

Aspects of Interlanguage Contact: Greek and Australian English

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Linguists accept that no languages, the users of which have come into contact with one another, are completely pure and free of transferred and borrowed language forms. Interlanguage transferences and borrowings, therefore, are considered a natural, universal phenomenon, and not accidental.

This paper aims at providing a cohesive account of the linguistic situation which has resulted from the interlanguage contact between Greek and Australian English. It will focus on two essential aspects: the impact of Australian English upon Greek in the immigrant context of Australia, and the influence of Greek upon Australian English. To present a more comprehensive picture, it will examine both direct and indirect influences, as well as their impact on different levels of language analysis (mainly phonological, morphological, and lexical), illustrated by a variety of oral and written (including literary) examples.

Introduction

A language does not develop just through its own means, but also through the influence exerted on it, to various degrees, by other languages through the bilingual and multilingual individuals of the different language communities. Linguists accept that no language is pure and free of borrowed forms. This is why borrowings are, and must be considered, a natural and therefore universal phenomenon. The French linguist Louis Guilbert claims that “borrowing is a linguistic phenomenon the study of which goes hand in hand with the history of the development of a language” (Guilbert, 1975:46). What is considered by the broader public as the influence of one language upon another, is regarded by the experts as “external linguistic borrowing”, in contrast to “internal linguistic borrowing”, that is absorption of elements by a social group into another group and/or into the environment of the same language or dialect. So, “external linguistic borrowing” is the acceptance and embodiment of linguistic structures (forms) and meanings (content) from one language into another, which makes use of them either unadjusted or adjusted,

partially or wholly, at all levels of language analysis: phonological, graphemic, morphological, syntactic, and lexical.¹

With regard to the adjusted loan words of a language versus the unadjusted ones, the former constitute the majority. A contributing factor is that many of the loan words, although during the initial period of their history within the environment of the receiving language they are unadjusted, later become adjusted (partially or totally) into the system of that language.

In general, borrowed or loan words usually function according to the rules of the receiving language and they often create derivatives or compound words:

Words adjusted to the Greek inflectional language system

			Singular	Plural
Latin	porta	> Greek	<i>πόρτα</i>	<i>πόρτες</i>
French	stylo	> Greek	<i>στυλό</i> <i>στυλός</i>	<i>στυλό ~ στυλά</i> <i>στυλοί</i>
French	limousine	> Greek	<i>λιμουζίνα</i>	<i>λιμουζίνες</i>

Derivatives and compound words

			Loan words	Derivatives
French	retouche	> Greek	<i>ρετούς</i>	<i>ρετουσάρω, ρετουσάρισμα</i>
English	shorts	> Greek	<i>σορτς</i>	<i>σορτσάκι</i>
			Loan words	Compound words
English	humour	> Greek	<i>χιούμορ</i>	<i>ψευτοχιούμορ</i>
Latin	cannata	> Greek	<i>κα(ν)νάτα</i>	<i>κρασοκανάτας</i>

The causes of interlanguage borrowing are diverse, comprising broad nets which in turn constitute a variety of categories, such as:

- social (immigration, long residence in another country, social prestige, exhibitionism, etc.);
- politico-military (occupation, colonisation, etc.);
- economic (commerce, trade, etc.);
- cultural (education, new technology, science, entertainment, sports, mass communication media, etc.);
- religious (expansion of religions, etc.);
- psychological;
- linguistic (internationally established foreign terms, brevity of foreign words in comparison to the corresponding words of the receiving language [*τρένο* ≠ *σιδηρόδρομος* etc.]).

¹ For an analysis of the language levels and their functional relation to the language skills (acoustic comprehension, speech, writing, reading) of a language, see Kanarakis, 1974:28–36.

Usually, the interlanguage borrowing is activated in four main cases:

- a. When there are no structures or elements available in the receiving language for covering its new needs (e.g. *κοάλα*, *μπούμεραγκ* from Australian English, *τσετσέ* from African Bantu, *φιορδ* from Norwegian).
- b. When the receiving language lacks suitable structures or elements for absolute, or even satisfactory, coverage (e.g. *μουλάς* [from Arabic] rather than *μουσουλμάνος κληρικός* or *μπουτίκ* [from French] rather than *κατάστημα*).
- c. Because of prolonged aural assimilation, as with individuals living and working in a foreign-language environment (e.g. a Greek-language person living in Australia where the dominant language is English).
- d. Because of lack of knowledge of existing Greek words due to the immigrant's limited Greek education (e.g. *χοστέσα* [hostess] instead of *οικοδέσποινα*, *αεροσυνοδός*, *αρχισερβιτόρα*).

However, the time comes when the borrowings no longer reflect particular language characteristics of individuals but steady and well established language qualities used by most bilinguals in daily communication, a linguistic communicative medium which, because of its idiosyncrasy (native language spoken in a non-native environment under the powerful and continuous influence of the language of the new country) develops into what is known as an "ethnolect".

The influence of Australian English on Greek

The Greek language in Australia has not escaped the ethnolectic process because it is not the dominant language, but a minority one co-existing with many other minority languages in a multicultural society, the official language of which is (Australian) English.

The degree of the borrowing process naturally varies among bilinguals according to the level of their English language knowledge. Among Greek-born individuals, in general, the better their knowledge of Greek is, in comparison with Australian English, the weaker (or even nil) the influence of Australian English appears when they speak Greek. In contrast, Australian-born Greeks and those whose knowledge of English is better than that of Greek, use more loan words borrowed from Australian English in their Greek-language oral communication. Of course, loan words from Australian English established as steady language elements of the Greek ethnolect of Australia in place of the corresponding Greek words, are used in speech by all, or at least by most Greek Australians:

From English: *χιούμορ*, *κλαμπ*, *σλόγκαν*, *ποπκόρν*, *σουτάρω*, etc.

From French: *ασανσέρ*, *ρεστωράν*, *στυλό*, *ριφιφι*, *παρκάρω*, etc.

Another interesting observation is that when Greeks or individuals of Greek origin in Australia use loan words borrowed from Greek speakers in other English-

language countries (USA, Canada, South Africa, etc.), and therefore belonging to other varieties of English, they are not understood. This is because these borrowings (either adjusted to the Greek language [hellenised loans] or unadjusted) are or derive from English words or meanings not used in Australian English, and are therefore not comprehensible:

From USA English:

bum	>	<i>μπόμπης</i> “derelict (dero)” ²
elevated (electric) train [the el]	>	<i>ελεβέτα</i>
quarter (25 cents)	>	<i>κοράκι</i>
[seating] hostess	>	<i>χαστέσα</i> “waitress in charge”

From Canadian English:

Park Avenue (a road in Montreal)	>	<i>Παρκαβενέικα</i>
quarter (25 cents)	>	<i>κοράκι</i>

The influence of Australian English on Greek in Australia is most obvious at least on two language levels, the phonological and especially the lexical, including words and phrase structures.

Phonological level

Phonemes

Many second or third generation individuals of Greek origin pronounce the voiceless stops /p, t, k/ in Greek word initial position with aspiration, that is as /pʰ, tʰ, kʰ/, the trill /r/ as a retroflex /ɾ/, the velar fricative /χ/ as a glottal fricative /h/, and in some cases the clear alveolar /l/ as a dark alveolar /ɭ/:

/pʰoté/	“never”	instead of	/poté/
/tʰúnel/	“tunnel”	instead of	/túnel/
/kʰamíla/	“camel”	instead of	/kamíla/
/ród̥i/	“pomegranate”	instead of	/róði/
/héri/	“hand”	instead of	/χéri/
/láði/	“oil”	instead of	/láði/

Intonation

Many second or third generation Greek Australians (especially women) tend to use intonation patterns of Australian English instead of Greek, particularly in cases of some interrogative sentences (open and wh- questions), where instead of using the Greek intonation pattern 2 – 3 – 3 they use the Australian English 2 – 3 – 1:

Είσαι εκεί; “Are you there?” [open question]
(Pattern: 2 – 3 – 1 instead of 2 – 3 – 3)

Πώς σε λένε; “What’s your name?” [wh- question]
(Pattern: 2 – 3 – 1 instead of 2 – 3 – 3)

² The word “bum” exists in Australian English as well, but it means “rear, bottom”.

Lexical level

The loans on this level can be classified as independent unadjusted words, “hellenised” words and loan translations.

Independent unadjusted loan words

This type of borrowing is noticed mainly among Australian-born Greeks whose English is better than their Greek:

το στράϊκ	“strike”
το ντίγκο	“dingo”
το πάι	“pie”

In this category of unadjusted loans there are at least two cases which attract the interest of researchers:

- i. In Greek-language communication we encounter phrase structures composed of the verb *κάνω* and an independent English word, most frequently of course unadjusted, although sometimes adjusted as well:

	κάνω ντράιβ	“I drive”
	κάνω σάουαρ	“I shower”
but also	κάνω μάπα	“I mop”
	κάνω τσόπισμα	“I chop”

- ii. The second case deals with the phenomenon of *simplification* which characterises the English inflectional system compared with the more synthetic inflectional Greek one. This is clearly noticed in the Greek surnames. Sometimes an Australian-born Greek is heard to say *του κου Πετράκης, του κου Αθανασόπουλος* following the uninflected English noun system Mr Petrakis > of Mr Petrakis, Mr Athanasopoulos > of Mr Athanasopoulos.

“Hellenised” words

These are Australian words morphologically adjusted to the Greek inflectional system by acquiring Greek endings. This category seems to be the largest and can be subdivided into three smaller groups:

- i. The first group consists of loan words to which a Greek ending is added:

Melbourne	>	Μελβούρνη
Adelaide	>	Αδελαΐδα [Austr. English /àdelaid/]
drive	>	ντραϊβάρω
agent	>	ατζέντης
steam	>	στίμη
basket	>	μπασκέτα [> μπασκετούλα]
sandwich	>	σέμιτζα [Aust. English/sáemidz/]

Note that many one-syllable Australian English loan words in the process of morphological adjustment to the Greek inflectional system become neuter gender nouns with the ending in *-ι* ~ (pl.) *-ια*:

bill	<i>μπίλ-ι</i> ~ <i>-ια</i>	
cake	<i>κέκ-ι</i> ~ <i>-ια</i>	[> <i>κεκάδικο</i>]
job	<i>ντζόμπ-ι</i> ~ <i>-ια</i>	
flat	<i>φλάτ-ι</i> ~ <i>-ια</i>	[> <i>φλατάκι</i>]
truck	<i>τράκ-ι</i> ~ <i>-ια</i>	
jar	<i>τζάρ-ι</i> ~ <i>-ια</i>	[> <i>τζαράκι</i>]

- ii. In the second group the endings of the loan words are substituted by Greek endings according to the Greek gender they have acquired:

television	> (<i>το</i>) <i>τελεβίζιο</i>	(neut.)
accountant	> (<i>ο</i>) <i>ακέοντας</i>	(masc.)
Newtown “suburb of Sydney”	> <i>τα Νιουτέικα</i>	(neut. pl.)

The Australian words, and English words in general, ending in *-er* belong to this group of borrowings. This is so because, since the pronunciation /ə/ of this ending does not exist in the Greek language, the loan words are usually adjusted by taking the Greek feminine gender noun ending *-α*:

blinker	> <i>μπλίνκα</i>
heater	> <i>χίτα</i>
hamburger	> <i>χαμπούργκα</i>
freezer	> <i>φρίζα</i>
but Peter	> <i>Πίτας</i> (masc.)

- iii. The third group carry a double meaning, one for the Greeks in Australia who speak the ethnolect and another for the Greeks in Australia or Greece who speak Modern Greek Koine:

	Greek ethnolect in Australia	Modern Greek Koine
stamp > <i>στάμπα</i>	“stamp” (for letters)	“seal”, “imprint”
note > <i>νότα</i>	“bond”, “bill”	“musical sound”
boot > <i>μπούτι</i>	“car trunk”	“thigh”, “leg” (animal)
deposit > <i>ντεπόζιτο</i>	“down payment”, “bond”	“container for liquids”
car > <i>κάρο</i>	“motor car”	“cart”
loaf > <i>λόφος</i>	“loaf of bread”	“high ground”, “rise”, “hillock”
metre > <i>μήτρα</i>	“parking metre”	“womb”

The hellenisation process should not surprise, simply because it constitutes a common linguistic process resulting from interlanguage contact. After all this happens

continually in Modern Greek Koine with the morphological adjustment to the Greek inflectional system of words borrowed from other languages:

Singular	Plural	
<i>τρένο</i>	<i>τρένα</i>	< Italian treno < French train
<i>ταξί</i>	<i>ταξιά</i>	< French taxi (first element of the compound word of Greek origin taximètre “ταξίμετρο” < “τάξη” + “μέτρο”)
<i>ράδιο</i>	<i>ράδια</i>	< English radio < English radium < Latin radius (first element of compound Greek origin words, such as radiophony)
<i>κιμάς</i>	<i>κιμάδες</i>	< Turkish kiyma < Turkish verb kiymak “I cut” “I chop”

It is interesting that many of these hellenised words are so entrenched in the Modern Greek Koine vocabulary that usually only language experts or linguists detect their foreign origin.

Loan translations

These are words, phrases or even syntactic structures borrowed by Greek from Australian English in translation:

Late night shopping	>	<i>Αργονυχτιάτικα ψώνια</i> instead of <i>βραδινά ψώνια</i>
Write down	>	<i>Γράψε κάτω</i> instead of <i>γράψε</i>
I like it	>	<i>Το</i> (direct object) <i>αρέσω</i> instead of <i>Μου</i> (indirect object) <i>αρέσει</i> , like <i>το θέλω, το ζωγραφίζω</i> applying the rule of analogy
I am right	>	<i>Είμαι σωστός</i> instead of <i>έχω δίκιο</i>

The main language area of these three categories is the oral level. However, they are encountered not infrequently in written texts, and even in the Greek-language literary writings of Australia, reflecting thus the influence of the Australian language mode of communication and of Australian society in general. Moreover, while in the past this influence used to appear only in one literary genre — poetry, particularly satirical poetry — now it is found in all literary genres, and not only in light-hearted writing but serious as well.

Concluding this part of my paper, I would like to challenge an old fallacy which has prevailed in foreign-language teaching and learning. The phonological and lexical borrowed items which end up as deviations from the Greek norm are not, and should not be considered, language mistakes or errors but a natural linguistic adjustment to the receiver language, in this case Greek in the Australian linguistic environment.

The influence of Greek on Australian English

The Greek language may have undergone influences within the Australian socio-linguistic environment but, thanks to its lexical flexibility, its semantic accuracy and its diachronic multidimensional cultural development, and therefore its cultural and linguistic prestige internationally, it has succeeded in developing a steady base of reference and been a continuous source of enrichment of various languages, especially in Europe, and through them many others in other parts of the world. One such case is Australian English. Australian English, despite its short linguistic history, exhibits interesting Greek influences, in many cases unique, as well as characteristic of its own independent sociocultural and historical structure. These influences are found in many fields, including the scientific (botany, zoology, medicine, etc.), the military, the social, the geographical, tourism, and immigration.

Many of the loans are *indirect* due to the historical origins of Australian English, especially its connection to British English, but also from its contact in modern times with other varieties of English, such as American English, while other loans are *direct* because of Greek immigration and settlement in this country.

Indirect loans in Australian English from Greek, especially through British English, constitute material charged with a multidimensional spectrum of cultural, social, political and ecclesiastical meanings and concepts, a fact which undoubtedly has played a significant role in the linguistic flexibility and lexical richness, initially of British English, and later of Australian English.

Here, it is worth noting that some lexicographers often erroneously credit loans to the Latin language instead of to Greek. According to the lexicographer John Smock,

the relative contributions of Latin and Greek to the English vocabulary had come to be misunderstood greatly to the disadvantage of Greek. The circumstance that Greek words are commonly [...] represented in dictionaries as taken from Latin and New Latin, tends to obscure the fact that most learned Latin words were taken from Greek and in the chief Latin authors were commonly used as alien words, in the best old manuscripts usually without transliteration. They were Latin in about the same sense that *blasé*, *contretemps*, and *nouveau riche* are English (Smock, 1931:xii).

Regarding *direct* Greek loans in Australian English, a notable source has been the long Greek immigration to this country. Among the direct loans there are words borrowed by Australian English mainly in the 1950s and 1960s and onwards on everyday matters, such as foodstuffs and meals (fet(t)a, filo/phylo [pastry], kalamari, souvlaki, taramosalata, etc.), beverages (ouzo, retsina), entertainment (bouzouki), handicraft (flokati), etc. In the case of direct Greek loans there are also the words which pre-existed in British English but acquired new meanings in Australian English, as well as those directly borrowed to render, for example, names of plants, animals and phenomena exclusively Australian.

All this linguistic polymorphism, carrying the mark of direct and indirect Greek influence, covers diachronically the entire course of the history of Australia as a nation, and at the same time exhibits influences not only from Modern Greek but also largely from Ancient Greek (words and word stems). In general, the Greek borrowings by Australian English are obvious mainly on the morphological and the lexical levels.

Morphological level

Synthesis

Combination of Greek elements

Greek Adjective + Greek Noun > Australian English Noun

έρημος + φύλλα > eremophyla (bush of very dry areas of Australia, known as “poverty bush”)[1810]

Combination of Greek with a non-Greek element

Greek Noun + English Noun > Australian English Noun

Λύρα + bird > lyre-bird [1824]

Compound words the components of which are linked with the connective vowel -o-

English Noun + -o- + Greek Noun > Australian English Noun

coal + -o- + πόλις > coalopolis (term attributed to the Australian city of Newcastle) [1891]

Combination of synthesis and suffixation

Greek Noun + Latin Noun + Greek suffix > Australian English Noun

τένων + synovia/sinovia (liquid greasing the joints and tenons) + -ίτις > tenosynovitis (teno) [1984]

Derivation

Apart from the derivational processes of *prefixation* and *suffixation* for the formation of new words (based on Greek loans) in English in general, the process involved in the production of exclusively Australian English words is *abbreviation*:

anabranh [1834]	< anastomosing branch (branch of a river linking two tributaries)
octo [1912] or ocky [1968]	< octopus
acca or acker [1977]	< academic
eucy or euky [1977]	< eucalyptus oil

Lexical level

Independent loans

Australian English has borrowed many independent Greek words either directly from Greek or indirectly through other languages, and in both adjusted and unadjusted forms. An example of an adjusted loan directly from Greek is cleft-y/-ie or clift-y/-ie (< κλέφτης < κλέπτης < κλέπτω) [1918] which entered the Australian lexicon with the Australian soldiers who returned from World War I. An adjusted Greek loan borrowed indirectly through Latin is the word monotreme (< New Latin monotrema < Greek μονό- + τρήμα “hole”) [1835].

Australian English adopted a number of unadjusted loans borrowed directly from Greek, mainly during the twentieth century, and especially after World War II. They entered the Australian English vocabulary mainly through Greek immigrants to Australia, but also through Australians who spent some time in Greece as tourists (taramosalata, dolmades, fet(t)a, souvlaki, kalamari, ouzo, flokati, etc.). By contrast, unadjusted loan words from Greek which entered Australian English before the mid-twentieth century are mainly scientific terms (zoological, botanical, etc.). Several Greek names (anthroponyms, mythological names, names of places, trees, plants, etc.) have been borrowed in the course of time by Australian English, enriching its lexicon. Such names have been given to Australian towns and topographic features (mountains, lakes, rivers, etc.), even to people as their first names. Some examples are: Diamantina, Pelion, Olympus, Achilles, Labyrinth, Acacia, Acheron, Calliope, Hector, Mysia, Scamander, Macedon, Theodore.

Here an idiosyncratic point is the problem which the polysyllabic Greek anthroponyms create when borrowed by Australian English. Their pattern is that, like most Greek words, they consist of two or more syllables, in comparison with the English anthroponyms (like most English words in general) which usually consist of one or two syllables. The result, to facilitate communication with English speakers who find polysyllabic words difficult to pronounce, is the tendency of Australian English either to abbreviate the Greek name by cutting down several syllables in the process of Australianisation or to translate them:

<i>Κωνσταντίνος</i>	becomes	Con
<i>Καλλιόπη</i>	becomes	Callie
<i>Αθανάσιος</i>	becomes	Athas
<i>Καλογερόπουλος</i>	becomes	Kalos
<i>Ραφτόπουλος</i>	becomes	Rafty
whereas,		
<i>Τραμουντάνας</i>	becomes	North
<i>Αγγελής</i>	becomes	Angel
<i>Ραφτόπουλος</i>	becomes	Taylor
<i>Διαμαντής</i>	becomes	Diamond
<i>Γεωργαντόπουλος</i>	becomes	Georgeson

Many Greek botanical and zoological names have been borrowed indirectly through Latin:

acacia	(Term for a family of trees in Australia [1903]) < Latin acacia < most probably from Ancient Greek <i>ακακία</i> “harmlessness” < adj. <i>άκακος</i> “harmless”
epacris	(Small Australian bush or tree [1804]) < New Latin epacris < Greek <i>επ(ι)-</i> “upon” + <i>άκρις</i> “edge”
eucalyptus	(“Eucalyptus tree” is the earliest Greek loan of Australian English I have located [1788]) < New Latin eucalyptus < Greek <i>ευ-</i> “well” + <i>καλύπτω</i> “cover”
menura	(Australian bird with crescent spots on its tail [1800]) < New Latin menura < Greek <i>μήνη</i> “crescent” < <i>μην (-ας)</i> (original meaning “moon”) + <i>ουρά</i> .

Semantic neologisms

Some semantic neologisms of Greek origin in Australian English are the terms “platypus”, “echidna” and “Eureka”:

The term “platypus”, “flat-footed person” (<*πλατύπους* < *πλατύς* + *πους*), was borrowed directly by Australian English to indicate the semi-aquatic burrowing monotreme mammal of Australia [1799].

The term “echidna” (the animal originally known as “spiny anteater”) is a Greek loan word (*έχιδνα* < *έχίς* “snake”) which Australian English borrowed indirectly through Latin (echidna). Like the platypus, the echidna is a monotreme mammal of Australia.

The term “Eureka”, Archimedes’ famous exclamation when he discovered the law of upward force in fluids, in Australian English became the place name of the gold mine in Victoria [1853] where an armed clash took place between gold miners and the British army [1854]. In addition, since the second half of the twentieth century, this term is also associated with the republican movement in Australia.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to comprehensively account for the situation resulting from the interlanguage contact between Greek and Australian English over time, directly and indirectly, in oral and written communication on different levels of language analysis (phonological, morphological and especially lexical).

It is hoped that it has amply clarified that the phenomenon of interlanguage borrowing is a natural as well as an age-old process among languages in contact.

Finally, interlanguage borrowing, as long as it is not the result of blind imitation, fashion or mindless “progressiveness”, does not destabilise or undermine the identity of a language. On the contrary it reveals an opening towards the cultures of other peoples, as well as a willingness for exchange of meanings, ideas and learning in general. This brings to mind Tappolet’s relevant distinction — referring in particular to interlanguage lexical borrowings — between “emprunts de nécessité” and “emprunts de luxe” (in Haugen, 1956:60).

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