Reflections on language-centred approaches to Greek "society" and "culture"

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Introduction

The enquiry into the relationship between language and culture has been the subject of intense theorizing from a number of perspectives, in particular since the first half of the twentieth century. (This is when several leading anthropologists made language a central theoretical concern in their study of various communities, particularly those of the fast-disappearing native American languages, e.g. Boas 1911, Malinowski 1922, Mead 1939.) For a long time, the concern was centred on the extent to which a language can be viewed as a structure which orders and defines social reality, constituting its speakers as social beings and thus mapping the "limits of their world", to echo Wittgenstein (1958). In this respect, the question was if and how speakers can escape the "prison-house of language", in Jameson's famous terms (1972); in other words, if they can contest the logic or conceptual categories of the experienced community language. This view, which accords primacy to language structure over individual agency, goes back to the influential if much debated Sapir- (1921) Whorf (1956) hypothesis, according to which the language of each community dictates a set of categories through which speakers make sense of and are bound to their socio-cultural reality. Departing from this rather deterministic view and under the influence of paradigm shifts within the social sciences (e.g. post-structuralism), socially minded linguistics (e.g. socio-linguistics, anthropo-

logical linguistics, discourse analysis) has been increasingly shifting towards a realization that the relationship between language and culture is not a straightforward one but of a subtle kind and quite complex.

Even if accepted as complex, there are certain aspects of this complexity that have been disentangled and that there is broad agreement on:

(a) The relationship between language and culture is widely considered as dialectic, in that language is not a static reflection of society and culture, but dynamically invokes and even *constructs* them. In other words, language is not simply seen as a medium for the representation of a language-independent reality but as a ubiquitous resource for (re)constructing social reality (Wetherell 1991: 391-406). In this respect, it can occasionally play a vital role in effecting social and cultural change.

(b) The exploration of language as a point of entry into culture-specificity mainly attends to language in use in specific environments. In this way, the analysis of the particular concrete context where a language is used takes precedence over the study of linguistic structure. By extension, the sort of language that is prioritized in the analysis is that which occurs in ordinary communicative encounters, i.e. in talk or conversation (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004: 22-3).

(c) In this dialectic relationship between language and culture, there seems to be less convergence on the definitions and views of culture. At the risk of over-simplifying matters, two rather opposing views of culture have fed into socio-linguistic research: (i) Culture as a unifying, homogeneous, static and a priori defined set of values, beliefs and behaviours that are invoked in communication. As I will argue below, this has been the dominant paradigm in studies of Modern Greek (henceforth MG) language, society and culture. (ii) Culture as fluid, heterogeneous, under-patterned, and emergent through interactions. This is frequently referred to as the anti-essentialist view of culture and, although not exclusive to it, it has been associated

with post-structuralist thinking (for discussions, see Duranti 1997: 23-50, Rampton 1999).

With the above as a backdrop for the discussion which is to follow, I will first outline what I see as the common denominators in studies of the relationship between MG language and culture. More specifically, I will argue that (socio)linguistic research has brought to the fore the significance of certain "communication styles" in Greek that either provide further evidence for, or are interpreted in the light of, a set of "core cultural values". I will subsequently assess the impact of such studies and findings, arguing that they have been instrumental in placing the Greek case in the framework of ethnography of communication (e.g. Hymes 1974), which celebrates cultural difference and diversity, and of multiculturalism, which shies away from evaluative statements of cultural superiority and uniqueness. At the same time, I will critically discuss their weaknesses, gaps and methodological misconceptions. I will suggest that an antidote to the essentialist view of language and culture that they have largely been based on can be offered by a "discourse perspective". I will outline the main assumptions and methodological principles of such a perspective, proposing it as a way forward for studies of MG language and culture which set out to provide accounts that are nuanced, empirically grounded, and sensitive to local sense-making.

Modern Greek language and culture: communication styles and cultural values

Despite any methodological and analytical differences, studies of MG language and culture can be brought together on the basis of having invariably invoked a set of social and cultural values as central to social and communication encounters in Greece. These values have been established as markers of the ethos of the culture affecting a variety of social actions, and have subsequently served as a form of a wider contextualization for sociolinguistic work in Greek. In this way, sociolinguistics in MG has not actively engaged in social and cultural theory

except for either using it as a post-analytical, interpretative frame of reference or providing further evidence for it through the results of empirical language-centred work.

The aforementioned core values have largely emerged from social psychological and cultural studies, some of which go back to the 1970s (e.g. Hofstede 1980, Triandis 1990, Triandis and Vassiliou 1972), and rural anthropological studies (e.g. Herzfeld 1985). At the time, dichotomous views of cultural differences were quite influential in the social sciences and the humanities alike; a specific distinction that has since resonated across psychology, sociology and anthropology is that between individualist (i.e. independent) and collectivist (i.e. interdependent) cultures (e.g. Marcus and Kitayama 1991). As we shall see, this dichotomy has been instrumental in work on MG language and culture.

The core cultural values mentioned above are as follows:

(a) *Sociability*: here, emphasis is placed on a range of values that have the effect of creating and reaffirming intimacy, close-knit relationships, and in-group membership (see Triandis and Vassiliou 1972, Marcus and Kitayama 1991). Coterminous with this notion of sociability and sometimes used interchangeably in the literature are the concepts of *solidarity* and *involvement* or *engagement* (Hirschon 2001, Tannen 1989).

(b) *Autonomy* (i.e. *independence, freedom*): these may seem contradictory to (a) above, as they inevitably compromise, or are compromised by, the necessity for social engagement; but it is notable that: (i) these values have been invoked less than those in (a) within sociolinguistics, and (ii) when they have been appealed to, it has been stressed that they should not be confused with the common meanings of individuality developed in the West; instead, they are to be viewed as central to a specifically Greek construction of self and personhood. This does not involve a reluctance to engage with other people and express solidarity, as in the case of Western individuality. It is rather marked by a pervasive concern with contesting hierarchy and defying authority, that is, being less accepting of

power differentials and not conceding rank (cf. Hirschon 2001: 22, Hofstede 1980).

Evidence for the cultural salience of the above values comes from the frequency, roles, and functions of certain linguistic choices (e.g. features, devices) attested to by relevant studies. These choices, found to be at the heart of communication practices in contemporary Greece, can be described as communication styles or strategies. The term "style" is used here in the rather broad sense of "the language habits shared by a group of people at one time" (Crystal and Davy 1969: 10); the term "strategies" simply invokes the notions of individual agency and purposeful creativity involved in language use. Both of these formulations point to the existence of a systematic co-patterning between elements of language form, content, functions and context (i.e. environment of use), which currently constitutes one of the main assumptions in linguistic studies of communication (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004: 28).

Substantial linguistic evidence for the culture-specificity of communication styles or strategies characterizing a variety of social actions and encounters in Greek comes from the systematic study of politeness. This is no accident: first, politeness happens to be one of the most researched areas of inter-cultural communication, on the assumption that this is where cross-cultural misunderstandings frequently occur and cultural differences become visible. Secondly, politeness within socially minded linguistics has long been defined as comprising a universally applicable set of requirements and needs (e.g. Leech 1983). From this point of view, it lends itself well to a study of the relation between language and culture that is based on the following thesis: language-producers across cultures are presented with the same set of requirements as to the way to use language in a given situation. Cross-cultural differences concern the strategies employed to attain this universally applicable set of requirements. At the level of linguistic choices, politeness is normally explored with reference to speech acts, that is, acts of speaking by which we do not just say things but also perform

actions (Austin 1962). Cross-cultural differences in the uttering ("realization") of certain speech acts (e.g. requests, apologies, compliments) have been the object of numerous studies (e.g. most notably Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989) that have attested to their culture-specificity in various communities worldwide and at various levels (e.g. definition, cultural salience, frequency and environment(s) of use, linguistic forms of expression, etc.).

Politeness studies across cultures have mostly been based on an influential model by Brown and Levinson (1987), which this paper cannot do full justice to or examine in detail. What is notable for our purposes is the distinction that Brown and Levinson posed, in their now classic monograph, between positive and negative politeness strategies. Working with the concept of face (Goffman 1967), which can be crudely defined as a speaker's public self-image, Brown and Levinson argued that politeness strategies attend to either the positive aspect of face, i.e. the desire to be liked, appreciated, approved of, and feel part of a group, or the negative aspect of face, i.e. our wish that our actions are unimpeded by others and that our territory is not intruded upon, our need for independence and privacy (1987: 61). As may be obvious already, positive face can easily be mapped onto the values of involvement and sociability that have been postulated as salient in Greek culture. It may then not be surprising that the results of numerous politeness studies in Greek, most notably those by Sifianou (e.g. 1992; see also papers in Bayraktaroglu and Sifianou 2001), have suggested a cultural preference for the use of positive politeness strategies. To put it differently, polite conduct in Greek more often than not draws on involvement and solidarity-building, which claims common ground and in-group membership, as opposed to being associated with formality, distancing, and evasiveness. The above explains a wide range of linguistic choices for the utter- ance of speech acts such as requests in everyday interactions: e.g. the frequency of pure imperatives and/or diminutives and other instances of affectionate language; the avoidance of

distancing modality (e.g. the equivalent of would/might, which seem to abound in English), etc. In general, the communication style of positive politeness in Greek can be summed up as follows:

Positive politeness
Immediate
Personal
Implicit
Direct
Informal
Claiming common ground

In the light of the above, it becomes apparent that the linguistic study of politeness in Greek has been instrumental in documenting the importance of sociability values in Greek culture, as discussed above. (In her influential studies, Sifianou frequently appeals to them, citing the work of Triandis [1990] and Triandis and Vassiliou [1972].)

Another strand of research that has provided evidence for these values comprises studies of text-types (or genres) in Greek. Text-typological research is invariably interested in textual distinctions that revolve around speaking and writing and/or around rhetorical stances, such as telling a story, arguing, describing, etc. (Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004: 40ff.). In turn, such distinctions become operational by means of their systematic co-patterning with textual features and styles that are prototypically associated with the respective poles of a distinction (e.g. speaking–writing). In this respect, speaking and spoken texts have been found to be prototypically more immediate, animated, dramatized, implicit in expression, participatory, local and context-bound than written texts. On the other hand, writing and practices associated with written language have been argued to be abstract and distinct from immediate activity, so as to facilitate norms of self-reflexive engagement (for a detailed discussion of relevant studies, see

Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 2004: 33-9). Similarly, the narra-
tive mode (e.g. storytelling) trades on the teller's and the
audience's emotional and experiential engagement with the
events narrated and, as such, it is prototypically more
associated with processes of subjectivity. In contrast, non-
narrative (e.g. expository) texts have been argued to draw more
on processes of reasoning, objectivity, and critical argument-
ation (ibid.: 40-55; see also Georgakopoulou and Goutsos
2000).

In the case of Greek, studies not just within linguistics, but
also in cultural and literary studies, have stressed the orality bias
of contemporary Greek society which is manifested not only in
the importance of oral modes of communication, but also in
the preponderance of features typically associated with oral
texts in written text-types, ranging from novels to essays
(Mackridge 1985 and 1992, Tannen 1989, Tziovas 1989).
Typically oral – in the sense of face-to-face, conversational –
features have also been found to abound in the new media, e.g.
computer-mediated communication (Georgakopoulou 2001a).
The main attributes of this orality-based or -biased style are
summed up below, where the overlaps with the features of
positive politeness above are immediately evident:

Orality-b(i)ased style
Immediate
Personal
Implicit
Animated/Dramatic
Informal
Context-bound

A style that is frequently presented as an exponent of the
orality-based style is the so-called "high involvement style"
occurring in conversational exchanges and characterized by in-
creased frequency of interruptions, speakers' overlapping con-
tributions, animated paralanguage (e.g. gestures, loud voice),

etc. This style was noted by Deborah Tannen in American-Jewish conversations (1984) and its occurrence was (re)-affirmed in her work on Greek conversations (1989). A specific feature of this style is the propensity for confrontation and dispute that does not threaten social relationships. This tendency for so called "sociable disagreements" (Schiffrin 1984) has been found to be prevalent in conversations amongst intimates in Greek (Tannen and Kakava 1992). Despite having the surface characteristics of a confrontation, a sociable disagreement remains non-serious. In other words, participants engage in it for its own sake, for the pleasure afforded by the activity itself, rather than in order to resolve the issues that were the ostensible subject matter of disagreement. In terms of their discourse features, sociable disagreements present vulnerable argumentative frames (i.e. easily exited or re-keyed as non-serious) and co-operativeness (Schiffrin 1984). A case in point in Greek is the affectionate use of first names in diminutive form following the particle "ρε" (Tannen and Kakava 1992).

One of the main rhetorical strategies for argumentation in Greek is that of telling (personal experience) stories frequently put forth as personal analogies (Tannen and Kakava 1992). This is closely related to the special place of storytelling as a rhetorical mode in a wide variety of settings in Greece, as attested by numerous studies (Georgakopoulou 1997, Herzfeld 1989, Kostouli 1992, Tannen 1983). The preference of Greek interactants to base their evidence for the views expressed on hearsay and the anecdotal, experiential knowledge conveyed through stories, as opposed to more abstract, deductive processes of reasoning, can be described as a "narrative bias" (see Georgakopoulou and Goutsos 1999, 2000). Furthermore, this narrative bias tends to be realized by means of performed (i.e. animated, dramatized) storytellings, which let the events speak for themselves, imply a story's point and tellability rather than explicitly stating it (Georgakopoulou 1997). In

sum, the main exponents of this narrative-based or -biased style are as follows:

Narrative-b(i)ased style
Personal
Experiential
Anecdotal evidence (i.e. hearsay) for argumentation

Performed narrative style
  Implicit
  Animated/Dramatic

As we can see above, the narrative-biased style is highly compatible with the orality-biased style, not least because the tendency for dramatization and animation cuts across both of them. In more general terms, this is revealing of an emphasis on the teller's verbal artistry and communicative skill and of attention to linguistic form. In turn, this is relatable to findings about the prevalence of language play and "γλωσσοπλασία" in Greek communication (e.g. Hirschon 1992).

Discussion
The above exposition has presented certain interrelated cultural values and communication styles in MG: the values of soci-ability, engagement and solidarity as well as those of autonomy and freedom (in the sense of resistance to normative meanings), independently postulated as being at the core of cultural processes in Greece, have been corroborated as well as being employed as interpretative grids for certain communi-cation styles, found by linguistic studies to be at the core of communication practices in MG. These styles are centred on language choices that are immediate and implicit on the one hand and serve as devices for dramatization and performance on the other.

It is worth examining here the sort of culture that is emerging on the basis of those communication styles and, by

extension, the kinds of cultural affiliations that Greece turns out to have with other communities, from the point of view of culture specificity as attested in language use: to put it somewhat crudely, the linguist's answer to the perennial question of whether Greece is in the East or the West or somewhere in the middle seems to be that Greece is East, or at least that it is not West. This bold statement is based on the fact that non-western cultures, since the critical gaze of Malinowski and other anthropologists turned on to their practices at the beginning of the twentieth century, have been invariably found to emphasize sociability values, which are, in turn, intimately linked with an interdependent, in-group oriented and antipersonalist construction of self (Marcus and Kitayama 1991). Similarly, communicative styles of performance and dramatization and ritualized, rhythmic practices have been found to characterize either "exotic" (American Indian) cultures (Hymes 1981) or ethnic, cultural and social minorities within Western states such as Black-African-Americans, working classes in the U.S.A., etc. (e.g. Gee 1985, Michaels 1981). Finally, positively polite strategies have been reported to be dominant in the Mediterranean cultures, China, Japan, and certain countries of Asia (e.g. Jordan) and Africa (e.g. Nigeria), at least those from which we have empirical linguistic studies (e.g. Eelen 1999, Gu 1990, Matsumoto 1988).

Studies of cultural and social groups which fall into the interdependent end of the continuum of cultural differences have succeeded in proving the complexity and intellectual potency that can in fact be found in their rituals, and furthermore that there are no superior languages or cultures. They have thus been instrumental in moving away from the view of cultural diversity as deficit, which subscribed to notions of high and low culture, to that of cultural diversity as difference, which subscribes to the notion of multiculturalism and relativism (Harris and Rampton 2003: 7-8). In the case of Greek in particular, it is arguable that one of the spin-offs of this kind of research is that it has largely legitimated "low culture", rural

Greece, and "spoken/oral, non-literary" Greek as an object of inquiry (cf. Hess 2003). At the same time, it has served as an antidote to one of the most dominant discourses of cultural studies in Greece, that of exceptionalism, which is in itself closely connected with the narrative of continuity (see Jusdanis 1997, Lambropoulos 1997): instead of stressing the uniqueness and cultural superiority of Greece, it has placed it in the comparative frameworks of ethnography of communication and multiculturalism.

Nonetheless, however noble the aims of such research, one common pitfall lies in its point of departure. This is the premise that there exists a set of norms of a dominant culture and language, in this case "the Western world", that can be more or less explicitly used as a reference point and yardstick for whatever departs from it. To put it differently, the underlying assumption seems to be that whatever is not the norm needs to be affirmed and sanctioned. A subsequent danger here is that the object of inquiry is exoticized and through that exoticization, its marginal status is in the end (re)affirmed (a similar critique has been voiced in relation to research on language and gender, e.g. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999). This has been frequently noted with concern in relation to (earlier) ethnographic studies of Greece: Tziovas (2001), for instance, has recently linked the ethnographic idealization of the exotic land of Zorba the Greek with the ambivalent position that MG culture has historically occupied in Western scholarship; this is to be found in crude binary oppositions between European Hellenism and Greek Hellenism, the Hellenic and the Romaic, European rationalism and oriental indiscipline, presented as clear-cut, which permeate studies of MG history and culture.

Taking those macro-accounts of dualistic stereotypes and dichotomies for granted in linguistic research has two notable methodological repercussions: not only are linguistic differences often exaggerated to fit them, but also certain conceptual links are made a priori between linguistic meanings and social

relations of solidarity or dominance, which may then interfere with the findings or interpretation of empirical research (cf. Eelen 1999, Rampton 1999), creating a circularity of accounts. For example, an accepted cultural macro-account of sociability and involvement inevitably makes the linguistic displays of power and conflict incompatible with its framework unless they are in effect construed as sociable behaviour. As my study on disagreements in the conversations of an all-female group of Greek adolescents showed (Georgakopoulou 2001b), treating disagreements as sociable and linking them with the cultural values of engagement and solidarity simply reifies accounts and naturalizes data. Without attempting to go into detail here, it suffices to mention that the study demonstrated that the following parameters bear on the linguistic forms and discourse functions of disagreement in the data: (a) the participants' shared interactional history and the implicitness that this history affords; (b) the participants' larger social roles and identities, such as internal hierarchical divisions amongst them that are in turn reflected in local discourse roles: e.g. who has a leading role in what, who argues more, complies more, etc.; (c) the activity-type in which disagreements mostly occur (in this case, talk about the future), which defines disagreements as a process of positing, negotiating and revising alternative versions of reality for the events to take place.

Another closely related issue that has been intensely debated in anthropology (see Duranti 1997) involves the degree to which concepts such as involvement, politeness, engagement, sociability, etc., which have so often accompanied descriptions of MG culture and communication are consistent with, make sense of, and have any sort of reality for the participants themselves and their perspective. For instance, it is not always clear – and sometimes even doubtful – whether the interactants that produced X data would, when so asked, also qualify those data in terms of sociability, positive politeness, etc. (Eelen 1999; cf. Mackridge 1992: 118-19). In most cases, it is fair to say that these concepts are in fact analytical,

that is, *etic*, as opposed to indigenous or *emic* and, furthermore, they frequently present an ethnocentric bias. That said, certain indigenous concepts have been flagged up for MG, such as φιλότιμο, παρέα, κέφι, etc., but (a) there has not been a systematic attempt to bring them together with the existing analytical concepts, and (b) they have not emerged from language-focused analysis of interactional data; they have largely occurred in ethnographers' interviews with informants. They are thus reports of cultural meanings in language use as opposed to actual language use.

On a different note, seductive as they may be, structural characterizations of the relations between language and culture such as the ones we have seen in the case of Greek seem to be over-normative and highly artificial impositions upon complex histories. They seem to be based on an essentialist idealization of one homogeneous Greek culture and do not allow a lot of room for more ambiguous, often contradictory linguistic practices differing among Greeks with different identity aspects in different contexts (cf. Tziovas 2001).

The idea that the time is ripe for socio-cultural studies of Greece, be they language-focused or not, to move away from idealizations and embrace document hybridity and dialogue has, in recent years, frequently been put forward as a plea within Greek studies (e.g. Jusdanis 1997, Tziovas 2001). What exactly is the way forward is less well recognized and agreed upon. Below, I will suggest an approach that draws on (situated) discourse analysis and (interactional) sociolinguistics as an avenue for future research on MG language, society and culture. Both discourse analysis and sociolinguistics are fast-growing areas and encompass a wide range of models, some more con-textualized than others. The terms in parentheses above, i.e. situated and interactional, are largely part of an internal dialogue within socially minded linguistics and aimed at high-lighting emphasis on contextualized accounts of language use in communication encounters.

Concluding remarks: Towards a discourse perspective

An alternative focus of research on the relations between language, society and culture in Greece would involve shifting emphasis from the macro- to the micro-: in other words, moving from the large and all-encompassing notions of society and culture that have monopolized research so far to "micro-cultures", that is, shrunk down, more manageable in size, communities of people who, through regular interaction and participation in an activity system, share linguistic and social practice norms as well as understandings of them. A fine-tuned concept that is currently gaining ground within socio-linguistics is that of community of practice (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1999, Lave and Wenger 1991): the notion is symptomatic of a dramatic recasting of "culture", "community" and the like from their traditional definitions as fixed and static collectivities to symbolic and even imagined constructions that are based on co-participation in specific activities (Rampton 1999). This pluralization of the notions of society and culture allows for members' participation in overlapping and intersecting communities.

A micro-focus at the level of analysis recommends attention to the particularities and exigencies of specific data in specific contexts, so that linguistic forms are by no means mapped with interactional functions or social meanings (be they sociability, politeness, solidarity) on a one-to-one basis and irrespective of local contexts.

This alternative focus of research is frequently described in the literature as a discourse turn or perspective (cf. Harris and Rampton 2003: 7ff.) and is currently part of a wide shift in the humanities and social sciences, particularly with respect to the study of (personal, social, cultural) identities. The discourse perspective comes with a rich descriptive apparatus that looks at socio-cultural phenomena close up, that is, in the moment-to-moment unfolding of communication. Its analytic point of entry is thus specific interactional events, specific occasions of communicative practice, specific speech events and activities.

Below, I will outline the main assumptions and methodo-
logies guiding the discourse perspective (adapted from Harris
and Rampton 2003: 8).

Approach to language: Constructionism. Discourse and inter-
action are crucial to the processes through which socio-cultural
realities and identities get reproduced, resisted or created anew.

View of culture (and identities): Anti-essentialism. Culture
emergent in (primarily discourse) activity; involved in situated
and dialogical sense-making. On the basis of this, social and
cultural identities are neither fixed not categorical entities;
instead, they are emergent in the sequentiality of discourse,
where they present an irreducible situational contingency
(Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003: 1).

Politics/social/cultural theory: Endorsement of macroscopic
facts about late modernity and globalization (particularly as
involving major population shifts, new social movements, and
the explosion of new information technologies; Gillespie
1995). There is a recognition that "the complexity of social
experience in a late modern era" is such that "it makes it hard
to predict" or pinpoint "its impact on particular groups and
individuals" (Harris and Rampton 2003: 8).

Descriptive focus: Micro- (see discussion above).

Data: Interactional; institutional (see discussion above).

Analytic focus: Attention to details of talk; close linguistic
analysis. The assumption here is that culture is produced in the
practices associated with specific positions in certain types of
interactional exchanges (see papers in Antaki and Widdicombe
1998).

The adoption of the discourse perspective by studies of
language, society and culture in relation to MG would shift
research questions: instead of asking what is culture-specific
about language use the question would be: How are cultural
resources enacted and reconciled but also contested in the con-
tingencies of situated activity? What do participants orient to

in terms of their cultural identity in specific contexts? How do they draw upon it as a resource for affiliation or disaffiliation? In addition, instead of examining "Greekness" in isolation and as a distinguishable attribute that can be singled out and kept apart from other identity aspects, the discourse perspective warrants an investigation of how it gets co-constructed and co-articulated with other aspects of identity in discourse (e.g. gender, age, social class). This is on the basis of the assumption that identities tend to be indirect and co-articulated in language rather than articulated neatly and separately from one another (for details, see Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003: 1-25). At the same time, taken to its logical conclusion, the discourse perspective would question the very methodological and analytical validity of the quest for "Greekness" as opposed to research that looks into culture if and when the data foreground it and make it relevant.

As I have attempted to show in this paper, the discourse perspective is currently lagging behind within Modern Greek studies of the interrelations between language, society and culture, as these tend to hypostasize society and culture and treat them as compact totalities. By the same token, inter-disciplinarities between (socio)linguistics and cultural studies, which tend to be a hallmark of the discourse perspective, are far and few between. In this respect, ethnographic studies of culture could benefit from a focus on language in the broad sense of discourse. On the other hand, linguistic studies such as the ones discussed above have tended to be agnostic about the sort of social and cultural theory and reality they subscribe to and ultimately driven by "dominant" macro-accounts of MG culture, "shuttling too fast up into grand theories from theories of data" (Rampton 1999: 2). A discourse perspective would thus be instrumental in forging timely and much needed inter-disciplinarities between linguistics and certain strands of cultural studies.

Moving to the discourse paradigm is partly a matter of shifting focus to data that have failed to be at the centre of

attention in research on MG. Interactional occasions within institutional, formal and public contexts of language use are certainly under-researched. At the other end of the spectrum, popular culture is only just beginning to make it to the centre of analytical attention. In his recent study, Hess suggests that there is an unwillingness within Neohellenic studies to fully encounter the commonplace aspects of Greek existence and that a shift toward popular culture as an object of intellectual inquiry is imperative (2003: 39; cf. Georgakopoulou 2000). Techno- could certainly be added to popular culture so as to capture the new media and technologies that we know have been embraced by Greek society at large, but what their impact has been on socio-communicative relations and networks is far less understood. Finally, conflictual moments, moments when questions of cultural identity are more likely to be oriented to (Gumperz 1982), as is the case in contact contexts where cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity are accentuated and made relevant, are also particular worthy of investigation in today's Greece, at a time when the demographics have been changing rapidly and when hybridity seems to be at the heart of cultural processes.

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