Alignment of tandem language data
in an English-language thesis

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This presentation piece is a part of my doctoral thesis which explores national identity construction by school children in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC). Lower Secondary School level (6-8 grades, 11-14 years) is the site where research takes place. The study is designed to examine the relationship between school children's construction of national identity and their educational experience.

Multiple data collection methods are used in the study, specifically (1) primary texts, which include pictures and various other symbolic representations found on the site in addition to conventional texts such as education policies, national curriculum and textbooks; (2) interviews with school children, teachers and senior people in the case study school; and (3) on-site observation of the school at work and lessons.

The text of the thesis will be presented and examined in English. The data collected for the study come in two languages – English and Turkish. Both languages are foreign languages of the researcher, a native speaker of Russian. The multitude of issues which arise out of this linguistic complexity is overwhelming at times.

The issues selected for discussion in this presentation revolve around conception of language as culture (Sapir 1949). Having spent years of learning and teaching languages, I can assert that language and culture are very closely intertwined. Having spent some time doing research multilingually, I can attest that lexical knowledge of language does not suffice when researcher conducts fieldwork in societies and languages foreign to the researcher. Similarly, mere translation of data from one language to another does not do justice to the data and does not allow the reader gain knowledge crucial to the understanding and appreciation of presented data.

Among challenges the researcher faces when navigating in a foreign cultural/linguistic setting are practical concerns of delivering foreign culture through language to the audience. Such practical concern of managing data sets in different languages are in the focus of this presentation.

Following a brief overview of the insights into language as cultural representation in existing literature, I would like to share my own experience of and my own insights into handling multilingual data in a doctoral thesis. The 'practical' portion of my presentation consists of two sections. Section one includes instances of my correspondence with dissertation supervisors where I seek advice on how to handle Turkish-language data, and receive their feedback. This phase of research process is important to acknowledge as it shows that making decisions on how to present multilingual data is far from straightforward. Section two includes instances of data presentation in the text of the thesis. I show how I utilize the space, provided by the dissertation format, to present data which appear in a language different from the language of the thesis.