This collection of papers is aimed primarily at students and scholars with an interest in the Modern Greek language and its various applications. It is also intended as an introduction to Greek sociolinguistics. As such, it can be studied in conjunction with introductory books to sociolinguistics. The volume brings together papers that have been published in journals dedicated to Modern Greek studies and international linguistics and in conference proceedings. The selected texts are frequently quoted in publications concerned with sociolinguistics in general and Greek sociolinguistics in particular, and have thus played a part in shaping new directions in the study of Greek language. The papers are grouped in broad thematic categories: language contact, register variation (diglossia), politeness, speaker and context variation (gender in language, youth language, electronic communication), ethnographic approaches.

Alexandra Georgakopoulou is a Lecturer in Modern Greek Language at King's College London. She has published widely on discourse analysis and co-authored (with Dionysis Goutsos) *Discourse Analysis, An Introduction* (Edinburgh, 1997). She has also published *Narrative Performances: A Study of Modern Greek Storytelling*. (Amsterdam, 1997). Her research interests include sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, cross cultural communication, educational linguistics and media.

Marianna Spanaki teaches Modern Greek Language and Culture at the University of Birmingham, Britain. She has published on translation studies, intertextuality, gender and Modern Greek language and literature. Her research interests include language studies in education, multilingualism, media and cultural studies.

Alexandra Georgakopoulou Marianna Spa
(eds.)

A Reader i
Greek Sociolinguistic

MARIA SIFIANOU

On the telephone again! Differences in telephone behaviour: England versus Greece

The study of telephone conversations has developed out of work concerning the organisation of conversation in general, pioneered by Schegloff (1968-1972). He was particularly interested in conversational openings, and telephone call openings were a case in point. Schegloff (1979: 25) maintained that 'the talk people do on the telephone is not fundamentally different from the other talk they do.' Differences between cultures were subsequently pointed out (Godard, 1977). These differences were presented in terms of the specific communicative event, however, and not as revealing broader differences between societies.

This article investigates certain conventions governing telephone calls in England and Greece within a broader framework of differences in interactional patterns. These conventions concern both the verbal telephone call openings and the attitudes concerning telephone usage in general. There are differences in the formality of first exchanges, as well as different functions that the telephone itself seems to serve within the two societies. In England, the primary function seems to be *transactional*, whereas in Greece, the primary function seems to be *interactional*.[1] These differences and their explanations are placed within a larger system of variant patterns in social relationships and in expectations between interactants, which in turn derive from different social norms and values.

Successful communication may require knowledge of culturally bound rules, including rules relating to the selection of the appropriate discourse channel, for example, a letter, a personal visit, or a telephone call (see Clyne, 1981: 61).[2] The awareness of such differences is very important, because as Trudgill (1974: 131) pointed out 'it can readily be imagined that differences of this type between cultures can often lead, in cross-cultural communication, to misunderstanding and even hostility.'

The telephone is a relatively recent invention; nevertheless, 'very definite rules surround its usage' (Chaika, 1982: 72). Clearly, these rules can be fully understood only within the larger system of interaction and the cultural values and attitudes of the members of the particular community. Investigation of telephone behaviour independent of more general interactional differences between any two societies will only yield a partial account of what is really happening.

My interest in the issue of telephonic interaction sprang mainly from a more general interest in discourse and a more specific concern with politeness in discourse. While I was collecting data in order to investigate the various markers which contribute to the politeness of an utterance, some of my informants expressed the view that some Greeks do not know how to respond over the telephone or, in other words, that they are impolite. Such remarks, coupled with certain unfulfilled expectations of politeness on my part while residing in England, kindled my interest in observing telephone interactions and collecting data on this speech event.

My data fall into two main groups: records of openings of calls received by my family and friends in my presence and overheard by myself – in these cases I was obliged to verify guesses as to the formulae used by the other party after the call had been completed – and records made by myself and cooperating colleagues and friends of opening formulae used by both parties in calls in which we ourselves participated, in which cases no verification was necessary. Since my concern was only with recording as many brief opening exchanges as possible, tape recording was not deemed necessary or desirable.

I discussed my data with native speakers both in England and in Greece in order to find out whether their reactions corresponded with my intuitions and findings. After correlating their comments and my findings, I constructed a list of differences between Greek and English telephone openings and distributed copies to 15 English and 15 Greek informants and another ten copies to Greeks who were conversant with the English culture, having lived in England for a number of years. On the whole, these respondents agreed that the list did indeed represent those patterns which are prevalent in the two societies.[3]

A model for interaction

Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) provided an insightful account of the different ways in which people can convey politeness. It seems that the interactional differences between Greek and English societies, including the differences in telephone call interaction, can be satisfactorily explained along the lines of the Brown and Levinson model. Their distinction between positive and negative politeness leads to another interesting distinction, that of positive and negative politeness societies, a distinction which even with its 'immense crudity,' as Brown and Levinson (1978: 250) put it, can shed considerable light on the differences in the social relationships prevailing in different cultures. Brown and Levinson (*op. cit.*) said that England can be considered a negative politeness society when compared to America. It can be argued that Greece is a positive politeness society when compared to England.[4] Greeks tend to prefer positive politeness strategies, such as in-group markers, more direct constructions, and, in general, linguistic devices which sound optimistic about the outcome of the encounter. By contrast, the English tend to prefer negative politeness strategies. They equate indirectness, the main motivation of negative politeness, with politeness, and this contributes to the elaboration of the structure and the tentativeness of the message. In general, they prefer devices which sound pessimistic. Linguistic pessimism versus linguistic optimism is perhaps the main difference between positive politeness and negative politeness societies (Brown & Levinson, 1978: 131)

I am not implying here that societies *as a whole* can be clearly labelled as being either positively or negatively polite. No society is likely to be completely uniform in its politeness strategies (cf. Harris, 1984: 175). No doubt all societies will exhibit both kinds of politeness (see Brown & Levinson, 1978: 251). Nevertheless, I believe that we can distinguish societies according to the ethos predominant in daily interactions, both verbal and nonverbal. In this sense, then, perhaps we could say that societies can be distinguished as being relatively more positive or negative; this is what I mean here when I refer to positive and negative politeness societies.

Furthermore, since this politeness orientation is relative rather than absolute, it follows that even two societies which may be characterised as having the same politeness orientation will not exhibit identical preferences of strategies. Consequently, although Greece and America exhibit a more positive politeness orientation than England, this does not mean that Greeks and Americans will employ identical politeness devices in their daily management of interactions. The interactional needs of participants which determine the choice of strategies will vary even within the same system, let alone cross-culturally.

Verbal telephone behaviour

Setting the scene

This section compares and contrasts the expected (and, therefore, natural, correct, polite, etc.) behaviour of telephone callers and answerers in Greece and in England. The variability observed seems to fit neatly with the distinction between positive and negative politeness strategies in social interaction. I am mainly concerned with personal telephone calls here and do not consider business calls.

For Schegloff (1972: 350), 'a first rule of telephone conversation, which might be called a 'distribution rule for first utterances,' is: *the answerer speaks first.* The ringing of the telephone is the first element of a sequence, a summons which calls for an answer if people are around and wish to respond. This sounds so logical a rule that one may be tempted to suppose that it is universal. 'There is nothing inevitable about this though' Trudgill (1974: 130) maintained, and similarly Chaika (1982: 72) warned us that 'it does not have to be so. The rule could easily be that the caller speaks first.' Trudgill (1974: 130) offered the example of Japan, where 'many people expect the caller to be the one to speak first' and added that 'there are other aspects of telephone behaviour, too, that differ from one culture to another.' This points quite eloquently to the fact that even in this very common situation, equally reasonable alternatives may be available from which different groups choose and establish their norms of interaction; or as Hymes (1986: 62) aptly put it, 'the common physical setting of a telephone call, two communicators not seen by each other, does not determine identical solutions of propriety from country to country.'

Responses used

In both Greek and English cultures, the ringing of the telephone is perceived as a summons and, therefore, the person at the receiving end is conversationally obliged to speak first. Greek answerers, however, have a greater variety of linguistic options from which to choose to answer their telephone. These range from verbs like *leyete* 'say' or 'speak', *parakalo* 'please' (which is a verb in Greek), and *oriste* 'order' or 'what do you want', to items like *embros* 'go ahead' and *ne* or *malista* 'yes'.[5] Combinations of these responses are possible, such as *leyete parakalo,* though they are not used as frequently as short, single-word responses.

Venardou (1988) found in her research that *ne* was the most frequently encountered item (33%), followed by *leyete* (22%), *embros 15%), parakalo* (10%), and *oriste* and *malista* (5% each). In the other 10 percent of the cases, either a combination of these or something more idiosyncratic was found. What is noteworthy is that individuals tend to employ one of these options most of the time. The choice does not appear to depend either on social parameters, such as social distance and education, or on any features of the context, such as place, time, and setting, which influence choices in other daily encounters. The only factor which has been found to influence occasional alternations in the form adopted was the momentary mood of the answerer.

The fact that this variety of responses exists may be a mere coincidence of no particular importance (although it is arguable whether there is much in language which is accidental). Nevertheless, the fact that it affords answerers the opportunity to choose also allows them to sound a little different or even idiosyncratic and thus helps the caller to guess correctly the answerer's identity. Thus, it appears that the language itself provides means which reduce the need for overt identification.

In England, besides the widely used *hallo* and the rarely employed *yes,* a very frequent practice is for answerers to recite their telephone number and sometimes their last name, for instance, '723457' or 'Mister Jones speaking.' Explanations for these two latter forms of response may be that they enable callers to check if they have reached the intended addressee, and if not, save their money. However, another explanation may simply be the general distrust of a problematic telecommunication system (Hannah, 1987: 40).

By contrast, Greeks will never answer their telephone by reciting their telephone number or by giving their name (especially not with the last name as in England and Germany) or address, even though there are many problems with the telecommunication system in Greece.[6] One reason which may contribute to people's unwillingness to give names and telephone numbers is that people feel this encourages nuisance callers to try again. This problem, however, is not only peculiar to Greece; nuisance calls are common in England, too, especially indecent ones. There are clear instructions in the British Telecom phone book on how to handle such cases – 'do not give your name or address' is one of them. Thus, I suppose that the reasons behind these differences lie elsewhere, a point I consider later.

At this point, we are not concerned with whether such explanations for both sets of answering strategies are valid or not. What is important is that these practices sound perfectly reasonable, appropriate, and polite to accustomed ears but sound odd and formal to unaccustomed ones.[7]

Verifying numbers

The common practice in France of *callers* reciting the number they have dialled as a way of checking whether they have reached the intended place (Godard, 1977) is almost entirely absent in both England and Greece, unless the caller feels that he or she has dialled the wrong number. But even in such cases, numbers are more freely given out in England; the Greek rule seems to be 'no answerers' numbers are to be recited over the telephone. In Greece, even when callers try to check whether the number they have reached is indeed the intended one, answerers might say 'yes' if that is indeed their number, but simply say 'no' without volunteering further information if it is not. Callers who ask for the number may have the question returned: 'What number did you dial?' In this way, answerers avoid revealing the telephone number.

It should be acknowledged that both the English practice of answerers reciting their telephone number as well as the French norm of callers checking if they have reached the right number eliminate the possibility of getting involved in fruitless and sometimes disturbing and time-consuming exchanges with strangers who ring, give a greeting, and then confidently go straight on to the reason for their call. The following examples from my notebook illustrate this situation. Once, at lunch time, I picked up the phone only to be greeted by an assured male voice asking if the fish soup was ready: *ela, ti mu kanis, ine i psarosupa etimi?* 'Hey there, how are you? Is the fish soup ready?' Another time I was woken up and invited out in the middle of the night by a strange but confident and cheerful male voice which asked: *se ksipnisa matakia mu, δe θa'rθis na mu kanis li γi pareitsa apopse?* 'Did I wake you up my little eyes? Aren't you coming to keep me company for a little while tonight?'[8] In both cases I easily realised that it was the wrong number because of the content of the call; but whereas I was amused in the first case, I almost slammed the phone down in the second.

There are, however, cases in which the content of the exchanges is not as immediately revealing as in the two previous cases. One such example was reported to me by an informant who received a phone call on New Year's Day. The voice on the calling end greeted her and after her return of greeting went on to ask how she had spent New Year's Eve. Because this is a somewhat conventionalised question on that day, she willingly responded that she had a lovely evening at a superb disco with some close friends and so forth. Although she admitted that she had not recognised her interlocutor's voice, she felt too intimidated to question his identity – he sounded so confident that she simply assumed he was a friend of another member of her family. During the next exchange, a name cropped up which signalled the possibility of a wrong number. Further clarification indicated that this was indeed the case, to the embarrassment of both interlocutors. In other words, she had tried unsuccessfully to save both her own face and that of her interlocutor by trying to establish his identity indirectly rather than ask for it directly and thus reveal her lack of recognition.

Such occurrences can, of course, be avoided if one of the participants uses some verification device, whether name or number, at the very beginning of the exchange. There is an instruction in the Greek telephone directory advising users to respond over their telephone with either their name or number in order to avoid such problems. Yet, no Greek will ever do this.

But even if the practice of reciting the telephone number were to be established in Greece, it would not contribute to a rapid identification because there is no standard way of reciting one's telephone number. In England, each digit is read separately, except for repeated numerals such as 55135, which would be 'double five, one, three, five.' In Greece, however, each individual recites the telephone number in the way he or she feels it is most easily memorised, using combinations from 1 to 999. Thus, because there is no consensus among individuals as to how to recite telephone numbers, a variety of combinations is possible. For instance, the number 9245975 could be read as 'ninety-two, forty-five, nine-hundred and seventyfive' or 'nine, twenty-four, fifty-nine, seventy-five,' and so on. This flexibility means that there is a strong possibility that neither the answerer nor the caller would immediately recognise a telephone number if it was recited in a way different than the one that they have been using.

Verifying interlocutors

For Schegloff (1979: 50), self-identification by name is a dispreferred method of achieving recognition as opposed to the preferred recognition by 'inspection,' through means such as greetings. There is a principle which instructs callers to avoid telling their recipients what they supposedly already know. 'This principle builds in a preference to 'oversuppose and undertell.' However, as Levinson (1983: 343) has pointed out, this kind of preference for recognition without overt self-identification may be culturally specific. Schegloff was most probably depicting American norms, and it is not unreasonable to assume that the reverse is true in England, bearing in mind the positive/ negative politeness distinction between the two societies. This point is made quite eloquently by Downes (1984: 249), who contended that allowing your hearer to identify you with minimal resources also conveys the idea that the two of you are very close. This is a politeness strategy directed towards the hearer's positive face. Such an assumption, however, may limit the hearer's freedom and thus threaten his or her negative face. The possibility of this threat is removed by the negatively polite, overt self-identification.

A significant difference between Greek and English telephone practices is that Greek callers tend not to identify themselves on the telephone, neither when the intended person answers the telephone nor when they have asked for somebody else. Venardou (1988) noted that out of 110 Greek telephone calls she collected and investigated, only 29 callers identified themselves. Whereas English people find this behaviour rather impolite, it sounds annoying and perhaps offensive to Greeks to hear a friend on the telephone saying 'Hallo! This is John,' as if he has woken them up in the middle of a dream or disturbed them so much that they cannot even recognise a familiar voice. It sounds too formal, distancing, and strained for the average Greek, who tends towards intimate relationships.

In cases in which identification occurs, a Greek caller will say something like 'I'm John' rather than the more impersonal English version, 'This is John.' It is noteworthy that a frequent, spontaneous response to the caller's identification is not a reciprocal identification on the part of the answerer but a phrase. like *ne se katalava* 'yes I recognised you'. This seems to be an acknowledgement of the caller's attempt to facilitate recognition and an overt expression of familiarity. Thus, the negatively polite assumption that the caller's voice may not be recognised is followed by a positively polite assertion of recognition. In this way, the interaction is moved in the desired direction of greater intimacy.

These observations concerning identification run contrary to Godard's (1977: 211) contention that identifications are, by definition, reciprocal. According to Godard, once the caller has identified him or herself, there is a conversational obligation for the answerer to do the same because not doing so would offend the caller. But in Greece, the reverse seems to be true. Once the caller has identified him or herself, reciprocation of identification would be offensive, a kind of reproach to the caller for having made the wrong assumption that there could be a possibility of not being recognised. The normal pattern would be to reciprocate the greeting rather than the identification. Reciprocation of identification rings true in Greek but only for the cases of the very first face-to-face encounters between interactants.

In Greece, if the answerer does not recognise the voice of the caller and asks 'Who is it?' he or she will very often be teased instead of receiving a straight answer, especially if the caller is a friend who is confident of having dialled the right place and has recognised the voice of the answerer. Expressions like 'Oh! you've forgotten me' and a kind of guessing game are not uncommon, thus offering more clues to the answerer about the identity of the caller. This jocular behaviour is another clear example of positive politeness in that it relies on shared knowledge and values (Brown & Levinson, 1987: 124).

Giving too much unnecessary information flouts Grice's maxim of quantity and can be interpreted as being insulting or even rude; identifying oneself on the phone in Greece seems to be interpreted in a similar way and, consequently, it is omitted. Callers presume that the answerer will recognise them from clues such as pitch, intonation, and characteristic answering phrase. Recognition is also facilitated through an exchange of greetings (sometimes accompanied by first names) immediately after the summons-answer sequence. Thus, overt identification can be construed as superfluous information.

This aspect of conversational organisation fits neatly with the distinction drawn by Brown and Levinson (1978: 131) between linguistic optimism and linguistic pessimism in exchanges. Thus, the English insistence on overt identification could be interpreted as an example of the negatively polite linguistic pessimism, because the caller in most cases gives this extra information immediately, just in case the answerer does not recognise the caller. By contrast, lack of overt identification in Greek can be interpreted as an example of linguistic optimism, a clearly positive politeness device, directed towards the addressee's positive face, indicating common ground and solidarity. Furthermore, as Brown and Levinson (1987: 39) aptly pointed out, 'the preference for recognition without overt self-identification on the telephone can be attributed to the deleterious positive-face implications of failure of immediate recognition (like name foretting).' When, however, the caller cannot safely assume solidarity with the addressee, then the caller may identify him- or herself. In other words, if the caller is not on close or intimate terms with the answerer, then he or she cannot be reasonably expected to be able to identify the caller from the minimum resources usually provided.

Brown and Levinson (1987: 39) contended that face considerations largely determine which of the two alternatives for the second turn will be associated with the unmarked, preferred turn. This contrast in identification preferences – overt in England, covert in Greece – reflects and is a result of the different politeness orientations in the two societies and should not, therefore, be related to degrees of politeness.

Intended person not available

The situation becomes more complex when the person who answers the telephone is not the one the caller wanted to speak to. In some cultures, identification seems necessary and even the polite thing in cases where the desired person was not available. Its function seems to be two-fold: On the one hand, it enables the person who received the call to inform the intended person later on who the caller was rather than have to report vaguely 'A lady/gentleman rang you and said nothing.' On the other, it prevents purposeless exchanges in cases of the wrong number. However, Greek callers might not even say 'Hallo' but ask directly for the person they want to speak to, often without either excusing or identifying themselves. The Greek convention here seems to assign the obligation to call back to the caller rather than to the person who was wanted, which justifies the lack of identification and explains why messages are not usually left or passed on, unless important. Even in cases in which the caller self-identifies, a very common message is 'I'll call back some other time.' No matter how odd and perhaps irritating and impolite this practice may sound to those who are not conversant with it, for the Greeks themselves, who spend hours chatting with their friends on the phone, it is quite natural. The degree of politeness is never questioned by those who share the same norm.

In England, the appropriate thing to do in such situations is to identify yourself before asking for your intended addressee, who seems, at least conventionally, to be thereby enabled by the caller to avoid the encounter, and to retain his or her independence of action, since it seems that the call is interpreted as an imposition. Callers who omit this information are usually asked to provide it even if the intended addressee is standing next to the answerer. Greeks do not usually ask the caller 'Who is it?' except perhaps parents who want to check on their children's acquaintances, or where the answerer feels that the caller has reached the wrong number. Questioning a Greek caller's identity sounds inappropriate or perhaps odd, and consequently, callers confronted with it frequently answer 'Oh, it doesn't matter, I'm a friend, I'll call back later,' which is neither rude nor insulting, although it may sound so to people with different conversational expectations. It simply means 'Don't worry' or 'I don't want to trouble you to remember or 'Since the intended person is not there, I'll take the trouble to try again.' What Godard (1977: 214) said about Americans – that it would be 'difficult to ask who was calling in a home situation because the caller would then feel that he was being filtered on the basis of his identity' – seems to be applicable to Greeks, too. Furthermore, it can be interpreted as a most unwelcome sign of curiosity on the part of the answerer.

Godard (1977: 213) also found that in America the answerer can assume the role of a pure intermediary in cases where the caller does not know the answerer. In Greece, the answerer is assigned the same role by the caller in what could be seen as an attempt not to bother the person who answered the telephone for longer than absolutely necessary. And this is undoubtedly polite, if politeness is broadly construed as consideration for the other person, in this case, of his or her time. If the caller knows the person who answers the telephone, then the caller may start with a greeting and identification and might have a short chat before asking for the person he or she wants to speak to. In some cases, answerers, as soon as they realise who the call is for, will call the intended person immediately after responding to the 'Hallo,' without the caller's having to ask for him or her, without giving the caller the opportunity, as it seems, for any casual exchange. This latter practice is also found in England and can be interpreted as indicating consideration for the caller's time.

Apologies

Another difference between Greek and English telephone behaviour is that the Greeks hardly ever apologise for ringing, most probably because they rarely assume that their call is a disturbance. They will do so only if they feel that they have indeed disturbed a friend. Also, few Greeks apologise when they reach a wrong number. A Greek answerer will never apologise to a caller for having reached the wrong place. There is nothing equivalent to the formula 'Sorry, wrong number.' If something relevant is said, it will be a phrase like *pirate láθos* 'You've dialled the wrong number' or *kanete láθos* 'You are making a mistake'. Generally speaking, Greeks tend to apologise less frequently than the English, which is not surprising if we bear in mind that to apologise is a negative politeness device.

Summary

Lack of both identification and apologies may be considered to be downright impolite by people whose expectations concerning verbal telephone behaviour are different. But it is not impolite if it conforms to the norms of telephone interaction in that particular society. No verbal or nonverbal behaviour can be seen as inherently polite or impolite, especially crossculturally. It can be perceived by an outsider as rude or formal, and so forth, yet for the insider this same behaviour may constitute a natural reaction and will go unnoticed. Casual conversation is part of our daily social life and reflects cultural knowledge which is largely subconscious. We do not usually stop to think how we are going to respond when the telephone rings or how we are going to initiate the exchange when we ring others. Conversational openings, however, are not meaningless. They influence the rest of the exchange and they are an integral part of it. From the repository of possible patterns, societies select and ritualise those conversational patterns which are felt to serve better their own sociocultural needs and values. This, of course, does not mean that societies are uniform in their choices. There are subcultural differences which create different expectations between interlocutors and can consequently lead to misjudgements even within the same culture.

Telephone Usage

So far, I have discussed the verbal variability in telephone call behaviour between the Greek and the English societies, and I have argued that the differences observed are related to culturally specific patterns of interaction. However, differences between the two societies can also be traced on a different but related level – that of the attitudes attached to telephone usage. The following discussion sheds even more light on the differences between Greek and English behaviours and explains certain misunderstandings.

Upon arriving in England, I was initially shocked and puzzled by the behaviour of English friends who, although amiable and hospitable to me by offering open invitations to visit them at any time, would never ring me to find out how I was or simply have a chat on the phone. I was perplexed because I could not understand their behaviour, and I naively tended to attribute insincerity to their invitations. I was relieved when I read the article by Godard (1977), because my perplexity was dispelled. It dawned on me that although I shared the linguistic code to a certain extent, I did not equally share the sociocultural conventions of the community, and consequently, my intense feelings were the result of a misinterpretation of what were clearly different attitudes to telephone usage in the two cultures. I was made aware that there are rules which govern not only verbal telephone behaviour but also telephone usage in general, and that these, too, differ from society to society. These rules are not explicitly taught in the way in which certain formulas such as greetings and thanks are drilled into everybody at a very early age, not even in the casual way that verbal telephone behaviour is explained. But they are obviously learnt through observation and become internalised.

Godard ascribed the differences in telephone behaviour she observed between French and Americans to the specificity of certain features of the telephonic interaction due to its more conspicuous authoritative nature. This leads to different assumptions about the extent of the disturbance that will be caused by the call in different cultures – greater in France, lesser in the United States. It is undeniable that there are certain specific features a telephone interaction does not share with any other form of interaction, yet these do not seem to be an adequate explanation for the cross-cultural differences observed. What all forms of interaction undoubtedly share are culturally specific rules which determine appropriate behaviour both in telephone and face-to-face interactions. Thus, although the degree of disturbance and imposition caused by the call will be weighed differently in different cultures, this cannot be seen as unrelated to assessments concerning the weightiness of impositions in general in the specific culture, or in other words, the kinds and the extent to which particular acts constitute threats to the interlocutors' faces.

Godard (1977: 215), following Schegloff's observation that the telephone ring is a summons which requires a response, stressed the authoritative character of the ring, since as a summons it entails the conversational obligation on the addressee to respond. For Godard, this authoritative aspect becomes more conspicuous in the case of telephone ringing because of the missing informational resources that are available to face-to-face interlocutors who have access to certain knowledge concerning the addressee's availability. The ring, however, seems to be the least authoritative summons because you can ignore it and at much less social cost. The only legitimate inference that can be drawn from the lack of a response is that nobody is in. It is interesting to note here that in research conducted by Androulakis and Ionnatou-Yannatou (1988), out of 50 Greek informants who were asked what they would suppose when they rang a friend and received no answer, 47 responded that they would assume that nobody was in. Such an inference, however, can be neither strong nor deleterious to the social integrity of the intended addressee who has not violated any rules by being out.

Godard (1977: 218) noted that a major difference concerning telephone calls is that their 'potential disturbance does not seem to weigh as heavily in the United States as in France against the necessity or the social obligation of the call.' This difference between the two countries seems to reflect clearly the essense underlying the negative politeness of non-imposition and the positive politeness of closeness. In this respect, the American concept of telephone usage appears to be closer to that of the Greeks. The Greek caller does not assume that the call will disturb anyone, as long as he or she sticks to culturally acceptable hours for telephone calls, but rather it will indicate concern and interest. To call friends and relatives is a social need and an obligation which has to be obeyed by the members of the Greek community, because neclative judgements and sanctions will be imposed for nonconformity. The more-or-less obligatory telephone contact to simply exchange news or chat among friends (sometimes for a very long time to the dismay of all those who might be trying to get in touch in the meantime!), especially in big cities, seems to have replaced the casual, unexpected visits people used to pay in the past. A telephone call seems to be more personal and thus preferred to sending letters or cards on many social occasions. An interesting bit of evidence for this social function of telephone usage in Greece is that it is extremely difficult to ring somebody on his or her nameday (namedays rather than birthdays are usually celebrated in Greece) to wish them 'Many happy returns,' especially if they have a very common name, because hundreds of other people are doing the same thing, and the lines get jammed.

There is another related aspect concerning telephone service in which Greeks appear to behave more like the Americans. Godard (1977: 218) observed that 'the use of the phone to exchange news with friends or enjoy a good chat seems to be more common here [America]... Social calls, for instance, are expected and [are] indeed obligatory among friends and relatives who rarely see one another.' I would like to add that in Greece, such calls are customary even among friends and relatives who see each other quite frequently. It is worth noting here that a rough Greek equivalent to the English farewell formula 'See you is a *tilefoniθume'We'll ring* each other'. Godard (*op. cit.*) added that 'failure to make such calls is seen as lack of interest.' Personal testimonies, though not offered as evidence, do serve to illustrate such feelings. Some of my Greek informants commented on the frequent complaints and reprimands they receive from relatives who perceive the scarcity of telephone calls to them as an indication of inconsideration, aloofness, and snobbery.

Greeks, being from a positive politeness society, value intimacy as an indication of their closeness with others. 'The principal factors predisposing to intimacy seem to be shared values...and frequent contact. Among the behavioral manifestations of intimacy, a relatively complete and honest self disclosure is important' (Brown & Ford, 1964: 236). The Greeks are likely to see their close friends every day and to discuss many personal issues with them (Vassiliou, Triandis, Vassiliou, & Macguire 1972: 96). As Mackridge (1985) pointed out, few Greeks spend time on their own. The majority seem to spend more time with friends and relatives discussing various subjects. They eagerly express their views and opinions even to complete strangers on buses, and so on. Generally speaking, talkativeness and effusiveness are not only tolerated but also highly desirable and sometimes compulsory components of interaction among Greeks. 'The advent of the telephone, radio, and television in this century has only served to consolidate the oral basis of the culture' (Mackridge, 1985: 338).

Observations, then, such as the ones given here contribute to an understanding of the function served by the telephone service for Greeks and reveal the way in which it differs from that served for the English, who are considered to be a 'literate' culture.[9] The telephone service in Greece simply enhances opportunities to talk more with friends, especially now that long distances in big cities are prohibitive to daily personal contact. This accounts for the informality (no number, no identification, no apologies, etc.) with which the Greeks respond over the telephone. Their behaviour in these respects appears to be closer to that of Americans as presented by Godard. This similarity can be interpreted as being due to belonging to societies with a more positive politeness orientation.

By contrast, the English, exhibiting a more negative politeness orientation, value distance as an indication of their unwillingness to impose on others. This distance, with its derivative formality, is reflected in the forms with which they respond over the telephone (almost obligatory identification, recitation of numbers, apologies, etc.). In general, they appear to reserve its use for occasions when there is something to be communicated rather than just to make social contact. This seems to explain why messages are usually left to be passed on and also why a lot of everyday dealings with offices and shops are handled over the phone. Thus, the function served by the telephone is primarily transactional.

Associating telephone expense and frequency of use, though a particularly popular explanation for differences, contradicts research findings which relate decrease in usage with increase in income levels (Fielding & Hartley, 1987: 113). Although it is true that the telephone service may be comparatively cheaper in Greece than in England, it should not be assumed that this is the main reason why social calls are rather rare in England. The different attitudes towards telephone usage that I have noted lead to the conclusion that different values are attached to it. In general, the telephone is a special conduit for communication, a means for keeping in touch, whether that is conducting business or relationships. In England, people appear to see it more as an instrument to be used in order to carry on business affairs, which also explains a certain formality in the language used. By contrast, in Greece the function is primarily interactional, with the telephone seen as a personal device which enables people to communicate more frequently and easily, rather than a way merely to manage their business.

This might be an explanation why Greeks do not usually rely on the telephone to sort out dealings with offices, stores, and so forth. People who have taken the trouble to go in person will usually take precedence over the unknown person who decided to use the telephone instead. Business information given on the telephone is usually abrupt and short or even nonexistent. A common answer in such cases is 'I can't help you over the telephone. You'll have to come in person,' and sometimes before having the opportunity to say another word or even 'Good-bye' you are left with the receiver in your hand and a dead line. If, however, the caller happens to be a friend or even an acquaintance of the clerk or assistant, then he or she will more often than not take precedence, to the dismay of all those people who might have been queueing for some time. The scarcity of service offered over the telephone in Greece can be quite understandably interpreted as impoliteness by people whose expectations require such a use, whereas people who rarely even consider ringing instead of visiting do not have such feelings.

Conclusion

In this article, I have demonstrated the variability observed in telephone call behaviour between the Greeks and the English. First, differences on the verbal level, and second, differences concerning the attitudes towards telephone usage in general were examined in the light of Brown and Levinson's interaction model, and it was shown that they all reflect different cultural norms.

It has been suggested that explanations for both types of differences must lie beyond practical problems (such as problematic telecommunication service, nuisance calls, etc.), which are rather similar in both countries. It seems that it is the sociocultural differences between the two communities which are responsible for the variable telephone behaviours and for the subsequent misunderstandings and misinterpretations by members of the other culture which inevitably reflect in the politeness of the individuals and their societies as a whole.

In the light of the account presented earlier of the different ways in which people can express their politeness, the differences delineated in telephone usage between Greeks and English fall into place. They are not independent of the cultural system which informs them and, consequently, should not be seen simply as related to the specific speech event. The preferences adopted in each culture are simply different but necessary for the successful management of interpersonal communication in each particular society.

I am not implying here that there are no subcultural or even individual differences in this behaviour. Of course, there are. For instance, it has been reported that effusive, socially active people will make greater use of the telephone. In other words, more face-to-face contacts are associated with more telephone calls. On the other hand, regularities and consistent patterns can also be traced, because otherwise communication, in general, would present an impossible puzzle. Individuals are unique and the shared knowledge which underlies the patterns of communication is by no means fixed in the way grammatical rules are. But this shared knowledge is systematically related to overall cultural patterns which restrict each individual's freedom.

In conclusion, then, the differences, in both telephone usage and in the linguistic code associated with it, which have been outlined are manifestations of different norms governing interpersonal contacts, which are culturally specific. They reflect what Gumperz (1982: 182) called cultural logic. Consequently, the behaviour of Greek callers can be interpreted as impolite by native English speakers because their judgements will be based on their norms and expectations. Similarly, the English callers' behaviour can be interpreted as distancing, odd, and unnecessarily formal by Greeks because they will judge in terms of their norms. The objective study of the interactional patterns will contribute to the sensitisation that preferred types of both verbal and nonverbal behaviour may be different because they result from deeply ingrained differences in the two cultural systems, but that they are equally natural, reasonable, and polite.

This study is by no means exhaustive. The telephone, although a relatively recent invention, has managed to penetrate our daily lives and to become an essential medium of human contact. In spite of this, the study of its use has not received the attention it merits by scholars, probably because it has been taken very much for granted and, consequently, its complexity has been underestimated. As has already been mentioned, Schegloff (1979: 24-25) overemphasized the similarities between telephone and other talk people conduct in his attempt to investigate the organisation of conversational interaction. It seems, however, that further research is needed on the specific characteristics unique to telephone interaction. Their study will also undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of conversational interaction in general. For instance, even the superficial observation that participants cannot see each other through the telephone may lead one to wonder what happens with the absence of all the paralinguistic cues that are present in face-to-face encounters. Is it that they are not as necessary for the successful management of interpersonal communication as it has often been suggested, or that other features are used in their place? Or, conversely, does this lack of paralinguistic cues imply that telephone interaction is less successful than or secondary to face-to-face contact? Questions such as these should be answered if we want to reach a more thorough understanding of the nature of human communication, in general, both interculturally and intraculturally.

Notes

1. Brown and Yule (1983: 1) have used the terms transactional to refer to the function of language to convey information and interactional to refer to the function of language to establish and maintain social relationships. These terms correspond with Lyons's (1977: 50) descriptive and *social-expressive* functions of language, respectively.
2. It should be noted here that note- and letter-writing, as a means of communication, has never developed in Greece as it has in England. Thus, in many cases in which the English will send a note or a letter to exchange news or information, the Greeks will most probably use the telephone. This is in accord with the oral orientation of Greek society (see note g).
3. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all those informants who, with great interest and commitment, offered me their insightful suggestions and comments. Some of my informants tried to find the underlying reasons for specific points of behaviour. For instance, the scarcity of social telephone calls in England was attributed to the considerable expense of the telephone service. It is interesting to note here that one of my English respondents, after having read the list depicting English telephone behaviour, confessed that he consciously stopped answering his telephone by the usual reciting of his telephone number because he agreed that it entailed a certain degree of formality, which he wanted to avoid.
   I also thank all those friends, colleagues, and students who helped me collect my data and stimulated various insights by conversing with me on the issue under consideration. I also record my very special thanks to Peter Trudgill, Jean Hannah, and Robert F. Halls, who generously gave me of their time and provided detailed and valuable suggestions on draft versions of this article. My gratitude is also extended to Dell Hymes for his insightful comments and encouragement, as well as to the anonymous reader.
4. In an extensive study of the realisation patterns of requests in Greek and in English, it has been shown that the preferred request constructions in Greek are evidence of the positive politeness orientation of Greek society, whereas those preferred in English are evidence of the negative politeness orientation of English society (Sifianou, 1987). There is also independent evidence that Greek society is indeed more oriented towards positive politeness than English society (Marmaridou, 1987).

5. Some of these alternatives may sound like commands to non native ears in the same way that imperative requests do. However, they do not sound like this to accustomed native ears. Besides the intonation and tone of voice used, which are not used with a command, these words have been conventionalised in the language as telephone responses and have thus lost their original force.
6. The only exceptions I was able to trace were cases in which a member of the service staff answered the phone with something like 'Residence of Shipowner Ioannou.'
7. The kind of misinterpretations and misjudgements that can arise by such differences in conventions is presented by Tannen (1984), who quoted Kitroeff's (1977) article of instances of Greek telephone behaviour. Kitroeff observed that 'in most countries, when people answer the telephone, they either start off with a cheery 'hello', or with their phone number or the name of their firm. In this country [Greece], one is usually met with a clipped *Embros!* ('Forward!' or 'Go ahead!') or with a guarded *Nai?* or *Malista?* ('Yes'),' and he continued in a similar manner. Tannen (1984: 12) quite rightly pointed out that Kitroeff assumed that his concept and strategies of politeness were universal, in spite of the fact that he had lived in Greece for twenty-five years. Consequently, since his expectations of polite behaviour were not met, the implication is clear. Politeness is inherent in the common telephone responses in most countries except Greece. The importance that expectations play in our judgements of others' telephone practices, especially in cross-cultural communication, is vividly presented by Hannah (1987: 41). 'Since the English are often thought of as polite and quaint, you might expect them to use an interesting greeting when answering the phone. Instead, they simply recite their telephone number, without even saying 'Hello'. If you do answer the phone with a greeting, the caller will often ask 'is that...' and recite the number.'
8. It is worth noting here that the imposition entailed by the request is mitigated by a number of diminutives which cannot be rendered in English and are examples of positive politeness. Other factors indicated that this call was not a nuisance call but a clear case of a wrong number.
9. For a discussion of the linguistic manifestations of the oral/literate continuum, see Tannen (1980). The use of the terms *orality* and *literacy* has been considered inadequate and perhaps misleading. For Tannen (1985), the issue should not be discussed in terms of orality and literacy, but in terms of relative focus on interpersonal involvement.

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