

English discourse markers in Cypriot Greek

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a dataset of 40 hours of recordings of informal naturally-occurring conversations among Greek Cypriots collected from 2008 to 2011 (Fotiou, 2015), this paper discusses the function of English discourse markers in the form of borrowing and codeswitching in CG informal discourse.

Discourse markers are lexical expressions which usually function to mark a relationship between a segment they introduce and a prior segment of talk (Fraser, 1999). A variety of English discourse markers is evident in the data, the most frequent being *anyway*, followed by *so* and *by the way*. The paper also discusses *sorry*, a borrowed politeness marker which, as Terkourafi (2011) claimed, is also used as a discourse marker in Cypriot Greek.

Following a conversational analytic approach (Auer, 2009), this paper shows the various functions these discourse markers have and claims that they by no means fill in a gap in the discourse marker repertoire of Cypriot Greek nor have they replaced the native discourse markers. Also, English discourse markers do not have a different function than the Cypriot Greek ones, but because they are usually “surrounded” by another language their function is enhanced (Maschler, 1994). Finally, the case of *sorry*, a borrowed politeness marker from English to CG is discussed in relation to its functions as a discourse marker.

KEY WORDS

Cypriot Greek, English, discourse markers, conversation analysis.

1. Introduction

Discourse Markers (henceforth DMs) are lexical expressions drawn from the syntactic classes of conjunctions, adverbials, and prepositional phrases which usually function to mark a relationship between a segment they introduce and a prior segment of talk (Fraser, 1999). What makes DMs a linguistic category is that they share a functional status (de Rooij, 2000). DMs are structurally independent elements; they have a clause-peripheral status in terms of their position in the clause, and they have positional flexibility (Myers-Scotton, 1993; Matras, 2009; de Rooij, 2000). These characteristics make them easy to use in bilingual discourse (Matras, 2009). While this may be true, DMs in the dataset studied in this paper are infrequent. Switching of DMs is reported *inter alia* in Boumans (1998) with Moroccan Arabic-Dutch data, de Rooij (2000) with French-Shaba Swahili data, and Maschler (1994) with Hebrew-English-, but their frequency is not always (adequately) reported.

2. Data and Methods

The data of this study originate from a PhD project (Fotiou, 2015). The study was exploratory in nature and aimed to address claims for extensive and destructive use of English in the Cypriot Greek discourse. The data involves 40 hours of naturally-occurring informal conversations (36 recordings) recorded from 12/2008 to 09/2011. The ‘friend of a friend’ sampling procedure was adopted in order to find participants willing to record themselves and/or their friends. In total, 112 participants were recorded, all born and raised in Cyprus, aged 10-55 years old, and all living in urban settings. A subset of the recordings (N=7) was conducted in the UK and they involved people temporarily living there for study or work purposes. Pseudonyms are provided for all participants (Fotiou, 2015).

For the analysis of the conversational functions of DMs a conversational analytic approach is followed (Auer, 1995; 1998; 2009). Auer’s framework has moved codeswitching work one step forward by diverging from the norm of analyzing isolated sentences and providing tenuous lists of conversational loci, forms and functions with no sequential analysis showing *how* codeswitching is implemented in the conversation and how it brings about the effects it does at the conversational level (Auer, 1995).

Overall, the conversation analysis approach for bilingual data studies codeswitching as a conversational event (Auer, 1998) without taking for granted any associations of linguistic varieties with social values and specific situations. The starting point of the analysis is the “embeddedness of codeswitching in the sequential organization of interaction” (2009: 490) and whether or not a certain choice of language comes before or after the same or a different language (ibid.).

Auer makes a distinction between discourse-related and participant-related codeswitching. Participant-related codeswitching tells us something about the speaker; it indexes some trait of the speaker (1999), and it is not of interest in this paper. This paper will discuss examples of discourse-related codeswitching, which occurs when codeswitching acts as a contextualization cue for the organization of discourse (Auer, 1995). It relates to issues about turn-taking in conversation, holding or giving up the floor of the conversation, repair mechanisms, cohesion and coherence in discourse, emphasizing something and so on. In other words, it involves using codeswitching “to organize the conversation by contributing to the interactional meaning of a particular utterance” (Auer, 1998: 4).

2. 1. What counts as codeswitching and what counts as borrowing?

This paper follows Thomason (2001: 132) and sees codeswitching as “the use of material from two (or more) languages by a single speaker in the same conversation”. From the arena

of codeswitching *established borrowings* are excluded. Any DMs in this paper which are referred to as borrowings are regarded as established borrowings in the Greek Cypriot community. Anything that is not referred to as a borrowing is an instance of codeswitching.

3. Analysis and Results

3.1. The use of *anyway*

The most frequently used DM is *anyway* (N=34), arguably a borrowing in CG and the structural and functional equivalent of *telospandon* ‘anyway’ with which it co-occurs. In English, *anyway(s)* functions to “signal a return from digression” (Heeman, 1997: 56; Park, 2010: 3283) or as a sequence-closing device (Park, 2010). These are also the two functions evident here. *Anyway* takes the form of a Turn Constructional Unit (henceforth TCU) (N=2), occurs at the beginning of a speaker’s turn (N=7), or in the middle of a speaker’s turn but between clauses (N=25).

In (1) the speaker starts his turn with *anyway* to mark the end of a digression; *anyway* acts as a “resumption marker” (Park, 2010; Halliday & Hasan, 1976), as explicitly stated in a metalinguistic comment:

1. *anyway* (.) ksefiyame tʃe lali mu
‘*Anyway*, we digressed and she says to me...’

In (2) and (3) *anyway* occurs twice to mark a digression, at mid-turn and end-of-turn. Demetra and Ioli talk about a school competition regarding which girl made the most changes in her appearance in high school.

2. Ioli: itan ipopsifia eyo tʃini tʃe (2) en θimume pca al:i itan (.) *anyway* tʃe ul:i ekarterusan na fci i Maria
‘She and I were candidates and, I don’t remember who else, *anyway* and everyone expected Maria to win’.

Ioli digresses from her narration because she cannot remember who the third contestant is. After a 2-second pause, she explicitly says what the trouble is, and following another shorter pause she marks the end of the digression with *anyway* and continues with the story. In the next turn, Demetra wants to know the changes Maria underwent:

3. Demetra: inda al:aji ekame?
Ioli: taxa efkale jaʎ:a eforise fakus eni ksero *anyway*
Demetra: ne
Ioli: tʃe taxa efcika eyo
Demetra: ‘What kind of change did she make?’
Ioli: ‘Supposedly she took off her glasses, put on contact lenses, I don’t know *anyway*’.

Demetra: ‘Yes’.
Ioli: ‘And supposedly I was the winner’.

Ioli perceives this as another digression, comments briefly on some of Maria’s changes, remarks that she does not know of any other changes –thus she downgrades them– and marks the end of the digression with *anyway*. *Anyway* also functions as a marker of indifference and of those changes being unimportant. Demetra accepts the end of the digression, and then Ioli reaches the resolution of her narration.

In (4) both Despina and Eleana use *anyway* to mark the end of an “interactionally troublesome sequence” (Park, 2010). First Despina provides a TCU with *anyway* and Eleana agrees on changing the topic by saying *ne* (‘yes’) and by reiterating *anyway*. They both work together with the use of *anyway* to overcome an “interactional impasse” (ibid).

4. Despina: en psemata pu sas ipan telika oti?
Eleana: eni ksero
Despina: ndaksi
Eleana: eʃi mas ipan
Despina: *anyway*
Eleana: ne *anyway*

Despina: ‘Did they lie to you when they said that?’
Eleana: ‘I don’t know’.
Despina: ‘Ok’.
Eleana: ‘This is what they told us’.
Despina: *Anyway*.
Eleana: ‘Yes *anyway*’.

3. 2. The use of *by the way*

By the way, which is arguably the structural and functional equivalent of *en to metaksi* ‘by the way’ occurs three times and it marks the occurrence of a side comment which gives extra information after the side comment is produced. *By the way* is not triggered by the use of English and it does not trigger English either. For example:

5. Timotheos: to *transformers* iðete to ðio?
Alik: ne ʃe itan para pol:a oreo
Revekka: mbori na to iða al:a en θimume ute titlus ute
Alik: ʃe en ixa ði to ena *by the way*

Timotheos: ‘Have you watched *Transformers II*?’
Alik: ‘Yes, and it was very good’.
Revekka: ‘I might have watched it but I don’t remember movie names’.
Alik: ‘And I hadn’t watched the first one *by the way*’.

Timotheos asks if anyone has watched *Transformers II*. Alik responds positively while Revekka is unsure. Alik assesses the movie (line 2) and adds (line 4) that she had not even

watched *Transformers I*. In other words, she liked the movie despite not having watched the first part. *By the way* not only marks this side comment, but also highlights it.

3. 3. The use of *so* and *plus*

Ten tokens of English conjunctions function as DMs: *so* (N=7) and *plus* (N=3). Use of conjunctions in bilingual discourse is noted *inter alia* in Boumans (1998), Ben-Rafael (2001), and Myers-Scotton (1993) where it is also infrequent. In English *so* is a consequential marker (Schiffrin, 1987); it marks “inferential or causal connections” (Bolden, 2009: 974). In this dataset, it always conjoins two independent clauses. The former provides the cause/reason and the latter provides the effect/result. *So* seems to be a structural and functional equivalent of *ἀρα* /ara/ ‘so’. Example:

6. ixame milisi proti fora tin evðomaða prin (1) so emena en me ixan ynorisi akoma
‘We had talked for the first time the week before, *so* they hadn’t met me yet’.

In three cases an English insertion precedes *so*; possibly triggering its use as below.

7. exume sewage treatment plant so enen toso pol:a kalo
‘We have a *sewage treatment plant so* that isn’t very good’.

Plus is a coordinate conjunction which seems to be the structural and functional equivalent of *και* /ke/ ‘and’ as well as *επίσης* /episis/ ‘also’. In two cases *plus* conjoins independent clauses, such as in (8), and once it occurs at the beginning of a turn.

8. ute eyo mboro na kamo sta ikosieksi *plus* e mboro na kamo moro
‘I can’t have a baby either at 26 *plus* eh I can’t give birth to a baby’.

3. 4. Prepositional phrases as DMs

Besides the aforementioned English DMs, the English prepositional phrases below also function as DMs. In (9) the speaker explains why she did not really cheat on her boyfriend.

9. vasika *according to him* (.) ekama tu cerata (1) *according to me* (.) ife tfero pu tu elea
θelo na xorisume
‘Basically, *according to him*, I cheated on him. *According to me*, I had been telling him for quite some time I wanted to break up’.

The use of the DMs here, along with the use of pauses, not only structures her talk but also highlights the differences in her account of the breakup and that of her boyfriend’s.

In a different context, two friends, Ivi and Zenia, discuss the possibility of going to the gym after work. Zenia insists that they should first leave their laptops at home because they might get stolen at the gym:

10. Ivi: ne al:a eyo ksero oti an erto spiti en θa fio

Zenia: ne ne *I know* apla leo su an mi jenito klepsun mas to lapt^hop kapcos en:a su pi “*what the fuck* jati en to epires spiti?” extos an en ena prama pu en:a to kamnume te λ a *automatic along the lines of* (.) mbenis spiti (.) al:asis (.) as pume *in and out* en:en na [speaking slower] anikso l:i::o to la::ptop mu:: na mili::so sto telefono:: na skefto nambu n:a fao::

Ivi: ne ne

Zenia: en:oo su nan *literally in and out* e (3) eni ksero re

Ivi: ‘Yes but I know that if I come home I won’t leave’.

Zenia: ‘Yes yes *I know* I am just saying God forbid they steal our laptop someone will tell you “*what the fuck* why didn’t you bring it home?” Unless it is a procedure that we will do entirely *automatic along the lines of* (.) you enter the house (.) you change (.) let’s say in and out it won’t be [speaking slower] I switch on my:: la::ptop I ta::lk on the pho::ne I think of what to ea::t’.

Ivi: ‘yes, yes’.

Zenia: ‘I mean *literally in and out* eh (3) I don’t know, mate’.

Zenia uses English to build up her argument and convince Ivi that they need to go home first before going to the gym. Ivi highlights her point by expressing the first person pronoun in line 1 which, since CG is a ‘pro-drop’ language, is done overtly for emphasis. Zenia aligns herself with Ivi’s thinking and shows this by saying ‘yes, yes *I know*’. Insertion of *I know* is her way of emphasizing that she understands that it would be difficult to go home first before the gym. However, she then creates the scenario that their laptop is stolen in case they do not take it home. As an argumentative device, she constructs a remark by an imaginary person which she sets off with the insertion of an interjection in English (line 3). With impersonal quotations, codeswitching offers the possibility to say something while also detaching oneself from what you say (Alfonzetti, 1998). The use of *what the fuck* in English has a euphemistic function, since it is less offensive to swear in another language rather than one’s own; “there is less emotional attachment to words in a foreign language” (Backus, 2000: 131). The construction of someone’s hypothetical words, instead of directly telling her friend her thoughts, also depersonalizes Zenia’s view that it is absurd to leave their laptops at the gym’s lockers. Therefore she avoids having a strong argument with her friend, and at the same time she adds intersubjective weight to it.

Zenia proposes an alternative solution which has to be *automatic* (lines 4-6). The insertion of *automatic* –which should have been *automatically*– perhaps triggers the use of the English phrase *along the lines of* which functions as a DM that introduces the steps that need to be

followed for the ‘automatic’ solution to work. The steps are introduced in a staccato manner with small pauses between them, and they are then contrasted with the slower pace in which what they should not do is described. Ivi seems to agree and then Zenia repeats the description of her solution: *literally in and out*, to emphasize once more how fast and automatic the solution must be.

3. 5. *Sorry* as a DM

The rest of this paper focuses on *sorry*, pronounced as /'sori/, a borrowed politeness marker from English to CG which also functions as a DM. Even though one can hardly imagine a language with no means to express apology, *sorry* has been borrowed by various languages and is used alongside their native counterparts. In such cases there is “a division of labour between [the borrowed terms] and the corresponding inherited ones” (Terkourafi, 2011: 219). My data confirm Terkourafi’s attributed functions to borrowed *sorry* but perhaps show a much more frequent use of *sorry*; she noted 6 occurrences in 110 hours while here 23 occurrences were noted in 40 hours.¹ As Terkourafi (2011) explains, *sorry* is used in informal settings (a) as a token for apology; (b) to lexically mark the occurrence of self-repair; and (c) to lexically mark other-initiated repair. In the sections that follow I provide examples which confirm Terkourafi’s classification and I add a fourth function: (d) to mark/give an account/excuse for something.

3. 5. 1. *Sorry* as a token for apology

The first example (11) involves a sincere apology for being a few minutes late at a work meeting, which is a minor offence, while (12) involves an insincere apology for not being present when it was the speaker’s turn to play cards:

11. Elpiniki: *sorry* ya tin kaθisterisi

Orestis: peθca *sorry* ya ti kaθisterisi en me kofti an perimenete (.) kserete (.) *you know*

Elpiniki: ‘*sorry* for being late’.

Orestis: ‘guys *sorry* for the delay I don’t care if you were waiting for me (.) you know (.) *you know*’.

The following examples show apologies articulated in the process of doing something, a function that English *sorry* also has (Kim, 2008, cited in Terkourafi, 2011). In such cases *sorry* also functions as an attention-getter (Coulmas, 1981, cited in Terkourafi, 2011). Below Mary apologizes to Zina for interrupting her while doing just that:

12. Zina: en:a pame tora sti vivliothiki pu ekamame//

Mary: //sa simera *sorry* pu se diakopto
Zina: ‘we will go now to the library we made//’.
Mary: ‘//for example today *sorry* for interrupting you’.

In (13) Natasa apologizes to Evagelia before doing something during a card game:

13. Natasa: *sorry* pu en:a to kamo tuto
Natasa: ‘*sorry* for what I am about to do’.

In (14) Kiriaki apologizes to her interlocutor before saying something she deems inappropriate:

14. Kiriaki: mesa sto potamo zi ena iðos psari na to po? ðe ksero pos na to po (.) otan to
(.) *sorry* pu en:a to po (.) ama katurisis mesa sto *Amazon* ine *attracted by the urine*

Kiriaki: ‘in the river there is a kind of fish should I say it? I don’t know how to say it (.) when the *sorry* to say this (.) when you urinate in the *Amazon* it is *attracted by the urine*’.

3. 5. 2. *Sorry* to lexically mark the occurrence of self-repair

Marking the occurrence of self-repair was the primary function of *sorry* in the data, as was also the case in Terkourafi (2011). Almost always prior to *sorry* there is a small pause (.)

15. Zina: na ine imerominia meyaliteri pu tudo *value* ara otan kseperasi tudo *value* tfe
ine meyaliteri (.) *sorry* mikroteri

Zina: taksinoma ta *by default* pu mono tu me to onoma tis formas (.) *sorry* ene se
forms tuto

Sofia: 22 *sorry* 23 en i eryasimi pu irtame piso

Zina: ‘[... it] would be a date higher than this *value*, thus when it surpasses this *value*
and it is higher (.) *sorry* lower [...]’.

Zina: ‘it sorts them by itself *by default* according to the name of the form (.) *sorry*
this is not in *forms*’.

Sofia: ‘22 *sorry* 23 was the working day we came back’.

Lastly, in (19) Anna is with three friends studying for an exam. Anna repairs her mistake by emphasizing the repaired part and then marking it with *sorry*.

16. Anna: en:a sas efi (.) en:a MAS efi *sorry*
Anna: ‘in the test, you will have (.) eh WE will have, *sorry*’

3. 5. 3. *Sorry* to lexically mark other-initiated repair

The following was the only instance of other-initiated repair. Zina said something wrong and Elpiniki who realizes it requests a repair:

17. Zina: tus ipolipus ðiate tus anaynosi sto periexomeno

Elpiniki: emis?//

Zina: //tis ipi[resias] ts

Elpiniki: [emis?

Zina: [vasika ts

Elpiniki: tus ðiume?//

Zina: oi anaynosi exun (.) *sorry* anaynosi exun oli

Zina: ‘to the rest [of the people] you give [permission] to read the content’

Elpiniki: ‘we?//’

Zina: ‘//of the ser[vice] ts’

Elpiniki: ‘[we?’

Zina: ‘[basically ts’

Elpiniki: ‘give them?//’

Zina: ‘no, they have [permission] to read (.) *sorry* everybody has [permission] to read’

When Zina realises her mistake she offers a repair which midway through she marks with *sorry*. *Sorry* acts more like a discourse marker, to mark the repair rather than as a token of apology.

3. 5. 4. *Sorry* to mark an account

Another function of *sorry* is to mark an account or an excuse for something. I provide two examples here:

18. Artemis: exume mia tasi sti kipro yenikos tfe o monos topos pu exo en ðame prepina kamno yimnastiki pu to proi os ti nixta yia na men exo ðame

Katia: ne

Artemis: e *sorry* exo tfa:i zoi

Artemis: ‘generally, we have this tendency in Cyprus and the only place that I have [fat] is here [her rear], but I have to exercise from morning till night so as to not have [fat] here’

Katia: ‘yes’

Artemis: ‘eh *sorry* I have other things to do’

Understandably, apologizing for not exercising all day long cannot be a sincere apology as the exaggeration of “morning till night” suggests. Artemis’ *sorry* marks and introduces an account for not exercising: she has other things to do.

In the following example three friends are talking about a relationship Aliko had with a man that was revealed to another friend of theirs who did not like him. They are discussing how their friend reacted to the fact that she did not know about it:

19. Revekka: ipe tipote?

Aliko: oi to mono ife paraono

Erato: e ma *sorry* pu mas elale oti itan malakas

Revekka: ‘did she say anything?’
Alik: ‘no, she only complained about it’
Erato: ‘eh *sorry* but she was saying that he was an asshole’

Erato is not producing a sincere apology for not telling her friend about her relationship with that man, she produces an account for it: their friend did not like him.

4. Discussion and concluding remarks

All English DMs in this dataset have structural and functional CG equivalents which co-exist with them. They do not fill in a gap in the discourse marker repertoire of CG and they have not replaced the CG DMs as documented, for example, in Salmons (1990) where English DMs have replaced their German counterparts. English DMs do not have a different function than the CG ones. However, because English DMs are usually “surrounded” by another language their function is enhanced (Maschler, 1994; de Rooij, 2000). In most cases what precedes and follows a DM is in CG. There are few cases where what comes before the DM is in English but the contrast is still there since what comes after is in CG.

As far as *sorry* is concerned, overall, borrowed *sorry* has lost its original illocutionary force of producing a *sincere apology* for something important or serious, as also put forward by Terkourafi (2011). In other words, this paper reinforces Terkourafi’s claim that *sorry* has “gradually bleached of [... its] speech-act signaling potential and increasingly come to function as [... a DM], serving to locally manage sequential aspects of discourse structure” (2011: 218). Thus, while in English *sorry* is used for sincere apologies for serious offences as well as non-serious offences or no offences at all (Andersen 2014),² here it is not used for apologizing for serious offences since its CG counterpart(s) are responsible for this (see Terkourafi, 2011). Similar observations have been noted for borrowed *sorry* in Norwegian (Andersen, 2014) and Serbian (Mišić Ilić, 2017), for example.

This paper has shown and discussed the various functions that borrowed and codeswitched from English DMs have in CG informal discourse. I believe that future research should focus on a comparison of these DMs with their CG counterparts as well as on investigating whether their use is evident in formal discourse as well.

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Appendix 1: Transcription Conventions

I adapt Gail Jefferson's transcript conventions (cited in Hutchby & Wooffitt 2008: x-xii) since these are usually used in works that use a CA or a CA-type of analysis.

(0.5)	the number in brackets shows the time gap in tenths of a second
(.)	marks a short pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second.
//	indicates latching between utterances
[shows overlap speech
[
[]	shows the onset and the end of overlap speech
.hhh	laughter
word?	a question mark indicates a question
WORD	louder speech compared to the surrounding one
wo::rd	colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter. The more colons the greater extent of stretching
[words]	transcriber's comments/additions
????	incomprehensible talk
[...]	shows that parts of the conversation are omitted
<i>word</i>	<i>conversation in English</i>
“”	indicate use of (in)direct speech

For the transcription of Cypriot Greek (CG), I follow the transcription conventions of Arvaniti (2010) since this is the latest comprehensive work on the phonology of CG. Semi-free translation is given for all examples.

Notes

1. Comparison of Terkourafi's data and mine is by no means possible. Her data include informal and formal settings, collected from all major cities of Cyprus and only from adults (2001: 30). She does not specify how many hours out of the 110 were conducted in formal settings where the use of *sorry* might not be expected.
2. This by no means implies that *sorry* does not have any other functions in English. For example, *sorry* acts as a repair initiator in English as well (Drew, 1997).