English in Cypriot Greek conversations: 
A preliminary investigation

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Abstract

This paper suggests an approach to code-switching which employs central discourse-analytic concepts in order to account for the multiplicity and broad range of the relevant phenomena. It suggests that instances of language alternation in conversation can be accounted for in terms of the distinction between local and global phenomena, and the tri-partite scheme of ideational, interpersonal and sequential functions. This approach is shown to operate in the use of English in Cypriot Greek conversations, as indicated by the analysis of extensive data from informal conversations. Switches to English cover a small part of the language alternation continuum that ranges from local borrowing to stereotypical sequential, and combined interpersonal and sequential, phenomena.

Key words: conversational code-switching, discourse analysis, Cypriot Greek

1. Introduction

Phenomena of language contact, mainly examined in the frame of code-switching, have come to occupy a central area in sociolinguistic research. As a result, the field of code-switching, as Milroy and Muysken point out, is “replete with a confusing range of terms descriptive of various aspects of the phenomenon” (1995: 12). This paper suggests an approach to code-switching which employs central discourse-analytic concepts in order to account for the multiplicity and broad range of the relevant phenomena, in a principled way. It brings together the insights of discourse analysis and sociolinguistics to offer a systematic account of language contact in particular contexts, aiming to contribute to a better understanding of the types of phenomena involved when two linguistic codes
are employed in conversation, as well as of their relative importance.

The approach suggested in this paper is applied to the findings of a study on the use of English in Cypriot Greek, reported in detail in Goutsos (forthcoming). The study analyses extensive data from informal conversations between members of a Limassol middle-class family, with the aim of bringing evidence from actual use as opposed to the description of attitudes, beliefs, etc., which has predominated in the literature on this controversial issue (see references in Goutsos forthcoming). The following sections describe the discourse-analytic approach to code-switching, illustrate its application to Greek Cypriot conversations and draw the implications of the approach for an understanding of the use of English in this context.

2. Code-switching in a discourse analysis perspective

Approaches to code-switching (CS) in the bibliography have either tended to lump together a variety of phenomena or have tried to introduce distinctions in order to keep them separate. The best-known instance of the latter is the distinction between CS as "the language choice of a person who speaks two or more languages and has to choose which one to use" and code-mixing as "the phenomenon where pieces of one language are used while the speaker is basically using another language" (Fasold 1984: 180). In this view, code-switching 'proper' should be kept apart from code-mixing, which usually includes borrowing. The extensive bibliography on the differences between CS and borrowing has also attempted to substantiate this distinction (see Romaine 1989, Myers-Scotton 1993, Μενοή-Τουλπάκου 1999). However, as Gardner-Chloros observes, "drawing clear lines between these phenomena is an ideological, rather than an objective, linguistic, activity" (1995: 70). She, thus, advocates a view that would locate all bilingual phenomena along a continuum of code distinctiveness, ranging from instances maximally distinct from the surrounding discourse to instances identical to the recipient language.

Granted that all instances of language alternation take part in a continuum of contact phenomena, we can still differentiate between their level of application. In this case, the best-known distinction is between tag-switching, which involves the insertion of a tag in one language into an utterance in another, intersentential-switching, which involves a switch at a clause or sentence boundary and intrasentential-switching, which occurs within the clause or sentence boundary (see Romaine 1989). At the same time, researchers like Dabène and Moore (1995) and Moyer (1998) have pointed out that CS may apply to a turn or turn constructional unit, a number of turns, within or between acts and, even, to an
entire conversation. These observations seem to fit in well with Auer’s (1988) approach, which sees language alternation phenomena in conversation as basically falling under two categories:

a) transfer: when the phenomenon in question is connected to a particular conversational structure, whether word, sentence or a larger unit, and

b) code-switching (proper): when language alternation is connected to a particular point in conversation (1988: 192).

In this view, the main issue is not the level of syntactic interference but the dependence of the phenomenon upon structural or conversational considerations.

What all the above distinctions seem to have in common is the insight that instances of CS crucially differ according to whether they refer to smaller or larger constituents and, correspondingly, whether they have a restricted or a wider role to play in their context of occurrence. This insight can be usefully recaptured by reference to the distinction between local and global phenomena, which is widely used in discourse analytic approaches (e.g., Georganakopolou and Goutos 1998).

In particular, we can distinguish between local and global language alternation, to refer to phenomena of a narrow, locally restricted role or phenomena of a wider role in the discourse event in which they occur, respectively. In general, language alternation involving words and phrases would usually be employed for local purposes, whereas longer switches would be expected to relate to global discourse functions, but this may not always be the case.

Most recent sociolinguistic views of CS have underlined the (social or personal) motivations of the participants. Gumperz’s (1982) notion of conversational code-switching has been central in this understanding. According to Gumperz, participants are often unaware of which code is used at any time, since their main concern is with the communicative effect of what they are saying. In this view, CS is a communicative option, which is available to a bilingual member of a speech community in the same way that switching between styles or dialects is an option for the monolingual speaker. This emphasis on the pragmatic aspect of CS assumes that the motivation for switching is stylistic and/or social, and that CS is to be treated as a discourse phenomenon that cannot be handled satisfactorily in terms of the internal structure of sentences.

The emphasis on conversational CS in recent work (Auer 1998) allows us to examine language alternation phenomena by referring to the place in the interactional event where languages alternate, and the functions of this alternation in the discourse as a whole. We can thus assess the significance of language alternation for the interaction itself, rather than for its narrower (grammatical, etc.) or broader (sociolinguistic) aspects. What has been disregarded, however,
is that the variety of functions identified in CS research have a significant overlap with the major categories of discourse functions. Specifically, Halliday’s tripartite scheme of (meta-)functions, as used in discourse analytic research (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1997), can be usefully applied to language alternation. We can thus distinguish between:

- **Ideational functions**: language alternation relates to propositional or topical aspects of discourse. These functions may include cases in the literature when language alternation is used e.g., to change topic, to reiterate what has been said, to qualify a message (Gumperz 1982), for commentaries, repetitions, expansions, etc. of a story (Alfonzetti 1988).

- **Interpersonal functions**: language alternation relates to self- and other-presentation, and the relations between discourse participants. This would apply to cases where language alternation is used to effect shifts from direct to indirect speech, to mark quotations and interjections, to mark personalization or objectification (Gumperz 1982), to provide cues about the speaker’s identity (cf. Auer’s 1988, “participant-related” alternation) and, in general, for evoking a new “frame” or “footing” for the interaction to be shared by the participants (see Auer 1998).

- **Sequential functions**: language alternation relates to the sequential organization of discourse, i.e. the signalling of units and their sequence (Goutsos 1997). This third category constitutes a departure from Halliday’s terminology (1985), which is indispensable if we want to retain “textual” as a meaningful cover term for all discourse functions rather than a sub-set of them. Goutsos (1997) provides a detailed definition and analysis of sequential relations in text. These functions would include cases where e.g., language alternation is used to specify the addressee (Gumperz 1982), for side remarks, and, more generally, for regulating the turn-taking mechanism and the ongoing interaction (cf. Auer’s, 1988 “discourse-related” alternation).

The approach to code-switching suggested here employs the two discourse-analytic distinctions — i.e. between local and global language alternation phenomena; and between ideational, interpersonal and sequential functions — to specify the continuum of language alternation and its significance for discourse. Local language alternation phenomena, thus, occur at one end of the spectrum, followed by phenomena with a global function. The definition of these global categories can suggest their place in the continuum, allowing for sequential phenomena to have a more limited, less global role, whereas ideational phenomena seem to affect discourse on a more global scale.
3. The context of the study

As hinted at in the introduction above, the discussion of the use of English in Cyprus has involved extensive speculation, numerous declarations of language planning and statements of linguistic purism, as well as detailed descriptions of linguistic attitudes but, as yet, little analysis of language data (see Goutsos forthcoming). Whether relating to justified fears at the face of a growing English language imperialism or to outdated beliefs in language purity, the question of the use of English in Cypriot Greek cannot be addressed without a systematic collection and analysis of language data drawn from real social contexts.

Goutsos (forthcoming) constitutes a step in this direction by focusing on extensive recorded data of naturally occurring episodes of interaction of the most typical kind, namely conversations between intimates who are members of the same family. This orientation towards talk-in-interaction gives emphasis on “the quotidian (sic) experience of the participants in [the] social worlds and settings they inhabit, frequent and construct” (Schegloff, Ochs and Thompson 1996: 18).

The data used in the study was collected as part of a larger research project aiming at a systematic description of Cypriot Greek and includes material from informal, spontaneous, face-to-face conversations between Cypriot Greek members of a Limassol middle-class family, recorded in seven different conversational events. This material was complemented by one hour of recorded telephone conversation involving members of the same family and either intimates (friends, relatives etc.) or not (e.g., directory inquiries).1

To decide whether a particular point presented an instance of language alternation, an independent assessment of each case was made by four judges, two speakers of Cypriot Greek, including the main informant, and two speakers of Modern Greek, including myself, (cf. Gardiner-Chloros 1991). The study found that, roughly, one fifth of the recorded talk, amounting to a total of about 15,000 words (which corresponds roughly to one and a half hours of talk from a total of eight hours), showed instances of language alternation —something which is in itself significant for the extent of the use of English in these conversations.

4. Language alternation phenomena in Cypriot Greek data

The analysis of conversational data has shown that Greek-English alternation in this context comprises both local and global phenomena. The former include internationalisms, non-assimilated and assimilated loanwords, either as proper

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1 For further details of data collection, etc., see Goutsos (forthcoming).
names or not, and compound forms, while the latter include boundary markers with stereotypical sequential functions, and longer instances with typically interpersonal-sequential functions.

4.1 Local language alternation phenomena

Items that were judged to be one-word switches from English include proper names, non-assimilated and assimilated loanwords and original compound forms.\(^2\) Firstly, proper names include internationalisms like ‘Superman’, ‘Batman’, ‘Bic’, ‘Spice Girls’, Χόλιγουτ (‘Hollywood’), ξυρόνες (‘corn flakes’), ‘Maggie’; names for local colleges (‘Anglia’, ‘Pitmans’) and assimilated to Greek or non-assimilated names for animals: Μπλάκι (‘Blacky’), Τούπας (‘Chippy’), Λάκης (‘Lucky’), Τιντοτσέ (‘Ginger’), Πόππο (‘Bobby’). Some non-assimilated items are/can be loanwords, which, according to the judges, may also be used in Standard Modern Greek (e.g., ντετόλ, αεροκλή, ντεσαφέ, αεροςδόλ, γκροουπ, κλατ ['club']) or not (e.g., ‘interview’, ‘highway’, ‘seasonals’, τάσσιν ['dustbin'], μοπαια ['mobile'], χαμ, χάντας ['handbag']). For the latter, SMG uses words of either Greek or French (ξαμπόν, σακ-βοτανιάς) origin. Finally, assimilated loanwords can also be similar to SMG, as in αναμία, μπαράκι, φιαζέβα, or not, as in τούκακι (‘cheque’).

Most interestingly, the data includes three instances of new compound forms of the kind that were found to be in use in the Cypriot Greek community of London (Gardner-Chloros 1992, Zarpeteia 1995). These are formed with the delexical verb κάμω and an English nominal form e.g., ενώ κάμω shower (‘I will do shower’), ενώ κάμει swimming (‘she will do swimming’).

Switches like the ones above have a clear local function, judging from the fact that they are not taken up or commented upon by the same or other speakers, and do not play a role in the ideational, sequential or interpersonal organization of discourse. In general, local phenomena of language alternation in the everyday interactions between family members under study seem to be restricted in both number and range of functions. It must also be noted here that the presence of loanwords seems to be field-related: in the case of the data studied, most instances come from interactions on a specific topic relating to foreign or international items.

\(^2\) The data are transcribed in the Greek orthographic system, broadened to include conventions of Cypriot orthography (e.g., οι for ω, etc.). Quotations of Greek data are in italics, while English equivalents are in single quotes.
4.2 Global language alternation phenomena

In the data studied, phenomena of global language alternation relate mostly to sequential and interpersonal functions. Both categories present characteristic instances of conversational CS that relies on the context for its interpretation.

4.2.1 Sequential functions

Switches to English signal sequential relations by functioning as boundary markers at openings and closings of interactional events, especially telephone conversations. This use is found with elements like ἀλό, πάι (πάι) ('bye') and θένκιον ('thank you'). Telephone conversation openings start with the contact item ἀλό or αλόν (hello), offered by the callee at the ringing summons. In Cypriot Greek, this move is followed by other-identification by the caller, confirmation by the callee and then the expected "how-do-you-do" greeting moves (cf. Schegloff 1986), as seen in the following:3

Fragment 1 (H1: 000)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>αλό</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(hello)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B:</td>
<td>κορού;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(girl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>ναι</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(yes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>B:</td>
<td>να μπου κάμνεις;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(how are you)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>καλά εσύ;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(fine, you)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data indicates that ἀλό also has a wider function as contact marker, as evidenced by its use in the middle of telephone conversations, when there is a change of speaker or when miscommunication occurs between the speakers:

Fragment 2 (H2: 007)

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A:</td>
<td>η Τασούλα εν' τιμαί;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(is Tasulla there)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>B:</td>
<td>ναι ένα λεπτό</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(yes, one moment)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3 All translations from Greek sources are mine. Transcription conventions follow Georgakopoulou and Goutsos (1997). In particular, arrows indicate points of discussion, comments by the researcher are included in double parenthesis, small pauses are shown by (.) and the equals sign is used for continuous utterances.
From cases like the above, it is clear that the item can act as a channel check mechanism. A similar function is found for θένξιον (<thank you) in the telephone conversations studied, where θένξιον marks the ending (pre-closure) of the exchange by confirming that the caller has followed the callee's instructions, as can be seen in turn 3, Fragment 2 above.

Finally, πάι (πάι) (<bye bye) is used as a marker of ending, typically following the pre-closing section, in both telephone conversations and face-to-face interactions, as in turns 5 and 6 in the following example:

Fragment 3 (G4: 063)

1 A: καλά πιστήνε μα μου πέις τη έγνω
   (fine call me to tell me what happened)
2 B: εντόξει
   (alright)
3 A: εντόξει
   (alright)
4 B: σκάη
   (OK)
→
5 A: δέξε πάι
   (urging particle, bye)
6 B: πάι
   (bye)

In sum, there seems to be systematic English-Greek alternation as regards a small set of boundary markers occurring at the beginning and end of sequential segments. These markers signal the opening (or re-opening), pre-closure and closure of conversational segments, and, thus, have a primarily sequential function (cf. Maschler 1998). In Cypriot Greek data, most of these items are found in free variation with their Greek counterparts (αλό; and παρακαλώ;, πάι πάι and γεια, θένξιον and φχαριστώ), an indication that language choice here does
not carry any social meaning for the participants. However, αλά; seems to have also acquired a specialized function for contact check in the middle of telephone conversations and, in this function, it has no Greek counterpart. Similar tendencies are found for θέννων, which seems to be restricted to channel contact, leaving the signalling of “thanks” to φιλοστηρω. As observed (Auer 1998), frequent code-alternation weakens the contextualization value of boundary markers or similar cues. This is true for the elements under examination, which seem to have developed an exclusively phatic role to conventionally indicate sequential relations. As such, they are expected to develop into fossilized, stereotypical uses, with less emphasis on their global discourse function.

4.2.2 Interpersonal functions

Instances of more extended switches to English are related to interpersonal functions in our data. The interpersonal function is evident in instances like the following, which involve the common case of representing another person’s voice:

Fragment 4 (C4: 293)

1  S:  το λοιπόν εγώ κάμνω σύδερο τώρα Ντίνα (;) αλλά εάν είχα μια ποντικότατη (;) τέσ (well I'm doing the ironing now, Dina, but if I had one of those, the)

2  D:  σομπανκέϕες  
(Sri Lankan ones)

3  S:  σομπανκέϕες  
(Sri Lankan ones)

4  D:  μα άδε όμως που εν έχουμε;  
(yes, but now that we don’t have one)

5  S:  η θεία σου εν να αδέρφωνα (θα αδέρφωνα) οι σομπανκέϕες  
(your aunt would not iron (they would iron) the Sri Lankan ones)

6  D:  όι θεία μα ένα κρίμα (;) εγώ λυπούμαι τέσ  
(no, aunt, it’s a pity (;) I feel sorry for them)

7  S:  λυπάσατε;  
(you feel sorry for them)

8  D:  λυπούμαι τέσ =  
(I feel sorry for them)

9  S:  =’ντα τοπιήνες κάμνουν χαρά που κάμνουν δουλείς  
(but they feel happy when they do the chores)

10 D:  επειδή κάμνουν χαρά που δουλεύουν  
(they feel happy ’cause they work)

→

11 S:  thank you ma- thank you madam

12 D:  ἐννα πού θέλεις να σου πουν οι κατεύθες στη φωτόσεια τους=  
(what would you expect them to say, the poor ones, in their
poverty)

→ 13 S: =κόψη μου με: μου λέεις madam (.) λέε με Σόφη (.) η να με λέεις madam
(girl, don’t tell me madam (.), call me Sophie (.), don’t call me madam)

The switch to English (turn 11) functions here as a means of adding validity to S’s argumentation and counteracting D’s arguments (in turn 10) by reference to evidence (speech) that is constructed to be real. In turn 11 S creatively reconstructs the voice of a hypothetical maid as supportive evidence for her argumentation. In her subsequent turn (13), she moves on to recontextualize the previous switch by performatively recreating her own voice, speaking back to the maid. By invoking a frame of equality in her interaction with the maid, she shows herself in a positive light and suggests an alignment with her interlocutor’s sympathetic position towards maids.

It is significant that the re-creation of the “English” voice is accepted without any comment on the language choice from Sophie’s interlocutor. Dina, instead, tries to contest Sophie’s argumentation, by offering an alternative explanation for the maid’s thanking voice and insisting on the generic case rather than any individual example (turn 12: “them to say...the poor ones... in their poverty”). The use of English, thus, constitutes an integral part of the argumentation stances of both interlocutors, indicating that it can successfully invoke a new frame for the talk through recreating a “foreign” voice.

Similar examples involve the re-creation of a different voice for the self claimed by the speaker, and the switch into a different speech act when addressing a “different” participant, like the family dog, who in more than one instance is admonished in English:

Fragment 5 (C6: 048)

→ 1 (dog bowing))

→ 2 S: Λάχα (.). Λάχα (.). be quiet
(Lucky (.). Lucky (.). Be quiet)

→ 3 D: αχα! να για μου θεία πάνως είσαι και η πρώτη (.) σε παιδί μου
(a ha! Christ, aunt, you’re number one (.), you are)

→ 4 S: ε να κάνουμε; (.). ((to the dog)) ε quiet σιωπή
(e, what can we do [= oh, well!] (.). ((to the dog)) eh quiet silence)

The employment of voices of, or for, the “other” serves creative purposes that imply a re-framing of the interlocutors’ stance. The same creative function underlies the speakers’ use of English in examples like the one below, where an intertextual reference is made:
Here (turn 2) S uses a stereotypical phrase in English to support her answer to D and then reformulates her answer in Greek.

In sum, instances of non-stereotypical language alternation in Cypriot Greek can have a global interpersonal function, which is related with some of the most common purposes of CS in the bibliography (see e.g., Gumperz 1982). Cypriot Greek speakers switch to English as a means of representing the voice of another person, a different aspect or persona of one’s self or as an intertextual resource. Switches contribute to the creation of polyphony in discourse (cf. Lüdi and Py 1986, Alfonzetti 1998) and are an integral part of the speaker’s argumentative strategy or narrative building.

4.2.3 The interplay of interpersonal and sequential functions
Interpersonal concerns are almost related to the indication of sequential aspects such as the signalling of the shift between different moves or major structural elements of a story. Non-stereotypical global language alternation may, thus, have a combined interpersonal-sequential function. This is particularly evident in examples like the following, in which language alternation occurs at strategic points in the narration in relation to both the sequential and the interpersonal concerns of the speaker:

Fragment 7 (D2: 612):

1 Y: πάει η νούνα σου να μετι σπιτί αννεί την πόρτα να μετι ποτσίει σπίτι τους (.) βρόχει το σπίτι τους πλημμυρισμένο (.) γεμίτες αι κατάρτες (.) αι λάει η νούνα σου έβαλε τες της ημέρας ότι happened λολά της (your grandma tries to get in, she opens the door to get in their house, next door (.) she finds their house flooded (.) the rooms were full (.) ah: says your grandma she puts out a scream what happened says I to her)

→ 2 D: άτε μάμα, άτε μάμα (.) μάμα είσαι (e’mon mum, mum (.) mum, you are)

→ 3 Y: μου λέει swimming, που τα καλά πώρα λέει της (she says swimming, for good, now, says I to her)
This is an extract from a story that Y tells about a leak that ended up in flooding her mother’s (D’s grandmother’s) house. The story mainly revolves around Y’s and grandmother’s reactions to the flooding. Note here that the switch into English occurs at the climax of the story (turn 1: “what happened says I to her”). Language alternation is thus not only used for the reporting of one’s own words; it also marks one of the culminating events of the story, also indicated by the switch to narrative present in Greek. The answer to the question (turn 3), which is also part of this climax, is again in direct speech in English. The indication of reporting, or rather re-constructing of voices, as seems to be the case in the story, is thus combined with the indication of the sequential organization of the narrative.

In contrast, the following switch in turn 9 marks the evaluative section of the story (“the carpets everything everything everything”). This switch repeats part of the previous utterance and continues with an emphatic repetition of everything, which functions to evaluate the story. The same evaluative function is carried over in the concluding event (turn 11), which is marked by an intrasentential switch to English. In both these cases, interpersonal concerns in the use of English are, thus, combined with the need to clearly indicate the structure of the story.
5. Conclusions

The findings of the study have indicated that the discourse-analytic distinctions suggested in this paper are operative in the analysis of conversational code-switching. The multiplicity of language alternation phenomena can be successfully accounted for in a broader discourse analytic framework. This approach has important implications, especially for an understanding of the role of English in Cypriot Greek conversations. Most phenomena of language alternation have been found to have a restricted, local role, according to the approach. There are also expressions used as boundary markers and instances of intersentential and, less commonly, intrasentential switches used for more global functions. In this respect, it is significant that ideational considerations (e.g., to reiterate what has just been said) seem to be much less important. Phenomena of language alternation in Cypriot Greek thus occur only in a restricted part of the continuum.

Most importantly, instances of global language alternation, when they occur, have a strategic function in the text. They constitute part of complex argumentation moves relating to self- and other-presentation, revealing the speakers’ concerns with account and narration, and evoking varying frames of stance and alignment. The use of English in Cypriot Greek conversation offers, thus, a useful resource for increasing the speakers’ stylistic repertoire. It is significant that this finding concurs with Μακρη-Τουλιπάκου’s (1999) analysis of language alternation phenomena in Standard Modern Greek, who has found that foreign language units in Standard Modern Greek are restricted to “islands” of morphemes, words or phrases, although it is suggested that such phenomena go beyond stereotypical uses. It is hoped that the further study of language alternation in a variety of Greek contexts will clarify and illuminate the relevant issues.

References


