

This collection of papers is aimed primarily at those with an interest in the Modern Greek language and culture. It is intended as an introduction to Greek sociolinguistics and is in conjunction with introductory books to provide together papers that have been published in journals of Greek studies and international linguistics and which have been selected texts are frequently quoted in publications on linguistics in general and Greek sociolinguistics in particular. The papers have played a part in shaping new directions in the study of Greek language. The papers are grouped in broad thematic categories: diglossia, politeness, speaker and context, youth language, electronic communication.

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# A Reader in Greek Sociolinguistics

Studies in Modern Greek Language, Culture, and Community

1997, 2000

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The paper was first published in Drachman, G. et al (1995) (eds.) *Greek Linguistics. Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Greek Linguistics*. 325-334.

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## Self-presentation and interactional alliances in e-mail discourse: the style- and code-switches of Greek messages

### Introduction

Computer-mediated communication (CMC), conducted in an ever-growing and ever-changing medium, has undoubtedly revolutionized our forms of social interaction, creating, according to a widespread view (e.g., Compaine, 1988), a new literacy which 'cannot be treated with the old rules alone.' (Shapiro and Anderson, 1985, quoted in Foertsch, 1995: 303). It is thus not in the least surprising that it has given rise to a proliferating volume of studies in diverse areas such as computer science, information science, cognitive psychology, composition studies, linguistics, etc. Nonetheless, questions remain unanswered and avenues for further exploration are still far from exhausted, hence the latest calls, within linguistics in particular, for systematic research on the various discourse types of CMC (e.g., see Foertsch, 1995).

The issue which has been at the heart of linguistic studies of computer-mediated discourse concerns its relations with spoken and written language. The underlying assumption of this enquiry is that electronic discourse is a unique form of discourse which exists on a continuum between the context-dependent interaction of oral conversation and the contextually abstracted composition of written text' (*ibid.*: 301). More specifically, it is recognized as combining qualities which are typically associated with face-to-face interactions – i.e., immediacy and informality of style, transience of message, reduced planning and editing, rapid feedback (or immediate feedback in certain discourse types: e.g., electronic chat) – with properties of written language – i.e., lack of visual and paralinguistic cues, physical absence of the addressee, written mode of delivery, etc. Descriptions such as 'interactive written discourse' (Ferrara, Brunner & Whittemore, 1991)

and 'written speech' attest to the positioning of CMC in the 'intersection of written and oral communication; being both 'written-like' and 'spoken-like', its discourses are forged out of different, spoken and written, existing genres (see e.g., Yates, 1996).

Studies on the spoken and written features of CMC have shed light on the discourse composition of its various sub-types, such as e-chat (e.g., Reid 1991; Yates and Graddol, 1996), e-mail (e.g., Du Bartell, 1995; Gruber, 1996), conferencing (e.g., Yates, 1992), and e-journals (e.g., Amiran and Unsworth, 1991; Harrison, Stephen and Winter, 1991). Their findings have provided further evidence for the widely endorsed view that spoken (oral) and written (literate) discourse should not be treated as a dichotomy but as a continuum which cuts across various uses of language which are in turn shaped by different sociocultural contexts (see e.g., papers in Tannen, 1984). There is thus no single, absolute difference between speech and writing, but several dimensions of variation, and particular types of speech and writing are more or less similar with respect to each dimension (see Biber, 1988).

The complex and multi-faceted ways in which spoken and written discourse uses interact in the construction of CMC discourse have yet to be uncovered. Reminiscent of earlier linguistic work on the differences between spoken and written language, studies of discourse have invariably followed the path of quantitative measures of numerous micro-level features at the expense of focusing on the macro-level constitution and contextualization of discourse styles. An integral part of the latter analytic focus is the construction of socio-cultural identities on CMC. The issue has been chiefly pursued within social psychology, yielding controversial findings with regard to the processes of individuation and group interaction on CMC. According to the view held by most earlier work, the limited contextual cues which typify CMC underlie a reduced audience and self-awareness, a de-individuation and the manifestation of uninhibited behaviour frequently instantiated by means of flaming (see e.g., Kiesler, 1986; Kiesler, Siegel and McGuire, 1984; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). This view has been opposed by a number of more recent studies which have concluded that the lack of interpersonal cues ultimately enhances the social context and leads to more inhibited behaviour (e.g., Spears and Lea, 1992; Taylor, 1996). Sociolinguistic interest in identity construction in CMC is still lagging behind,

having mainly produced quantitative analyses of identity indices across text-types (e.g., Yates and Graddol, 1996).

While frequency measures can serve as a good starting point for investigations of discourse and identity, the time is ripe for research which will be informed by current advances in sociolinguistic and discourse studies to provide a deeper understanding of the relation between CNC discourse and sociocultural processes (for instances of this type of research, see papers in Herring, 1996). This article<sup>1</sup> takes a step in this direction by drawing on the frameworks of interactional sociolinguistics (originating in the work of Goffman, 1974, 1981 and Gumperz, 1982; for a discussion, see Schiffrin, 1994) and ethnography of communication (see Saville-Troike, 1989) in its exploration of self-presentation and alliances in e-mail discourse. Both approaches to discourse, which are based in linguistics, anthropology, and sociology, have provided useful tools and methods for analyzing linguistic choices during interpersonal communication. In addition, despite their differences, they share the concern with language use in situational and sociocultural context (for a detailed discussion, see Schiffrin, 1994). They have thus informed current conceptions of the text-context interaction, according to which discourse invokes, indexes, reconstitutes and is shaped by processes, activities, stances, roles and relations (see Duranti and Goodwin, 1992). In accordance with this, personal and sociocultural identities are not viewed as externalized and static notions which are reflected in discourse activities, but as negotiable and dynamic constructs which are locally occasioned and methodically produced by means of and in language (e.g., see Davies and Hane, 1990). Their linguistic signalling instantiates both macro- and micro-level meanings, providing continual indices of who the speakers are and what they want to communicate. From this point of view, the linguistic strategies of doing identity are arguably an integral part of any discourse's contextualization, 'comprising all activities by participants, which make relevant, maintain, revise, cancel any aspect of context, which, in turn, is responsible for the interpretation of an utterance in its particular locus of occurrence' (Auer, 1992: 4).

In view of the above, the study's aim is to bring to the fore the recurrent linguistic strategies which index the speakers' identity and the alignments which they take up to themselves, their discourse and their audience (i.e., footing, Goffman, 1981). In accordance with current discourse-analytic research, the identification of those strategies will be based on the criteria

of probabilistic and institutional context-bound use (i.e., unmarkedness, see Ochs, 1992).

### The data

The data for this paper departs from most studies of e-mail discourse in two ways: first, the participants know one another personally, their e-mail interactions thus mediating past and future face-to-face interactions: second, the data is not English. To take up each issue separately, to date the main data source for studies of e-mail have been various bulletin boards and 'listserve' interactions, in which e-mail messages are exchanged between participants who are unknown to one another and (at times) non-specific. E-mail communication between intimates has remained uncharted territory on the grounds that it is a less accessible and inconvenient data source, in particular in view of the privacy issues involved (Yates, 1996: 30). This study has succeeded in accessing such data by securing permission for the messages analysed from both their senders and receivers. This was felt to be a worthwhile endeavor since prior observation suggested that, despite being least explored, communication between intimates is a very frequent and salient type of e-mail. Furthermore, CMC between 'real' as opposed to 'virtual' friends provides interactional contexts which are more comparable with everyday informal communication in view of the contextual parameters of participants' roles and relations (i.e., lack of anonymity, intimacy, shared assumptions, history of previous interactions of various types). In this way it helps analysts gain deeper insights into the differences in identity construction and participation frameworks between CMC and face-to-face communication. By contrast, the need for control of confounding variables has been largely overlooked in comparative studies of e-mail and spoken interactions. As a result, it is not always clear whether certain findings in CMC are medium-specific or simply the outcome of a conglomerate of contextual parameters in different discourse types. Furthermore, while the effect of given context constraints on linguistic construction in CMC has been amply documented, as for instance that of anonymity on aspects of self-presentation (e.g., Yates & Graddol, 1996) less is known about other

aspects of interpersonal communication which are equally salient in CMC and everyday interactions – e.g., linguistic strategies for enhancing symmetrical or asymmetrical relationships.

The data for this study comprises e-mail messages which I have received from friends and colleagues, as well as messages received by three men and three women, all native Greek speakers, who live in London. This study is based on 500 messages: 200 from my personal corpus and 50 from each of the six participants (300 in total). Since all seven participants could not have just been static recipients of messages, but were ultimately involved in an interactional process of discourse construction, their own replies and contributions, when included in their addressers' message, were not discarded, but treated as an integral part of the text to be analysed. In fact, on certain occasions, the participants had employed the standard procedure of e-mailing their messages to themselves as well as to their addressees, which ensures automatic saving of the text. None of the six recipients had known in advance that their messages were to be analysed. The same applies to me in the sense that I had not yet developed this subsequent research interest when exchanging the messages in question. Nonetheless, my own texts were still not included in the analyses except for when they were actively invoked by and included in the addressers' e-mail messages to me. This methodological decision is congruent with the framework of discourse analysis which employs as its main methodological strand the researcher's active participation in the speech events to be analysed.

The senders and recipients of the analysed messages are temporary residents in U.K., most of them in London and are either students or recent graduates who can be further subdivided into academics and professionals. Their ages range from 23 to 35; the sample contains equal representation of the two genders. In all cases, the participants' roles and relationships are held constant: they are involved in intimate, symmetrical relations. Most messages exemplify the dyadic scheme of participant roles, namely addresser-addressee; there are very few group-directed messages in the data. In terms of content, the data form a continuum of transactional-interactional e-mail messages. More specifically, numerous messages function as quick, local phone calls involving rapid exchange of news and social arrangements. Others are more reminiscent of cards, in that they encode various speech acts such as thanks, congratulations, apologies, etc. Finally, messages which are closer to the transactional end of the continuum

normally involve some form of academic cooperation, i.e., requests for papers, invitations to lectures and seminars, co-participation in projects, etc. Most of the e-mail interactions are same-gender interactions. There are very few messages to and from countries other than the U.K.

The time-lag between sending a message and receiving a reply to it is normally short, ranging from half an hour to one day. As discussions with e-mail users and my own experience indicate, e-mail messages of this kind are preferred over e-chat, on the grounds that they give the addressees the opportunity to respond at their own convenience. Rapid and frequent exchange of e-mail messages is intertwined with brevity of content. Longer messages (i.e., over 200 words) as a rule occur when e-mail communication has been interrupted for a period of time, thus functioning as letters. In contrast, brief messages, which constitute the majority in the data, are highly contextualized and immediate, acting as a rapid follow-up to previous e-mail interactions or as turns in an adjacency pair, in which the second turn is ultimately dependent on the prior one. In a similar vein, Sorensen found that the high speed in exchange of e-mail messages enhances their resemblance to prototypical spoken interaction (1991: 52, quoted in Yates, 1992: 1). Storytelling, which constitutes a longer turn in conversations, though abundant in Greek conversations (see Georgakopoulou, 1997), is normally absent in these data. Though this article is not intended as a comparative study, in order to gain better insights into e-mail discourse, a corpus of e-mail messages in English was also obtained using the same data-collection procedures and was subsequently analysed (see Georgakopoulou, 1996).

## Results

### *Discourse Style at a glance*

The interdependence between a previous message and the response to it is reflected in the structural patterns of e-mail: in contrast to letters, answering machine talk, and telephones, opening and closing sections (e.g., greetings, routines) are normally absent in e-mail (for a similar finding, see Du Bartell,

1995). In the few instances of their occurrence, they are highly routinized, drawing on a closed set of formulae (e.g., *ja su* 'hello', followed by the addressee's first name: *ela* 'hello', which literally means 'come' and is a common telephone conversation opening). A gendered pattern of opening formulae involves the affective use of rude terms such as (re) *malaka* 'you jerk'. This allies to a consistent finding about gender-preferential interactional styles according to which male friends exchange insulting address terms for solidarity building (see e.g., Holmes, 1995). The infrequent use of opening and closing routines in e-mail contributes to a conversational and immediate style. As Du Bartell (1995) aptly pointed out. Conversationalists who know each other well can likewise by-pass conventional routines in the course of their face-to-face interactions.

The body of the message is normally organized in the form of thematic units which either lack or present loose connections (for a similar finding see Maude *et al.* 1985; Shackel, 1985). This structuring is intertwined with an oft-discussed feature of e-mail, namely the use of 'quotations' or text-copied excerpts from the previous message which are responded to. This has been made possible by various user-friendly mail systems (e.g., Eudora) which allow cutting and pasting of text in the same way as advanced word-processors do. A significant factor in the establishment of cohesion and coherence in e-mail discourse (see Du Bartell, 1995), these imported portions of others' messages enhance the sense of interactivity and immediacy and are arguably a simulation of the conversational sequential mechanism of turn-taking. In these e-mail pseudo-turns, however, due to the asynchronous nature of communication, the transition points for offering second-part contributions are self-selected by the contributor.<sup>2</sup> The new addresser is thus at liberty to segment the previous message, import portions of it, construct separate points and respond to them. In some cases, pseudo-transition relevance points are inserted in the message for the addressees, as, for instance, in the case of posing questions which are not framed as if an imminent answer is coming (for a similar finding in answering-machine talk, see Gold, 1991).

The above organizational features belong to the speech-like resources of e-mail. As regards the overall discourse style, it is congruent with findings which have been reported about e-mail (in English) and other types of electronic discourse (e-chat). Furthermore, it is closely associated with the style of other instances of mediated communication (e.g., answering-

machine talk – see Gold, 1991; Liddicoat, 1994), in that it is a unique amalgam forged out of different existing genres spoken and written: letters, notes, telephones, telegraphs, postcards, conversations, etc. These are not only drawn upon as resources to be adapted to the functional requirements of a new genre. But they are also at times unashamedly recast and parodied or alluded to. Such intertextual references combined with language play enhance the hybrid style of e-mail. Their use has been attributed to the uncertainty which the novelty of the medium engenders (see a comparable interpretation of language play in answering-machine talk in Gold, 1991; Liddicoat, 1994) or to the medium-shaped promotion of disinhibition which gives rise to increased creativity and risk-taking; or closely related to that, to the essentially postmodernist construction of social interactional worlds which the medium allows – worlds which exhibit care over nuances of language and symbolism and concern for a realisation of the power of language, that is, with the hallmarks of postmodern culture (Reid, 1991: 32). One could add the factor of the age of the average e-mail users who played a role in shaping the discourse type's conventions: as is widely accepted, young people are more prone to bricolage-type speech patterns which capitalize on non-standard varieties (see e.g., Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995).

However interpreted, there is convergence on the identification of email (and e-chat) style as a multivoiced and pastiche style, interspersed with language play. In the present study, this style is taken to form a shared web of textual and verbal significances in e-mail discourse. The contention here is that the predictable, almost normative adherence to this suggests that it has turned into a conventionalized generic feature. As such, it forms the context within which activities on e-mail can and should be interpreted.

This playful, pastiche style is evident in Greek and English messages alike. For instance, we can see how the following example starts off with a playful construction in German (the addresser refers to the addressee's recent trip to Germany) followed by mimicry of an Australian accent. These are combined with an overall informal and teasing style:

- 1a) So, what's new? Ich bin Deutschlanderbunken? hee hee  
 10 weeks till I board THE BIG PLANE! Brisbane to Sydney to  
 L.A. to N.Y. to London... thank GOD for free in-flight drinks...  
 though it's gonna be hard to stay sloshed the whole flight.

Can I get your thesis (personally autographed?<sup>3</sup>) in paperback when it comes out?

Even the briefest messages capitalize on elements of this style. In the following message, the addresser emphasizes the news about the end of his military service with a switch to English (CITIZEN), which, combined with the shortening of his name (he is normally called Thanasis), can be read as an intertextual reference to the film *Citizen Kane* (Thanos is closer to Kane than Thanasis):

- 1b) Ela...<sup>4</sup>  
 epitelous apoluthika!  
 Elpizw na ta poume arxes Iouliou  
 CITIZEN Thanos  
 [Hi...  
 I have at last finished my military service!  
 Hope to see you beginning of July  
 CITIZEN Thanos].

#### *Switches as contextualization cues*

Within the overall hybrid style of e-mail as discussed above, two interrelated phenomena figure very prominently in the Greek data as devices for self-presentation and interactional alliances, namely style-shifting and code-switching (Greek-English). These are arguably the main textual cues that allow participants to signal their interpersonal relations and alignments and on the whole evoke the knowledge frames necessary<sup>5</sup> to interpret e-mail. Code-switching can be simply defined as changing between different languages, and style-shifting as changing between social or stylistic varieties of the same variety. Both terms have been the object of controversy regarding their scope covered and the analytic validity of treating the phenomena subsumed under them as distinct. This discussion does not aim to embark on yet another terminological debate. Instead, it employs the two terms as analytical constructs for the present purposes. It nonetheless endorses the widely held view in sociolinguistics, according to which code-switching and style-shifting are highly similar regarding their socio-psychological

dynamics and frictions in discourse. Both are points on a continuum with fuzzy boundaries which presents numerous gradations and manifestations of contact of varieties with different degrees of linguistic independence and discreteness (see e.g., Fasold, 1984; Milroy, 1987; Saville-Troike, 1989; Siegel, 1995). Furthermore, code-switching is taken as an umbrella-term which encompasses a continuum of code alternations, more or less rapid, occurring in the same turn or in different turns, and involving phenomena such as transfer and code-mixing (for a discussion, see Auer, 1995: 115-35). On the basis of the above, the linguistic differences between the two phenomena are by no means significant, so their separation rather than being theoretically justifiable serves analytical purposes (i.e., the convenience of studying them separately).

Numerous sociolinguistic studies have convincingly demonstrated that both code-switching and style-shifting are drawn upon by speakers as linguistic resources which enable them to communicate social meanings and accomplish various interactional goals (see e.g., papers in Heller, 1988 and more recently in Milroy and Muysken, 1995). They are thus indices for the listeners which convey implicit messages about how to construe what is said. In Gumperz's terms (1982, 1992), they act as contextualization cues: these are defined as verbal or non-verbal signs that help speakers hint at or clarify a certain set of sociocultural expectations, attitudes and social actions associated with the discourse activity, thus helping listeners to make inferences about what is meant. Comparably, in the e-mail messages analysed, style-shifts and code-switches proved to be major contextualization cues. Though the notion of contextualization cues has been almost exclusively aimed at capturing processes of construction of meaning and inferencing in on-line, interactive discourse (see papers in Auer and Di Luzio, 1992), the present analysis attests to its validity and relevance for self-presentation and alignments in e-mail discourse too. There, their roles and functions are arguably modelled on spoken, conversational discourse to suit the informal and conversational style of e-mail. More specifically, in spoken discourse, contextualization cues serve to highlight certain phonological or lexical strings vis-à-vis other similar units, thus functioning relationally and in context. To act as fore grounding mechanisms, they have to mark a departure from the text's local norms. This also applies to the code-choices of e-mail messages: specifically style-shifts and code-switches amount to approximately 7% of a text's total number of words.

At the same time though, e-mail contextualization cues are tailored to the functional requirements of the communicative context of e-mail. The main contextualization cues of spoken discourse, which include prosodic features (e.g. stress, intonation), paralinguistic features (e.g., tempo, laughter), and other non-verbal signs cannot be easily adapted in an e-mail environment. Instead, the e-mail cues mainly operate at the level of code choices from among the options in a linguistic repertoire. As a result, code-switches prove to undoubtedly represent the lion's share of cues in the processes of contextualization by being systematically focussed on.

The heavy reliance on code-centered contextualization cues is congruent with what we have argued to be the conventionalized communicative style of email. However, a full contextualization of this discursal choice is to be sought in the interaction among the communication context of e-mail as the activity which participants are engaged in, the local construction of meaning and occasioning of macro-level sociocultural norms of interaction, and the particularities of the specific participants' linguistic resources. The latter first involve a language contact situation for the speech community examined which underlies the switches from Greek (the matrix language frame, Myers-Scotton, 1993) to English. Second and more importantly, they are inextricably bound with the aftermath of the Greek diglossic situation which was resolved in 1976 when Katharevousa (the high variety) was officially abolished for education and government affairs in favour of Demotic (the low variety).

The resolution of diglossic situations is, as Ferguson (1972) aptly pointed out, a particularly slow process involving a gradual leakage of functions from one variety into those formerly reserved for the other. In the case of Greek, it has bequeathed a fair amount of paired items (doublets) and co-existing elements at different linguistic levels denoting register variation. At its worst, it has resulted in linguistic insecurity regarding the appropriation of use of one or the other variant which is frequently instantiated in the form of hypercorrections (see Kazazis, 1992: 57-69). While it is fair to claim that Standard Modern Greek in its current form involves a considerable mixture of Demotic and Katharevousa, the mixing occurring in the e-mail messages is easily recognisable as exaggerated. Specifically, it involves a comic combination of incongruous elements from Katharevousa and various vernacular or non-standard elements belonging to marked social or regional varieties. This mixing takes place at different

levels (e.g., lexical, grammatical). For instance, it can be realized by an unexpected Katharevousa ending (e.g., alimono-n, lampro-n in example 2 below). In the following examples, small capitals denote switches to Katharevousa or formal varieties; underlining denotes switches to non-standard, informal varieties; italics marks switches to English; and the symbols denote language play or intertextual allusions.

2) Elpizo na diavazis akoma to e-mail sou...

ALIMONON ksekollame potes apo thn mhxanh mas gia na ksekollhhsoume kai tvra?

[at the end of the message]

Sou euxomai LAMP<sup>6</sup>HON xeimvna kai fusika eimai on line.<sup>6</sup>  
ASPASM<sup>6</sup>OI kai apo AUTHN LEGW thn eparxia ths Agglias.

[I hope you still read your e-mail...]

[ALAS, as if I ever log off.]

[I wish you a GLORIOUS winter and of course I'm on line. EM BRACES from THIS AS I SAY, province of England.]

Style-shifts such as the ones above are difficult to accurately render in the translated text, since they capitalize on 'bisociation': this refers to their bringing together incongruous linguistic forms which are felt to be inappropriate for use in the specific context or in their combination. This frame-breaking juxtaposition and blending of different semiotic contexts typically introduces a humorous element. As incongruity theories of humour have asserted, an unexpected switch from one frame to another, while initially incompatible, provides an unmistakable key to laughter (Raskin 1985). In fact, a spontaneous conversational joking thrives on such a bisociation of conflicting frames (see Norrick, 1994).

*Personal footings and professional messages*

An in-depth qualitative analysis of the data for code- and style-switches was aimed at identifying their unmarked and recurrent instantiations as contextualization cues rather than at producing an exhaustive taxonomy of their functions. The first such instantiation to be discussed here involves their occurrence in e-mail messages with a predominantly transactional and/or professional content. In such cases, code-switches and style-shifts signal a rapid departure from a formal linguistic variety deemed appropriate for the issues discussed. They thus introduce rapid shifts in interactional frames or footings which give the addressees instructions on how to understand their alignments with the addressee. More specifically, they reframe the communication as an informal interaction between friends who happen to be involved in a professional exchange of some kind. In this way, they enable addressers to project themselves during formal talk in the capacity of a friend.

Constructions of personal footings have been reported about various types of professional discourse, e.g., medical interviews, and have been found to be proposed mostly by the person who is in a subordinate role in the interaction (e.g., Tannen and Wallat, 1987; Telles Ribeiro, 1996). Their functions there are inevitably intertwined with the organizational and contextual constraints of particular institutionalized settings. However, their common denominator with the style-shifts encountered in the e-mail messages is that they both instantiate the dynamic nature of identity construction in communication which involves stepping in and out of a variety of social roles and choosing the ones which best fit the communicative situation they find themselves in. Furthermore, they attempt to establish or reinforce intimacy relationships and symmetrical alignments.

In the case of the e-mail participants examined here, personal footings simply reaffirm the unmarked rights and obligations set of a symmetrical relationship (Myers-Scotton, 1993) which is momentarily overshadowed by official framings within a formal professional interaction. Speakers thus signal that the activity which is being engaged in is perceived as intimate and informal. At the same time, they enhance their positive self-image by demonstrating access to and participation in multiple personas and social roles (Myers-Scotton, 1988), ranging from the formal-professional to the intimate-jocular:



- 3a) Egw prospika vrisko oti den einai eparkos tekmiriomeni i anangaiotita tis synyparxis pollon dekon, se antithesi me dinteri programmata. Telos sta vivliogafika zitimata kalo tha itan na ksanasketoume kapoia pragmata giati toulaxiston i germaniki vivliografia einai aneparkis.

Ola ayta prepei na ta ksanasketoume sovara. Dhlahds, o dromos pou blepw egw ayth th stigmh cinai na steiloume FAXION STAS BRYXELLAS OSONOUPPO kai na rwame pou allou mporoume na to xwsoume to kolokiithi. Auta prepei na ta kanw egw???

[Personally, I do not think there is a strong enough case for the co-existence of numerous users as opposed to bilateral projects. Finally, with respect to the literature review, it would be wise to revise some of our current thinking because at least the German section is insufficient.]

[We need to give more thought to all these issues. So, the way to go as I see it is to send a FAX TO BRUSSELS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE asking where else we can stuff the thingy. Should I do these things??]

- 3b) Tha synesthna loipon na epikoinwnhsete me tous armodious sth xwra sas. Pantws, ta calls tha prepei na aginoun gyrw sta telli Maiou kai oi prothesinies na kleisoun ston Augousto (gia osous programmatizoun diakopoules)

Exoulme dhlahd ligon kairo gia na **\*\*\*sketoume\*\*\*** oxi na --->anapautoume... (kai oute na apautwthoume<---... polu moiazan metaksu tons aftes oi duo leckscis grammenes fragkolebantini).

[So, I'd suggest that You should contact the relevant people at your end. In any case a call will be out by the end of May and the deadline is some time in August (for those who were planning on a little holiday).

[So we have a trifle bit of time to **\*\*\* think\*\*\*** but not to --->rest... (or to fool around... funny how similar those two words are written in Greek with Latin characters).]

- 3c) Katarxin se epishma keimena parakalo to onoma mou na anagrafetai ws XXXXX kai se epishma documents efoson etsi me kscroun oli tous edo. 2. I tipissa lei oti mas volevei na katevoume san Ellhniko prama...

[First of all, I request that my name is written as XXXXX in formal documents since this is how I am known here. 2. The chick says it's better if we go on the tile pitch as a Greek team...]

In the above examples, a sudden shift in variety relaxes the scholarly discourse and introduces an element of levity. In this way, it acts as a contextualization cue which indicates the frame (in this case playful, jocular, informal) in which the utterances should be interpreted. For instance, the jocular aside in 31) shifts the participant alignments towards the intimate, playful end of the continuum, thus reframing the communication as play, in accordance with global expectations about e-mail. The style-shift is combined with a pun, based on the near-identical pronunciation of two words which are semantically unrelated. Its humorous effect helps to establish a familiar frame of reference which stresses intimacy. Finally, the shift to an informal code in 3c is clearly signalled by setting it off from the rest of the text with the number 2, and it is rendered more salient by immediately following a formally phrased request.

#### *Switches as hedges*

In addition to the introduction of personal framings in professional talk, a regular pattern of use of the code-choices in question is their co-occurrence with speech acts as qualifying devices or hedges that is, as devices which mitigate or enhance the force of the utterances as part of their participation in the text's face-work. The latter covers processes of maintaining or enhancing the speaker's and/or addressee's face. As hedges, style-switches and code-switches present an unmarked co-occurrence with requests: these

have been well researched as face-threatening acts (acts which by their nature run contrary to the face needs of the addressee and/or the speaker – Brown and Levinson, 1987: 65). In particular, requests pose a threat to the addressee's negative face, defined in Brown & Levinson's influential model of politeness as the basic desire to maintain claims of territory and self-determination. While face-threatening acts can be performed without any redressive action baldly and on record, they are frequently accompanied by various devices which avert or counterbalance the potential face-damage. Style-shifts and code-switches in the data arguably function as such devices:

- 4a) Tha hthela na kserw mhpws exoyne tipotsi corporakia *available*.  
Prokeitai na kataskevasoyn TI TO PAROMOION?

[I would like to know whether they have any little corpora *available*. Are they going to construct ANYTHING SIMILAR?]

- 4b) To thlefono mou, *just in case*: 111111 (PERI OIKIAS  
OMILOUME).

[Here's my phone number, *just in case*: 111111 (WE ARE DISCUSSING the number of our ABODE).]

- 4c) den sas akouw sto e-mail.  
einai inhps giati oi mhxanes mas einai sunexeia ftwmata h giati  
--->sigeite<---?

[I don't hear you on e-mail.  
is it that your machines are dead or are you --->silent [literary register]<---?]

- 4d) mia kai o dromos mu meodhgei AYSTRALOTHEN tha eimai sto  
londino stis 8 isos kai 9 kai 10 tou minou. An exete lipon, h den  
exete, tipote na kanete, rixte ena e-mail gia na kanonisme na  
vrethume.

[as I'm about to leave AUSTRALIA, I'll be in London on the 8th and maybe 9th of this month. If you have, or don't have anything to do then, drop us an e-mail and [ we'll arrange to meet.]

The examples above encode instances of more or less indirectly expressed requests, which are accompanied by style-shifting devices. These are aimed at mitigating the imposition of the act performed by introducing a jocular dimension in the speech act and by cueing shared assumptions. In this way, they act as bids for solidarity which appeal to the addressees positive face, that is, the desire to be liked, appreciated and approved by others.

- 5) > Epishs legame poso tha htan efikto (*knowing how busy you are*)  
na mas ekanes  
> *proof-reading* kai genikotero sxoliasmo 1 kefalaiou (*we would be unreasonable if*  
> *we asked for more*). Kathoti *bloody foreigners* kai prospathoume  
ksereis na vrume  
> *anthropus* (*native speakers, academics. male, middle class etc, just kidding*) na tu riksun mia matia --->ews dyo<---, Gi  
ayto---> leeeew mporeiteeeeeeeleew (kyrie  
> Samiwta kh lew)<--- an soy steiloyme kati tis epomenes dvo  
vdomades na to diavasis  
> mexri telh, Aprili? An ne, --->*let me know (e-mail me now)*<---

nai. mono pou ego fevgo to savvato --->leo gia ena taksidaaaki<--- sto Swaziland kai tha gyriso th (dytiki) megali paraskevi. opote (*my favourite conjunction*) to panepisthmio mas tha einai kleisto logo PASKHATOS. Ams kai ksananoigei kata --->tin oxi kai toso megali<---tetarti. opote tha argiso men alla nai poli efaharistos. ok? ola gia hari ton *bloody foreigners* (*just kidding*).

afta

perimeno dema me --->xeirografo (i xeirotetografo)

- [> We were also saying how feasible it would be (*knowing how busy you are*) for you  
> to do some *proof-reading* and provide general comments on 1 chapter (*we would*

- > *be unreasonable if we asked for more*). Being *bloody foreigners* we are looking for
- > *people (native speakers, academics, male, middle class etc, just kidding)* to give it
- > a one --->or twice over<---, so I'm aaaaasking could you I'm aaasking (Mr
- > Samiotakis I'm asking) [allusion to a popular Greek movie from the '60s]<--- if we
- > sent you something in the next two weeks could you read it by the end of April?
- > If yes, --->let me know (e-mail me know)<---,]

[yes. only I'm off on Saturday --->I'm saying on a teeny weeny trip<--- to Swaziland and will return on (occidental) Good Friday, at which time (*my favourite conjunction*) the university will be shut for EASTER and will reopen on the --->not so good<--- Wednesday, so I'll delay a bit but yes of course with pleasure. Everything for the --->bloody foreigners <--- sake (*just kidding*). that's all.

awaiting a parcel with a --->manuscript (or worsescript) [pun on hand-worse]<---.]

The above extracts from a request-response pair of e-mail messages illustrate an orchestration of humorous code-switching devices (mostly in the form of asides in English) with intertextual allusions and language play. In the first message, this is arguably a qualifying device for the act of requesting. The adoption of a comparable style in the reply to the message is a signal that the cues of shared assumptions have been successfully recognised: their reiteration is ultimately a reaffirmation of the intimacy frame set by the first message.

Apologies, a potentially face-threatening act for the speaker's positive face are also realized by means of style-shifts:

- 6a) Exw polles typscis pou den ta xomne pei kanonika toson kairo. Me sinxoris. diko mou ine to lathos, alla ime *overwhelmed by work*. [I am very guilty that we haven't properly seen each other for so long. Sorry. it's my fault, but I'm *overwhelmed by work*.]

- 6b) Omologw oti eimai ligo aparadektos, pou toso kairo den edwsa shmeio zwhs. H alitheia eivai oti hmoun YPERAPHSXOLHMENOS MET' AMOIBHS VEVEIWS, me diafora kollegiaka zhthinata. Upologise kai th xsetikh doulcia gia to didaktoriko: thn wra pou DAPANW apo dw kai apo 'kei me to *socializing* kai tha vgaleis arnhtiko *balance of account*.

[I confess that I'm a bit unforgivable for not giving any signs of life for a while. The truth is that I have been occupied, OF COURSE WITH A FEE, with various college activities. Add the Ph.D. work, the time SPENT here and there on *socializing* and you'll come up with a negative *balance of account*.]

The above switches to a formal register followed by a switch to English introduce a jocular dimension which strengthens the part of the apology that offers the excuses.

A comparable discursual occurrence of switches is met in responses which, in view of the pseudo-turn-taking system of e-mail messages, can be characterized as dispreferred turns (i.e., least expected and preferred turns in an adjacency pair of turns: e.g., refusal instead of acceptance of an invitation, disagreement (instead of agreement) to an assessment, etc.; see Pomerantz, 1984). Dispreferred turns, being largely destructive of social solidarity and the relationship between addresser and addressee, have been shown to be accompanied by various face-saving devices (hedges) which are aimed at weakening the threatening act and disarming the addressee's potential criticism:

- 7a) *fkaristo* gia *tim brosklisi*, isos ton hronou, otan douleoun --->ta apala eidh (software)<---.

[*thanks* for the *invitation*, but maybe next year, when the --->soft-ware [literal, nonsensical translation]<--- is working.]

- 7b) > Kala. molis twra esteila e-mail ston X (*at last!!!* de douleuei paidi mou to  
> *kavourdisthri* tons), o X me thelei nwris nwris ayrio mexri arga (tha ta poume

- > prwta oi dyo mas kai meta me thn kyria). --->Ti travame emeis oi xoreytries<--- gia
- > to KALON enos consortium.

Egw den kserei ti potis, organwnei metakomish kai exei mpourinia.

- [> Well, I' ve only just now e-mailed X (*at last!!!* their thingamijig doesn't work.
- > man). X wants me there tomorrow at the crack of dawn until late (the two of us
- > will talk first and then meet the woman). --->The things we 'dancers' do [
- > allusion to a popular Greek sitcom]<--- for the GOOD) of a consortium.]

[I doesn't know anything. I is moving out and being edgy, [using third-person verb endings for first-person, allusion to foreign/ 'Gypsy' talk]]

The style-shifts like in example 7a above are arguably hedges of the dispreferred act of rejecting an offer. In comparable ways to the examples in 4, 7b qualifies the act of putting forth a complaint and an indirect request for help to the addressee. The dispreferred response in the reply (*I doesn't know anything...*) is a downshift towards a marked variety, used by linguistic minorities in Greece (mainly the Romany community).

As can be seen from the examples above, the use of style- and code-switches as hedges typifies both social (interactional) and professional messages. In the process of constructing alliances, the differences in the content of the messages are thus overridden by the relationships and roles of the participants, which are constant across the exchanges: as already stressed, the participants are involved in an intimate, symmetrical relationship. It is thus arguable that the redress involved by means of style-shifts and code-switches conveys the speakers' desire to reinforce solidarity with the addressee by emphasizing their shared assumptions as members of an in-group (i.e., a discourse community of Greeks in an English-speaking context). Membership in a speech community. In the aftermath of a diglossic

situation, the redress thus appeals to positive face aspects or put in different terms, activates approach-based rather than avoidance-based, interactional strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In sum it satisfies the need for connection and involvement rather than the maintenance of social distance.

The preference for positive politeness strategies has been documented about Greek society and culture as a whole (Sifianou, 1992) though it remains to be tested out and empirically validated in a variety of interactional contexts. However, the contention here is that sociocultural norms of face-work are not sufficient for accounting for the positive politeness orientation of the data as part of their participant alignments. Attributing this tendency solely to a cultural preference makes for a too normative and static interpretative framework. This fails to do justice to the multiplicity and diversity of sociocultural subgroups and of the text-context interaction patterns. This view was supported a cursory analysis of English e-mail messages between intimates which suggested that they too exhibit a general informal tone: this relaxes the requirement for avoidance-based strategies of politeness, which have been time and again reported as characteristic of British English communication. The explanation for the positive politeness strategies in the data should thus be sought in the data's contextualization, more specifically in the interaction among sociocultural norms, participant roles (friends) and relationships (intimate, symmetrical), functions of their communication (maintaining and enhancing friendly relationships), medium specific factors (see e.g., Ma, 1996) and generic frames (e.g., the requirement of immediacy, brevity), and, finally in the recasting, of all the above in local contexts for the pursuit of interactional projects.

## Discussion

The above patterns of use of code choices in the data can be brought together by the overarching function of enhancing intimacy and solidarity, as well as of reaffirming the participants' in-group membership. Thus, the main contextualization cues of e-mail discourse as identified here **arguably** underlie the creation of symmetrical participant alignments. This is congruent with solid findings in the sociolinguistic literature. First, the use

of rapport-building discourse strategies invariably characterizes informal communication between friends. Second, code-switching and style-shifting have been amply documented as such strategies in conversations. Underlying their function as solidarity indices is their ability to introduce an element of joking and levity which renders social contacts more enjoyable. Humour helps to establish familiar frames of reference. In particular when it relies on bisociation, as in the case of style-shifts, in the data it acts as a test of intelligence for the addressees: it invites them to search their repository of sociocultural assumptions shared with the addresser and prove their joint membership by accurately inferring what is being signalled. In Norrick's terms (1994), this is a test which routinely aims to find common ground, passing it means sharing in the payoff of amusement and increased solidarity.

While code-switching and style-shifting have been found to be devices which frame symmetrical alignments, only a contextualized approach can shed light on the ways in which they are put to use in different discourse activities, in particular in view of the form-function anisomorphism<sup>7</sup>, by which the same devices can instantiate solidarity and power in different contexts. Such an approach recognizes the importance of looking at the interaction among language use, functions and participant roles and relations for a comprehensive account of discourse choices. Applied to the case of e-mail discourse, it introduces a caveat to ascribing the use of recurrent devices solely to the medium: though a favourable interpretative path within numerous studies of CNC, this can at times oversimplify issues. That approach would, for instance, provide an inadequate interpretation for the code-choices discussed here, whose use proves to be inextricably bound with the following contextual parameters,

- the participants' intimacy roles and relationships,
- the chief function of the specific type of e-mail communication as a form of sought-after social interaction which supplements face-to-face interactions,
- linguistic and sociocultural features of the specific discourses communities: Greeks in a language-contact situation with English; educated and computer-literate participants with an acute metalinguistic awareness of language subtleties and register variation in their language; young people who are more likely to exhibit an age-linked predilection for the use of

marked (i.e., non-standard) speech variants in order to construct their identity,

- the conventionalized discourse style of e-mail: this includes language play, intertextual references and a textuality of pastiche as frames which dictate expectations about the activity and quality of interpersonal relations in e-mail,
- the communicative context features of e-mail, mainly the addressees' physical absence and their inability to provide on-line feedback. This lack of on-the-spot co-construction of meaning results in an increased reliance on code-centered contextualization cuing, which would be otherwise delegated to different signals. The following example shows how style-shifts in a face-to-face interactional context capitalize on phonological features:

P: Tim Barasevi ti kaneis;

L: Ti ti kano;

P: Eleya na kaname hyo mbe - mberiodiko.

L: De jinete. Thm Barasevi tha pao sto Lirintzis.

P: [laughter]

[P: What are you doing this Friday?

L: Why are you asking?

P: I thought we could work on the journal. [the interactants are co-editing an academic journal of history]

L: Can't do it. On Friday I'm going to Lirintzis. [both speakers know that Lirintzis is giving a lecture]]

The above example exhibits two phonological style-shifts which are the main contextualization cues in the specific adjacency pair. The first co-occurs with a potentially, face-threatening act (a request) and involves a play on words: it can be taken as an allusion to the onomatopoeic sound of the sheep which in a humorous key, introduces a downshift in relation to the word *periodiko* (mb = 1) in Greek: this by implication adds an element of levity to the purpose of the formal professional meeting which the addresser is requesting. While such a shift could be imitated in an e-mail context, the phonological downshift which follows it would be almost impossible to convey. This latter style-shift involves a marked (regional)

pronunciation of *Lirindzis* consisting of the palatalization of l as well as dz before i. This is arguably a hedging device in the dispreferred turn. The audience's roaring laughter is indicative of the success of the choice. The speaker has thus saved face, even enhanced her positive self-image by means of a humorous dispreferred turn.

The above is only one instance of the wider range of contextualization cues which speakers can choose from in everyday conversational contexts. While mail users do in fact attempt to simulate non-verbal signs by using various semasiographic and logographic signs, they still cannot fully replicate the presence of the addressee, which, among other things, provides immediate feedback as to the successful uptake and desired duration of a code-switch (see Norrick's 1994 discussion of language play in everyday conversations). In addition, the specific communicative context features of e-mail are such that e-mail participants need to juggle the conflicting requirements of being engaging and immediate, though without having the benefit of on-line negotiation and co-construction of meaning with the addressee.

## Conclusions

This article reported the findings of a study of a corpus of Greek e-mail messages exchanged between intimates. The data analysis brought to the fore certain general discursual choices, congruent with the findings of studies of e-mail in English, which were argued to be conventionalized generic features, tailored to and shaped by the communicative contexts of e-mail, more specifically by its neither-here-nor-there quality on the continua speaking-writing, formality-informality, involvement-detachment.<sup>8</sup> These features create a hybrid style which draws on various discourse types, spoken and written, and is interspersed with language play episodes and intertextual allusions. It was found that, within this discourse style, participants construct their self-presentation and alignments with their addressees primarily by means of code-choices (codeswitches and style-shifts). These were argued to form the major contextualization cues which frame footings of symmetrical alignments and intimacy. Style shifts in particular succeed in

doing so by capitalizing on frame-breaking incongruous associations (bisociations) between elements from different varieties and contexts.

The two most unmarked patterns of use of such code- and style-switches were (1) their occurrence in e-mail messages of professional content as devices which introduce shifts in interactional frames, namely from the formal-professional to the informal-intimate-personal, and (2) their co-occurrence with various speech acts as qualifiers of their illocutionary force. The first pattern, specific to professional messages, instantiates the clearest difference in self-presentation between interactional (social) and transactional (professional) messages. The use of both patterns is, however, motivated by the overarching function of appealing to the participants' in-group solidarity, which in turn attends to positive face needs.

Part of the significance of the present study lies in the fact that it drew on and applied tools and methods from sociolinguistic areas (e.g., interactional sociolinguistics) whose impact has not yet been adequately felt and explored in studies of CNC. The study thus aimed at demonstrating how instead of pursuing normative explanations which reduce e-mail discourse to a point in the continuum of spoken-written, a more fruitful avenue is to explore the complex ways in which it invokes and is shaped by its contexts of occurrence. E-mail discourse, like any other form of discourse is not detachable from its context which involves not only the medium, but also the roles and relationships of the participants, the purpose and functions of communication, etc. E-mail is usually compared with other types of discourse as if the single differentiating dimension between them were that of the medium. This problematic assumption normally underlies comparative studies of data sets whose contextual comparability is highly questionable. While this study was not comparative, its choice of data was such that it could render comparisons with spoken, conversational data more reliable and valid. Looking into e-mail messages of participants who know each other well and comparing them with the same participants' conversational interactions is a methodologically more sound way of securing comparable data which vary in the dimension of the medium. This study could also form a point of departure for exploring how the desire to communicate intimacy and reaffirm solidarity cuts across different media of communication and manifests itself through a specific set of contextualization cues.

The findings also provide insights into local interpretations and recastings of CNC shared discourse norms by specific linguistic, social and cultural groups. The point of interest here is how, within frameworks of generic assumptions and expectations, speech communities draw upon their linguistic resources in order to maximize the effectiveness and functionality of their communication. The specific community in question uses English and shifts (main], involving Katharevousa) as resources for framing and strengthening symmetrical alignments. A Greek community which lacked those resources (a continuity which was not in a language contact situation) would arguably draw upon other discourse strategies in order to construct personal framings. For instance, a discourse community of less-educated e-mail users who might lack an acute metalinguistic awareness of Greek social and dialectal varieties including Katharevousa would resort to other linguistic resources. Comparably, older participants might draw less on stylistic down-shiftings to marked varieties which form part of young people's slang. However on the basis of this study's findings, it can be hypothesized that in that case too style-shifts, play and other related code-centered phenomena would play a vital role in the construction of participant alliances in e-mail.

At a less language-specific level, the above findings demonstrate the necessity of contextual approaches to the study of CMC. These can illuminate the interplay between the inevitable globalization of discourse practices in CMC, and their parametrization within various linguistic and sociocultural user communities. In addition to shedding light on hitherto neglected aspects of CMC, establishment of interpretative links between linguistic choices and contextual parameters will pave the way towards a constructive dialogue between current advances in discourse analyses and the linguistic study of this new and exciting communication mode.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Sociolinguistics Symposium 11 in Cardiff, 20-22 September 1996, under the title 'Yours virtually': self-presentation and interactional alliances in e-mail discourse'. I would like to thank the audience of that presentation for their constructive comments. I am also grateful to two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions and to Jean Hannah for her encouragement

- and excellent editorial work. Any remaining errors are, as customarily stated, my own.
2. The term 'transition point' is to be found in the conversation analytic literature and denotes the point in the turn-taking system at which the current speaker reaches completion, thus allowing the next speaker to get into her turn (see e.g., Button and Lee, 1987).
  3. Typing and spelling mistakes are left uncorrected in the messages.
  4. The participants could not have typed their messages using the Greek alphabet. As a result, they resorted to transliteration. The transliteration conventions employed in the data present a striking variability even within a single message. The data are presented here exactly as they were originally written; hence the messy and erratic use of transliteration conventions.
  5. Frames can be defined as data-sets of assumptions and expectations about the type of activity engaged in, the organizational and interactional principles by which it is defined and sustained as experience (see Tannen and Wallat, 1987).
  6. One-word language transfers, e.g., *deadline*, *clubbing*, *e-mail*, frequently used in the examples, are not included in the linguistic signals discussed here. All of them are in fact more or less integrated loans in Greek.
  7. A widely held principle in discourse analyses, according to which one (linguistic) form can realize more than one (discourse) function and vice versa.
  8. The distinction between involvement and detachment is widely employed in studies of expressivity or subjectivity in discourse (see Tannen, 1989). The notion of involvement captures the linguistic strategies which express degrees of ('addressers' and in turn addressees') emotional interest and engagement in discourse. By contrast, detachment comprises strategies for encoding distancing from discourse.

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The paper was first published the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 7 2 (1992) 141-164.

## Part V

### Ethnographic approaches