



Critical Review on Telephone Conversation in Greek and German: Attending to the Relationship Aspect of Communication



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Abstract

The research was intended at focusing on how German and Greek ways of opening and closing the conversation on telephone calls attending to the relationship aspect of communication. This study as well to know how to counteract a possible intrusion through the telephone call and how to terminate the call without causing and bad feeling.

Keywords:

Conversation;
Cross-cultural;
German;
Greek;
Telephone;

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1. Introduction

Telephone communication has become an indispensable (much needed) element of everyday life. Due to the lack of visual information, at least in the normal use of this medium, linguistic information is foregrounded, and the role of a pragmatic aspect of language becomes more critical. Thus, a telephone conversation is a challenge to anybody learning a foreign language and remains a sensitive area in intercultural encounters, even for those who have mastered the basic of foreign language and culture.

Linguistics research on telephone conversation bears the distinct mark of conversation analysis, through which certain universal feature of the structure of telephone calls have been established (e.g. Schegloff 1972, 1973, 1994). Telephone calls most commonly have a tripartite structure: an opening section, a middle section in which the main topic, i.e. the reason for the call, is exposed, and closing section.

The Research Question of this study are: (1) How are the opening and closing sections of a telephone conversation between acquaintances usually managed (e.g. who speaks first, how is recognition accomplished, how fast do you get to the reason for calling, which linguistic items can function as pre-closing, etc.)? Do the characteristics seem more similar to the Greek or the German conversations describes here? (2) What types of comments or topics are considered 'safe' and suitable for a *phatic* talk with people you do not know well? How comfortable would you feel using each

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of the phrases below to a casual acquaintance you met in the corridor at university/work, and why? What other phrases might you be likely to use in this context?

- a. *How are things?*
- b. *Have you had lunch?*
- c. *Where are you going?*
- d. *It's really cold today, isn't it?*
- e. *How's life?*

(3) What are the differences reported between the German and Greek ways of attending to the relationship aspect of communication using Spence-Oatey's rapport management concept of equity and association rights? How satisfactory is this framework?

The Purpose of the Study are: firstly, the purpose of this study is focusing on how German and Greek ways of opening and closing the conversation on telephone calls attending to the relationship aspect of communication. Secondly, is how to counteract a possible intrusion through the telephone call and how to terminate the call without causing and bad feeling?

2. Research Methods

The method used in this research using qualitative analysis. The data collective of transcribing by *tape-recorded* interview. All calls were initiated and tape recorded by young adults with a university degree, both of them from Greek and German. Respondents are: (a) the data sample of telephone opening is based on a sample of 120 Greek and 62 German telephone calls. All calls were initiated and tape –recorded by young adult with a university degree, the Greek calls by five women and two men and the German calls by two women and three men, (b) the data sample of telephone closing based on sample of 45 Greek and 27 German telephone calls made between relatives or friends. They are mainly a subset of the sample used for analyzing telephone opening.

2.1 The general structure of opening and closing telephone

In the opening section of the telephone call, the typical channel has to be opened and the acoustic contact between the partners has to be established. Moreover, it must be clarified whether the person answering the phone is the one the caller wishes to talk to before the caller can proceed to the reason for calling. E.g. by saying 'hello?' after this very first adjacency pair or 'How are you?' may appear before the partners proceed to the main section of the call.

i.e. the terminal sequence, usually comprising an exchange of *goodbyes*. However, as there is no linguistic mean, at least in English, which exclusively serves as pre-closing, the first closing turn has to be placed after a topic has been closed down ([Schegloff and Sack 1973:305](#)).

2.2 Phatic communion and the relationship aspect of communication

The German closing the emphasis is on the consolidation of the relationship whereas Greek closings are recognized toward a cooperative parting ([Pavliduo 1997:216](#))

An insightful analysis, He comes to the conclusion that the functions of *phatic* communion 'in the crucial marginal phases of encounters when their (the participants) psychological comfort is most at risk are to establish and consolidate the interpersonal relationship between the two participants to and from interaction; or putting the two function together, *phatic* communion serves to facilitate the management of interpersonal relationships. ([Laver 1975:236](#))

2.3 The use of phatic talk in Greek and German Openings

The term "phatic" was first used in linguistics in connection with the term 'communion'. The phrases 'phatic communion' was introduced by the anthropologist [Malinowski \(1966:315\)](#) to describe 'a type of speech in which ties of union are created by the mere exchange of words'. As [Haberland \(1996:164\)](#) emphasizes the main contrast is between 'communion' and 'communication'

3. Results and Analysis

3.1 Greek openings – German openings

- a. Greek opening calls. A calls B to tell her about a lecture they wanted to go to, however after that they move on to another topic {A (Sofia, female, 26 years old) and B (Lea, female, 28-year-old)}
- B *Oriste.*
\$Yes, please.\$
- A *Ja su LEA.*
\$Hello LEA\$
- b. German opening calls. A calls B in order to thank her for sending him some English workbooks, however after that they move on to another topic { A (female, 28 years old) and B (female, 27 years old) are friends }
- B B {name}
- A A Tach, B, this is A {name} speaking.
\$Hello B, this is A {name} speaking. \$

Greek closings – German closings

- a. Greek closings
e.g. {A (female, 26 years old) calls B (female, 31 years old), a friend to analyze the meeting point and time with other friends }
-
- A *de ja.*
\$bye.\$
- B *Jaxara, ja.*
\$Byebye, bye.\$
- b. German closings
e.g. {A (female, 26 years old) calls B (female, 27 years old), whom she hadn't seen for a long time and whom she met again only recently to invite her to a party }
-
- A *Bis dann. Tschus.*
\$Till then. Bye.\$
- B *Tschus.*
\$Bye.\$

3.2 Discussion of using the phatic talk in Greek and German Openings

The term “phatic” was first used in linguistics in connection with the term ‘communion’. The phrases ‘phatic communion’ was introduced by the anthropologist Malinowski (1966:315) to describe ‘a type of speech in which ties of union are created by the mere exchange of words’. As Haberland (1996:164) emphasizes the main contrast is between ‘communion’ and ‘communication’

The following utterance/features were regarded as *phatic*:

- Ritual question, e.g. *How are you?*
- Comment on lack of contact, e.g. *We haven't met for ages.*
- Ritual expression of wishes, e.g. *Happy Birthday!*
- Apologies for the intrusion, e.g. *I hope I didn't wake you up.*
- Comment on the connection, e.g. *This line is very poor.*
- The joking use of the V-form among intimates, e.g. *Ti kanete ciria mu?* \$What are you (V-form) doing my lady?
- The use of *phatic* particles, e.g. *Na? Hast du noch Gaste?* \$PARTICLE? Have you still got guests?

Table 1
Use of *phatic* talk in Greek telephone openings according to the relationship of the participants
(transactional calls only)

Relationship	Calls with <i>phatic</i> talk	Calls without <i>phatic</i> talk	Total
Personal	16 (53.33%)	14 (46.67%)	30
Familiar	28 (73.68%)	10 (26.32%)	38
Formal	7 (50.00%)	7 (50.00%)	14
			82

$df=1, \chi^2=4.07, p<0.200$

The finding reported above suggest that, at least sometimes, there are some difference in what German and Greek considered be appropriated ways of opening a telephone conversation: Greek seem to prefer exchange of *phatic* utterance before coming to the reason for calling, whereas German opt for a more direct path to the main section of the call. While this difference can lead to cultural clashes and misunderstanding in Greek-German encounters, it can definitely not be explained away by saying either that Greeks are very considerate and German impolite, or vice versa. We can see it above based on the table for example of analysis.

3.3 Discussion of using the repetition/redundancy in Greek and German closings

Using “repetition” in a very general sense, covering ‘all kinds of “happening again”’. But there is a very important qualification to this: there is a kind of repetition required for organization of conversation, as opposed to repetition that goes beyond the minimal structural necessities. For example, if somebody greets you or bids you farewell, you normally reciprocate this, e.g.

A: Hello.
B: Hello.
or
A: Goodbye
B: Goodbye

The example in conversation:

A (female, 26 years old) and B (female, 28 years old) are friends; A calls B to tell her about they wanted to go to, but after that, they move on to another topic.

A: *Ax kala* (hurriedly). *Lipon. Klino ne?*
\$Ah, good (hurriedly). So, then. I am hanging up, O.K.?\$
B: *Ejine. Ade, par esi kamna mera etsi?*
\$Done. ADE, you call me sometimes, O.K.?\$
A: *endaksi. Ne.=*
\$All right. Yes.\$
B: *=Ade tsao.*
\$ADE, ciao.\$
A: *Ade, ja, ja.*
\$ADE, bye, bye.\$
B: *Ade, ja, ja.*
\$ADE, bye, bye.\$

An obvious consequence of the redundancy discussed above is the greater length of the telephone closing. As already mentioned, on the whole, Greeks closings exhibit a greater degree of redundancy in the use of the elements that are constitutive for the closing section of the telephone calls (i.e. agreement tokens and parting formulate); and this means that Greek closing can be expected to be longer than Germans ones. This would imply that there tendency for the partners to cling together in Greek closings. Moreover, the extended use of *ade* emphasizes the locally negotiated mutuality of the partner's decided to close the call is negotiated by means of tag particles like *ne*, which

implicitly invoke already existing common ground. Moreover, repetition of expressions like *bis dann*, which project the relationship into the future, suggest that Germans built upon the past of their relationship and invest in its future, whereas Greeks invest in the *hic et Nunc* of their relationship.

3.4 Discussion of Phatic communion and the relationship aspect of communication

An insightful analysis, He comes to the conclusion that the functions of *phatic* communion ‘in the crucial marginal phases of encounters when their (the participants) psychological comfort is most at risk are to establish and consolidate the interpersonal relationship between the two participants to and from interaction; or putting the two function together, *phatic* communion serves to facilitate the management of interpersonal relationships. (Laver 1975:236)

The German closing the emphasis is on the consolidation of the relationship whereas Greek closing is recognized toward a cooperative parting (Pavlidou 1997:216). In other words, *phatic* communion as one way of attending to the relationship aspect of communication not only by doing something (i.e. interactional work) but also by not doing something, which brings it back to the result. The Greek way may be to exhibit an interactional surplus and build the relationship through small talk, but the German way may be to refrain from keeping the partner on the phone for too long and letting them know pretty soon the reason for calling. Both styles may pay equally well, through different service to the relationship aspect of communication. There is numerous way of attending to the relationship aspect of communication: e.g. *phatic* communion, redundancy, negative politeness, talks about the relationship itself, and also strategies of directness which may result in the omission of all the previous strategies. Which way is opted for presumably depends not only on the phase of the conversation but also on cultural factors.

3.5 Critical of the article

I am as readers interested know more about an aspect of attending to the relationship of communication of telephone calls by Greeks and Germans. What I am expecting of this article had suitable of the discussion of each part case that appeared as factors involved within entitled.

The question of the research was already answered clear enough in the discussion. Even though, there are many of question in this article made, moreover the researcher can explain and elaborate more aspects included the relationship between each country. The problem of study as mentioned about the characteristics they used for opening and closing sections of telephone conversation has responded in the discussion. That was one researcher done for a telephone call. In term of “phatic” was clearly explained base on the theory applied in this research and the last about the aspect of attending to the relationship aspect of communication that Greek way may be to exhibit an interactional surplus and build the relationship through small talk, but the German way may be to refrain from keeping the partner on the phone for too long and letting them know pretty soon the reason for calling.

The purposes of study was related to the discussion however in this articles does not mentioned of result and finding of all the problem that the researcher tries to find out, focusing on the discussion of opening and closing, all of that conclude uncertainty, but in *phatic* communion the researcher has clear enough explained and elaborate more on the aspect of communication in its.

The research of method of this article has used a suitable of getting satisfied value for the reader to reach a reliable goal to get relevancy information to aims of it. The qualitative analysis by tape-recorded I considered better conducted with an interview with university students. In my opinion, it will be more interested if the researcher not only uses the university but also try to carry out the hypothesis of more respondent as a business or ordinary peoples.

The main theory applied by the researcher was by Theodosia – Soula Pavlidou and supported by other theories. The support theories is a very important supported to how analysis the hypothesis of the example uses of this research.

Based on my review, although this article doesn’t mention a result of research I can understand what the findings found through clear explanation in the discussion section of three sections of hypotheses. The discussions were representative of the result and conclude the findings problem arise in this article. Due to three discussions in the article, they are able to make a result of this research.

Some of this article being weaknesses, what are they: firstly, I think if we are willing to make the reader interesting to read our article, we should recognize and manage how to convey the format of research, for example, submit the result or conclusion inside. Secondly, in my opinion, the respondents should be involved more alternative peoples, such as a society, employees, and ordinary peoples. Thirdly, the reader is expecting to know what are the relationship

aspects of attending in communication between Greeks and Germans, therefore we have to concern about it and consist of it in the article.

4. Conclusion

As analysis and discussed the German closing the emphasis is on the consolidation of the relationship whereas Greek closing is recognized toward a cooperative parting. In other words, *phatic* communion as one way of attending to the relationship aspect of communication not only by doing something but also by not doing something, which brings it back to the result. The Greek way may be to exhibit an interactional surplus and build the relationship through small talk, but the German way may be to refrain from keeping the partner on the phone for too long and letting them know pretty soon the reason for calling. Both styles may pay equally well, through different service to the relationship aspect of communication. There is numerous way of attending to the relationship aspect of communication: e.g. *phatic* communion, redundancy, negative politeness, talks about the relationship itself, and also strategies of directness which may result in the omission of all the previous strategies. Which way is opted for presumably depends not only on the phase of the conversation but also on cultural factors.

Suggestion

This article deals with cross-culture communication between Greek and German. It concerned about attending of relationship aspect in communication. In order to attract the reader of knowing more about it, I suggest the reader be more critical to what message or study want to convey by the author. It will be necessary for learning by the students. The data research is the main important thing of this article to get a reliable result of studies and the method of how to answer the research question of this article.

Conflict of interest statement and funding sources

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Statement of authorship

The author(s) have a responsibility for the conception and design of the study. The author(s) have approved the final article.

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