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Athanasia Chalari  
PhD candidate in Sociology

University of Warwick  
Sociology Department

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**“Why Greeks talk at the same time all together:  
Examining the phenomenon of overlaps in everyday Greek conversations”**

**Paper for 2nd LSE PhD Symposium on Modern Greece****Title: “Why Greeks talk at the same time all together:  
Examining the phenomenon of overlaps in everyday Greek conversations”****Abstract**

In recent work on Conversation Analysis there has been a growing interdisciplinary interest among conversation analysts and linguists with regard interpretation of social interaction and grammar/syntax. This paper investigates the phenomenon of overlaps in everyday Greek conversation within the context of the amalgamation of interaction and grammar/syntax. The core of the present investigation would be the study of how Greek grammar and syntax make possible the occurrence of overlaps in specific locations, in everyday Greek conversation. Greek grammar and syntax have specific functions (such as freer word order, much information included in the verb, subject omission) which allow interaction to occur in specific forms (displays early projectability and early occurrence of overlaps). Furthermore, the co-existence of the above grammatical and syntactical characteristics within a Greek turn, make possible the appearance of overlaps in specific locations. Consequently, syntactic practices of Modern Greek language shape the organisation of overlaps that occur in everyday Greek conversations.

In Greek, grammar and interaction organise each other and more specifically syntactic practices of language shape the organization of overlaps. This study proposes that if over time the suggestions of this study are generalisable then it could be supported that social and national stereotypes (for example that Greeks are loud or impolite or that they talk all together) actually born in interaction. Namely, those kinds of patterns (the production of early overlaps because of the Greek grammar and syntax) lead to those kinds of perceptions (that Greeks are loud and interruptive, as many of us characterise ourselves).

**General Review**

Conversational interaction can be understood as a form of social organization through which the work of most institutions of society –family, economy, policy, and socialization- gets done. The natural environment that helps conversation to develop and grow is language. One of the most fundamental preconditions for a viable social organization is the opportunity to participate in social interaction. For the members of societies, i.e. humans, conversation is the complete representation of this aspect of sociality. One feature that underlines all forms of talk-in-interaction is the turn-talking organisation. Schegloff, 2000 suggests that turn-taking is an organisation of practices

designed to allow routine achievement of what appears to be overwhelmingly the most common default ‘numerical’ value of speakership of talk on interaction: one party at a time (however, the cases of more than one speaker talk at a time are not rare and those cases are called *overlapping talk* or simultaneous talk, and this kind of conversational element will be the core of the present study).

This is a matter not so much of politeness as of the constitutive features of commonplace talk-in-interaction, as an enabling institution for orderly commence between people. In 1988, Schegloff mentions that the absence of such an organisation would subvert the possibility of stable trajectories of action and responsive action through which goal-oriented projects can be launched and pursued through talk-in-interaction, whether to success or failure. The organization of turn-taking practices in talk-in-interaction is among those features of social life that are so deeply embedded in ordinary common-sense practice that they challenge articulate awareness and explicit disciplined description.

Conversation (and other forms of talk in interaction) is the key organisational core into which language is introduced. An important organizational device for the structuring of talk in turns and especially the units from which turns are constructed is called: turn constructional units –TCU (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, -SSJ 1974: 702-703). The TCU can be identified as grammatical structuring as language’s ‘equivalent’ fitting to the organizational need of turns as the ‘host space’ in which language deposits are accommodated. TCUs can constitute possibly complete turns, on their possible completion; transition to a next speaker becomes relevant. Therefore, grammar could be considered as a basic organization for the turn constructional unit. Consequently, a key unit of language organization for talk-in-interaction is the turn constructional unit; its natural habitat is the turn at talk; its organization should be called ‘grammar’ (Schegloff, 1996a).

The first possible point at which a turn-constructional unit is hearably complete is called turn-relevance place (TRP). This is a juncture where turn-transfer or speaker-change may potentially occur, though it need not necessarily take place at the first transition-relevance place (Tanaka, 1999: 27). Therefore, the accuracy of the turn-taking system must rely on a method of prediction on the part of inter-actants as to

where a turn is likely to be completed. The TRP is a spot in a turn that participants recognize as the potential end of a turn, a place where a transition from one speaker to another becomes relevant, and thus TRP can be understood as the possible completion of the turn. TRP is related with *projectability*, since, through projectability TRP can be recognised (in the following section this issue will be further analysed). Consequently, a word (or a phrase, or a clause or a sentence) being used as a complete turn will have TRP at its end. In conversational turn taking, the various practices that participants use to change from one speaker to another (or give another turn to the same speaker) operate at the TRP (Nofsinger, 1991: 81).

Furthermore, Schegloff mentions that grammatical and syntactical structures of language should be understood as at least partially shaped by the organization of the turn, the organizational unit that ‘hosts’ grammatical units (Schegloff, 1979). The following section will present the notion of projectability and relevant grammatical elements will also be discussed (although a more comprehensive discussion concerning Greek grammar and syntax follows in the next section).

### Projectability.

An important concept for the establishment of common understanding and the regulation of talk is that of *projectability*.

*“Projectability can be understood as those features of a Turn-Constructional Units (TCU), which allow participants to anticipate or predict where an instance of the unit will come to an end (...)The first possible point at which a TCU is hearably complete is the TRP” (Tanaka, 1999: 27).*

This is the property of utterances to project what is going to occur within a turn and its possible completion point or turn relevance place – TRP (SSJ, 1974: 702; Hutchby and Wooffitt, 1998: 48). The way turns are constructed and the units are used is important for what is projected. In post-positional languages such as German and Japanese, the ‘sense’ of what is being said is most often left for the very end, where the verb appears in clause-final position. In these languages we have low projectability. The opposite occurs in a pre-positional language such as English:

projectability is high, as the crucial elements of the clause are in the beginning of the fixed SVO (Subject –Verb-Object) (Schegloff et al., 1996). Research has shown that turn beginnings in English are important places in the turn for turn-shape and turn-type projection (Schegloff, 1987). According to Schegloff:

*“Projectability is the capacity to project for a hearer more or less what it would take for the talk-unit then in progress to be possibly complete. Such a projection could, of course, be confirmed or transformed by any next bit of talk out of the speaker’s mouth, or any talk-related other conduct (gesticulation, facial expression, posture, etc.)”* (Schegloff, 2000: 43).

A key element of the turn-taking organization is the projectability of possible turn completion in advance of its actual arrival<sup>1</sup>. As Ochs, et al (1996) demonstrate, it is clear that a basic contribution to projectability is grammar structure. They also state that it is possible that projectability might vary within different grammatical structures. English grammar for example gives more weight to word order than to morphological inflection, and that is –within the word order languages – a so-called SVO language<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, by the time ordinary English clauses/sentences approach their ends; their last elements have often been substantially adumbrated, and may appear well determined. The projectability can then be very high ( Schegloff, et al 1996). Schegloff (1987a) also says of English conversation:

*“Turn beginnings are an important initial place, and an important initial resource, for the projection of the turn-shape or the turn-type of the turn that is being begun at the turn beginning. Such projection is a critical resource for the organisation of the turn-taking system for conversation. It is a critical resource for the organisation of a system that aims to achieve, and massively does achieve, the feature: one speaker speaks at a time in conversation.”* (Schegloff , 1987: 71).

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<sup>1</sup> Further analysis see Lerener,G. H., (1996) & Ford, C. E. and Thompson, S .A. (1996)

<sup>2</sup> Note that Greek is a VSO language as it will be discussed but the pattern of SVO is used more often.

Elsewhere, Schegloff mentions that generally the starts of turns are designed to connect to their prior turns, and their ends are designed to provide projections and connections for their following turns (Sacks et al 1974: 722).

Hence, as it becomes clear, projectability is a very important tool in everyday conversations in order to predict or understand what the speaker might say next. Also, projectability is directly related to syntactic practices of each language and English (as a SVO) language can be characterised as language that could offer 'early projectability'. Finally as Schegloff in 1987 argues, and SSJ, in 1974 states, the beginnings of TCUs are very important in CA studies as they could project what it might follow. In Greek, as it shall be argued, there are often cases of 'early projectability' which derives from the Greek word order and the phenomenon of 'subject deletion'<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore it will be argued that syntactic strategies of Greek language shape the organization of overlaps. In other words, early projectability in Greek language is directly related with the phenomenon of overlaps which occur in specific locations within Greek TCUs.

#### The identification of the phenomenon of overlap.

As it was discussed, the basic method that conversations are organised in a way that can present a form of social organization and the notion of talk-in-interaction is turn-taking organization. As SSJ argues in 1974, the basic target of turn-taking organisation<sup>4</sup> is the achievement of one party talking at a time. The absence of such an organisation would subvert the possibility of stable trajectories of action and responsive action through which goal oriented projects can be initiated and practised through talk in interaction, whether to success or failure (Schegloff, 1988: 98-99).

The organisation of turn taking which represents the practice of talk in interaction directly derives from every day common sense practices. This characteristic of social life was first observed and studied by E. Goffman in 1955. After this first attempt Duncan and his associates (1972 and 1977) continued analogue studies (i.e. two

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<sup>3</sup> Further discussion will follow.

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on turn-taking: Tanaka, H. (1999), Nofsinger, R. E. (1991) and Ten Have, P. (1999)

persons interactions). However, the main account offered in the social sciences has been that of SSJ in 1974. According to SSJ the central problem in turn taking in conversation is an organization device that would allow parties to achieve the design feature of one-party-at-a-time in the face of a recurrent change in which the speaking party was, while providing as well for such occasions of multiple speakership as the parties might undertake to co-construct (Schegloff, 2000).

Schegloff (2000) supports that talk by more than one person at a time in the same conversation is one of the two major departures that occur from the basic design feature of conversation, and of talk-in-interaction (more generally namely 'one at a time'). The other departure is silence i.e. fewer than one at the time. Comparison with activities that are designed to apply other values of 'one-at-a-time' (e.g. 'all-at-a-time' in political or athletic venues) allows an appreciation of a different sound talk-in-interaction has by virtue of its one-party-at-a-time design. No matter how much overlapping talk can be found in the talk of members of such categories the talk appears to be co-constructed by reference to one-at-a-time as its target design feature, rather than to any other value Schegloff (2000).

*“However simultaneous talk comes into being- whether by simultaneous start-ups of a next turn by more than a single speaker, or by apparently orderly and warrantable start-ups by a next speaker while a prior is still talking (Sacks et al, 1974:721, Jefferson, 1984a, Lerner, 1991, 1996) or by outright interruptions whether designed or not (...) The most obvious practice for stopping talk by more than one at a time is to stop talking. One or more of the parties to the simultaneous talk should stop talking; and to display that it is the overlapping talk that is the grounds for stopping, they should stop talking before coming to a possible completion of the turn-constructive-unit they are producing ” (Schegloff, 2000: 3).*

Therefore, as it was presented above, *overlap*, which can also be understood as *simultaneous talk*, is identified as the talk two or more persons produce at the same time. Furthermore, the notion of overlap or simultaneous talk should not be confused with the term 'interruption' whose service (as Schegloff, 2000 states) an analytic resource is overwhelmed by serious problems and which is used as a vernacular term.

Moreover, it should be underlined that in the present study we are not interested in the management of overlaps or who produces them or why, as Schegloff, 2000 tries to analyse in his study. This study investigates the position an overlap can take in a Greek clause and the connection this position might have with the Greek word order (i.e. the position of the verb and subject). In other words, how the function of Greek syntax and grammar can make the appearance of overlaps possible in particular positions. Finally 'overlaps' refer to talk by 'more than one person at a time' and as Schegloff, 2000 suggests, regularly when more than one person talking at a time, two persons talk at the same time and no more. Talk by more than two at a time seems to be reduced to two even more effectively than talk by two is reduced to one.

#### The involvement of syntactical and grammatical elements

Overlaps in the present study are examined in relevance with projectability that syntactical elements within the turn can provide. As it was discussed before, linguistics can contribute to the further understanding of projectability and in this study, linguistics provided the basis for the understanding of the projectability, according to the word order patterns Greek language can offer. Therefore, syntactic organisation can determine how projectability can be unfolded and in which spot within the turn. In this study, syntactic practices of Greek language shall be supported that shape the organization of overlaps.

Conversation Analysis on Anglo-American interaction has proven to be an innovative field of investigation into the detailed organization of a wide variety of naturally occurring interactional phenomena. This study attempts to make a contribution to the area through an examination of the phenomenon of overlaps in everyday Greek conversation. This examination shall be based on the syntactic organisation of Greek utterances, which shall guide this investigation to the appreciation of the early projectability Greek everyday conversation sentences could display. The next step would be the identification of a possible location overlaps might take, according to the most preferred word order pattern Greeks use. However, since basic research on Greek interactional organisation and conversation analysis and therefore overlaps is still relatively sparse, this dissertation will be centred on Greek language, while relying on existing work on overlaps and projectability by others (e.g. SSJ. 1974,

Schegloff, 2000, Lerner, 1996) and on Greek syntactic organization by linguistic scientists (e.g. Philippaki-Warbuton, 1985; 1987; 1990; Mavrogiorgos, 2003; Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou, 1998; Georgiafentis, 2001).

### Method:

In this study, the method of Conversation Analysis is used – an approach to the analysis of spoken interaction that was first developed in the 1960s by the sociologist Harvey Sacks and his collaborators. The data for this dissertation is from an audio recording of naturally occurring conversations that take place in three different encounters. The first encounter involves three students (two law students and a girl) lasting 90 minutes. The second encounter involves three young men, lasting approximately 60 minutes and the third encounter takes place between the members of a family and it lasts 60 minutes. Each transcript is labelled after the people who take part. Thus, in the first encounter the transcript is called “Law students”, the second “Kostas-Petros-Nikos” and the third “Family”. All participants are Greek native speakers and they come from Athens. The ages of participants are between 20 and 50. The setting for each encounter is informal and the two first conversations (“law students” and “Kostas-Petros-Nikos”) take place in a café whereas the third (“family”) takes place in the family’s home.

The study is based on the analysis of 210 minutes of the recording. The first line of each turn in each transcript is written in English characters but it is a phonetic rendering of the original Greek utterance. The second line is a direct word-by-word translation in English of the previous line (including grammatical descriptions) and the last line is the English gloss. All symbols that are used in the second line are analytically presented in the appendix. The following example taken from the transcripts constitute an illustration of the above description:

#### (1. Family Transcript)

```
05.I: >pes mu pos geernusate to vradee< sto Peeso Leevadee
      >tell me how came back CLI night < CLI Piso Livadi
      >tell me how you were going back in< Piso Livadi at night
```

06.A: ʔme to leoforeeo°  
 °with CLI bus°  
 °by bus°

The main phenomenon that it was identified was overlapping talk and the following symbol marked it: [...], but also some prosodic features are marked. An example of overlapping talk shall make clear the above symbol:

## (2. Family Transcript)

25.A: elate edo Keereea Taseea [pu pate?]  
 come here Ms lnameF [where go?]  
**Ms Tasia come here [where you are going?]**

26.T: [erhome:e ]  
 [comi:ing ]  
**[I'm comi:ing]**

## CA Presentation:

Conversation Analysis (CA) is a research tradition that grew out of ethnomethodology, and has some unique methodological features. It studies the social organisation of 'conversation', or 'talk-in-interaction', by a detailed inspection of tape recordings and transcriptions made from such recordings. Conversation Analysis is a disciplined way of studying the local organisation of interactional episodes; its unique methodological practice has enabled its practitioners to produce a mass of insights into the detailed procedural foundations of everyday life. It has developed some very practical solutions to some rather thorny methodological problems.

As Heritage & Atkinson (1984) mention:

*“The central goal of conversation analytic research is the description and explication of the competences that ordinary speakers use and rely on in participating in intelligible, socially organized interaction. At its most basic, this objective is one of describing the procedures by which conversationalists produce their own behaviour and understand and deal with the behaviour of*

*others. A basic assumption throughout is Garfinkel's (1967: 1) proposal that these activities - producing conduct and understanding and dealing with it - are accomplished as the accountable products of common sets of procedures".*  
(Heritage & Atkinson 1984:1)

The idea is that conversations are orderly, not only for observing analysts, but in the first place for participating members (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973: 290; Sacks, 1984 a: 22). This orderliness is seen as the product of the systematic deployment of specifiable interactional methods - 'devices', 'systems', an 'apparatus' - that are used by members as solutions to specifiable organisational problems in social interaction. These methods have a double-faced characteristic: on the one hand they are quite general, while on the other they allow for a fine-tuned adaptation to local circumstances; in the terminology used by Sacks et al (1974), they are both 'context-free' and 'context-sensitive'.

CA researchers insist on the use of audio- or video recordings of episodes of 'naturally occurring' that is non-experimental, interaction as their basic data. This insistence is quite unique in the social sciences. The subject of investigation for conversation analysts is sequences and turns within sequences rather than isolated sentences or utterances that have become the primary units of analysis. This focus on participant orientation to the turn-within-sequence character of utterances in conversational interaction has significant substantive and methodological consequences. In a variety of ways, the production of some current conversational action proposes a here-and-now definition of the situation to which subsequent talk will be oriented. Instances of this process occur when the current turn projects a relevant next action, or range of actions, to be accomplished by another speaker in the next turn – a phenomenon generally referred as the 'sequential implicativeness' of a turn's talk (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973: 296). Therefore, the vast majority of utterances occur as selections from a field of possibilities made relevant by some prior utterance, and in their turn project a range of possible 'nexts'.

### **Greek Grammar and Syntax: a Linguistic Approach**

The Greek grammar.

In this section we shall investigate how Greek grammar and syntax make some actions possible. This way of analysing data through conversation analysis (i.e. interaction and grammar) is very strongly supported in English literature (Ochs, Schegloff & Thompson, 1996). Since Greek language is different from English, and there is no relevant literature regarding this view on Greek syntax, the basic features of Greek syntax and grammar are considered vital, and therefore should be presented.

Although Greek has been traditionally considered an SVO (Subject, Verb, Object) language (cf. Greenberg 1963; Lightfoot 1981), nowadays it is generally accepted that VSO is the basic word order, being the most neutral one in structural and pragmatic terms (cf. Philippaki-Warbuton 1985; Tsimpli 1990). Furthermore, in Greek the subject and/or the object may precede or follow the verb, yielding a relatively free(er) word order.

However, generally, the most repeatedly form of word order in a clause in Greek language is: Subject (S), Verb (V) and Object (O). The verb is the central element of the clause since every clause must contain a verb with the exception of some popular clauses where the verb "*eeme*" - "*I am*" may be unexpressed/implicit. Furthermore, the number and the type of components that may combine with the verb are determined by the type of the verb (direct, indirect, locative, benefactive e.t.c.) or predicate complements as well as the manner, place and time adverbials, which modify the verb. It would be beneficial to present an example:

*"Kostas sees Athens"*

The VERB in a sentence tells us what is happening (here it is sees). Who is doing the seeing? Obviously, Kostas is doing the seeing. We call the doer the SUBJECT of the sentence. There is one word left over in this sentence, Athens. This is what Kostas sees, the object of his vision. We call this the OBJECT of the verb. In order to understand better Greek syntax we should focus our attention in verb, subject and object separately.

In Greek we use single words to express each of these tenses. Thus, in English "I was stopping" is three words, while in Greek it is only one (*stamatusa*). Greek tenses are very important in Greek language. This observation is essential for the present study. As will be shown, the occurrence of an overlap could depend on when a participant could guess what the speaker might say. In Greek language a single word, (e.g. a verb) might project more information than it could project in English language or other languages, and in that sense, the overlap might occur earlier in a Greek sentence. As will be shown in the following section, the position of an overlap could be related to the position of the verb in a clause, and therefore it is very important to understand the projectability verbs could contain. This projectability is actually 'located' in the Greek verb ending. Thus the more we can understand of how the Greek verbs operate, the better we shall understand the position of the overlaps.

### (3. Family)

```
05.I: >pes mu pos geernusate to vradee< sto Peeso Leevadee
      >tell me how came back CLI night < CLI Piso Livadi
      >tell me how you were going back at< Piso Livadi at night
```

This is a characteristic example, which shows clearly the difference between the use of a Greek verb, and the analogous in English. The verb "*geernusa-te*" is a single word that the ending *-te* indicates the person: you, the tense: past continues, the number: plural, the voice: passive etc. As it is obvious, there is much information that a single verb can provide. Therefore, in an everyday Greek conversation, a participant may easily guess what the present speaker is about to say, just by hearing the first verb of a clause.

### The Subject.

Subject, in Greek language is the word (or the part of sentence) that shows the one who acts or the one who receives an action or the one who is in a situation. An additional important point that requires clarification is when we can have omission or deletion of the subject (ellipsis or implicit). This case occurs very often in Greek language, but mainly when the subject is easily understood. For example:

## (4.Law students)

77.A: =eeha par[ee:ee]  
 = had ta[ke]  
 =I had cho[sen]

78.D: [to single] market den>eehes paree<?=  
 [CLI+SG single]market NEG> had take<?=  
**Haven't you chosen the single market (module)?=**

In this fragment the verb is in blue. In the phrase “eeha paree:ee”, we observe deletion of the subject. This deletion however, is perfectly understandable since the verb ‘eeha’ contains the meaning of the subject. The subject is the word ‘ego’ or in translation ‘I’. As we will see in the following sections, this phenomenon is very common in Greek language. Furthermore, it is a very important observation which will be related in the following analysis, with the position of the overlaps. In the previous example, the overlap is located very early in the clause, and a possible reason could be the early projectability of the following phrase. A further and more detailed analysis will make this point clear in the following sections.

*A synthetic example.*

In order to understand how Greek verbs function and how the subjects could be omitted in Greek, some characteristic examples taken from the Family transcript demonstrate the above characteristics. (Please note that the words in blue are the verbs in each sentence).

## (5. Family)

615.T: menun [olee mazee ]?  
 live [all together]?  
**do they live [all together]?**

616.F: [.h mazee ke] ee gee tus?  
 [.h together and] CLI+PL sons POS?  
**[.h with them and] their sons?**

617.A: e:eh den xero  
 e:eh NEG know  
**e:eh I don't know**

In the above example, the verb is “*menun*” which directly means “they live” (the ending *-un* provides this information). Also there is a question. In Greek language the question is identified from the voice’s tone, but in English language the word “do” has to be added. Thus, the word “*menun?*” is translated as: “do they live?”. Furthermore, is the case that the subject is implicit because it is inferred from the verb. We can also see that the verb is at the beginning of the sentence and exactly after F. heard this word, overlapped with the first speaker and he made clear that he understood what T. was about to say. If this dialogue was in English the second speaker may have had to wait to hear three words instead of one in order to understand what the second speaker was about to say, and then decide if he will overlap with him or not.

#### The Greek syntax – The Linguistics’ contribution.

In Modern Greek (hence Greek) the structure of a clause depends in many ways on the subject. There have been many arguments concerning a general pattern of the Greek word order and the recent linguistic research has focused its attention on the location of the subject. It should be mentioned briefly that Casimili (1991) has argued that Greek language is a non-configurational language with ‘flat’ clause structure while Tsimpli (1990) advocates a ‘configurational’ analysis in which subjects invariably occupy a position structurally superior to complements. Tsimpli also argues, following Philippaki-Warbuton (1985, 1987, 1990) that Greek has VSO as its basic word order, and that VSO order arises only when a topicalized constituent adjoined to the projection of a higher functional category is coindexed with a null subject (*pro*) in the canonical, postverbal, subject position. Horrocks (1992) also supports this view by providing further evidence. However, two recent studies propose a different approach concerning word order in Greek language. Georgiafentis (2001) studies the VSO order and criticises Philippaki-Warbuton’s models. Furthermore, Mavrogiorgos (2003) presents the basic patterns of word order in

Modern Greek. In the present discussion we shall present the importance of the subject in Greek word order.

Greek is a Null Subject Language (NSL), and many properties of Greek subjects have been attributed to this fact. There have been quite a few analyses of Greek subjects and other related issues by a number of linguists, mainly in the GB model (e.g., Philippaki-Warbuton 1987; Drachman 1989; Horrocks 1992), but also in the Minimalist Program (e.g., Alexiadou & Anagnostopoulou 1998; Philippaki-Warbuton & Spyropoulos 2001). As we can understand, the role of the subject is central in linguistic analysis and some recent research has taken place concerning the nature of Greek subjects and their structural positions (Mavrogiorgos, 2003, Georgiadjis, 2001). As we shall support in the present study, the position of the subject (or the deletion of the subject) is one of the key elements in the position of an overlap in Greek language and therefore the understanding of the structural position of it is essential. The following section describes the word order patterns in Modern Greek, and therefore the main properties of Greek subjects shall be analysed.

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#### The nature of Greek subjects.

As it was mentioned above, Greek is a Null Subject Language. This means that in Greek clauses the pronominal subject can be dropped. Note that *pro* (representation of subject deletion) must be identified by the agreement suffix on the verb, the latter being the only element in the clause that bears the appropriate person and number features. This is related to the traditional view that verbal agreement morphology is in some way responsible for the possibility of null subjects (cf. Taraldsen 1978)<sup>5</sup>. The availability of *pro* (subject deletion) is associated with a group of other phenomena, such as subject inversion, apparent absence of filter effects, and in general subject-object asymmetries (cf. Rizzi 1982 for Italian). In all these cases the overt subject is said to move to a postverbal position, while an expletive *pro* is in. The null hypothesis is that an element enters the numeration only if it has an effect on output (Chomsky 1995: 294). Since *pro* has by definition no phonological features, only semantic evidence can support its existence (Mavrogiorgos, 2003: 15-17).

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<sup>5</sup> Rich morphology is not enough, as languages like Hebrew or Chinese show (cf. Rizzi 1997b).

### Quantitative Evidence.

As it was described above the basic word order pattern in Greek is the SVO. This conclusion derives either from theoretical linguistic aspects or from quantitative studies. In Lascaratou, (1989: 42 and 47-48) on the basis of the analysis of 2530 active declarative clauses, it was shown that SVO was by far the most frequent active transitive order (49.2%), in contrast with VSO (1.1%) and VOS (0.7%), as well as the overwhelmingly most frequent main clause order (62.8%). In other words, SVO is the main clause order *par excellence*, which justifies the widely held view that Modern Greek is an SVO language. However as Laskaratou states and as modern literature supports, Greek should plausibly be classified as having free word order with SVO as its *dominant* active transitive order.

The above study supports in statistical terms the most common word order. In the present study, the fragments that are going to be used will mainly have the SVO word order and therefore it was necessary to explain why this word order is the basic and – as it was supported- the most frequent. Also many fragments that will be used for this study should present the phenomenon of the subject deletion. The following study could present some statistical frequencies which might explain this preference:

The study examines the frequency of the deletion of the subject and took place in 1996 by Katsimali. . In newspapers' articles she observed that the subject is missing very often from the sentence (72.2%) but in natural occurring dialogues the frequency of the subject deletion is even higher and the presence of the subject is the lowest (27.7%). This fact according to Katsimali can be explained as long as the two speakers have given all their attention to the dialogue and they can easily understand what the next speaker wants/tries to say. It was also observed that in natural occurring conversations the subject was located before the verb (SV) slightly less times (49.4%) than the verb was located before the subject (VS) (50.5%).

As becomes obvious the phenomenon of subject deletion is common in Greek as it was explained in the previous section, but also there is some statistical evidence that it is frequent especially in natural occurring conversations. Therefore, it can be

supported that the examples that are going to be studied (which present the phenomenon of subject deletion) in this study are not rare occasions in everyday dialogues. The linguistic literature investigates mainly written (and not oral-verbal) conversations-fragments-sentences and dialogues which could be produced in everyday life (or can be characterised by linguistic scientists as typical examples). Therefore both studies (especially the first one) which were discussed above are mainly based on written and not oral speech and especially not on spontaneous oral conversations. Nevertheless, they support the existence and the importance of phenomena (subject deletion in relation to word order) that this thesis investigates from a different scientific point of view.

### **Exploring projectability through overlap.**

#### Projectability and Overlaps in Greek Language.

Schegloff proposes a key role of grammar: to provide orderliness to the shape of interactional turns and to facilitate the calibration of possible turn endings and turn-taking. Cecilia Ford and Sandra Thompson (1996) found that syntax alone is not an adequate guide to projecting when a speaker is completing a turn, but rather that interlocutors also rely on intonational and pragmatic structures in making such projections. Lerner in 1996 studied further the interlocutors who anticipate the remainder of a turn before a current speaker has completed his/her utterance. In the present study, Greek grammar and syntax were extensively investigated in order to understand how they contribute to the possible appearance of certain social actions. Such action is overlap or simultaneous talk.

So far it was supported that Modern Greek is characterized by flexible order of constituents in the clause (Holton et al., 1997), but at the same time it was suggested that, VSO is the basic word order. The subject is very often omitted and therefore the verb regularly takes, the place of the first word in a Greek clause. Verbs contain a big amount of information in their endings (including the subject) and therefore when the verb appears in the beginning of a sentence the following speaker is able to anticipate

what might follow. This can point to the argument of early projectability<sup>6</sup> in Modern Greek.<sup>7</sup> Turn initial position in Greek is therefore an important structural point for the study of conversation.

In the transcripts that were used for the present study, there were found numerous examples of early projectability. Several of those fragments contain overlaps<sup>8</sup> within the turn in progress that the early projectability is observed. Overlaps in those cases indicate early understanding of the hearer of what the current speaker might say next. Furthermore, syntactic elements shall be connected with early projectability in order to demonstrate the relevance between Greek word order, projectability and overlaps.

### Early Projectability and Overlap.

Firstly we have to describe how projectability is related with overlaps in Greek every day conversation.

#### (6. Family)

269.M: *poso to peeres to walkman?*  
 How CLI bought CLI walkman?  
**How much did the walkman cost?**

270.A: *e:e 50 evro*  
**e:e 50 euros**

271.M: *kalee [teemee]*  
**good [price]**

272.A: *[eehe ke] akreevotera ke kaleetera*  
 [had and] more expensive and better  
**[there were] some others more expensive and much better.**

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<sup>6</sup> As it was discussed, “Projectability can be understood as those features of a Turn-Constructional Units (TCU), which allow participants anticipate or predict where an instance of the unit will come to an end (...)The first possible point at which a TCU is hearably complete is the TRP” (Tanaka, 1999: 27).

<sup>7</sup> Projectability in Greek may be even higher than English, as it will be analysed later on.

<sup>8</sup> As it was discussed *overlap*, which can also be understood as simultaneous talk, is identified as the talk two or more persons produce at the same time.

In this fragment A and M are talking about a walkman A bought. After M asks A how much the walkman cost, A says the price and in line 271 M starts the utterance by saying ‘good’. The word ‘good’ is what A heard and it was enough to understand that M was characterising the price. Therefore, A produces simultaneous talk after the production of the word ‘good’ by M, and explains that there were some more expensive walkmans in the store. Obviously this is a case of early projectability which is followed from an overlap. We have to add at this point that the overlap occurs close to TRP since as M said ‘good’, A understood that he was referring to the price and that M was close to a possible completion of the turn. This is why he overlaps with him. Word order in this fragment does not have any interesting application but it constitutes a characteristic example of early projectability.

Subject deletion, early projectability and overlap.

As it was discussed in the previous chapters, subject deletion is a very common syntactic phenomenon in Greek language. We shall now see how subject deletion is related to early projectability. The following fragment shall exemplify this case:

(7. Law students)

76.D: *esee peea ↑eehes paree?=  
you which had taken?=  
which ones you have chosen?*

77.A: *=eeha par[ee:ee]  
= had ta[ke]  
=I had cho[sen]*

78.D: *[to single] market den>eehes paree<?=  
[CLI+SG single]market NEG> had take<?=  
[haven't you] chosen the single market (module)?=*

D and A are students and they are talking about some modules they've chosen. D asks A in line 76 which modules he has chosen. In line 77 A begins his utterance by saying the word ‘eeha’. This word in blue is the verb (= had) of the sentence. As it was discussed in the second chapter verb endings provide much information for the

syntactic sentence and for the understanding of the participants. Therefore, in this case the verb ending (-a) indicates that 'I' was the one who had (e.g. chosen). Thus 'eeha' indicates that the subject is the word 'I' which does not have to be spoken because it can be understood from the verb ending. As A pronounce the word 'eeha' (= I had) D understands that A is talking about something *he had* done in the *past* (the time is aorist). Therefore, since the question had to do with the modules A had chosen he did not wait for A to complete his utterance but he understood and predicted his answer, although, D takes the floor not close to TRP. This is why he overlaps with him in the middle of the second word (which he might understand which that word was) A produces and he says what modules he thought A had chosen.

In this fragment we have a case of subject deletion and early projectability which is understood by the production of the overlap the participant displays in the middle of the production of the second word. We have to mention though that although early projectability is achieved, the change of the turn, does not take place close to TRP. In other words the overlap does not occur close to a possible end of the current turn.

#### SVO word order, early projectability and overlap.

As it was supported, VSO is the basic word order in Greek language. However, in the present study the SVO pattern is going to be used because this pattern occurred repeatedly and as it was discussed, this is the word order Greeks use more often in everyday conversations. Furthermore, subject deletion arise very often and therefore, the SVO is considered as SVO and not VO although S is not expressed verbally.

#### (8. Law students)

292.A: *mu les o Deemaras tha [paree 8%]*

POS say CLI+SG 2nameM will [get 8%]

**you tell me that Dimaras will [get 8%]**

293.D: [OHI deeno] 10% sto

[NO (I) give] 10% CLI+SG

**[NO I give] 10% to**

294.D: *Deemara ke 8% sto Kuvelee*

2nameM and 8% CLI+SG 2nameM

**Dimaras and 8% to Kuvelis**

→295.A: *boro* [na eeme seguros]

can [CO be sure]

**I can [be sure]**

→296.D : [pereepu mu les]

[nearly POS say]

**[(tell me more or less)]**

In this fragment, A and D are making some estimations concerning the percentages two politicians are going to get in national elections. In 292 A says what he thought D believed about the percentage one of the politicians would get. In 293 D overlaps (but this overlap shall not be analysed at this point) with A as he corrects him. In 295 A begins his utterance with the verb in blue ‘boro’ (=I can). We have a case of subject deletion and therefore after the production of the S and the V it is expected (in syntactic terms) that O should follow. Indeed the sentence ‘na eeme seeguros’ (= to be sure) constitutes the O. However, D overlaps with the speaker after the production of the verb, obviously not close to TRP, which means that the only word he heard was the word ‘boro’ (= I can). Consequently, the present word order-SVO offered the hearer the chance to predict what the current speaker would say next, after the production of only one word, and therefore, he overlapped with him. It has to be underlined once again that the TCU in line 295 was not close to completion, thus not close to TRP. However, D takes the floor from A as he overlaps with him and at the same time he displays understanding of the current turn-in-progress. Finally, D in 296, displays understanding of the utterance A produced although he did not hear it because he was talking simultaneously with A.

This is an example of SVO pattern which contains subject deletion, gives the chance of early projectability by the production of the first word/verb and also this example ends with an overlap between the two speakers which occurs after the production of the first word/verb i.e. very early in the utterance and not close to TRP. The combination of the above contradictory findings (early projectability that leads to an overlap but not close to TRP) are characteristics that occur repeatedly in everyday Greek conversations.

A synthetic example:

## (9. Family)

355.I: *steen Eveea eetan orea*  
 CLI Evia was nice  
**in Evia was nice**

356.T: *peegename* [*polee seehna*]  
 going [*very often* ]  
**we were going** [**very often**]

357.M: [*eemun ke ego?*]  
 [was and I? ]  
**[I was with you too?]**

In this fragment we have the chance to see all the syntactic and CA elements co-exist in one turn. I, T, and M are talking about a place they used to go in their holidays. In 356 T, produces the verb ‘peegename’. This verb is translated as ‘we were going’. As we can see, the subject once again is deleted (S = we), and although the pattern is SVO the verb is located in the beginning of the utterance. As it was discussed in the second chapter, the verb under the present circumstances contains much information that the hearer can understand just by the production of a single word, i.e. the verb. Therefore, the verb ‘peegenane’ displays early projectability and thus, the next speaker understands what the rest of the turn could be (although the end to the production of the verb ‘peegename’ does not constitute a TRP) and he overlaps with the current speaker in order to make an explanatory question. The question concerns the turn the current speaker produces but the next speaker (M) does not hear because of the production of the simultaneous talk. Namely, as T says ‘we were going’ M understands that T refers to that place (Evia) but he can not understand if T means that M was with them in that place. Thus, he overlaps with T in order to clarify this point. This example is very characteristic of SVO pattern, which encloses a subject deletion and at the same time the first word is the verb that provides early projectability and the ‘ground’ of an early overlap, although it does not occur close to TRP.

Possible placement of overlap in SVO patterns.

As it was discussed, the present dissertation focuses its attention on the cases of SVO word order pattern and at the same time the syntactic phenomenon of subject deletion is considered. It was observed in the transcripts that were used for the present study that overlaps tend to take a specific position – a position that is made possible by the syntax of Greek [According to Levinson (1983), overlaps tend to occur close to TRPs. When they do not, they are hearable as interruptive]. Furthermore, after an extensive study in the linguistic area, it was found that SVO is indeed the most repeatedly pattern of word order in Greek language and subject deletion is a regular syntactic phenomenon. Therefore, the pattern that the overlaps occurred in the present data (SVO) was not accidental. Furthermore, it can be argued that the location of the specific overlaps was not coincidental either, since as it was deeply investigated, those overlaps have every reason to occur at that location. In terms of syntactic theory it was supported that the first verb in the utterance can contain extensive information and can also enclose the subject. Therefore the hearer can understand much information from one single word. Furthermore, in CA terms it was supported that projectability plays a central role in the evolution of a turn and more importantly, as Schegloff proposed, the beginning of the turn is the most important part for the projectability this turn could display.

*Therefore, the position of a verb in the beginning of a sentence, which has a SVO form and the subject is deleted, can be supported that could produce early projectability. Moreover, early projectability could lead the hearer to overlap with the current speaker since he/she displays early understanding of what the rest of the turn could be. The overlap however, does not occur necessarily close to TRP.*

However, we have to add at this point that in a TCU which begins with a verb, it is very difficult – if not impossible to locate a possible TRP after the production of the verb. Although, the first verb of a TCU can display early projectability, it can not be considered as a location of TRP. This observation was also mentioned in the fragments that were presented so far. This leads us to the suggestion that overlaps which occur under the conditions described above are also related to the rest of the content of the conversation. The understanding from the participants of the rest of the conversation and the co-occurrence of the above characteristics could guide this

investigation to a suggestion of how the Greek syntax and grammar make certain actions possible, or else, suggests possible positions of overlaps that are made possible by the syntax and grammar of Greek.

According to these reflections the possible location of an overlap could be identified as follows: In every fragment that was presented in this section, the overlap occurs just after the production of the verb, i.e. just after the production of the first word. This means that this analysis offers the presumption that in SVO pattern it is possible that *if* an overlap would occur, this overlap might take the position after the first verb:

**SUBJECT – VERB – *OVERLAP* – OBJECT**

(S – V – [ ] – O), [ ]: overlap

But as it was discussed in a case of subject deletion, the verb comes in the beginning of the utterance, and then the overlap shall take the following position:

**VERB – *OVERLAP* - OBJECT.**

(V – [ ] – O)

Furthermore, as it was observed in many fragments, the current speaker might not complete his/her turn, thus in this case the position of the overlap is simply the following:

**VERB – *OVERLAP*.**

(V – [ ])

The present suggestion of the location of overlaps in Greek is only applicable under the specific circumstances that were analysed above. Any kind of generalisation can not be implied. However, further research on the location that overlaps could take, is essential, but not only in Greek language. Also, further comparison of the above findings with the form of early projectability that English language was claimed to have, would be enlightening. It has to be mentioned however, that the term ‘early projectability’ can not be understood in the same way in both languages (Greek and English).

Furthermore, Chalari in 2005 tried to reveal the placement of overlaps within some syntactic patterns that were not discussed in this paper. A syntactic phenomenon like this was the omission of the verb. Early overlaps could also occur in utterances without a verb. This observation is seditious and confined at the same time, since on the one hand, the core of a utterance is the verb according to linguists and the present research supports that the occurrence of overlaps is strongly related with the position of the verb, and on the other, the occasion of a utterance which does not have a verb is obviously atypical. As Chalari suggests, even if the verb is omitted we can still observe occasions of early overlaps. This observation however, can not relate the occurrence of the overlaps with a location close to TRP. In some cases overlaps did occur close to TRPs but in some others they did not. The content of the whole conversation allows early projectability to occur, even if the TCU does not begin with a verb.

Furthermore, it was supported by Chalari (2005), that early overlaps might occur in sentences which the subject is not omitted or in sentences with different word order (i.e. not SVO which was used in this study), such as the unusual word order of OVS. Again, those observations although constituting examples of non-typical occasions, support the argument that early overlaps can occur even in a different syntactic structure. Finally, as Chalari argues, anticipatory completions could be understood as an alternative understanding of overlaps which involve simultaneous talk within a distinctive syntactic pattern (i.e. if X → then Y).

Conclusively, it can be argued that overlaps in everyday Greek conversation constitute a distinctive phenomenon which has many and different ways to occur within a turn in progress. Although this study tried to identify the most typical pattern in which overlaps could arise, it becomes apparent that there are endless occurrences that the phenomenon of overlaps (and especially early overlaps) could take. Therefore, further research on more syntactic patterns is essential.

Finally, what became apparent from this paper is that Greek grammar and syntax organise interaction and vice versa. Greek grammar makes such early overlaps

possible, under specific circumstances which were discussed. It was supported that Greek word order and specifically the position of the verb is strongly related with the early appearance of overlap or else, social action such as overlaps within everyday Greek conversations is connected with the position of the verb within a turn in progress. In this study, TRPs were not related with the appearance of overlaps and since simultaneous talk occurred in locations not close to TRPs they could be characterised as interruptive [as Levinson (1983) states].

### **Discussion.**

The central attempt of this research was to support the argument that syntactic practices of Greek language shape the organisation of overlaps that occur in everyday Greek conversations. In order to propose that grammar and interaction organise each other, we had to follow an amalgamative path which had a dual departure: the deep understanding of how conversational interaction is organised and how Greek grammar and syntax function. In order to achieve this target, we had to combine CA and linguistic analysis in order to explore the phenomenon of overlaps in everyday Greek conversations, or in order to support the suggestion that *syntactic practices of language shape the organisation of overlaps*.

What became clear was that the understanding of Greek grammar and syntax constitute the basis for this exploration. The extensive discussion of how linguists perceive Greek word order and how they explain syntactic phenomena (i.e. subject deletion) guided this endeavour to the core of its investigation: the synthesis of syntactic elements (the basic SVO word order and the co-existence of subject deletion) with CA concepts (projectability) and phenomena (overlaps). The outcome would be the suggestion that:

*The position of a verb in the beginning of a sentence, which has a SVO form and the subject, is deleted, can be supported that could produce early projectability. Moreover, early projectability could lead the hearer to overlap with the current speaker since he/she displays early understanding of what the rest of the turn could be. The overlap however, does not occur necessarily close to TRP.*

The above suggestion, offers the presumption that in SVO pattern it is possible that *if* an overlap would occur, this overlap might take the position after the first verb:

**VERB – *OVERLAP*- OBJECT.**

**(V – [ ] – O )**

Moreover, it was supported that even in rare cases of verb deletion or in instance that the subject is not omitted, or even in atypical syntactic patterns, overlaps might still occur early in the turn. These exceptional instances were examined in order to support the central connection between syntactic patterns and the early occurrence of overlaps in everyday Greek conversations. It has to be mentioned though that it was not observed that overlaps occurred systematically close to TRPs, in any word order pattern. Therefore, we could not provide a generalisable conclusion concerning the position of overlaps in relation to TRPs.

Finally, what was suggested in this study is that in Greek, we can understand why overlaps occur often and early in the turn. The underlying reason was supported to be the Greek grammar and syntax. What it was proposed thus, was that Greek participants have a distinguished way to interact with each other while they talk, because of the Greek syntax and the grammar. Therefore, over time if the suggestions of this research are generalisable then it could be supported that social and *national stereotypes* (for example that Greeks are loud or impolite or that they talk all together) actually *born in interaction*. Namely, those kinds of patterns (the production of early overlaps because of the Greek grammar and syntax) lead to those kinds of perceptions (that Greeks are loud and interruptive, as many of us characterise ourselves).

Thus, by looking to the detail of a single interactional phenomenon, such as overlaps, we found that Greek participants tend to overlap with each other repeatedly and easily, not only because of possible cultural idiosyncratic reasons, but also because the Greek grammar and syntax make this kind of interaction (and in this case Greek interactional characteristic within conversation) possible.

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