy and the linguistic picture in the UK overall is less likely to be affected by the enlargement than that in other countries. For one thing, the UK is not home to any of the major EU institutions, and so

[1] In alphabetical order, the pre-2004 members were: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxemburg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The new member states are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.

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does not have to cope directly with the major institutional difficulties of translation and interpretation which the arrival of the new members entails.[2]

Secondly, it is well known that English is the most widely learned and spoken second language in the current EU, and this is likely to be the case in the enlarged Union as well. A 1998 survey by Eurostat, the EU statistical organisation, reported that 90% of pupils in the EU learn English as a second language (Hoffman 2000). A survey carried out in 2001 on 'Europeans and Languages' by the EU's Directorate General of Education and Culture (INRA (Europe) 2001) reported that 41% of the population of the EU claimed to speak English on top of their mother tongue – more than the next four languages (French, German, Spanish and Italian) combined. There was an inverse correlation between knowledge of English and age and a strong positive correlation with educational level (2001:10). An article in *the Times* (9 January 2004) cites a European Commission survey showing that seven out of ten EU citizens believe that everyone in the EU should be able to speak English – though one might wish to question the journalist's conclusion that achieving this would 'do wonders for cultural understanding' and 'inspire European unity'.

Although we do not yet have equivalent figures for the new member states, there is likely to be a similar trend. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the countries formerly under its domination have been systematically replacing the compulsory teaching of Russian in schools with that of English. This makes it more likely that any new arrivals following enlargement will be in a position to adapt relatively quickly to an English-speaking environment, although, as the Australian experience has shown, many other factors come into play as regards: (a) cultural assimilation and; (b) loss or attrition of the mother tongue (Clyne 1991). It has been pointed out that there appears to be a tendency for foreign groups in the UK to assimilate, rather than forming a 'hyphenated' identity (as in 'Italian-Americans' etc. in the US), which can help maintain ethnolinguistic vitality (Sherwood 1991). On the other hand, it is clearly economic and cultural influence from the US which is responsible for the strength of English in the first place (see the papers in Cenoz & Jessner 2000).

Surveys on European languages in the UK

Two main questions are relevant here: first, the question of the language skills of the existing population and the linguistic policies affecting them; and second, the question of existing community languages. The second is

[2] The number of translations between different EU languages required for EU documents has increased from 110 before the latest enlargement to 380 now.

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obviously part of the first, but will be discussed separately as the issues raised are quite different.

Language skills among the 'native' population

Educationalists and others have long deplored the UK's poor record in learning and speaking other languages. Research in second language acquisition suggests that attitudes and motivation are key factors in success. Comparisons with other European countries whose native language is not widely spoken outside their borders suggests that the rest of the world's propensity to learn English has been a serious disincentive to the British as regards learning other languages. Recognising their inferior performance compared with other countries but not necessarily recognising its causes, it is a common stereotype among the White English population that they are intrinsically less gifted than other nationals at language learning. In a European Commission survey in 2001, 65.9 per cent of UK respondents stated that they did not speak any language apart from their mother tongue – by far the highest proportion of the EU countries participating in the survey (Eurobarometer, 2001).

The responsibility for this situation lies, historically, at least partly with unenlightened and unimaginative educational policies in this field. Two brief contrasts may be drawn. First, with Canada where, unlike in the UK, policy makers have taken account of research findings which show the advantages of bilingualism for pupils' linguistic and cognitive development (Hamers & Blanc 2000); the success of immersion schools has been particularly striking. Second, with the Netherlands, where in *gymnasia*, the more academic secondary schools, *three* modern foreign languages are taught on top of Latin and Greek, making up more than half the curriculum (Extra & Verhoeven 1993). In Britain, by contrast, parents of bilingual children continue to be misadvised by some teachers, speech therapists, etc. to the effect that it would be better for their children's development if they were only spoken to in English. In most schools, the only foreign language taught is French, regardless of the pupils' language skills, ethnic background or particular motivations. While it has often been pointed out that French is not the ideal choice for all pupils in the UK, for reasons too numerous – and partly too obvious – to go into here, there is now also a serious shortage of teachers who could teach any *other* language in mainstream schooling. As languages have been given such a low priority in schools over the last decades, a vicious circle has developed where fewer and fewer people are qualified to study languages at university and so numerous university language departments have shrunk or closed down entirely, thus producing fewer and fewer language

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teachers. Realising the seriousness of the situation, the government has recently brought out a 'national strategy for languages', which involves providing some additional funding (£115 million over three years) to provide support for foreign language teaching in primary schools in England (they are currently taught in only one in five primary schools) (DfES 2005). However it has also recently been made optional to take a language up to age 16, whereas it was compulsory before – so the overall trend is unlikely to improve in the foreseeable future. In Scotland, by contrast, 99% of participants in a recent survey of languages at secondary school were studying another language. For the majority (81%), this language was French, which had also been studied by 75% of respondents at primary school (Scotlang 2002).

A policy developed by the Department for Education and Skills (2002), entitled *Languages for All: Languages for Life*, summarises the situation thus: 'The number of young people studying for language qualifications post-16 continues to decline, although numbers taking A levels and participating in higher education have increased. There were over 500,000 pupil entries for language GCSEs in 2002, but at A level this number reduced dramatically to under 30,000, equivalent to fewer than 5% of total entries. Numbers are declining at degree level too, with fewer than 3% of students in 2000/01 enrolled on first degree courses studying language subjects.' (2002:11). Oddly, this situation does not reflect a lack of demand in the employment market, quite the reverse: 'Language graduates score highly on employability compared to graduates of other disciplines . . . Language skills audits commissioned by a number of Regional Development Agencies over 2000–2001 have indicated that 45% of international businesses surveyed experience language and cultural issues as barriers to international business . . . 30% of British companies have over 20% of their customer base outside the UK and . . . over 70% conduct some business in other countries' (2002:13).

Census data on European language communities in the UK

There are no comprehensive sources of statistical data on speakers of European languages in the UK. Instead one has to rely on piecemeal, related evidence from various surveys and organisations. It would be extremely useful if future Censuses could include a question on language skills – since they do include questions on generally more sensitive issues such as ethnic group and religion, there seems no reason to continue omitting this important information.

The last Census, carried out in 2001, and applicable to England and Wales only, showed the following figures for place of birth (Census 2001):

Born in UK:	53,883,986
Born elsewhere in EU:	1,306,731
Born outside EU:	3,598,477
TOTAL:	58,789,194

The comparable figures for Scotland, Northern Ireland and for the Republic of Ireland are as follows:

Scotland (SCROL 2001):

Total population	5,062,011
Born elsewhere in EU	1.10%
Born outside EU	2.25%

Northern Ireland (www.nisra.gov.uk):

Total population	1,685,267
Born elsewhere in EU	0.6%
Born outside EU	1.2%

Republic of Ireland (www.cso.ie) (*NB the Republic of Ireland Census was carried out in 2002*):

Total population	3,917,203
Born elsewhere in EU	0.9%
Born outside EU	3.1%

Various guesses can be made as to how these figures relate to the number of people who speak another European language as a mother tongue or as a joint mother tongue with English:

- The most significant imponderable is how many of those born in these countries are of second or third generation migrant origin and therefore probably native or near-native speakers of other languages on top of English. To make a guess at this, one can make the following calculation: 87% of the population of England and 96% of that of Wales gave their ethnic origin as White British. If we reckon that, averaging these out, 91.5%[3] of those born in England and Wales are White British, that leaves 4,580,139 who are not. Most of these are made up of Indians (2%

[3] The average of the two percentages – a rough figure as it has not been weighted for the difference between the population of England and Wales.

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of the population of England and Wales), White Irish[4] (1.2%), Black Caribbeans[5] (1.1%), Africans (0.9%), Bangladeshis (0.5%), Chinese (0.4%) and Other Black groups (0.2%). Between them, these represent approximately 6.5 % of the population (= 3,502,459). So this leaves a potential maximum of just over a million people born in England and Wales who are neither White British nor of one of the other ethnic groups, i.e. likely to be second or third generation 'Other Whites'. A factor to take into account in relation to Northern Ireland is the almost total lack of net immigration; a situation which is gradually changing since the ceasefire and the Good Friday Agreement, though the most numerous groups of immigrants are non-European.

- A small number of those born elsewhere in the EU may be people of British parents who happened to be born abroad, but we can reasonably guess that most people born 'elsewhere in the EU' speak another EU language.
- A certain proportion of those born *outside* the EU would also be speakers of European languages: they might be either from European countries not in the EU, such as Norway or Switzerland, or from other continents but still speakers of EU languages (including English if they are American, Australian, etc.) or they might speak a European language as part of the repertoire of their multilingual country of origin (e.g. French speakers from Africa).

The sum of those born elsewhere in the EU and those likely to be second generation speakers of European languages is, on the basis of these figures, well under 2.5 million people.

Other surveys providing relevant data

Since the disbanding of the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), which used to carry out Language Censuses (1981–87), and since the Linguistic Minorities Project (1985), which included a survey of Adult Language Use but is now almost twenty years out of date, no large-scale survey of minority languages in London or the UK has been carried out. Community language provision was surveyed, however, in a European research project funded in this country by the Department for Further Education and Skills, and coordinated by CILT and Scottish CILT. The results were published in September 2005, to coincide with the European Day of Languages.[6] Further information about the current situation in

[4] Some of these are of course Gaelic speakers.
[5] Some of these would be French and/or Creole speakers. Africans may also be French speakers.
[6] See http://www.cilt.org.uk/key/trends2005/trends2005_community.pdf [last accessed 25/01/07].

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Scotland is provided in a publication by the Centre for Education and Racial Equality in Scotland (1999).

For the time being we can extract relevant information from various sources. These include:

- the EU's Labour Force Survey (2003), which shows the figures, in each EU member state, for employed nationals of that state, other EU nationals and non-EU nationals;
- the International Adult Literacy Survey (1996), which asked about 'conversational' languages spoken, and in which a sample of 3,184 respondents were given six chances to state which languages they could hold a conversation in (84 languages as options);
- the Skills for Life survey, carried out in 2003 for England only among 460 people who speak English as a foreign language and 8,270 native English speakers;
- the National Literacy Trust's EAL survey (2000) of the most common mother tongues for children in London.

Relevant information provided by each of these is detailed below.

The EU Labour Force Survey (Eurostat 2003)

This shows that out of a total of 28,115,388 people employed in the UK in the second quarter of 2003, 886,403 were nationals of other EU states (roughly as many again were nationals of non-EU states). This is further broken down by nationality as follows:

German	40,531
Danish	11,535
Spanish	35,651
Finnish	10,216
French	63,626
Greek	10,056
Irish	185,828
Italian	56,139
Dutch	24,535
Portuguese	55,255
Swedish	13,896

(Figures for Austria, Belgium and Luxemburg were not reliable due to small sample size.)

The breakdown is significant as by far the greatest number of other EU nationals employed in the UK turn out to be the Irish, whose home language would, in almost all cases, be English.

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The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS)

The IALS (OECD 2000) was a survey conducted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Great Britain in 1996 about 'conversational' languages spoken (sample size 3,184). Respondents were given six chances to state in which languages they could hold a conversation. As the majority were native English speakers, this gives some idea of foreign language ability (98.4% claimed to speak English well enough to conduct a conversation).

Looking first at the EU member states' official languages:

- 0.1%[7] of those surveyed claimed to speak Danish (weighted up for the UK population this world represent 28,561 people).
- 0.2% claimed to speak Dutch (65,435 people) and roughly another 10,000 claimed to speak Flemish.
- 15% claimed to speak French (amounting to 5,431,688 people). Since this is the most significant percentage after English, a further check revealed that some 170,000 French nationals are registered with the French Embassy in London. The remainder therefore represent native speakers of English (or other languages) who speak French as an L2.
- 0.1% claimed to speak Czech (24,742 people).
- 6.1% claimed to speak German (2,202,426 people).
- 0.4% claimed to speak Greek (150,699 people).
- 0.1% claimed to speak Hungarian (25,167 people).
- 1.2% claimed to speak Italian (423,394 people).
- 0.2% claimed to speak Polish (73,880 people).
- 0.2% claimed to speak Portuguese (13,751 people).
- 2.4% claimed to speak Spanish (878,956 people).
- 0.1% claimed to speak Swedish (24,415 people).
- 6,926 people claimed to speak Finnish.

Since Czech, Hungarian and Polish speakers are now in the EU and can therefore settle without difficulty in the UK, the figures for these languages are presumably on the increase.

It would be interesting – but unfortunately beyond our scope here – to investigate the ethnolinguistic vitality of, say, German or Spanish – learned by a relatively large number of people in Britain as second languages – and languages such as Greek, for which the figure above represents almost exclusively native or second/third generation speakers. It would also be worthwhile to investigate the effect of having a second national language, in particular in the Republic of Ireland and Wales, on European language learning in schools in those countries.

[7] Percentage figures are rounded up here, but weightings are calculated from the full percentage. This explains why apparently the same percentage (e.g. 0.1%) in some cases corresponds to a different weighted figure.

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The Skills for Life Survey (DES 2003)

This survey took 8,270 native English speakers and 460 people who spoke English as a foreign language, aged 16–65 inclusive. Apart from being somewhat more recent and based on a larger sample, the main difference with the IALS Survey above is that the native English speakers are treated separately from those whose first language is not English.

(i) *Languages spoken well enough to have a conversation: respondents with English as first language:*

EU members' official languages:

Czech	0.04%
Danish:	0.04%
Dutch:	0.33%
Flemish	0.01%
French	11.90%
German	4.27%
Greek	0.22%
Hungarian	0.01%
Italian	0.86%
Maltese	0.02%
Polish	0.08%
Portuguese	0.16%
Spanish	2.43%
Swedish	0.07%

(ii) *Respondents with English not as a first language*

EU members' official languages:

Czech	0.7%
Danish:	1.1%
Dutch:	2.0%
Finnish	0.9%
French	14.3%
German	7.6%
Greek	1.3%
Italian	6.5%
Maltese	1.5%
Polish	2.6%
Portuguese	2.6%
Spanish	6.7%
Swedish	1.1%
Maltese	1.5%

(NB there were presumably no native Hungarian speakers in this sample.)

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The National Literacy Trust's EAL Survey

The National Literacy Trust's website[8] states that despite Britain's quarter century membership of the EU, only 2% of pupils in Britain are from 'other white backgrounds' (as compared with, for example, Asians from the Indian subcontinent who account for more than 7% of primary children and 6% of secondary). More than 300 languages are spoken by children in London's schools, and for more than a third English is not the language they speak at home. The figures for mother tongues of European language speaking children in London schools are given as follows (*Evening Standard*, 21 January 2000):

English	608,500
Greek	6,300
French	5,600
Spanish	5,500
Italian	2,500
Polish	1,500
German	800

The total excluding English is 22,200. The rank order compared with adults who speak these languages (see the other surveys) is, interestingly, quite different.

Overall, it can be seen that knowledge of European languages in the UK, with a population of almost 59 million, looking at both the native and non-native population, is both very low and fragmented. No language apart from French comes even close to being spoken by 10% or more of the population. Some 5 million people claim to be able to speak French and some 2 million German. Considering that everyone is taught one of these languages at school, that is not an impressive record. Nor is it the case that other languages spoken by millions worldwide are better represented – Spanish, for example, is spoken by well under a million. Major non-European languages such as Hindi/Panjabi/Urdu, Chinese, Arabic and Russian are spoken almost exclusively by those who use them as a first language (Alladina 1993).

Community usage

In order to put some flesh on these bones, one needs to turn to a small number of publications and assorted research projects which concern

[8] See http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/Database/stats/EALstats.html#2006 [last accessed 25/01/06].

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individual communities. After considering some general issues which emerge, notably from the relevant papers in Alladina & Edwards (1991), I will briefly discuss some of the linguistic aspects of community usage in relation to the largest group of European extraction, the Greek Cypriots.

Issues affecting community usage

Alladina & Edwards (1991) contains chapters by various authors on communities long established in the UK. Of these, three are long-standing EU members, i.e. the Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese. Other chapters concern the Greek and Turkish Cypriots whose EU position was discussed above, and three other newer members: Lithuanians, Poles and Hungarians.

Typically, these immigrant communities are made up of subgroups who came over in different waves in the twentieth century. Some of these came for economic reasons, such as the earliest Cypriots and Lithuanians. Such migrants were often peasants and illiterate, whereas later waves, which came for political reasons, were more socially varied, including many professionals such as doctors and teachers. Communities grouped together under a common language umbrella are therefore often extremely internally varied – contrast the wealthy middle-class mainland Greek expatriates with the working-class Greek Cypriots in Haringey.

The various communities also differ widely in size. Estimates suggest that the largest are the Italians and Cypriots (about 200,000 each), followed by the Poles (about 100,000), the Spaniards (50,000) and the Portuguese (40,000), with Hungarians and Lithuanians making up very small numbers and furthermore being less cohesive owing to being scattered. The make-up of the existing communities in the UK is likely to change considerably in those cases where the country of origin is now in the EU. The likely influx of nationals from Poland, Lithuania, etc. should have some positive impact on the ethnolinguistic vitality of the existing communities of speakers of those languages. At the same time, the new arrivals will find their passage to Britain eased by the existence of structures supporting their mother tongue and traditions.

Ethnolinguistic vitality depends partly on continued contact with the country of origin, and groups which were cut off from their country of origin by virtue of having left for political reasons have found it more difficult to maintain their identity (e.g. Hungarians or Lithuanians). At the same time there can be factionalism within the immigrant community, with divisions along social and political lines, and according to the social, regional and dialectal origins of particular migrant groups.

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Mother tongue teaching is not always well-supported or organised. Britain's record of supporting community languages has not been impressive, and projects such as the Bedfordshire EEC Mother Tongue and Culture Project (1979–80) (Tosi 1984) and the European Commission Project on Community Language in the Secondary Curriculum (1984–87) (Community Language in the Secondary Curriculum Project 1987) have been few and far between. Even in the case of languages taught as foreign languages in Britain (e.g. Spanish or Italian) – whose communities are in a stronger position than those whose language is considered a minority language only – the different needs of young people learning their community language and others learning the same language as a foreign language are often not recognised. Some of the main initiatives for producing teaching materials in community languages are described in Edwards (2000); overall, the responsibility for doing this is left to the communities themselves. The country of origin may offer them teaching and/or support materials which are both culturally and linguistically inappropriate for children of the second and third generation of migrants. For example, the Greek government provides teachers who try and teach Standard mainland Greek in Saturday schools to children in the Cypriot community whose only contact with any type of Greek has been with the (spoken) Greek Cypriot dialect.

Particular attention has been drawn to the influence of economics in determining language use, maintenance and shift. As Edwards (1985) observes, the lack of economic advantage or pragmatic motivation attached to the use of a community language are among the most significant factors in its abandonment. A conflict may arise between the desire for maintenance of the language and culture of the country of origin, and a need to assimilate to the host society in order to have equal rights with the indigenous population and a better standard of living.

Linguistic aspects: the Greek Cypriot example

Even those communities which have been most successful in maintaining their language and identity eventually show signs of assimilation over two to three generations (Clyne 1991). Regardless of wide differences of culture and circumstances, similar linguistic and attitudinal changes occur in most immigrant communities over time. The 200,000-strong Greek Cypriot community in London has been mentioned as the largest group in Britain speaking a European language other than English (Anthias 1992, Christodoulou-Pipis 1991). Although Greek speaking migrants are often among the best at maintaining their language and culture (Clyne 1991, Smolicz 1985), a recent study found that the

younger generation of Cypriots do not consider the widespread use of English within the community to be a threat to the ethnic language to the same extent as their elders. Therefore, in spite of continuing to value their ethnic identity, the youngest generation report an overwhelming use of English, even in the private sphere and with other family members (Gardner-Chloros, MacEntee-Atalianis & Finnis 2005).

Linguistically speaking, the commonest phenomenon reported in many communities is borrowing and code-switching (i.e. the use of two languages within the same conversation or sentence). In the first generation, particularly where this consists of relatively uneducated people from rural backgrounds, there is typically an influx of borrowed words which are morphologically and phonologically integrated with the mother tongue and which principally concern cultural concepts and items which have acquired prominence in the new setting. Examples from Cypriot Greek include *paso* 'bus', *marketa* 'market', *kitSi* 'kitchen', *taspin* 'dustbin' and *Xaspas* 'husband'. A comparable example from Italian migrants, quoted by Tosi (1984) is the sentence:

Nun'ce stanna i ***moni****, li sordi per le* ***olidei***
[There is no **money**, the money for the **holidays**.]

The second generation usually code-switches in a more varied manner depending on the topic of conversation, being generally equally fluent in English and the language of origin. This more linguistically complex and deliberate kind of mixing often constitutes the 'in-code' and even acquires a name (e.g. *BBC Gringlish*). In the following example, an aerobics teacher in North London gives her instructions to her pupils in a 'mixed code' (Gardner-Chloros, unpublished example):

Monon to *hip* ***na kamni*** *move*
[Only the] [should be moved]
Cheria *to the side, I want you* ***na stathite kai na kanete*** *touch the ceiling*
[Hands] [to stand up and to (do)]

Estebanez (1991) quotes the following, comparable example of Spanish–English code-switching:

Me gusta la ***Bibici*** *con el* ***frich ful*** *y la* ***jita on***
[I like the **BBC** with the **fridge full** and the **heater on**.]

As the younger, British-born generations create a mixed identity for themselves, so they elaborate new ways of speaking, using the resources of both languages and exploiting them for new purposes of their own. Notably, disapproval for code-switched speech is attenuated in each successive generation, and the possibility of alternating languages is

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increasingly appreciated as functional. In another study for instance, it was shown that young women switched to Greek in order to exploit the greater directness and positive politeness associated with Greek and to express themselves more openly and forcefully than they could have if they had stuck to English throughout (Gardner-Chloros & Finnis 2003). The following example illustrates this tactic:

(1) Speaker F(=female)1, after asking the same question in English twice and failing to get a response from speaker M(=male)1, switches to Greek to elicit a response. Having succeeded in doing so, she then switches back to English.

F1 Stop, how many days is the conference?
M1 Guys, I wanna finish at seven o'clock
F1 I'm asking ! How many days is the conference?
M1 ??? It's half past six.
F1 ***Kirie Meniko, poses imeres einai?***
[Mr Meniko, how many days is it?]
M1 It will be around four days, I imagine
F1 Ok, four days, good . . . and what time?

The potentially face-threatening act – an escalation of repeated questions – is carried off thanks to the switch to Greek, which not only allows greater directness but is also the 'we-code' and the language of humour. Thus code-switching provides a powerful toolkit for women in the community, who can get away with jokes, strong repartee, etc. without appearing aggressive or unfeminine. The possibilities offered by code-switching are – perhaps paradoxically – one reason for keeping the ethnic language alive, as is recognised in the next example, where young Greek Cypriots comment on the 'bonding' function of code-switching, as below, in relation to text messaging:

(2)

F1 English letters, but we do a little joke in – in you know, Greek but with the English letters . . . just text each other ***'kalimera koubara, pos pai'***
[good morning, friend, how's it going]
just occasionally, you know . . . its just –
F2 Yeah, its a kind of bonding thing, isn't it?

Although such mixed modes of speech have, traditionally, been frowned upon by purists, within the educational system in particular, the evidence is clear that they arise in all immigrant contexts, European or otherwise. While they may have a limited long-term impact on the development of English, they represent an important phase of acculturation in the lives of such communities and are of growing interest to linguists, as they reveal many aspects of how languages change through contact (Thomason 2001).

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Conclusions

Describing the use and presence of other European languages in the UK is like sewing a patchwork quilt with many very small patches.

First, it is clear that active knowledge of other European languages is restricted to a small proportion of the native population – mainly the educated elite. Only French, German and Spanish are taught to any substantial extent in schools, barring exceptions, and there appears to be a total lack of co-ordination between educational language policy and the nation's language needs from a trade or foreign relations perspective. This lack of vision applies equally – perhaps one should say a fortiori – to non-European languages, both those which have a substantial presence in the UK, such as Hindi and Urdu, and those which may be less widely spoken but have a huge importance in the world, such as Arabic or Chinese.

The presence of several substantial native European language speaking groups is a separate issue, with Greek and Italian speakers currently being the largest groups, though groups of Eastern and Baltic origin will acquire greater prominence as their nationals take advantage of their entitlement to settle in the UK, following the latest EU enlargement. Members of these groups gradually assimilate to their environment, over approximately three generations, linguistically as in other respects, and in the case of the UK this assimilation is likely to be expedited by the 'world popularity' of English. Along the way to assimilating, the younger generations of migrant origin often create new mixed forms of speech. Some, like creole, leave a mark on the local varieties (Sebba 1993, Rampton 1995a), though this has, so far, been less noticeable in the UK than in other comparable settings, such as North African influences in France or Italian influences in Switzerland.