

GREEK-ENGLISH CODE-SWITCHING

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Speaker A: EH TI THA GINEI, THA PAME STO movies?
E, τί θα γίνει θα πάμε στο
Hey, what's going on, will we go to the movies?

Speaker B: Well, I don't know. THELO NA PAO STO ESTIATORIO.
Θέλω να πάω στο εστιατόριο
Well, I don't know. I want to go to the restaurant.

The above type of dialogue is quite awkward for a monolingual speaker. However, for a Greek-English bilingual speaker there is nothing peculiar with switching from one language to another in mid-sentence. The purpose of this paper is to investigate and discuss the social significance of codeswitching with a concentration on Greek-English bilingual codeswitchers. Codeswitching is defined as the use of two or more linguistic varieties in the same conversation. Usually in a codeswitching environment there are no more than two types of language varieties. These consist of the dominant variety (used in the conversation), referred to in the literature as the matrix language and the other variety, which is called the embedded language. It is important to note here that:

“Although the two forms occur contiguously in the codeswitch, the embedded language forms do not become part of the matrix language” (Scotton, 1985).

In order to avoid any confusion, I will make the distinction between “code-switching” and “borrowing”, two terms which are often falsely fused. Borrowing is used by monolinguals while switching is a bilingual intragroup behavior. An example of a borrowed word into the Greek language is the word “computer”. While many Greek speakers use this term, they are not codeswitching, because the word “computer” has become an accepted word to use among monolingual speakers. The scope of this paper will limit itself to codeswitching while ignoring other linguistic phenomena, such as borrowing.

Codeswitching is an extremely natural strategy of language production for bilingual speakers. There can be various types of codeswitching. For example, there is codeswitching between sentences and codeswitching within sentences. (Intra-word codeswitching will be discussed later). Therefore, one speaks of inter-sentential switching and intra-sentential switching respectively. According to the literature, there is a third type of switching called tag-switching or as Poplack (1980: 118) refers to it, “emblematic switching”. This type of switching involves an exclamation, a tag, or a parenthetical utterance in a different language from that used in the rest of the sentence. In other words, it is a marker or an emblem of the bilingual character of an otherwise monolingual sentence. Here are some examples of inter-sentential, intra-sentential and tag codeswitching:

Inter-sentential:	THEN XERO, I'll go and talk to him. Δεν ξέρω (I don't know).
Intra-sentential:	NEY, THA PAO YEA shopping downtown. Ναι θα πάω για (yes, I will go for)
Tag-switch:	PO, PO! What a surprise! Πω, Πω! (exclamation)

Furthermore, Wardhaugh (1992:100) makes another classification. He distinguishes between two kinds of codeswitching: situational and metaphorical. As the word itself implies, situational codeswitching refers to language change according to the specific situation. Hence, one language is used in one situation and another is employed for a different situation. No topic change is involved.

“When change of topic requires a change in the language used we have metaphorical code switching” (Wardhaugh: 106).

The question of why people switch from one code to another is an area that sociolinguistic literature has given extensive weight to. When I discuss the reason for codeswitching, the above classifications of switches will be ignored. Instead, switching will be looked at in the general sense of switching between languages.

At this point, I will comment on a personal observation I have made, which partially goes against Wardhaugh's claim that it is the more educated bilingual speakers that employ codeswitching more often. I believe that educated Greek-Canadians (at least within the confines of the Greek-Canadian community in Calgary, Alberta) tend to codeswitch significantly less than the uneducated ones. Uneducated bilingual speakers have not mastered either language, therefore they extract components from both languages in order to communicate more clearly. I agree that effective codeswitching requires a good command of both languages, a trait which educated bilingual speakers tend to have. Nevertheless, these Greek-English bilingual speakers usually restrict themselves to one language, because of their ability to communicate effectively in that language alone.

Now I will explore the various functions of codeswitching:

1. Switching can be employed for *referential* purposes.

When there is a situation where people of common linguistic backgrounds bring up a subject which requires sophisticated language skills, they may choose to use one of their languages because the subject may be more appropriately discussed in one language as opposed to the other. This type of switching is one of the more common ones and bilingual speakers are very conscious of this kind of function. Personally, I am very conscious of this function and am able to predict when I will employ my Greek or English code. For example, I feel more comfortable speaking

in English when discussing a subject such as linguistics or pedagogy because I have been trained at an English-speaking university in these areas. However, I use Greek in the field of science, because I do not know the English technical terms in these areas because I have not received any training in an English school.

2. Another function of codeswitching is the *directive* one.

It is called “directive” because it involves the hearer directly. Appel and Muysken (1987: 119) point out that the directive may be used to exclude or include certain persons in a conversation by either using or avoiding usage of his/her language intentionally. For instance, at a foreign airport, one can often observe the airport officials speaking amongst themselves in their own language in a traveller’s presence, despite his/her inability to speak their language. This phenomenon occurs to exclude the “outsiders” from comprehending the dialogue.

3. A third codeswitching function is the *expressive* one.

Poplock (1980) specifically focusses on this function. Speakers emphasize a mixed identity through the use of two languages in the same discourse. An example of expressive codeswitching comes from Greek-English codeswitching in the large English-Greek communities of Toronto, Melbourne, and New York. Fluent Greek-English bilingual codeswitching has become a mode of speech in its own right, therefore individual switches carry no significant function.

4. A fourth function is called *metaphorical* switching.

This term is used by Gumperz and Hernandez-Charez (1975). Metaphorical switching is referred to as a phatic function in the majority of the literature. For this function, reference will be made to Appel and Muysken’s (1987) example:

“Think of the stand up comedian who tells the whole joke in a standard variety, but brings the punch line in a vernacular type of speech, e.g. urban dialect” (119).

5. A fifth type of function has been termed *metalinguistic*.

Scotton (1979) makes reference to this term to describe another function of codeswitching. This function can be observed when comments are made directly or indirectly about the languages involved. Such examples can be observed when a speaker switches between different codes to “advertise” his/her linguistic abilities. Such phenomena are very common in even small bilingual communities such as the Greek-Canadian one in Calgary where one can find people switching from one code to the other apparently to impress their interlocutor. An even more interesting phenomenon is the one I have personally observed when listening to Greek-English speakers. Although quite unscientifically documented, I have noticed the following correlation: the more uneducated the people are, the more likely they are to use this metalinguistic function. Sometimes, it can be very humorous or even comical to listen to this type of speech. In addition, this speech has many elements of hypercorrection which further makes it unique. For example, some speakers may add the English plural suffix “-s” to an already pluralized Greek word: “skili + a + (s)” σκυλιά(dogs). Hence a double plural is created.

6. The last and most popular function of codeswitching is the *poetic* function of language.

Appel and Muysken (1987) provide examples from the poet Ezra Pound (Canto XIII). Pound works with complex internal rhymes across languages such as Chinese, Greek, French, and Italian.

Many people are under the false impression that codeswitching is a random mixing of words and sentences governed by no rules and structure. Most of the literature would disagree with this statement. As Wardaugh (108) points out:

“Codeswitching is not just a haphazard mixing of two languages brought about by laziness or ignorance or some combination of these. Rather, it requires conversants to have a sophisticated knowledge of both languages and to be acutely aware of community norms”.

As mentioned, codeswitching is governed by certain rules, just like any other area of language. In other words, there are certain syntactic constraints which permit only a few possible places in which codeswitching can occur. First I will look at particular grammatical constraints (for our purpose I will look at Greek-English codeswitching). Then I will consider universal constraints.

Grammatical Constraints:

1) Switching is allowed between a subject and a predicate in a copular construction:

AFTO TO MAGAZI EINAI down town.
Αυτό το μαγαζί είναι
'(This store is) down town.'

2) Each verb phrase (VP) or noun phrase (NP) of a sentence can be in a different code:

EINAI ORAIO CHRISTO, can you tell me where you got it from?
Είναι ωραίο
'(It's nice Chris) can you tell me where you got it from?'

3) Subject and object pronouns must be in the same language. (The asterisk signifies an ungrammatical string):

* You look at AFTON.
αυτόν
'You look at (him).'

4) An auxiliary and a main verb must be in the same language:

* He has ERTHE.
'ερθει
'He has (come).'

5) It is unusual to switch within a prepositional phrase (PP).

* at TO PARKO
 το πάρκο
 'at (the park).'

6) It is also peculiar to switch between the article and the noun (although later I will consider some exceptions).

* O YANNIS KITAXE TO dog.
 O Γιάννης κοίταξε το
 '(John looked at the) dog.'

When talking about universal constraints, I will consider two fundamental grammatical and psycholinguistic concepts: linearity and dependency. Appel and Muysken (1987: 123) state that linearity constraints generally state that switching from one language to another in the middle of a sentence is only possible if the linear order of a sentence in both languages is preserved. In addition, Poplack (1980) claims that codeswitches will tend to occur at points in discourse where juxtaposition of L1 and L2 elements does not violate a syntactic rule of either language, i.e. at points around which the surface structures of the two languages map onto each other. To illustrate this point, Poplack uses Spanish and English and shows how these two languages map onto each other. Instead of Spanish, I will use Greek.

English: I gave him	a	pen	so	he	would	write	that.
Greek: TOY ETHOSA	ENA	STYLOETSI	OSTE	(AFTOS)	NA	TO GRAPSEI	EKEINO
Του έδωσα	ενα	στυλό	έτσι	αυτός)	να	το γράψει	εκείνο

In this example, switching is only possible where the vertical lines appear, because these are the places where the word order in both languages is equivalent. Where the crossed lines appear, switching is impossible.

Woolford (1983) reformulates Poplack's "equivalence constraint" in generative terms. Instead of using single word correspondence in both languages, Woolford considers the phrase structure rules:

S → NP VP eg.	English: John throws the ball.
	Greek: O YANNIS PETAEI TIN BALA.
	O Γιάννης πετάει την μπάλα
NP → Det N eg.	English: John...
	Greek: O YANNIS ...
	O Γιάννης ...
VP → V NP eg.	English: ...throws the ball..
	Greek: ... PETAEI TIN BALA...
	πετάει την μπάλα

Similarly, the “equivalence constraint” theory makes predictions for other parts of speech like adjectives (adj) and prepositions (P):

English: NP—> Det adj N PP
Greek: NP—> Det adj N PP

- a) The nice cat on the roof...
b) ΕΙ ΟΜΟΡΦΗ ΓΑΤΑ ΣΤΗ ΣΚΕΠΗ...
Η όμορφη γάτα στη σκεπή

Another model focusses on dependency. This model states that there cannot be a switch between two elements if they are lexically dependent on each other (Appel and Muysken 1987, 124). The authors who have focussed on dependency are DiSciullo, Muysken and Singh (1986). They developed a restriction in terms of “government”, a term that comes from Chomsky’s theory of “Government and Binding”. The restriction is as follows:

“Whenever X governs Y, both constituents must be drawn from the same language” (Appel and Muysken, 1987:124).

An example of government is case assignment. For instance, the Greek preposition ΣΤΟ στο (in) assigns the accusative case:

ΣΤΟ ΣΠΙΤΙ (accusative)
Στο σπίτι
in the house

Therefore, it seems that the only elements that can switch are ungoverned ones such as tags, interjections and exclamations. Nevertheless, this statement is not totally true. Some governed elements may in fact switch. DiSciullo et al.(1986) claim that these exceptions are accomplished through a neutralizing element, such as a determiner, which they illustrate with a Spanish example.

(Again I will resort to the Greek language):

- a) ΠΙΡΑ ΤΟ bus.
Πήρα το
b) *ΠΙΡΑ the bus.
c) I took the bus.

Sentence a) is acceptable because the Greek determiner “ΤΟ” would make the entire NP Greek in terms of government restrictions. In sentence b) the switch is impossible because the whole sentence would be English.

So far, I have considered switches within and among sentences. I have also explored various syntactic constraints. However, there is another interesting phenomenon which the literature I have consulted does not consider. I will refer to this phenomenon as intra-word switching: switching of elements within a word. Unlike the sentence or phrase level, intra-word switching

follows phonological constraints. First, I will present some examples, then I will try to formulate some rules. (I must advise the reader that this account of intra-word switches is not an exhaustive one. It is just a sample to introduce the phenomenon).

Examples:

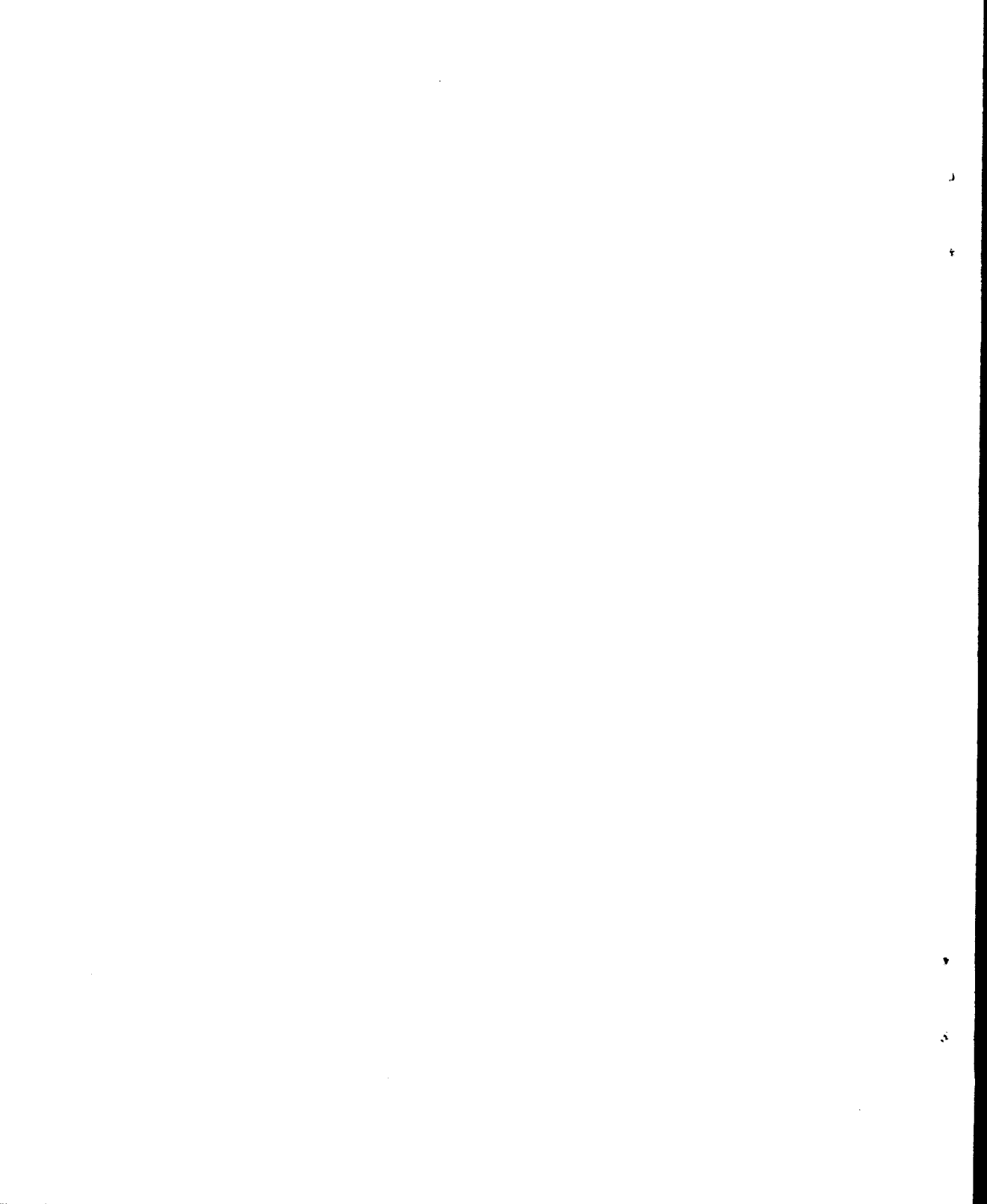
"GREEKIZED"		ENGLISH	GREEK
a) STEK-I	Στέκ-ι	'steak'	'brizola'
b) TROK-I	Τρόκ-ι	'truck'	'fortigo'
c) CAR-O	Κάρ-ο	'car'	'aftokinito'
d) CARPET-O	Καρπέτ-ο	'carpet'	'hali'
e) YARTH-A	Γιάρδ-α	'yard'	'avli'

The actual Greek words of (a,b,c,d) are neutral in terms of gender. Hence, the neuter Greek suffixes -I and -O are attached to the English word. The question that arises here is when does one use -I and when -O? The vast majority of Greeks are not trained in linguistics, therefore there must be subconscious rules being applied when these "Greekized" words are being formed. There does not seem to be any clear phonological reason for the choice of alternation of the front and back vowels I and O. In the placement of -A, speakers seem to follow the Greek grammatical gender. The word for "yard" in Greek is of feminine gender. Therefore, the Greek feminine suffix -A becomes attached and creates the word "YARTHA", which is used by most English-Greek speakers. These intra-word switches are common in all Greek-English speaking communities, whether in Canada, the United States or New Zealand.

In general, codeswitching does not have the same functions in every linguistic and social community. For example, the more educated a person is, the more rule-governed intra- and inter-sentential codeswitching will occur. However, intra-word codeswitching (specifically Greek-English speakers) is employed by the less educated people. It seems that this would be a profitable area of sociolinguistics for further exploration. Codeswitching is constantly evolving and very soon it could constitute a new, 'third' language among bilingual speakers: a language with unique syntax, phonology and all the sociolinguistic constraints any language requires.

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