Politeness and the Greek diaspora: Emic perceptions, situated experience, and a role for communicative context in shaping behaviors and beliefs

Abstract: Partial bilinguals who were born and raised in diaspora communities sometimes experience pragmatic failure when interacting with native speakers of their heritage language. This paper explores encounters among heritage and native speakers of Greek, focusing specifically on how the former conceptualize politeness, and how expectations may differ. Differences have been identified between Modern Greek and English: for example, the negotiation of the communication norms of a positive politeness society, – the management and mitigation of face threatening acts, the use of diminutives and terms of endearment, and the use of politeness markers and formulae. The present research explores how Greek and English politeness norms are conceptualized, experienced and managed by Australian-born heritage speakers of Greek. In semi-structured interviews of 1–1.5 hours’ duration, eliciting both general beliefs and small narratives of lived experience, Greek Australian participants were asked to reflect on their experiences communicating in Greek in a range of interpersonal contexts, including visits to Greece. The key concepts to emerge were directness, consideration and generosity, and respect, manifest in both behavior and language. Findings suggest that politeness expectations are at least partly shaped by experiences of communication with other members of the diaspora and with local and/or native speakers encountered during visits to Greece. A model is proposed for a range of situated interactions emerging from the data, which it is suggested can impact on politeness behavior and belief.

Keywords: diaspora, emic, intercultural, Greek, politeness, socio-pragmatic plurality

1 Introduction

In seminal studies of pragmatics in Greece and England, Greece has been described as predominantly a positive politeness society, where involvement
and solidarity within the in-group take precedence over the distance-based, negative politeness preferred by British English speakers (Brown and Levinson 1987; Sifianou 1992a, 1992b). In the intervening years, numerous well-documented challenges have been made to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) framework, and refinements proposed (Eelen 2001; Gu 1990; Ide 1989; Matsumoto 1988, 1989). Alternative terminology includes distance, deference and camaraderie politeness (Lakoff 1973, 1977, Lakoff 2005), connection/separation (Arundale 2006; Arundale 2010), and solidarity (Spencer-Oatey 2009). Although details of interpretation differ in this work, a division is acknowledged between societies that tend to express politeness through minimizing imposition and those that express it through maximizing involvement. This raises the question of how prior socialization into one set of norms might impact on functioning in a different politeness environment, such as some second, third or fourth generation migrants experience on return visits. The study focuses on Greek migrants in Australia, but there are also implications for returning diaspora of other ancestries.

Although Greek migration to Australia can be traced back to the days of early European settlement, most arrivals occurred in two waves. The first of these was from 1890 to 1920, followed by the post-war wave beginning around 1950 and peaking in 1971. Migration subsequently entered a reverse phase of population decline. Nevertheless, the community remained cohesive, as evidenced by community\(^1\) language schools, Greek language press and community societies, and cultural events. The most recent Census\(^2\) (2011) records 378,270 people of full or partial Greek ancestry living in Australia, 99,939 of whom were born in Greece and 252,211 of whom reported that they spoke Greek at home.\(^3\) There has also been considerable cultural intermingling, with marriages to non-Greeks estimated at around 45% (Tamis 2009). The same Census reported that 26.2% of Australians of Greek background indicated that they also identified with one or more other ancestry.

In the homes of the first-generation migrants, Greek language predominated and until children reached school age it was the main communication medium used by the second, Australian-born, generation. Grandparents were frequently primary carers for the third-generation migrants, perpetuating the transfer of language and culture (Tsianikas and Maadad 2013), but also providing models that did not correspond fully to the way in which either was evolving in Greece. A third wave of migration occurring after the Greek financial crisis, which had

\(^1\) This term is preferred over ‘heritage’ in Australia.


\(^3\) In addition, most of the 22,680 Cypriots (18,070 born in Cyprus) are of Greek speaking background.
been gathering momentum since 2009, providing increased opportunities for Australian-born Greek speakers to interact with members of contemporary Greek society and directly experience the recent arrivals’ socio-pragmatic norms and expectations. While politeness in Greek has been extensively studied and compared with other European languages (Kallia 2005; Pavlidou 1994; Sifianou 1992a), its manifestations in the diaspora remain relatively unexplored.

The data for this study consist of approximately 20 hours of oral interviews with Greek Australians living in Sydney. The 14 people who participated in the interviews were aged from 18 to 49 years, were all born in Australia, and were of at least partial Greek descent. They ranged from second to fourth generation and their experience varied from a maximum of seven years living and working in Greece to having visited only in childhood. Only one participant had never visited Greece. The participants’ exposure to the language was both formal – through attending Saturday schools in childhood, private tutoring and University study – and informal – through family members, particularly elders. Fellow Greek Australians were represented to varying degrees in their friendship networks. Four of the group had children and three were in mixed marriages.

Some of the interview items related specifically to politeness; whereas others were of a more general nature, but designed to provide opportunities for participants to comment on politeness aspects if they perceived them to be relevant. The interviews thus provided a forum for the diaspora Greeks to discuss their experience as learners and users of politeness conventions in Greece as well as in the culturally blended environment of Australia.

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Etic and emic conceptualizations of politeness

Early approaches to politeness theory were confined to the etic (or analyst’s) perspective. The basis of an emic perspective, as defined by Lett (1990: 130), is that it explicates concepts “in terms of the conceptual schemes and categories regarded as meaningful and appropriate by native members of the culture whose beliefs and behaviors are being studied.” It can take the form of how lay people’s beliefs are evidenced in their real-life interactions (Mills 2003; Watts 2003), but also of “metapragmatic politeness” or “instances of talk about politeness as a concept, about what people perceive politeness to be all about” (Eelen 2001: 35). The emic approach has been adopted in the study of metapragmatic comments (Spencer-Oatey 2011) and in the study of rapport-sensitive incidents (Spencer-Oatey 2002).
Although caution has been expressed in relation to elevating lay perceptions “to the status of second order concept” (Watts 2005: 4), emic perspectives can inform the development of theory. They also have their own intrinsic value in fostering the development of an accessible vocabulary of metapragmatics to discuss and explore cultural and pragmatic concepts that might otherwise be inaccessible. Mills (2009) also notes that considerations of politeness at a societal level can usefully draw on stereotypes, but only when this is acknowledged, and when the stereotypes are interesting and valuable to examine.

Non-specialist language user accounts provide a point of entry for discussion and development of intercultural understanding and competence. Haugh (2007: 657), for example, argues for the benefits to learners of an “emicly grounded understanding” of the “dimensions that can be influenced by or influence their second language identities.” Emic perspectives can be analyzed quantitatively through discourse completion tasks (DCTs) or questionnaires, as in the work of Sifianou and Tzanne (2010), and investigated using qualitative research paradigms through narratives of experience.

### 2.2 Cross cultural variation in Greek and Anglophone politeness systems

Early work on Greek pragmatics concentrated on differences between Greek and other languages, particularly British English. Although pragmatic variation exists within both languages due to sociocultural and geographical factors (see Goddard 2012; Schneider 2010, 2012 for Australian English; and Terkourafi 2005a, 2005b, 2009, 2010, 2011 for Standard Modern and Cypriot Greek), Greece remains overall a society where face is experienced collectively, and where features associated with positive politeness (closeness, warmth, and involvement) tend to be valued over those indicative of negative politeness (providing space, privacy, and individual freedom). Instead of focusing on the avoidance or mitigation of face threatening acts, Greek politeness emphasizes the building of solidarity (Economou-Kogtsidis 2005; Makri-Tsilipakou 2001; Pavlidou 1994; Sifianou 1992a; Tzanne 2001). Thus, language features interpreted as face threatening in English, such as making personal remarks, interrupting, and the use of some insults have been noted to promote inclusion in Greek (Koutsantoni 2007; Makri-Tsilipakou 1994).

The importance of drawing an in-group / outgroup distinction was recorded in early works on national character (Sifianou 1992a; Triandis and Vassiliou 1972) and has been an ongoing theme in Greek pragmatics research. Koutsantoni extends the idea of the in-group beyond “my family, my relatives, friends and
friends of friends” proposed by Triandis and Vassiliou (1972: 305) to one “determined by variables such as similarity of age, social background, profession and sex, team membership, as well as affect (liking)” (Koutsantoni 2007: 97). In some contexts, Greek speakers have been noted to favor directness over indirectness (see, for example Economidou-Kogetsidis 2005; in telephone requests, but c.f. Tannen 1981; Terkourafi 2009), a preference which may result in pragmatic failure when transferred into English (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2011). Politeness formulae such as parakalo (‘please’), efcharisto (‘thank you’), and sygnomi (‘sorry’) have been noted to occur less often in Greek than in English, and in a more restricted range of contexts (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2005).

Linguistic pragmatic issues have been noted in studies of interlanguage Greek. In her work on the acquisition of pragmatic competence in the production of apologies, Bella (2014) found clear instances of pragmatic transfer, which she attributed to the English speakers’ negative politeness orientation. The continued prevalence of negative transfer even at advanced level suggested that the speakers’ status as foreign language learners provided limited opportunities for the development of pragmatic competence. Similarly, when developing a native-like production of the speech act of refusing, intensity of interaction was shown to have more of an effect on pragmatic competence than length of residence (Bella 2011).

These studies provide justification for the key assumption underlying this research: Australian-born Greeks visiting Greece are likely to have been exposed to a different range of pragmatic norms in the contexts in which they usually communicate, and their assumptions about how to ‘do’ politeness and rapport may go some way towards explaining their reactions to the speakers of Greek whom they encounter in Greece.

2.3 Studies of Greek politeness using emic perspectives

There have been a small number of studies that take an emic approach to the pragmatics of Greek. Hirschon (2008) provides an anthropological perspective on the relationship between linguistic choices and the ‘key values’ of honour and obligation, situating these as “embedded in family loyalty and identification” (2008: 189). In addition, Terkourafi (2009, 2005a, 2005b) examines and contrasts linguistic preferences of speakers of Standard Modern and Cypriot Greek when enacting politeness. Emic perspectives on politeness from the point of view of native speakers have been investigated diachronically by Sifianou and Tzanne (2010), who explored the way young Greeks conceptualized im/politeness. To chart the variations in emic perspectives they investigated “general patterns, values and assumptions” (2010: 664), by eliciting the perceptions of 75 young
informants, using the same questionnaire applied in a comparable study 25 years earlier (Sifianou 1992a). To counter perceptions that observed differences may be due to the age of the participants, they also applied the questionnaire to a sample of 20 older people.

Sifianou and Tzanne’s (2010: 669) findings did not show a large divergence from the earlier study. Politeness tended to be described in behavioral terms as what people did, rather than what they said. A polite person was characterized as having attributes associated with approaching others (kind, selfless, generous, patient), but was not “associated with keeping social distance.” Impoliteness was associated with both language and behavior, including the inappropriate use of informal language. There was also a general feeling amongst respondents that, in terms of the criteria they had identified, society was becoming less polite.

In a recent study, Sifianou (2015) explored how politeness was conceptualized by contributors to Twitter. She found that mentions of non-verbal behavior and politeness as an abstract notion took precedence over specific reference to language. Acknowledging the self-presentation function of Twitter, she noted that the nature and affordances of the medium limited the conclusions that could be drawn from it, but that they nonetheless made it useful for augmenting datasets from conventional sources.

To the best of this author’s knowledge, there have been no studies of Greek politeness to date which use small stories and accounts of experience to investigate the emic perspectives of language users, or to explore how politeness is subsequently constructed by them. Members of the diaspora are of great interest because they inhabit a zone of partial biculturality in which the impact of pragmatic infelicities (and indeed a speaker’s or hearer’s perception of what counts as one) can be difficult to predict.

3 Data collection and analysis

Data were collected through 1:1 semi structured conversational interviews undertaken by a single researcher. First, ethical aspects of the project were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the author’s university. Participants were then recruited using two processes: the distribution of flyers at Orientation Week events at three universities, University Greek societies, and a Greek bookshop in Sydney; and informally through the researchers’ personal and professional networks. The project was described on the flyer as “A Study of Greek Language and Identity,” with the intention that politeness was not to be the sole focus of the conversation, but considered as part of an overall intercultural
socio-pragmatic experience which would be different for each participant. In preparation for the interviews, participants were given a set of core questions which they were asked to reflect upon.

The questions covered five areas:

1. The story of your family:
   These questions prompted participants to tell the migration narrative of their family, to discuss the family’s geographical and cultural affiliations in Greece and Australia, and to comment on their own position in this broader narrative. They provided useful data concerning the contexts in which the participants had had opportunities to communicate inside and outside of Greece, and the extent to which this was influenced by the family’s geographical and class background.

2. Identity questions – the story of who you are:
   As the relationship between language and identity was also a focus of the broader study, participants were asked to reflect on questions related to the factors contributing to or detracting from their feelings of Greekness, what they valued or rejected from ‘Greek’ and ‘Australian’ culture (whatever they conceived that to be), and how they believed Greeks in Greece and Greek Australians viewed each other. The findings of this aspect of the study are discussed in separate publications, but the questions evoked numerous spontaneous mentions of politeness behaviors.

3. Language questions – the story of you and Greek:
   Language proficiency was not tested, but in this section participants described how they had learnt or acquired Greek, and provided a self-rating of their proficiency level, both as a general impression and in terms of what they considered they were and were not able to do. The participants were asked about the people with whom they used Greek, in Australia and elsewhere, and how this had changed over the course of their lives.

   – Using Greek in Greece
     Participants were asked to recount in detail the stories of their visits to Greece – when, where, for how long, and the type of interlocutors and some of the contexts in which they had communicated. The data from this section were invaluable for building the model developed later in this article. However, it must be acknowledged that the conversational interview method relied on the participants’ recollections and it was therefore not possible to capture every possible context.

   – Using Greek on Social media
     Social media have been identified as communication contexts of increasing importance in developing new kinds of transnational identities, and for broadening the range of communication contexts amongst
regionally separate diaspora communities as well as with homeland Greeks (Doutsou 2013; Panagakos 2003). This was an important mode of exposure for some participants.

4. Differences in English and Greek: the stories of your thoughts and experiences about the Greek language:

In this section, specific experiences and self-reported behaviors were elicited through the following questions:

A] Do you think Greeks and English speaking Australians have different ideas about what it means to be polite or impolite?

B] What does ‘being polite’ mean in Australia?

C] What does ‘being polite’ mean in Greece?

D] What experiences have led you to think this of politeness this way?

Experiences were probed in terms of contexts of occurrence, consequences, and impact. As well as recounting the experiences, participants were asked in general terms to elaborate on specific language features (e.g. T/V forms of address, terms of endearment, taboo language) and how they would use them. Some, but not all, of these responses concerned politeness and were relevant to this study.

The questions were not designed to constrain the conversation, but to provide participants with opportunities to recall what they had noticed about how Greek and Australian-born Greeks tended to do things, to describe what they tried and/or preferred to do themselves, and to focus their evaluative accounts of communication experiences. The limits of this approach lie in the fact that none of the data comes from actual observed interaction, but from recollected experience. The assumption is made, however, that to have been recollected and reported, the event must have been judged to be in some way significant; either considered by the participant to be effective in illustrating a prior expressive or classificatory observation (Eelen 2001), or to merit mention and/or evaluation in its own right. The participants’ communication experiences (lived or noticed) were thus reported in terms of both speakers’ intents and hearers’ responses, as well as the participants’ own judgment of pragmatic effectiveness or failure in specific recollected incidents. These were supplemented by more general reflections, opinions, and reported beliefs.

It is also important to keep in mind that a conversational interview is a socially and interactionally constructed speech event in which the role of the interlocutor is by necessity not neutral. (Talmy 2010; Talmy and Richards 2011; see also De Fina’s 2011 work on the involvement of the researcher in story co-construction). In this case, the identity of the researcher was that of an insider in terms of familiarity with the language and many aspects of the culture, but an outsider in not having been brought up in a Greek family and having acquired
the language through a combination of formal study, living in the country, and being in a cross cultural marriage. This semi-insider status enabled her to introduce some examples of her own experience of the insider/outsider perspective,\(^4\) eliciting participants’ comments and perceptions. Sequencing was important in such instances, and care was taken to avoid pre-empting the telling of participants’ own recollections.

Previous researchers have pointed out (e.g. Felix-Brasdefer 2010; Golato 2003; Kasper 2000) that asking people what they would do in a situation (as in the DCT approach to data collection) tends to produce an idealized set of responses, and the method applied in this study is not immune to such criticism. Clearly, beliefs about politeness norms are not a totally reliable guide to how people would really apply them. They do however provide insights into their expectations and beliefs about how a person should, and how they believe they would, try to behave.

In addition to the direct questions about the way politeness was conceptualized, there were also opportunities for participants to elaborate on their views or impressions by providing narratives of experience. Some participants took up the opportunities and others did not. Thus, in terms of eliciting conversational narratives, the effectiveness of the conversational interview protocol was not uniform among the participants. It was mostly the younger participants who did not take up the option to elaborate, or who did so only in a minimal way.

An outline of the participants’ demographic information and experiences is presented in Table 1. ‘First generation’ refers to Greek born parents/grandparents, and second and subsequent generation refers to those born outside of Greece. Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant anonymity.

There was a great deal of variation amongst the participants in the ways they interacted with their homeland and how they experienced using the language. Communication networks in Australia included Greek family and elders, fellow Australian-born Greek friends and acquaintances, local and Greek-born teachers of the language, visitors, and recent migrants. Potentially there was overlap among these categories, but none was noted in the data. In Greece, their networks comprised family members (some of whom had lived in Australia and some who had not) and locals encountered while travelling, predominantly in service industries. Only Penelope and Sandra, who had stayed in Greece the longest, reported opportunities to use Greek in professional contexts, although Despina did so with Greek clients in Australia. More detailed information about

\(^4\) Such as being told by a cousin that she had put on weight, and evaluating the statement as impolite.
The participants’ communication networks and contexts is provided in the Appendix.

The 14 interviews were transcribed in full and uploaded to NVivo 10. All sections referring directly to politeness were coded first, followed by those which did not use the actual lexemes ‘polite’ or ‘impolite’, but nevertheless shed light on how im/politeness was conceptualized. Keywords such as ‘rude’ or ‘obnoxious’ helped to identify these sequences, but given the dataset was limited in size it was not difficult for the researcher to develop a high degree of familiarity with all of it and to identify such sequences without the need for text-searches. Finally, the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Visits to Greece</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calliope</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Late 30s</td>
<td>Resident in childhood. One visit as an adult with her family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Resident in teens. One short visit in childhood with family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>Many visits to parents’ home island (approximately 10 in 30 years). Lived and worked there, teaching English for 7 years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irini</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>Two visits in childhood: one with family and one with a high school excursion, plus one independent visit as a young adult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimitris</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mid 20s</td>
<td>One visit accompanied by parents. Two visits in adulthood as part of language study programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markos</td>
<td>2/mixed</td>
<td>Mid 30s</td>
<td>Several visits as an adult with his family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despina</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>First visit to family when aged 15. One visit with husband and young child. Several visits as holidays with family and Greek Australian friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niki</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Once in childhood, one visit in her 20s: a religious pilgrimage with her mother. Independent holidays in young adulthood. One visit with non-Greek husband and baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petros</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>Late teens</td>
<td>Once in early childhood. Many visits to grandparents’ home island – lived and worked there for 2 years. On holiday in other regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mid 40s</td>
<td>Two independent visits in late teens and early 20s. Two short visits when aged 14 and 16, accompanied by his mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stavros</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Early 20s</td>
<td>Never.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vasilis</td>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>Late teens</td>
<td>Many visits with family and independent family visits and holidays.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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participants’ narratives of their experiences negotiating the different politeness systems were extracted. Depending on the nature and number of experiences the participants had with Greeks, some also chose to discuss politeness in the Greek Australian community. Following the open coding phase outlined above, data were recoded using conceptual thematic categories, including conflict, closeness, imposition, sincerity/insincerity, directness, and respect. For reasons of space, the scope of analysis in this article is restricted to perceptions of politeness and accidental transgressions, excluding deliberate impoliteness.

4 Results

4.1 Metapragmatic conceptualizations of politeness

In response to the question about whether they thought Greek and English speakers had different ideas about what it meant to be polite, there was unanimous agreement. Despite a growing belief that Australian English should be seen as a separate socio-pragmatic variant, (Goddard 2012; Merrison et al. 2012; Schneider 2012), responses were consistent with the prototypical British model of negative, or ‘separation’ politeness, particularly evident in the terms in which the behavior of Greeks in Greece was described.

The following section identifies the themes that arose in the participants’ attempts to capture the defining features of Greek politeness. Illustrative extracts are included.

4.2 Directness and “the politeness filter”

In response to the question of whether Greek and English speakers have different ideas about what it means to be polite, the lexeme direct and its synonyms occurred frequently. “Direct” was used 14 times in total by 10 different participants to describe speakers of Greek, while “upfront” was used once and “straightforward” twice. Consistent with the prototypical British model of English, the words “direct” and “polite” were commonly presented as contrasting attributes. Some illustrative examples are given below.

Despina is in her late 40s and second generation (Australian born). She visited Greece for first time at 15 years of age and several times later with her husband and family. She describes her Greek as fluent, and uses it in her work. When asked about the different views of politeness, she responded as follows:
DESPINA: I think the Greeks can be a little bit more, as I said, direct. So, I think English speaking people can be a little bit more polite in the way they speak at times.

Researcher: So, what does being polite mean in Australia?
DESPINA: Just to be more reserved, I think. It’s like in their conversation that they don’t go right in to it. Yeah, they’re um ... not as direct at times.

A similar response was given by Amalia, a third-generation Greek Australian in her mid-20s. She visits Greece frequently for holidays and to connect with family. The following example shows how ‘directness’ is also presented as being opposed to ‘politeness’ in a situation involving conflict. Amalia introduces the ‘filter’ as a metaphor for polite restraint, as shown in the underlined sequences:

AMALIA: Greeks are so much more direct, I find, than English speaking people. If Greeks have a problem they’ll just tell you straight out. They won’t really have much of a filter. Whereas, Australians will be a lot more ... I think it takes an Australian a few times, you know then if you’re really pushing the buttons, then they’ll kinda get angry. Even not in a ... you’ll get angry, but you’ll kind of still be a bit restrained until you really make sure. With Greeks, I think if they’re just ... if they don’t like something, that’s it. They’ll just let you know how they feel. The politeness filter just goes. That happens if someone ... I’ve seen things like, if I was at a café with my cousin or something like that and this friend didn’t get the meal or something, or the meal was wrong, then straight away there’d be a ‘what have you done?’ Whereas, in Australia you’d be more inclined to say, ‘no, this is not right’, and you’d try and go about it in a polite way.

The term ‘direct’ arose many times in talk about how Greeks behaved in communication, but the responses suggested it was not always interpreted as an indication of a lack of politeness. Sometimes it was mentioned in the context of involvement (usually presented as a positive feature of Greek society) or it was presented without any specific evaluation.

Again, Amalia explains the differences that occur in disagreements:

Researcher: If you’re going to disagree with someone, is it done differently in English and Greek?
AMALIA: Yeah, I think so. A lot more direct again, with the politeness thing in Greek.
Researcher: How would you disagree differently?
AMALIA: I think if I was talking Greek I’d be a lot more straightforward, to the point initially with what I wanted to disagree with; whereas, in English I’d kind of ... I would beat around the bush a bit and see if they understood where I was coming from, and then proceed; or it would be softer.

Clearly these references suggest the Greek tendency to be ‘direct’ is not perceived by the participants as ‘polite’. However, this does not correspond to an evaluation of it as objectively impolite or rude either, especially in Greek contexts when directness is not unexpected. In this sequence, Amalia projects an insider identity by positioning directness not as what ‘they’ do in Greece, but as what she herself would do when there. This is without any suggestion that this behavior in context would (or should) be categorized as impolite.

The term ‘filter’ was used spontaneously by another two participants, Nina and Stavros. Nina, a second-generation Greek Australian in her early 20s, noted that Greeks “kind of just say anything on their mind – and there’s no filter whatsoever” and referred to her own filter as being less operative when she spoke Greek with her family. “I guess because you’re just brought up sort of having no filter and speaking your mind.”

In the case of Stavros, a second-generation Greek Australian in his early 20s who strongly identified with his Greek heritage, the absence of a filter was about achieving immediate intimacy with family and new friends in Greece: “we discuss completely personal things where there’s no filter whatsoever with someone who I’ve just met”. This was something he viewed in a very positive light and did not consider to be impolite. Similarly, Nina’s evaluation of unfiltered communication was not negative, but associated with closeness and belonging.

Notwithstanding the different evaluations of politeness, directness was regarded by all participants as a characteristic associated more with the Greek language than with English. Tannen (1981, 1987) presents a somewhat contrasting view of directness in her investigation of conversational style. She cites her experience of attempts at making friendly conversation in Greece during the 1970s as being misunderstood as constituting indirect requests. In her comparative DCT and interview study of Greeks, Greek Americans, and Americans of

5 “It is the very sharing of conversational strategies that creates the feeling of satisfaction which accompanies and follows successful conversation: The sense of being understood, being ‘on the same wavelength’ belonging, and, therefore, of sharing identity. Conversely, a lack of congruity in conversational strategies creates the opposite feeling: of dissonance, not being understood, not belonging—therefore, of not sharing identity” (Tannen 1981: 222).
other backgrounds, she found that Greeks and Greek-Americans were more likely to choose an indirect interpretation of what was said rather than the direct one. Specifically, Greeks were more likely than Americans to attend to the request or command functions that could be implicit in an interrogative form. Tannen noted the tendency of Greeks to convey requests/commands within the in-group with minimal directness; that is, very little information needed to be provided to understand what one person demanded of another. This study has not been replicated with speakers of British, Australian, or other variants of English, but it nonetheless serves to illustrate that directness is a complex concept and suggests that perspectives on how, where, and when it is appropriate to ‘be direct’ may be formed on the basis of individual experience.

4.3 Politeness is thinking about the effect of what you say on others

Niki is in her mid-40s, second generation, and married to a non-Greek partner. She conceptualizes Anglo-Australian politeness as including awareness of the effect of one’s behavior and words on the audience. This expands on the concept of directness discussed above, but is framed more in terms of its consequences:

NIKI: I do feel yeah, whether it’s … I think we’re more politically correct; whereas, I think in Greece it’s ‘oh this is how it is, this is what I feel, this is what I think’. I think, um, we try to be a little bit more polite sometimes in our thoughts because of how it might be received; what we say.

The ‘filter’ construct, though not specifically mentioned by Niki, may also indicate a concern with how what is said will be received.

In fact, all three conceptualizations of politeness are closely related. When communicating in some (but, of course, not all) contexts in English in Australia, to speak one’s mind or to ask questions ‘directly’, with ‘no filter’, can be construed as showing a lack of sensitivity to the feelings of others. In Greek, at least within the in-group, it is more likely to be an indication of solidarity.

Dimitris is in his mid-20s and third generation of Greek and Cypriot descent. He stated clearly during the interview that his heritage has always been an important part of his identity. He has visited Greece twice as part of language exchange programs and has also made family visits to Greece and Cyprus. He evaluates his Greek language proficiency level as high. Dimitris echoes Niki’s view, but is more critical in equating frankness and directness in the expression of opinions with a lack of empathy. He constructs Australia as a context in
which consideration for others is valued, and where directness can be interpreted as an assault it.

DIMITRIS: Yeah, I think Greeks are generally more up front. They speak very frankly. Probably growing up here, that came as a bit of a shock to me and it’s something that I still have to get used to because yeah, here you maybe just generally, you don’t show all your cards in day-to-day conversation. Whereas, in Greece they might be less caring about doing so. They will tell you what they think whether you like it or not.

Despite the importance of his background to his sense of identity, Dimitris distances himself from this behavior using the impersonal “you” to denote the Australian behavior and “they” for the Greek. The choice of “still,” however, suggests that he could potentially become accustomed to the practice and accept it in time.

Differences have been noted in how politeness is enacted in Standard Modern and Cypriot Greek (Terkourafi 2005a, 2005b, 2011), but despite having visited both countries, Dimitris did not volunteer anything in his interview to indicate that these differences were salient to him.

4.4 Politeness, curiosity, and privacy

There was broad agreement among the participants with the idea that personal questions and remarks were more expected in Greek than in English. In the following extract, the word ‘polite’ is strongly associated with the participant’s conception of the Anglophone-Australian worldview, contrasted with the Greek tendency towards expectations of openness in the sharing of information. There is a clear ‘us’ and ‘them’ delineation in this extract. We, (Australians and possibly Greek Australians) are “polite,” Greeks in Greece are not:

NIKI: Sometimes I laugh because I think it’s just, it’s just them, they’ve got no problem asking and again I think it comes back down to that politeness. We’re more like, ‘okay, well that’s a little bit personal. We won’t go there. We won’t ask that.’ But I remember Greeks in Greece asking me; “Well, how much do you earn?” “How much is rent and how much do you pay on your mortgage?” I’m like ... and I found myself answering them and thinking, ‘why am I answering?’ Like again, so I think they’re more forthright, they’re more like ... whereas we are more ... try to be more polite and consider that rude, that’s private, we don’t go there.
The narrative incorporates double voicing, where Niki plays both the roles of her own silent monologue and the others whose questions she judges to be inappropriate. Allegiance to negative politeness norms is evident in this extract, in which the inquisitive character of Greek positive/involvement politeness is negatively evaluated.

Sandra, second generation and in her late 40s, has spent the longest time of all the participants in Greece, where she lived and worked for seven years. In the following extract, she describes how her experience growing up in a Greek family prepared her for the expectation of openness and involvement, and gave her an understanding of the consequences of choosing not to participate:

SANDRA: Because I grew up with it I always expected the Greeks were going to be more curious. Like ‘what are you doing?’ and ‘who is this?’ and ‘how long?’ and ‘what are you going to do?’ and ‘why are you here?’ and ‘how long are you going to stay?’ You’ve just arrived, ‘how long are you going to stay?’ Whereas, and again I think that’s the definition of the level of, like of politeness. So ...

Researcher: How is it related to politeness?

SANDRA: Well most, ah, like English speakers would ... you don’t ask people about their political affiliation, about their religion, about whether they’re married and who they’re married to, and why they aren’t married and all that. They think they’ll offer that, and if they offer it it’s okay. Otherwise, it’s not polite to ask. Whereas for...

Researcher: In Greek, do you think it’s impolite not to ask?

SANDRA: Um ... It shows an indifference.

Sandra describes the behavior of Greeks (in both Australia and Greece) as “curious,” not as ‘impolite’. When asked explicitly how this behavior relates to politeness, she emphasizes that “English speakers” would consider it impolite. Sandra’s extensive experience of both Greek and Australian contexts, along with the linguistic and cultural awareness that was required of her role as a language teacher, may explain the finding that her perception of politeness was less constrained by the cultural expectations of Anglophone-Australia than that of some of the other participants. Her response to the question about whether not asking personal questions is impolite is consistent with the Greek positive politeness orientation (Sifianou 1992a; Bella 2011, 2012). Not showing interest suggests a rejection of the interlocutor’s claim to in-group membership. As Sifianou (1992a: 316) proposed, “To be indifferent is not neutral; it is essentially hostile.”
4.5 Politeness is involvement and giving: reactions and identification with positive politeness

Another manifestation of politeness mentioned by many of the participants concerned hospitality.

Irini is third generation, in her mid-20s, and evaluates her proficiency in Greek as low. She has travelled extensively and is fluent in two other languages. She has visited her family on several occasions and has also travelled independently. When asked about the different approaches to politeness, she responded as follows:

IRINI: If a stranger knocked at your door, it’s a given that you would offer them something to drink or eat, et cetera, so that hospitality is there. Whereas, I think there are more reservations here. People are less open to strangers. So, I think that’s a lovely, polite aspect of the Greek culture.

Calliope is second generation in her late 30s and, like Niki, has a non-Greek partner. She identifies strongly with her religion (as the most important aspect of her Greek identity) and feels a strong commitment to pass the language and culture on to her children. Of all the participants, she has the most critical opinion of Greece, and early in the interview she expressed her negative views, describing Greeks in Greece as “arrogant,” “lazy,” “obnoxious,” and “rude.” In the following extract, Calliope outlined her conceptualization of politeness as she enacted it in her Greek Australian role:

CALLIOPE: ... polite for me is opening my doors and feeding. For me, being Greek is me putting out food and eating, and drinking wine, and celebrating, and being, and, you know, communicating and having friends over, and entertaining. That to me is being polite. That to me is having the circle of love. Being rude is somebody that isn’t that.

The data revealed a variety of participant experiences. It was the rule rather than the exception that individual informants stated perceptions of politeness in English and Greek (and in Australia and Greece) that were not always consistent, as they reflected on diverse recollections. The model developed in section 5 attempts to account for these observations in an integrated way, and to do justice to the complexity of politeness and to the contradictions in the diaspora experience.
Sophia, an 18-year-old third-generation Greek Australian who has never been to Greece acknowledged the necessity of accepting hospitality as well as offering it. Her view was based on her experience of Greek Australian values:

SOPHIA: Rejecting someone’s hospitality I think would be enough to, I guess, shun you. It’s something that isn’t really respected. I think Greeks can’t really comprehend the fact that you don’t want to accept something from them. They’re always giving, they’re always being generous. I feel that it simply is just a disservice to yourself not to accept, even if you don’t want something, because people have gone out of their way.

Participants reported that it is also expected that one gives of oneself, opinions, and beliefs in an unrestricted way. The combination of interacting factors is interesting in the following example. Petros is in his late teens, and is a fourth-generation Greek-Australian who has not visited Greece since his early childhood. His experience is based on the Greek Australian contexts of language use:

PETROS: So, I think you’ve got to make a bit more of an effort in Greek to be a lot more personal and intimate. … Like being neutral just comes across really cold and it’s just not how you speak in Greek. Whereas, in English you can be a lot more neutral and reserved, I guess, and not as warm. So, to be polite and respectful in Greek, you’ve just got to be intimate …

Politeness is equated with involvement and giving, which is itself a demonstration of respect. The participants’ descriptions in this section are consistent with the ‘positive politeness society’ view of Greek society presented in the literature (Sifianou 1992a).

4.6 Politeness and conversational management

Conceptualizations of politeness were not only about the underlying value systems, but also specific features observable in spoken interactions. Greece has been described as having a high involvement conversational style like that of New York Jewish Americans (Tannen 1981). It is consistent with a positive politeness orientation (Makri-Tsilipakou 1994; Tzanne 2001), but less consistent with an Anglo-Australian conversational style. This style was not considered
impolite in Greece, but could constitute a source of possible discomfort for Anglophone Australians and some Greek Australians.

For example, Sandra’s comparison of Greek and Australian politeness focused on the discourse aspects of communication:

Researcher: Do you think Greeks and English speaking Australians have different ideas about what it means to be polite?

SANDRA: Yep, absolutely … They don’t really think it’s impolite to butt in when somebody else is talking. To talk really loudly over somebody else is not necessarily considered impolite. The other person will just yell louder, sort of thing.

In a similar vein, Irini equated the over-speaking and interruptions directly with disregard for the opinions of others:

IRINI: I think it would shock people here sometimes; the talking over, the interruptions, disregard for other person’s opinion sometimes. I mean, I just have … sometimes, just out of amusement, I watch Greek news and you get nine experts split into panels and you just wonder, how on earth do they do that? They’re all talking over each other …

In this sequence “people here” does not explicitly exclude Australian-born Greeks.

4.7 Politeness markers: ‘please’ and ‘thank you’

The differences in use of politeness markers, as well as the evolution that they have undergone in Greece, is well documented in the literature (Sifianou 1992a; Terkourafi 2011). Hirschon (2001: 39) notes: “Adept English speakers who learn Greek soon become aware of the inappropriate nature of expressing gratitude for small routine services.” Overuse by English speakers makes them seem “insincere, distant and hypocritically subservient” (Hirschon 2001: 39). Therefore, it is possible that if used by Greek Australians in a context where mutual obligation is a given, they may give the impression of a distancing device, perhaps reflecting the desire to avoid building up obligation to reciprocate.

In general, the experiences of participants who had been in contact with Greek-born Greeks were consistent with what is already known about the different use of politeness formulae (Economidou-Kogetsidis 2005; Terkourafi 2011). For example, drawing on her experiences in her family’s village, Sandra notes:
“They don’t use ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ to the level that a Greek Australian or an Australian would use it.”

Dimitris contrasted his knowledge of Australian politeness with his experiences of service contexts in Greece:

DIMITRIS: Probably one of the most obvious differences that I’ve noticed in day-to-day speaking is we will use ‘please’ a lot more. If I go to a restaurant or to a café and order something to eat, I say, ‘Can I please have this, this, this?’ Whereas, if I go to do the same thing in Greece, as I’m ordering a coffee I’ll just say, ‘One frappe’ and I’ll tell them how many sugars I want in it.

The difference between the two treatments of the information is in the level of distance between the narrator and other characters in the story. As in the previous example with Despina and Amalia, Sandra describes what “they” do and Dimitris describes how he behaves when adapting to each context, using “we” to exclude Greek-born Greeks.

In terms of thanking and the use of politeness formulae, Dimitris focused not on the behavior of Greeks, but on their expectations of others. He explained his understanding of the reasons why thanks are less appropriate – that gift giving is less unusual and more expected.

DIMITRIS: Actually, funnily enough, in Greece I think just speaking matter-of-factly is a good way to be polite. I’ve noticed, say with gift giving, whereas here we might put a big emphasis and show a lot of emotion towards a person, you don’t necessarily need to show that same level of emotion in Greece. But there’s ... you can be more subtle about showing your appreciation.

This is very much in accord with Hirschon’s (2001) analysis of expectations regarding expressing thanks for gift giving. However, participants who had limited contact with Greece and who used the language mostly in the Greek-Australian community provided contrasting responses. For example, Vasilis and Stavros both reported that the use of politeness markers in English and Greek was the same.

### 4.8 The right to impose

When asked what politeness meant in Australia, Irini indicated her belief that people in Australia are more likely to expect consideration from others and
hence to feel that they could ask other people not to impose on them, as in the following example:

IRINI: The other thing too, I think people here would feel more comfortable making a request. Like, if you’re at a café saying, ‘Look, you’re smoking, if it’s okay, could you stop?’ I think that would be the start of a massive argument over there. ‘I have every right’ ... you know.

Hence, Irini believes that Greek-born Greeks consider it impolite to restrict another person’s right to impose on them. She feels that Anglo Australians experience the imposition itself as impolite, expecting their space to be respected. A revealing contrast is evident with another third-generation participant’s experience working in a service context where there were many Greek Australians. In a twist on the ‘politeness as giving’ theme, Amalia (who worked in a homeware shop while completing her degree) comments that Greeks have an expectation that giving of attention and care will occur, and in general they have high expectations of how they should be treated. As such, they do not hesitate to impose on her in her service role:

AMALIA: Even when I work at [shop name] and when you have Greek customers come in, compared to the Australian customers the Greeks are always so much more demanding. They just expect you to ... and if something’s wrong with an order it’s more often than not the Greek customers that’ll just be really ... like ... angry and will just blow up. Whereas, other people ... I find Australians, like, a lot more patient and they’ll be more understanding, yeah.

Imposition was perceived to have occurred in both contexts, but it came from a different underlying sense of rights and obligations.

4.9 Politeness, deference and respect

Respect was an important factor in the conceptualization of politeness, with the word being used by all participants (a total of 77 times in the dataset6). This being the case, it was interesting that only one of the participants explicitly equated deference politeness in Greek with showing respect. The extract below is from Markos, who is in his mid-30 and of mixed Greek and Italian descent. The

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6 Excluding uses by the researcher.
two manifestations of respect were deployment of a specific linguistic feature (the plural) and a specific kind of conversational style:

MARKOS: I think even in the Greek language, you use the plural when you’re talking to someone who’s older than you or who you respect. I think there’s, in my observation, I don’t know if it’s just where I’ve … what I’ve seen or if it’s more widespread, but respecting the elderly, respecting your parents, not talking back. Yeah, I think there’s a lot of ceremony that goes on in a Greek household that doesn’t go on in an Australian household around that.

Later in the conversation the notion of respect arises again in a context more aligned to positive politeness; namely, that showing respect is taking an interest in what people say, and giving them time and attention.

Markos’ explanation of why he is loved by his Australian in-laws is that he applies some of the Greek principles of positive politeness and that they are appreciated in the Anglophone Australian context:

MARKOS: I feel like it’s more natural in a Greek context, if that makes sense. Being polite, maybe it’s an expected norm. I think in the Australian context … my in-laws love me. They love me to bits and I think it’s partially because there’s a certain chivalry that comes from the way that I was brought up. It’s not only to their daughter, but it’s to them and to their friends.
I’ll sit there and I’ll listen to Aunty Jean’s old stories, not because I care but because I know that Aunty Jean is old and I should be respecting her. She’s talking. I’m not going to cut her off. None of the other kids are doing that. None of the other relatives are doing that. I think I got that from being engaged with senior Greek people and that’s what you did.

Most of the references to respect or disrespect did not occur in the sequences where participants were directly asked what politeness meant. They tended to occur in more general accounts of experience, and often in the context of the use of singular and plural pronouns. There was only one explicit reference to cultural interpretations of respect from Stavros (second generation in his early 20s):

STAVROS: I see people get angry over people saying, ‘Well he did that, it’s impolite, he did that, it’s not respectful’. But I guess that’s maybe how they see respect and obviously, you have to respect them for that.
4.10 Summing up

In the conversational interviews, examples of encounters in which im/politeness was experienced or enacted were volunteered from a range of Australian and Greek contexts. Some positioned politeness alongside directness which, in some contexts, was moderated in various ways by a ‘politeness filter.’ Politeness was associated with a respect for privacy and an anticipation and consideration of the perlocutionary effects of words and actions. Consideration for others also extended to how a conversation was conducted, including approaches to manifesting involvement and engagement, and the deployment of linguistic politeness markers such as ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. The giving/involvement aspect of politeness was widely noted, again in both Greek and Greek-Australian contexts, while the right to impose one’s negative face wants onto others was regarded as characteristic of the Australian context by one participant only. Respect was a recurrent theme, constructed in contexts of both positive and negative politeness.

Explicit reference to different regional variants of Greek was made by only one participant (Markos) and this referred to different settings in Australia. It did not refer specifically to politeness. Similarly, where rural/urban differences were highlighted (Penelope, Amalia, and Calliope) it was in reference to general mentality and worldview rather than politeness behavior or expectations.

Class differences were mentioned only by Penelope, but she clearly considered them to be an important determinant of how she saw and enacted politeness. She situated her rejection of stereotypes in terms of the nature of her exposure:

PENEOPE: ... I guess my family in Greece are fairly ... very respectable, well educated. So, they have certain modes of speaking and there are ways that they wouldn’t speak. So, ... I mean, I know there’s a sort of stereotype where people say, ‘Oh Greeks aren’t polite because they’ll speak so forwardly’. But there’s that class ...

Researcher: You’d contest that, would you?

PENEOPE: Well, that whole class of Greeks. I guess the people I ... because I do church stuff ... priests and then .... Well, I suppose in ... with my cousins, they knew quite a few intellectuals and maybe university people. So those people are incredibly polite .... I think it’s similar to very highly educated people.

Researcher: Educated people in English, yeah?

PENEOPE: Yeah, there’s a manner. There’s an expectation that you will speak to people in a certain way, you will be respectful, you’ll use language that isn’t insulting or demeaning, and you’ll have a respectful attitude.
Penelope attributed her own politeness behaviors and expectations to the formative nature of this class context. However, the overwhelming majority of participants did not explicitly refer to the class, regional, or socioeconomic backgrounds of the interlocutors when reporting on their experience of politeness.

As has been pointed out by one of the reviewers of this paper, the essentialist view of culture is problematic in intercultural studies. Social constructionists view the conceptualizing of national characteristics as if they were stable traits of individual members as a “trap” (Piller 2011: 171), a monolithic stereotyping which must be challenged. Generalizations such as “Greeks are so direct”, would be considered part of this questionable essentialist discourse. It is my view that analysts should indeed challenge these discourses, but a study of emic perspectives which gathers participant experiences cannot and should not aim to impose a social constructionist (or indeed any) theoretical view. The aim of this study is to gather individual experiences and views of politeness as they are perceived and conceptualized by the participants themselves. Subsequent theory building may, however, probe the role of contexts in the formation of these conceptualizations, and this will be discussed in the following section.

5 Situating emic perspectives: a model of context, socio-pragmatic plurality and the mediation of politeness expectations

5.1 Breadth of experience

It has been argued that politeness is unmarked in situations where interlocutors hold the same expectations (Terkourafi 2005a). While it was interesting that 14 people could focus on such different features in the way they constructed a Greek Australian view of Greek politeness, it should be noted that there was a wide variation in the range and nature of people with whom the participants had the opportunity to interact. While it is not possible to conclude that a type of interaction did not occur because it was not mentioned, the information provided about context was nevertheless interesting. The findings suggest that the contexts experienced may play a significant role in defining the participants’ socio-pragmatic horizons: their initial expectations regarding politeness, the differences they noticed, the infelicities they became aware of, and the adjustments they made.
The following extract is an example of a participant’s response when asked if she adopted a higher involvement style when in Greece:

DESPINA: No not, well mainly because of the people that I’m with, because not always when I’m with a lot of family for a long time. So I don’t get a big chance to adapt, we might spend three, four days with family a week. So no not for me, no.

It seemed from this and other comments\(^7\) that the communication context played a role in determining what level of pragmatic knowledge was actually necessary: firstly, to function effectively in the language without experiencing disruptive levels of pragmatic dissonance\(^8\); and secondly, to maintain a sense of Greek identity and belonging (to the extent that it was conceived as desirable).

As discussed above, while in Greece Despina was only exposed to her family and friends who were English-speaking and familiar with Australia. Amalia experienced a wider range of contexts in Greece, but also commented that she felt more comfortable communicating in Greek with her family there:

So, I find that Mum’s family – having been to Australia and having lived here and experienced the Australian way of life, and having been exposed to it, they understand us, if that’s ... a lot better than Dad’s other family, who has never left Greece. They live more of a village life. I feel like when I go ... that’s why when I go to Greece I also feel so connected because my cousins understand me a lot better, if that makes sense.

All of Amalia’s experiences of miscommunication attributed to the directness of Greeks were experienced in hotels, airports, and other service contexts. The only other aspects that made her slightly uncomfortable were the curiosity of others and their personal questions. However, as they were less unfamiliar, she had strategies to manage these situations. She also learnt to adjust her use of politeness markers to the requirements of Greek and Australian contexts. By contrast, Vasilis, who mostly experienced family contexts on his short visits to Greece, was not aware that any usage differences existed, and reported that he translated the English ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ directly into his Greek, regardless of context.

Based on the interview data, a new model is proposed which provides a way to view the sites of emic perception formation in terms of interlocutor and context. The term tolerance is used here in the sense of tolerance of ambiguity; that is, it does not necessarily imply positive evaluation or acceptance. It refers

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\(^7\) Space constraints preclude their inclusion.

\(^8\) My thanks to the reviewer who pointed out that Australian Greeks may cause pragmatic dissonance for others without being aware of this. Unfortunately, they can only reflect on their own perspectives and the explicit reactions of others.
to expectation; for example, the expectation that Australians will probably overuse ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ in their Greek, and native speaker Greeks will use the imperative more often to request. Tolerance is about an ability to compensate for this in the way intent is perceived and response formulated. This is explained in the next section.

5.2 Socio-pragmatic plurality

Any communicative event can give rise to a range of pragmatic behaviors. For example, in gift-giving the giver may or may not apply the modesty maxim (Leech 1983) and seek to minimize the value of the gift, the receiver may or may not open the gift in front of the giver, the receiver may or may not give effusive or minimal thanks, and the giver may or may not reciprocate. When receiving an unwanted invitation, a person may simply refuse or add an apology, excuse, alternative suggestion, etc. Because it represents the potential for diverse behaviors, we refer to this range of choices as *pragmatic variation*.

All communication in any context can be said to take place against a background variable that I shall refer to as *socio-pragmatic plurality* (SPP). This operates at both societal and individual levels and can be defined as the degree of tolerance of pragmatic variation. As shown in Figure 1, the greater the diversity experienced, the higher the degree of tolerance is likely to be.

![Figure 1: Socio-pragmatic plurality (SPP) as a function of diversity.](image)
At the individual level, the broader the range of experiences and intercultural knowledge a person has acquired, the greater the likelihood of tolerance of different behaviors. At the societal level, the greater the cultural diversity, the broader the range of behaviors which can occur within that society without being experienced as marked.

In high-context cultures (Hall 1976) with little migration and low levels of mobility, the SPP tends to be low. By contrast, in multicultural societies where it is expected that interlocutors may operate from the standpoint of different systems of pragmatic norms, SPP tends to be higher. As stated above, high SPP does not assume a positive evaluation (see Blommaert 2013 on how super-diversity does not always result in positive attitude to the norms of others), but refers to the interlocutors’ knowledge and expectations of each other.

It would be an oversimplification to say that diaspora contexts always have higher SPP than source countries, as social and individual factors combine to influence the SPP operating in the specific contexts within them. To resolve this, I also propose that SPP has two facets: global and local. These facets are outlined below, with specific reference to the politeness experiences of diaspora-born Greeks.

5.2.1 Global socio-pragmatic plurality

In Greece, there are many users of English who have never experienced living as a migrant or long-term resident of any Anglophone country. However, their expectations of diaspora visitors can still be moderated by their experiences as foreign language learners of English and their explicit knowledge of politeness norms. The language learning experience of these residents has enabled them to develop what I call global socio-pragmatic plurality (GSPP): knowledge of English pragmatics that is not aligned to a particular Anglophone cultural context. These internationalized Greeks would not be surprised when encountering pragmatic transfer from English to Greek, and may not respond with any strong indications of discomfort. By contrast, it is proposed that monolingual Greeks who have never travelled – referred to in the model as “non-internationalized” – are more likely to have a narrow bandwidth of tolerance; that is, low SPP. The islanders whose children were learning English from Sandra are examples of non-internationalized Greeks.

Some cases are less clear-cut. Firstly, internationalized Greeks who work in tourism may prefer to communicate with visitors in English. If they do use Greek and wish to be polite, they may deliberately adopt some English politeness features into their Greek. Their SPP would manifest directly through their
knowledge of the English language in these cases only, and the Greek they used with peers would remain unaffected. In the data, however, the experiences of the Greek-Australian participants encountering internationalized Greeks were mixed. Some mentioned the politeness they encountered in hotels and restaurants, but in fact most accounts of ‘rude’ behavior (excessive directness, absence of politeness markers, loudness, confrontational interrupting, condescension etc.) were encountered in service contexts.

There are two issues here. Firstly, when dealing with recollected experience, instances of pragmatic failure may not be readily separated from deliberate impoliteness. Examination of talk-in-interaction would provide a clearer picture. Secondly, knowledge of how an English speaker would behave when they intended to be polite means internationalized Greeks may be able to moderate their expectations, but this may not extend to their behavior. Once the pragmatic knowledge exists, application of the norms becomes a matter of choice.

5.2.2 Local socio-pragmatic plurality

In contrast to GSPP, I propose there is also local socio-pragmatic plurality (LSPP). This describes the type of tolerance of ambiguity which operates in diaspora communities when interlocutors share the experience of integration into diaspora life and the knowledge of how politeness is enacted in the dominant culture. In Australia, high level LSPP can be characteristic of interactions in Greek language and/or cultural contexts where the participants share knowledge of the local politeness systems and where their expectations are shaped by it. This is, in some cases, to the extent where the Greek spoken amongst the group may be considered a local socio-pragmatic variant. The SPP emerges from the fact that the sociolect of Greek they speak – which may be the only one they know – is already influenced both by its regional origins and by English.

For example, when Nina, Vasilis, or Stavros speak Greek with their young Australian Greek friends their strongest socio-pragmatic competence is in English and their use of the heritage language may simultaneously be influenced by local varieties. They can express emic perspectives of politeness in terms of being ‘more direct’, or ‘more curious’ in Greek because their biculturality gives them a standard of comparison. However, they would not be likely to experience pragmatic failure with others who applied more Anglo conventions.

Research on socio-pragmatic variants of English has not gone so far as to claim these conventions are inapplicable to Australian English (Schneider and Östman 2010; Schneider 2012; Goddard 2012), although negative politeness norms may be less pervasive than in Britain.
in their Greek, such as mitigating requests or overemphasizing gratitude, because it is also part of their shared experience. LSPP is thus not just a matter of geography, but of interlocutors having local experience of diversity in politeness conventions of the heritage language.

High levels of SPP can also be found when Greek-born Australians interact with returned migrants who are now living in Greece, such as Despina and Amalia’s cousins. Again, expectations of politeness conventions overlap due to the interlocutors’ knowledge of English and shared experience of the diaspora context where pragmatic transfer is common and unremarkable. Greek Australians encountering only this kind of interaction are less likely to unwittingly offend people by transgressing politeness conventions because their interlocutors are operating in a zone of expanded tolerance. They are also less likely however to obtain the kind of feedback that would be useful in equipping them to venture beyond it.

Figure 2 illustrates the range of contexts experienced by the participants in this study and in which they formed their emic perceptions of politeness. The
arrows indicate the different types of interlocutor with whom Greek Australians might interact in Greek, both in Greece and in Australia. The lowest levels of SPP are found in communication with non-internationalized Greeks in Greece and non-Anglophone visitors in Australia. It is hypothesized that it is with low SPP Greeks where distressing but instructive intercultural communication breakdowns can be experienced.

Although a qualitative study based on recollected experience cannot demonstrate this conclusively, the nature and effect of the experiences reported by the participants did seem to be related to the different communicative contexts in which they had found themselves when visiting Greece, and on the SPP of their interlocutors. As mentioned above, most interactions in Greek within Australia were potentially (and often actually) mediated through English language and the fact that both parties were English speakers accustomed to using local variants of Greek. With diaspora peers raised in Australia, this was possible 100% of the time. For people whose experience was restricted to this domain, differences in the politeness systems were not salient as no feedback was received when non-diaspora varieties of Greek pragmatic norms were contravened. When the participants communicated in Greek mostly with diaspora peers (Vasilis, Stavros) and Australian-born elders (Petros, Sophia), it placed them in an environment where most interactions were mediated in this way. Critical moments leading to developments in Greek socio-pragmatic knowledge were thus less likely to occur.

In communication with diaspora elders, the interactions were also mediated by shared knowledge of the diaspora context. The elders varied, however, in their acceptance and degree of preference for English language and politeness conventions. Diaspora elders within the family frequently played an important part in the participants’ initial socialization into the language and its socio-pragmatic conventions. However, the models many provided were filtered through the (potentially) distorting lens of the migrant experience, lack of educational opportunities, experiences of disempowerment and low status, concentration in regionally-based sub-communities, and the strong desire to preserve their culture the way it was when they left. These factors all made them less than reliable models of pragmatic norms in their changing homeland. While some caring, committed, and over-inquisitive grandmothers modeled what involvement politeness meant so that when it was encountered in the homeland it was familiar and comforting, second or third-generation elders may by choice or necessity have already established distance from the original culture.

In addition to its internal diversity, the composition of the diaspora is in a constant state of change. Greek-born visitors to Australia are more reliable informants regarding socio-pragmatic norms in twenty-first century Greece, despite variable individual levels of SPP. Reported experiences of
communication with such people (e.g. Sophia, Vasilis, Stavros, Dimitris, Irini) accorded them a special significance as cultural informants.

In Greece, the potential for learning about politeness was greater. Again, there was considerable variation in the range of possible interactions and the nature of the interlocutors to whom the participants’ life trajectories had permitted them to be exposed. Like English, Greek has a range of regional, class-based social variants and formative experiences have the potential to be contradictory. Nina and Dimitris identified as learners, open to noticing and discussing the differences they found. Despina travelled mostly with other Greek Australians, and Penelope spent time on an island where much of the population had links to Australia. Experiences where there was little or no influence of English and little experience of migrant life (covered in extensive detail in Sandra’s stories of her experiences living in Greece) provided perhaps the most authentic model of local practice. However, even this was moderated to some degree by the interlocutor expectations of Sandra as a teacher and hence a representative of the English-speaking world.

Not all participants considered it possible or desirable to adapt. It is crucial to acknowledge the divide between emic perceptions of how politeness is done in Greece and a desire to emulate observed practice.

As summed up by Sandra:

I think that’s why I have a lot of conflict with myself and conflict often in the different environments that I’m in. Because I tend to behave the same way really, irrespective of sometimes changing my tone or the formality or words, sort of stuff. I think my core values and who I am doesn’t change.

6 Conclusion

This paper considered the emic perceptions of Greek Australians and argued that perceptions of politeness are grounded in interactional experiences. Two factors were identified and discussed as important in shaping perceptions. One was the breadth of the interlocutor’s perception of what was considered acceptable, and hence unmarked, behavior. A monolingual user of Greek is likely to have a narrower range of tolerance as defined by his/her age, class, and region; whereas, an interculturally experienced interlocutor may tolerate a wider range of pragmatic behaviors. I have called this SPP (socio-pragmatic plurality) and distinguished two different forms: one relating to contact with the English language in foreign language contexts and tolerance of pragmatic transfer from English being based on an explicit knowledge of English norms; and the other...
resulting from lived experiences in diaspora contexts and the internalization of hybrid pragmatic norms from local variants of Greek. These forms have been termed GSPP (global socio-pragmatic plurality) and LSPP (local socio-pragmatic plurality), respectively. While high GSPP results in moderated expectations and minimizes the likelihood of pragmatic failure, it seems less likely to result in active pragmatic transfer from English into Greek. High LSPP, by contrast, arises from direct experiences of using Greek in a diaspora context where localized norms impact the variant used and applied. In the data collected for this study, the effect of LSPP was more prominent. Future research could perhaps examine high GSPP communication contexts in more detail.

As well as interlocutor SPP, the other key factor was the range and purpose of the interactions reported by the participants (i.e., the actual nature of the experiences with the potential to shape emic perceptions). For some, circumstances placed a limit on the opportunity to notice differences or to encounter formative experiences of pragmatic failure.

Many questions of interest emerge from this study. One concerns the actual nature of the LSPP that operates in different diaspora communities. Despite recent research claiming positive politeness tendencies in Australian socio-pragmatics, the participants in this study seemed to be more familiar and comfortable with the negative politeness orientation associated with British English. This may not be the case in the US. Another possible line of enquiry regarding GSPP is whether im/politeness in Greece is subject to change due to increased interaction with English language and speakers, and how this may contribute to greater flexibility of behaviors and perceptions of pragmatic norms in the future. Finally, questions of identity and belonging are crucial to all diaspora communities, not only Greek Australians. Experiences of pragmatic failure in the homeland have a human cost, which may at least in part be alleviated by a deeper understanding of the complexities involved.

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**References**


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Appendix: Communicating in Greek: networks and contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calliope</td>
<td>Parents – both with basic education only.</td>
<td>Family and other villagers in Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Lived in Greece aged 5–8, and 8–9.)</td>
<td>Mother with poor English</td>
<td>when she lived there as a child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural context.</td>
<td>Sister (less frequent since leaving home)</td>
<td>Nieces and nephews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used only Greek up to age 10)</td>
<td>Brother (infrequent)</td>
<td>Aunties in Greece (village)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncle and Aunt who visited from another city</td>
<td>Children in Greece</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Her children (helping them learn)</td>
<td>Hotel staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former fiancé</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Former employer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father’s friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Greek husband who has studied Greek</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australian mothers in Sydney</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
### Table: Participant and Language Interaction Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nina</td>
<td>Parents (especially Cypriot father)</td>
<td>Cousins and other relatives</td>
<td>Cyprus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandparents (only communicated in Greek)</td>
<td>People in service industries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>People who spoke only Greek in a medium-sized town</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Schoolmates at Greek school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australian Friends: (&quot;99%&quot; of friends are Greek)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek lecturer at university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other students in university society</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Greek friends (whom she tries to teach)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People in Greek shops in Australia and NZ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People involved with church and cultural events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Teachers at Greek school in Australia</td>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother's family</td>
<td>Young Greeks (mostly her students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandparents (communication only in Greek)</td>
<td>Parents of students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australian friends</td>
<td>Greek friends in Greece (writing to Greek friends overseas when learning Greek)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>God-children</td>
<td>Partner's family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partner, a recent migrant from Greece</td>
<td>Bureaucrats (e.g., Dept. of education, Tax office)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Villagers (mostly uneducated)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>People who knew her family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Facebook friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irini</td>
<td>Father, who taught her to write. (She commented that her father had “textbook Greek”, while her mother had learned from her parents). Parents (for privacy in public places) Grandparents (English speaking so rare to use Greek) Other elderly relatives Teachers in Greek open high-school One recent migrant</td>
<td>Service contexts: Hotel staff on island Family and friends of family (island village context) Strangers met while travelling (e.g., asking for directions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimitris</td>
<td>Parents when he was a child (less frequently now) One grandmother (other grandparents deceased) One recent migrant Teachers and university lecturers Members of student organisations</td>
<td>Relatives (aunts, uncles, cousins) and friends in Greece Strangers in Greece Doctor Service industry contexts Taxi driver Bank staff Facebook friends</td>
<td>Cyprus Other diaspora Greeks when travelling in UK for exchange (social contexts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markos</td>
<td>Teachers at Greek secondary school University Greek societies members His godparents Australian born son His son’s godfather and his father Friends of Greek descent (less frequently) One close Greek Australian friend</td>
<td>Strangers on short trips to Greece Priests in Mt. Athos People in service industries</td>
<td>Diaspora Greeks in NY (service contexts) Diaspora Greek friend from Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
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<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Despina</td>
<td>Parents (father deceased), daughters, husband, extended family (but more frequently in English)</td>
<td>Friends she met at university</td>
<td>Transport staff, shop staff in Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People she met through her daughters' schools (Greek independent schools in Sydney)</td>
<td>People she met through her daughters</td>
<td>Greek Australian travelling companions (rarely – as English preferred)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customers in her business</td>
<td>Mother and father in law, aunts, aunts and uncles here, where Greeks their first language</td>
<td>Greek Facebook friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Older Greek people</td>
<td>Her dog.</td>
<td>Family in Greece, by phone (not frequent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Mentioned that her Greek improved when her daughters were studying it]</td>
<td>Used to write Greek Xmas cards but no longer does]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niki</td>
<td>Parents – all communication in Greek (mother speaks little English; father now deceased)</td>
<td>Greek Australian friends</td>
<td>Service providers (e.g. bus drivers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australian friends</td>
<td>Siblings – when sitting down together as a family</td>
<td>Cousins in Athens, aunts, uncles, on both parents' sides; cousins, their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Her daughter – but less now than when she was younger</td>
<td>Her daughter</td>
<td>Returned migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petros</td>
<td>Spoke only Greek at home as a young child</td>
<td>Elderly people at family functions</td>
<td>Only visited in childhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Saturday school</td>
<td>Family members who visit from Greece</td>
<td>Skype with family members in Greece – limited interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His father speaks only Greek to him</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elderly people at family functions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family members who visit from Greece</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Elsewhere</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>Grandmother (deceased)</td>
<td>Church contacts in Greece</td>
<td>Cousins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private tutors in childhood, brother, 2nd generation mother, recent</td>
<td>Cousins</td>
<td>Gov't. officials in Athens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>migrants / visitors</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australians in Athens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small amount with second generation friends and family gatherings</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greek (Island village context)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(nieces and nephews)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Greek-born cousins, nephews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek born husband of her cousin</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stavros</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek at home and Greek primary school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family in Greece – uncle and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents (English now preferred)</td>
<td></td>
<td>grandparents (visiting from Australia),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Close Greek friends in a social environment</td>
<td></td>
<td>one cousin of the same age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td></td>
<td>Friends of the cousin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>University Greek society – lecturers at university</td>
<td></td>
<td>Other uncles and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek cultural events (theatre)</td>
<td></td>
<td>aunts who only know Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vasilis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother, grandparents when living</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family in Greece,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australian friends (but infrequently – for privacy or deliberate</td>
<td></td>
<td>(cousins, aunts, uncles)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>practice)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Service contexts: taxi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customers in mother’s shop</td>
<td></td>
<td>drivers, people in restaurants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diaspora elders who don’t speak English</td>
<td></td>
<td>Uses social media to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>communicate with 5–6 cousins in Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td></td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandparents (now deceased)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>First generation older relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mother (less so now than when young)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music teacher (recent migrant)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek teachers at university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatives who live between Australia and Greece</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other university students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bionote

Jill C. Murray

Jill C. Murray is a lecturer and researcher at Macquarie University, where she teaches SLA, pragmatics, and intercultural communication. Her research interests include im/politeness, the teaching and learning of pragmatics, the assessment of pragmatic competence in a range of specialist contexts, and the presentation of meta-pragmatic information in EFL, ESL and heritage language teaching materials.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Elsewhere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amalia</td>
<td>Grandparents (no English)</td>
<td>Cousins and aunt in Greece (returned</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents during childhood – but</td>
<td>Greece (returned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>less so now</td>
<td>migrants)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers at Greek primary school</td>
<td>Cousins via social media from Australia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greek Australian friends</td>
<td>Tourist service staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customers in the shop where she worked</td>
<td>on islands – hotel staff, airport staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)