From transliteration to trans-scripting:
Creativity and multilingual writing on the internet

Tereza Spilioti
(Cardiff University)

Abstract

Although research on multilingual writing has widely explored transliteration and, particularly, Romanization practices, we know little about how related phenomena are reconfigured in social media contexts where users can manipulate a wide range of writing resources and navigate between multiple intertwining audiences. By analysing more than one thousand tokens of forms that illustrate what appears as reversed Romanization (i.e. English-related forms written with Greek characters, *engreek*), the study aims to discover, first, how these forms are created and, second, for what purposes, and for whom, they are mobilised at given moments. In order to address these questions, I propose a translanguaging lens for the study of multilingual digital writing and draw on the notion of trans-scripting as key for understanding such writing practices as creative and performative. My findings reveal that there is a link between trans-scripting as a creative practice and digital orality, as users orient primarily to phonetic respellings of the English-related forms and associate such spellings with particular forms of stylized speech and social personas. The paper concludes with a critical discussion of the study's implications to research on the role of English as a resource for multilingual writing and current debates about language diversity and fluidity in the digital mediascape.

1. Introduction

With their seminal volume on the multilingual internet, Danet & Herring (2007) brought issues related to language representation and choice, code-switching and transliteration to the core of computer-mediated communication (henceforth, CMC) research. Yet, most research on transliteration has focused on Romanization - the use of Roman characters for writing languages conventionally associated with other writing systems – and attended to the technological constraints, communities of users, and indexical potential associated with such scripts. With the advent of social media, we know little about how multilingual writing may get reconfigured in the specific communicative environments. This is important to explore because the internet reality of current users is distinct from the past in, at least, three different ways: (i) technological advances have long enabled users to employ a range of writing characters on their devices; (ii) boundaries between public and private are blurring and digital texts often become available to multiple audiences at once (Marwick and boyd 2011); and (iii) there are increasing circumstances of mobility, fluidity and diversity as both people and

semiotic resources move across offline and online spaces (Jorgensen et al 2011; Deumert 2014; Androutsopoulos 2015). Against this backdrop, questions arise about whether other forms of multilingual writing, beyond Romanization, are attested in such contexts and, if yes, to what extent existing approaches to transliteration may need to be revisited in light of the new communicative exigencies.

This paper contributes to filling this gap by investigating what appears as a phenomenon of reversed Romanization: the use of non-Roman characters for writing English-related forms. By analysing more than one thousand tokens of such forms (known as *engreek* or, more descriptively, Greek-alphabet English) collected from six different types of online sources, the study aims to discover, first, how these forms are created and, second, for what purposes, and for whom, they are mobilised in specific digital environments. In order to address these questions, I shy away from seeing transliteration as a mere encoding practice whereby writers make one-to-one mappings between distinct languages and writing systems. Instead, I propose the adoption of a translanguaging lens and draw on the notion of trans-scripting as key for understanding digital multilingual writing practices as creative and performative. I offer a definition of trans-scripting as a process of respelling that creatively manipulates elements from wider graphemic repertoires and is performed to (and for) multiple networked audiences. In the case of *engreek*, the study reveals that users orient primarily to phonetic respellings of the English-related forms and associate such spellings with particular forms of stylized speech and personas, suggesting a link between language creativity and orality in digital communication. The paper concludes with a critical discussion of the study's implications to research on language diversity and fluidity by shedding light on the ambiguous positions internet users take with – and towards - such written performances.

2. Romanization and transliteration research

Romanization, i.e. transliteration of non-Roman alphabeted texts with typographic symbols including Roman letters, has been widely researched in very diverse internet contexts (from professional emails to playful personal texting) and across a range of languages, including Arabic, Cantonese, Greek (e.g. Palfreyman & Al Khalil 2007; Lee 2017; Tseliga 2007). In early CMC research, Romanization phenomena are approached as manifestations of non-standard spelling in digital writing and are understood as 'ad-hoc improvisation[s] by users' in response to technological constraints such as software character sets that included only Roman characters (Danet & Herring 2007: 8-9).

Given the association of Romanization with technological specificities, one would expect that the phenomenon - and its academic study - would have disappeared as soon as new software (e.g. Unicode) enabled the use of other characters for digital writing. Surprisingly, though, research interest in Romanization remained evident throughout the 1990s and 2000s. The continued academic interest can be explained partly in terms of users' unpredictability in the

process of taking up technological advances and partly in terms of the field's shift of focus from technological affordances to users' agency and practice. The turn 'from medium-related to user-related patterns of language use' in the second wave of CMC studies (Androutsopoulos 2006: 421) has reconfigured research on transliteration by zooming in on three broadly defined areas: (i) group-specific patterns and norms of transliteration, (ii) the indexical potential of Romanization styles, and (iii) language ideologies that are reflected in metalinguistic discourse about transliteration on the internet.

To take research on Romanized Greek (or *Greeklish*, as commonly known) as an example, studies of transliteration patterns reveal that the process of moving between the two alphabets involves two main orientations: a *phonetic orientation* based on perceived sound correspondences between Greek and Roman characters, and an *orthographic orientation* based on either perceived *visual* correspondences between graphemes or *keyboard*-based associations whereby (Roman) graphemes are entered as if the typer employs a Greek keyboard (Androutsopoulos 2009; Tseliga 2007; cf. Palfreyman & Al-Khalil 2007 for similar orientations in Romanized Arabic).

Previous research has also revealed an association of Romanized Greek, as well as Romanized Cypriot Greek, with particular social groups and argued about the indexical potential of transliterated forms to signal technological competence, cosmopolitan outlook and global/local orientation (Androutsopoulos 2009; Spilioti 2009a; Themistocleous 2010; cf. Lee 2017: 98 for similar indexicalities of Romanized Cantonese). With respect to the metalinguistic discourse produced around *Greeklish*, both sociolinguistic research on language attitudes and critical discourse analytic studies of media representations have shown that transliteration phenomena trigger a variety of ideological stances. Such stances range from instrumental and aesthetic views to more explicitly ideological positions that see such internet uses as a threat to - or (less frequently) as an enrichment of – national language and identity (Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou 2007; Spilioti 2009b; cf. Hamdan 2016 for similar debates in Romanized Arabic).

The study of Romanization through a transliteration lens has demonstrated that such multilingual phenomena can be studied as patterned and regularity-oriented language uses with meaningful sociolinguistic indexicalities for particular groups and communities of users. Nevertheless, second wave CMC research arguably continues to conceptualise transliterated forms as unconventional and, thus, broadly recycles what Lillis & McKinney (2013: 415) identified as a 'non-standard – standard' binary bias in sociolinguistic research on writing. Transliteration schemes, for example, draw on mappings between letters of the standard writing system for a particular language (e.g. Greek, Arabic) and forms that are considered unconventional or non-standard in the given context (e.g. Roman letters or numerals).

In this paper, the focus will be on digital forms that appear initially as types of transliteration (e.g. spelling of English-related forms with Greek characters) but challenge the current

paradigm, as they are not necessarily triggered by software constraints and, at the same time, they are produced through *transient* manipulations of linguistic resources that may go beyond the speakers' assumed national or standard language. In order to investigate these forms and their meanings as they emerge in specific contexts, I will draw on recent advances in sociolinguistic research and the notion of translanguaging as a framework that orients to fluidity of language resources and challenges ideas of clearly bounded language structures and patterned regularities.

3. Beyond Romanization: translanguaging and trans-scripting

Respellings of English-related forms in other writing systems are largely underexplored, although isolated cases are documented in studies with a multilingual focus. As shown in table 1, Angermeyer (2005) notes the use of Cyrillic characters for what he calls 'English-origin items' in classified ads and signs targeting members of the Russian American community in New York. Moving to digital contexts and echat in particular, Chinese characters are employed for the sign-off formula 'good bye' by an IT professional in Taiwan (Yang, cited in Deumert 2014). In texting, Blommaert (2012) also identifies as 'English with an Antwerp accent' examples of rebus writing where readers need to activate Dutch-related pronunciations of numerals. Furthermore, Spilioti (2014) and Jaworska (2014) note experimentations and appropriations of English-related forms through the manipulation of writing resources associated with the Greek and German writing system accordingly.

Cyrillic alphabet (Angermeyer 2005)	**ЛОЕР** *lawyer*
Chinese characters (Yang 2009, cited in Deumert 2014)	**咕 德 拜** 'gu dé bài' *good bye*
Rebus writing ('English with an Antwerp accent' Blommaert 2012)	U R my **3M** *You are my dream*
Greek alphabet ('engreek', Spilioti 2014)	**νέβερ** *never*
German diacritics (Jaworska 2014)	**hilariös** *hilarious*

Table 1. Respellings of English-related forms in other writing systems

All the above examples evidence writing that transcends systems but moves in the opposite direction of Romanization by mobilising other writing resources for typing English-related forms. The visual representation of these forms challenges assumptions not only of what writing *should* look like but also of what it *can* look like, to paraphrase Deumert (2014: 5). The transliteration paradigm (section 2) appears to be addressing primarily the former: the focus is on challenges to the prescribed written norm (e.g. Greek, Arabic) and on identifying new norms that appear to substitute standard language forms in certain contexts. Attention to

challenges of what English (or any writing) *can* look like involves a reconceptualization of such choices not only as being responsive to a standard and its boundaries but also as initiating a process whereby users are testing the elasticity of such boundaries through novel reworkings of existing written forms. Such reworkings involve moving between scripts and other semiotic resources (e.g. numerals), but they are more transient than Romanization. Compared to longer digital texts and interactions that are attested in Romanized scripts, the above examples document such reworkings to happen at certain moments and appear to be limited to individual words or phrases.

Current advances in sociolinguistics offer an appropriate conceptual framework for revisiting transliteration research. Among the multiple labels associated with recent developments, e.g. metrolingualism, (poly)languaging, superdiversity (Blommaert & Rampton 2011), I will draw on *translanguaging* as an overarching term that encompasses the main tenets of this line of research. Drawing on Li Wei's work (2011; and also Garcia & Li Wei 2014; Li Wei 2018), translanguaging is defined as

'both going *between* linguistic structures and systems, including different modalities (speaking, writing, signing, listening, reading, remembering) and going *beyond* them. […] The act of translanguaging then is *transformative* in nature; it *creates* a social space for the multilingual language user by bringing together different dimensions of their personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance, and making it into a lived experience' (Li Wei 2011: 1223)

While the notion of translanguaging has been applied to CMC research (e.g. Jaworska 2014), its relevance to the study of spelling and written multilingualism is rather under-explored. In order to address this gap, I draw on the notion of 'script-focused translanguaging' or *trans-scripting*, introduced by Androutsopoulos (2015: 188), and redefine it in order to capture the creative and agentive aspects that characterise users' refashionings of existing written forms. Androutsopoulos's (2015) definition of trans-scripting as a process 'whereby features of one of the available languages are represented in the spelling or script of another' succeeds in turning attention to spelling and script as key resources in networked language practices. The definition is also sensitive to (re)mixing phenomena that may operate at the level of single features (e.g. individual graphemes, words, structures). The above definition, however, approaches trans-scripting primarily as a process of *representation* in another system (*spelling or script*), rather than as a *transformative process* through which novel and unexpected forms are produced by certain users at particular moments.

I propose, therefore, a definition of trans-scripting as a process of *respelling* that creatively manipulates available resources associated with multiple languages, scripts and other modes for (and to) multiple networked audiences. If the first and second wave of CMC research on spelling and multilingualism were primarily concerned with who uses Romanised script(s), for what languages, how, when and to what end (to paraphrase Garcia & Li Wei 2014: 10), a translanguaging turn in the field would revise such questions in terms of: how and what is

being respelt, who is engaging in processes of respelling, under what circumstances and for what purposes in a particular place and time. There is, thus, a shift of focus from language norms and regularities associated with entire groups to the very act of respelling as a creative or transformative act performed at specific – often transient – moments. The study of respelling as a process where certain resources are mobilised by particular actors for certain purposes and, thus, potentially include or exclude certain audiences responds to the burgeoning third wave of CMC research and its critical turn that gives priority to issues of power and access in social media environments (Georgakopoulou & Spilioti 2016: 5).

4. Research Design

The data on which this paper draws is the result of a four year journey that started by observing and documenting respellings of English-related forms with Greek characters on individual sites (e.g. the webpages of a satirical show or comments to humorous YouTube videos) and that gradually opened up to other satirical (e.g. memes) and non-satirical content (e.g. online marketing). The need for a *multi-sited approach* that investigates digital discourse across multiple media and platforms has been attributed primarily to the openness, diversity and connectivity of internet networks (Deumert 2014: 26). In the case of researching trans-scripting, I argue that openness to harvesting data across multiple sites is also directed by the transience and mobility of the very language forms under investigation. Moving away from Romanization involves a shift of attention to shorter fragments of texts and a commitment to study what seems unexpected, strange or surprising for both analysts and users.[1] Such commitment may be challenging in terms of research design, as following links and moving across sites could result in missing certain examples or having, at times, to understand retrospectively how a site has developed over time. Yet, the a priori selection of a particular site or community would neither guarantee access to the fleeting moment of transgression nor replicate, to some extent, social media users' practices that also involve following links and moving within and across networks. In order to address some of the challenges in the research design, I repeatedly revisited the same sites over regular periods (almost every three months over my four year journey) in order to note any changes or further content added.

The internet sites, where moments of transgression into *engreek* - or Greek-alphabet(ed) English forms – have been documented, include:
- YouTube, especially comments responding to videos satirizing Greek speakers of English (particularly public figures like singers or politicians);

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[1] Instances of *engreek* triggered at times suspension of the main conversation topic and they were responded to by several likes and exaggerated laughs (*hahaha*s) from other Facebook and YouTube users, suggesting elements of surprise and unexpectedness from the participants' perspective. Similar to analysts, participants were more readily able to recognise Romanized Greek; it was only after some reflection that they could talk about reverse phenomena on the internet, indicating that *engreek* use is rather marginal and transient.

- Facebook, especially posts and comments/replies in private and public profiles (such as the eponymous *engreek* Facebook page);
- online dictionary slang.gr, with a focus on the *engreek* entry and users' comments;
- webpages associated with popular radio satire, such as the so-called *Greekophrenia* show;
- online/social media marketing campaigns, particularly tourism campaigns; and
- popular memes.

Most of the aforementioned sources are publicly available sites; owners of private Facebook profiles have given consent for collection and analysis of their messages. In accordance to research ethics guidance of Cardiff University's ethics committee, I have anonymised and carefully selected the examples included in the paper in order to avoid republishing messages with potentially sensitive content.

The sample used in this paper amounts to 1116 tokens of lexemes (i.e. words) that include some form of trans-scripting, realised primarily as the respelling of a feature associated with English in the local (Greek) writing system.[2] The choice of quantifying the sample in terms of word tokens, rather than posts/messages, has been driven by the fact that trans-scripted features may operate at the level of individual words or even individual characters within a word. Table 2 provides an overview of the distribution of tokens across different sites and indicates the dates the material were posted or made available online.

Source	Word-tokens (1116)	Date
YouTube	560	2011-2016
Facebook	245	2012-2016
online dictionary	102	2008-2014
webpages of TV/radio satire	92	2012 and 2016
social media campaigns	76	2014 and 2016
popular memes	41	2016

Table 2. Sources and distribution of tokens

My analysis seeks to address the following inter-related questions that arise from understanding trans-scripting and multilingual writing as creative and performative: (i) how and what is being respelt in the process of creating novel forms, and (ii) for what purposes, as well as for, and to, whom such respellings happen at given moments. In order to answer the first question, I have quantitatively analysed the whole sample of tokens in terms of the orientation displayed by users in making acoustic or visual associations while refashioning English-related forms. For the second question, I have drawn on moment analysis (Li Wei 2011: 1224) and qualitatively analysed specific moments of trans-scripting, with particular

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[2] Words that are considered as standard and graphemically assimilated loans, e.g. μίνι for mini skirt or κομπιούτερ for computer, have not been included, as processes of lexical borrowing fall beyond the scope of this paper.

focus on instances where momentary actions of trans-scripting are accompanied by metalinguistic commentary from internet users. The existence of such metalanguaging data generated by language users themselves indicates a heightened level of awareness that characterises linguistic performances and, thus, as Li Wei (2011) points out, the users' reflections at such moments deserve attention in the analytical process.

5. Creating novel forms: Respelling orientations in *engreek* or Greek-Alphabet English

If trans-scripting is defined as a process of respelling that results in the production of novel forms, the first step is to investigate how these novel forms are created and identify the respelling processes through which social media users refashion English-related forms. Rather than assuming a priori the existence of two distinct writing systems and identifying correspondences between individual characters (as often practiced by transliteration research), I have mapped all the word-tokens to the English-related forms they are associated with and organised them in terms of their sources. This method is motivated by the study's translanguaging perspective that approaches such refashionings as happening in situ and in the act of typing actual words, rather than as products of a distinct representational system.

The analysis reveals that although there are instances of forms that get respelt in the same manner across sources (for example, <γουέλκαμ> for 'welcome'), word-tokens of high frequency lexical items are written in different forms not only across but also within a particular source: for example, 'we' appears as <γουί>, <ουί> and <γουεί>. The overall analysis of word tokens in the sample suggests that the ways in which social media users respell English-related forms are far from uniform. Nevertheless, certain respelling orientations can be detected and they are presented in this section in order to contextualise the more detailed qualitative analysis of trans-scripting moments in sections 6 and 7.

Like other creative processes that draw on the ability to perceive similarities, as well as differences, in language production for purposes of imitation, repeat or mimicry (Deumert 2018: 10), respelling capitalises on perceived associations between written forms. Considering that reading and writing involve texts that are simultaneously *seen* and *heard* (Sebba 2007: 126), such similarities orient to the forms' sound values and/or visual shapes that get recontextualised within other semiotic environments, languages, codes, etc. While both orientations are evident in my sample, the study of *engreek* reveals further variability within phonetic orientations in the trans-scripting process.

For illustration purposes, I will use the phrase 'comments are free' that appeared in my sample as a sub-heading to the comments' section of the webpage of a popular radio satirical show. The phrase was respelt in capital letters and following a phonetic orientation on the actual webpage (i.e. ΚΟΜΕΝΤΣ ΑΡ ΦΡΙ). While actual examples from different orientations will be analysed qualitatively in the following section, I will briefly present here the various

orientations by making reference to the same example. By doing so, it will be easier to compare and contrast the visual forms created, together with their broad sound values, and, as a result, any visual or phonetic transformations that each respelling orientation achieves will be made more apparent.

The phrase 'comments are free' is respelt below according to the two basic orientations, together with an indication of how the respelt forms would 'sound out' in each case. Phonetic respellings appear closer to how these forms would 'sound out' if appearing in the Roman alphabet. In contrast, visual respellings produce sound sequences that bear little resemblance to the original form but they appear closer to the shape of Roman characters.

	Written form	*Form 'sounded out'* (broad IPA transcription)
	comments are free	kɒmɛnts ɑː friː
phonetic:	κομεντσ αρ φρι	koments ar fri
visual:	κοΜΜεητς ατε Γτεε	komeits ate γteː

In addition to these two orientations, my analysis reveals further variability within phonetic respellings that, to my knowledge, has been largely unexplored in previous literature. Variant respelt forms represent *allographs*, i.e. written forms that are spelt differently but have the same pronunciation (homophones). In the case of Greek-Alphabet English, allograph forms are produced through manipulation of Modern Greek spelling that affords the representation of the same sound with a number of alternative characters. Resistance to spelling reform proposals have resulted in a rather complex historical orthography in Modern Greek (see Moschonas 2009: 311 for language ideologies and spelling reforms). Complexity is particularly evident in the vowel system where, for example, the sound /i/ is spelt with six different homophone graphs, i.e. <ι>, <η>, <υ>, <ει>, <οι>, and <υι>. As shown below, writers refashion phonetic respellings by playing with the allographs' perceived visual similarities or differences. They choose from a continuum of more *simplified phonetic* orientations with allographs visually closer to Roman letters (phonetic I) to more *complex phonetic* orientations with allographs that are visually distant from 'English' spelling (phonetic II).

	Written form	*Form 'sounded out'* (broad IPA transcription)
	comments are free	kɒmɛnts ɑː friː
phonetic I:	κομεντσ αρ φρι	koments ar fri
phonetic II:	κωμαιντς αρ φροι	koments ar fri

With respect to their frequency (table 3), respellings of English-related forms in my sample are primarily phonetically-oriented, with instances of visual respellings displaying manipulation of alphabetic characters only. This finding is in stark contrast with previous research on Romanization where both orientations are equally attested and transliteration

practices exploit non-alphabetic symbols (e.g. numerals, punctuation marks) in terms of their visual potential to represent alphabetic characters (Palfreyman & Al Khalil 2007; Androutsopoulos 2009: 231; Vaissman 2011: 183). It points to a potential difference between Romanization (e.g. Romanized Greek) and trans-scripting in the form of Greek-Alphabet English: while the former may have emerged as a representational written practice due to software constraints, with users refashioning forms in terms of acoustic or visual associations, or both, the latter is primarily sensitive to oral aspects of writing and orients to the sound potential of the novel forms. Trans-scripting, thus, as manifest in *engreek* reveals an orientation towards speech with the production of 'oral written texts' that are typical of what Sofer (2012: 1093) identifies as digital orality. In this form of 'oral written communication', to echo Sofer, the written form becomes a product of individual choice and is influenced by the 'oral' not only in terms of phonetic respellings, but also in terms of alluding to particular spoken stylizations of English and associated personas, as demonstrated in the next section.

Respelling Orientations	Tokens % (n)
Phonetic I (simplified) κομεντσ αρ φρι	94.5% (1054)
Phonetic II (complex; visually distant) κωμαιντς αρ φροι	2% (22)
Visual κοΜΜεητς ατε Γτεε	3% (34)
Idiosyncratic	0.5% (6)

Table 3. Frequency of respelling orientations

If 'the transformation and reinstantiation of linguistic resources involves the production of new meanings, values and social relations' (Swann & Deumert 2018: 3), the following sections focus on particular moments of trans-scripting in order to investigate who is engaging in certain respelling orientations, for/to whom, and for what purposes. The moments selected for qualitative analysis include some metalinguistic commentary that targets either language use (and engreek, in particular) or specific individuals and their language production. The examples analysed in the following sections are primarily selected from the user-generated online dictionary slang.gr that includes the earliest documented instances in my sample and from metalinguistic performances on YouTube, memes, and other public forums that typify a series of similar examples in the relevant sources.

6. Reflecting on respelling orientations: The case of slang.gr

User-generated online dictionaries as sources for studying digital discourse may be considered rather problematic and limited in terms of access to spontaneous and authentic language use. Nevertheless, they differ from traditional dictionaries in that the content is generated by and for lay users and, as a result, they open a window onto folk (meta)linguistic

debates and emic explanations of phenomena under study (Deumert 2014: 27). In my sample, the earliest instances of Greek-Alphabet English (2008) appear on the Greek version of the online slang dictionary (www.slang.gr). Under the entry <engreek>, one finds the definition of the phenomenon, an example originating in allegedly real chat between two users on Windows Live Messenger, and a number of comments by other users who discuss the entry and engage in respellings of the main example. For the purposes of this section, the analysis will focus on the user-generated definition (Extract 1), the example accompanying the definition and displaying respellings that follow a simplified phonetic orientation (Extract 2), and a user's comment that employs a visual respelling orientation for typing a couple of sentences from the main example (Extract 3).

Extract 1 (definition)
engreek: Διαδικτυακή γλώσσα, αντίθετο του greeklish. Τα engreek είναι αγγλικά γραμμένα με ελληνικούς χαρακτήρες. Δεν χρησιμοποιείται και πολύ, αλλά όταν γίνεται έχει πολύ γέλιο και είναι τρομερή φάση.

    engreek: Internet language, the opposite of greeklish. Engreek is English written with Greek characters. It is not widely used, but when people do use it, it's very funny and a good craic. (my translation)

The user-generated definition identifies the phenomenon under study as marginal ('not widely used'), typical of digital environments ('internet language'), and hybrid. The coinage of the blend 'engreek' (en[glish]+greek) highlights ideas of hybridity and messiness in language practice that transcends assumed language boundaries ('English written with Greek characters'). The definition also describes this phenomenon as related to previous internet practices ('opposite of greeklish') and foregrounds its potential to create playful and humorous contexts. Greek-Alphabet English or engreek is, thus, presented as a form of vernacular creativity, characterised by play, humour, responsiveness to previous texts or practices and hybrid manipulations of form and meaning. The definition is accompanied by an example that illustrates engreek use on echat.

Extract 2 (example)
1. - Σόου, χάου ντου γιου ντού;
2. - Αι έμ φάιν, άι τζάστ χέντ ε μπάθ.
3. - Αααα, νάις, άι ντιντ του. Γουάτ πέρφιουμ ντου γιου πουτ;
4. - Αι ντοντ.
5. - ... Οοου. Οκέη. Γουίλ γιου καμ του δε πάρτυ τουνάιτ;
6. - Νόου, μεν, αι χεβ εν ινγκλις λέσον. Ιτ σαξ, μπατ άι χεβ του γκόου.
7. - Γκάτ-ντέμιτ! Γιού αρ μίσιν δε τάιμ οβ γιούρ λάιφ, μπρο!!
    1. - So, how do you do;
    2. - I am fine, I just had a bath.
    3. - Ahhh, nice, I did too. What perfume do you put?
    4. - I don't

5. - ... Ohhh. Ok. Will you come to the party tonight?
6. - No, man, I have an English lesson. It sucks, but I have to go
7. - Goddammit! You are missing the time of your life, bro!!

The position of the extract as the main illustrative example of *engreek* suggests that slang.gr users consider it prototypical or representative of the phenomenon. The two anonymous participants who engage in trans-scripting across seven turns are presented as non-fluent learners of English, as one of them attends English classes (see line 6) and their language production includes interlingual transfers, i.e. word-for-word translations of Greek expressions into English (see line 3 'what perfume do you put'). The respelling process creates visual distance from written 'English' that is further enhanced by the use of diacritics (see accented vowels <ά, ό, έ>). Following the aforementioned (simplified) phonetic orientation, the writing symbols become meaningful only if they are 'sounded out', creating an acoustic effect that is closer to what is generally recognised as 'English'.[3] Nevertheless, the sounding out of the specific characters still mobilises resources associated with 'Greek' pronunciation, such as a more limited range of vowel sounds and lack of distinction between alveolar and palatoalveolar fricatives, e.g. [tzast] vs. [dʒʌst] for 'just'. In previous research of popular TV commercials and radio satire, the mobilization of similar resources was noted in spoken stylizations of Greek-accented English for the humorous portrayal of rural and backward looking Greek personas (Archakis et al 2014; Spilioti 2017). Against the backdrop of spoken performances of Greek-accented English, phonetic respellings become additional resources that, together with the thread's content and interlingual transfers, index the stylized voice of non-fluent learners of English who have been the target of humour and mimicry in media performances. Trans-scripting, thus, presupposes a knowing audience who does not only decode the script but is sensitive to the phonetic interpretation and indexical potential of the typed words.

The relevance of audience considerations in trans-scripting practice is also evident in the following comment uploaded by one of the users under the <engreek> entry on slang.gr:

Extract 3 (user comment)
1. και όμως τα engreek δε (θα έπρεπε να) είναι έτσι...
2. Αυτά είναι οι αγγλικοί ΗΧΟΙ όπως διαβάζονται και γραφονται στα ελληνικά. Ένας άγγλος
3. ποτέ δε θα μπορούσε να τα γράψει έτσι γιατί δε ξέρει ελληνικά...
4. Εάν λοιπόν θεωρήσουμε ότι τα πραγματικά engreek είναι τα αγγλικά με ελληνικούς
5. χαρακτήρες (...όποιοι τελωσπάντων θα ταίριαζαν περισσότερο στα ματια του άγγλου),
6. όπως τα greeklish είναι τα ελληνικά, δωσμένα με τους πιο ταιριαστούς λατινικούς

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[3] 'English' is employed, here, as a socio-ideological concept. In fact, some of the phonetic respellings, e.g. <άι έμ> 'I am', reveal an orientation towards representing the [æ] sound more fronted, i.e. [em], that could be associated more with certain varieties of English. As the anonymous reviewer pointed out, Greek Cypriots would probably opt for a respelling that would allude to a more central pronunciation of the vowel, closer perhaps to British English: <άι άμ> [æm/am].

7. χαρακτήρες ....τότε έπρεπε να πάει κάπως έτσι:

8. ςο Ηοω Δο Υου Δο; (ηχητικά: σο ιοο δο ιου δο;)

9. Ι αΜ Γιηε. Ι ζυςτ ηανε α βατη! (ηχητικά: ι αμ γιιε. Ι ζιστ ιανε α βατι!)

10. ...τα οποία εάν τα διαβάσεις στο κατάλληλο τόνο και είσαι στο Τόκιο κινδυνεύεις να πας

11. μέσα για εξύβριση.....

  1. still, engreek is not (should not be) like that…

  2. These are the English SOUNDS as they are read and written in Greek. An English person

  3. would never write in this manner because they do not know Greek…

  4. So if we consider that real engreek is English with Greek characters (… well, at

  5. least, those characters that would look most appropriate to the eyes of an English person),

  6. similar to greeklish that is Greek represented with the most appropriate Latin

  7. characters… then it should go like this:

  8. ςο Ηοω Δο Υοθ Δο; (sounding: σο ιοο δο ιου δο;)

  9. Ι αΜ Γιηε. Ι ζυςτ ηανε α βατη (sounding: ι αμ γιιε. Ι ζιστ ιανε α βατι)

  10. … and if you read that in the right tone while in Tokyo, you are at risk of being arrested

  11. for swearing in public…..

(my translation; trans-scripted forms as in the original)

Phonetic respellings are presented as meaningful only to speakers and writers who are familiar with the sound values of Greek characters. Instead, the commenter opts for a visual respelling orientation, which they also consider as default or 'appropriate' for Romanized Greek as well. They offer an alternative spelling for the first two lines of the previous example: the user capitalises on the potential of both upper and lower case letters to evoke visual associations. For example, the lower case final sigma <ς> is used instead of its allograph <σ>, due to its visual association with <s> in 'so'; and upper case <M> is employed to circumvent visual distance between lower case forms <μ> and <m> in 'am'. Visual closeness, though, is accompanied by acoustic distance: the visual respellings of 'so how do you do' would sound out as [so io: ðo iu ðo] and 'I am fine I just have a bath' as [i am ji:e i zist iane a vati]. The phonetic interpretation of visual respellings is not indexically linked with a particular voice and, thus, becomes meaningless for the Greek-speaking internet audience. As the user jokes, the phonetic interpretation of the respelt forms alludes to Japanese sounds and, thus, may put somebody at risk of being arrested in Tokyo (see lines 10-11). In this type of playful trans-scripting, language becomes fluid: the respelt forms cannot be recognised a priori as belonging to a single linguistic system (Greek, English or Japanese); instead, they acquire referential and indexical meanings when contextualised in specific environments and/or perceived through different modes. When *seen* as visually-oriented respellings, they may be associated with 'English'; when *heard,* they may be associated with 'Japanese' in the streets of Tokyo or with 'nonsense' in the streets of London. It is through their transposition and emplacement across social and physical spaces that language forms gain or lose associations with particular codes, speakers, and cultures.

Although this game of associations is potentially endless, only constrained by one's 'limits' of creativity, it does have social implications for the (trans)languagers involved. As implied by the user in the comment above, respelling orientations have the potential of including certain addressees while excluding others; spelling, thus, becomes a resource for addressee selection in social media environments with multiple intertwining audiences. The phonetic orientation excludes speakers of the language such forms are typically associated with, unless such (English) speakers are familiar with the sound values of Greek letters. The virtual absence of visually-oriented respellings (3% of overall tokens) that would widen the pool of potential addressees indicates that trans-scripting in the form of respelling English-related forms operates primarily as an inside joke – a play for insiders who can experiment with and move freely between and beyond available resources.

7. Trans-scripting as creative play: Moments of online metalinguistic performances

From metalinguistic discussions of engreek on slang.gr, we move now to moments of metalinguistic performances on other social media platforms. Drawing on Bauman's broader definition of performance (1992: 44), I identify as moments of metalinguistic performance instances where social media users objectify language (e.g. a particular accent or script choice), isolate it to some extent from its immediate context and put it on display for internet audiences. In such instances identified in communication among Facebook, YouTube and other online forum users, the use of phonetic and visual respellings discussed in the previous section has also been attested. The predominant (simplified) phonetic orientation is found with similar indexical meanings: phonetic respellings of English-related forms are used to represent the stylized voice of non-fluent speakers of English.

The creators of memes and YouTube comments that accompany videos of public personas who are considered to be speaking Greek-accented English are found to engage in this form of trans-scripting. This is evident in Extract 4 that illustrates one of a series of popular memes that followed a meeting of the Greek Prime minister with Angelina Jolie in her role as UN special envoy for refugee issues. The meme captions in engreek represent the Prime Minister's words that read as: 'Nice to meet you, Madame Lara Croft' (Extract 4). The humorous meaning of the meme is triggered by the incongruity between the formal setting depicted in the image and the style of the caption, with its unexpected term of address and the graphemic refashioning of English-related forms.

Extract 4 (meme)

Extracts 5 and 6 also illustrate the respelling of English-related forms to represent the voice of the Greek Prime Minister and follow a YouTube video where the former US President Bill Clinton is interviewing the PM for an American TV show. In Extract 5, the user repeats the actual words uttered by the Greek politician and marks them as humorous by the iterative typing of the laugh particle haha. Repetition, though, through respelling foregrounds the words' form, as the content of the comment is the same with what is heard on the video. The written forms repeat and exaggerate sounds heard on the video; for example, 'question' is respelt as <κρουεζιον>, echoing and slightly distorting the politician's pronunciation with a form that would sound like [kɹuezjon]. When the form becomes more noticeable than content, enjoyment and fun are achieved through appreciation of the written stylization, its relation with prior performances of stylized spoken English and the indexical meanings it evokes.

Extract 5 (YouTube comment)

δις ιζ α κρουσιαλ κρουεζιον μπατ χαχαχαχαχαχαχαχαχαχαχαχαχχαχαχαχαχαχαχααχαχαχαχααχ

       this is a crucial question but hahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha

Memes and comments, like Extract 5, reveal a community of social media users who relate through the aesthetic appreciation of trans-scripting as creative play, especially in terms of its potential to graphemically represent and index particular forms of stylized speech. But is respelling a creative act of mere fun and enjoyment or does this form of vernacular creativity open up space for other social meanings and critique? Commenters on YouTube do not only respell words uttered by the Prime Minister on the video but they also use trans-scripting in order to create alternative scripts for the same characters. As shown in Extract 6, such comments project negative representations of the persons whose words get respelt and rescripted: for example, the Prime Minister is presented as an ignorant and foul-mouthed liar.

Extract 6 (YouTube comment)

Αϊ αμ σορυ μιστερ κλιντον,μπατ αϊ ντοντ αντερσταντ σιτ.Αϊ τζαστ νοου χαου του σεϊ 'go back mrs merkel'.. Αϊ ολσο σεϊ βερυ γκουντ λαϊς του στοοπιντ γρικ πιπολ.Οκ,φακ γιου,μπαϊ μπαϊ

       I am sorry mister clinton, but I don't understand shit. I just know how to say 'go back mrs merkel'.. I also say very good lies to stupid greek people. Ok, fuck you, bye bye

In the comment, the user engages in what Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) describes as double-voicing: while the graphemic imitation of the Prime Minister's speech suggests that the commenter adopts the Greek-accented voice, it achieves, at the same time, some distance between the writer, on the one hand, and the stylized voice, on the other. Through the creation of such distance, social media users engage in (dis)identification acts that enable them 'to characterize themselves and others, to locate themselves with respect to others (and vice versa), to situate themselves and others in a narrative, and to place themselves and others in a category/categories in different contexts' (Leppanen et al 2017: 15). In Extract 6, imitation through respelling affords an act of disidentification from the voice and persona represented. The respellings of English-related forms become resources for parody, mockery, and critique of the other, as well as what the other represents, including their perceived language competence, political beliefs, and power.

Beyond acts of disidentification in relation to represented personas, moments of trans-scripting are also documented in interaction between social media users. Extract 7 captures a sequence of two messages uploaded on an online forum that discusses the so-called birth order effect (i.e. the effect of birth order on psychological development). The two messages are juxtaposed in terms of their script: while user1 types their views on the topic in Romanized Greek, user2 replies with a comment in engreek and targets the form, rather than the content, of the previous message.

Extract 7 (online forum exchange)
@user1
Sorry alla to mati sas to alloi8wro! kati tetoia paidia e3eliswntai se antikoinwnikous prezwnes, ceytes, kleftes kai apatewnes epi to pleiston gia na synthroyn thn alazwneia poy toys ema8an oi filodo3oi goneis na exoyn gia dikh toys xrhsh! Ta alla paidia toys kanoyn grhgora sthn akrh […]

> Sorry but you are a fool! such kids turn out to be antisocial junkies, liars, thieves and mainly crooks, in order to feed the arrogance their ambitious parents had instilled on them! The other children soon marginalize them […] (my translation)

@user2
Πλοιζ ράοιτ οιν γκροικ. Γκροικ ηζ δαι λάνγκουιτζ γουεί σποικ αιντ ράοιτ οιν Γκροις.

> Please write in Greek. Greek is the language we speak and write in Greece.

User2's metalinguistic comment voices a conservative stance towards Romanization and evokes ideologies of standardisation that acknowledge one language as the standard spoken and written in a nation-state. According to this ideological frame, Romanization is understood as a threat to the unity and survival of the national language and identity (Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou 2007; Moschonas 2009). In the specific comment, though, this conservative voice is projected through respellings of English-related elements. Rather than adopting a simplified phonetic orientation (e.g. <ιν>, instead of <οιν>, for 'in'), user2 follows a more

complex phonetic orientation that capitalises on the Modern Greek orthographic system of vowel allographs (see table 3). The respelt forms are visually opaque to readers who are not familiar with Modern Greek orthography; yet, the estrangement process would not affect intelligibility by user1, as Romanized Greek presupposes understanding of the phonetic values of both Greek and Roman characters. Considering the position of the message and the type of phonetic respelling deployed, respellings of English-related forms are used as resources by user2 for disidentification from user1 and from the hybrid practice of Romanized Greek. User2 imitates hybrid language practices but they do so in ways that distance them from user1: they reverse the directionality of trans-scripting (i.e. switching from Romanized Greek to Greek-Alphabet English) and they opt for the most opaque type of phonetic respelling that can be appreciated and understood only by those who have a sophisticated knowledge of the Modern Greek writing system. Although mockery in humorous performances capitalises on ambiguities as to who or what gets ridiculed, the refashioning of English-related forms in this context is arguably used to mock hybridity and reinforce the conservative ideology voiced in the message. This argument is further supported by similar uses of engreek in other messages in my sample where far-right nationalist social media accounts campaign in favour of writing in Greek and criticise the use of Greeklish online.

8. Concluding Discussion

The starting point for this study was research on transliteration that has widely explored phenomena of Romanization since the early days of the internet, but little is known about how such phenomena take shape in the social media era that brings together multiple audiences in single platforms and technologically affords multiple scripts for encoding. By studying respellings of English-related forms, this paper draws attention to multilingual practices that involve crossing between (and beyond) scripts and languages but appear more transient and with different directionality compared to the widely researched Romanization. My analysis of English-related forms respelt with Greek characters in a range of social media environments has attested to trans-scripting as key in understanding processes of respelling that are *creative* in transforming widely accepted forms and *performative* in evoking knowing audiences in social media networks.

This paper develops an analysis of trans-scripting by attending to how the respelt forms are created, on the one hand, and for what purposes, as well as for whom, they are mobilised in specific digital environments, on the other. My analysis of the ways in which forms are respelt showed that, unlike findings from research on Romanized Greek, respelling orientations in my data recontextualise primarily the acoustic value of English-related words. Nevertheless, the process of respelling is never solely phonetically-oriented; I have documented how phonetic respellings are still sensitive to visual aspects of the written form. While orienting to the acoustic value of the form, (trans)languagers employ allographs as

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resources for playing with the degree of visual recognisability of the English-related forms for particular audiences. Furthermore, my analysis of specific examples in different sites demonstrated that trans-scripting also creates social spaces for play and enjoyment by invoking certain knowing audiences. The mobilisation of respelt forms was found to be associated with the representation of particular voices and social personas that again resonate with other knowing audiences online. Furthermore, the respellings of English-related forms become resources for metalinguistic commentary and signal acts of (dis)identification with individual users and their writing practices.

The findings allow a number of implications that contribute to our understanding of multilingual practices in digital communication and illustrate a link between trans-scripting as a creative practice and digital orality. In the case of trans-scripting investigated in this study, there is an overwhelming orientation to phonetic respellings and the acoustic effect they produce. Typographic and other symbols that were often used in Romanization practices for their potential to evoke visual associations with individual letters are notably absent in my sample. This finding is of course related to the motivation for trans-scripting in the social media era that is no longer tied to technological constraints and the very limited set of characters users could manipulate. Although technology may influence typing speed (switching to another alphabet mid-text requires time), there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the creative play documented in my study is activated through transformation of the written word into the acoustic sphere. It is through this transformation that users attribute social meanings to these forms and the associated personas by alluding to stylizations of spoken English, for example. The resonance of trans-scripting with such spoken creative language practices attests to the need of approaching such phenomena of multilingual writing through a creativity lens.

The findings also shed light on the role of English as a resource for multilingual writing. They complement recent research (e.g. Seargeant et al 2012: 516; Androutsopoulos 2014: 72) that rejects the a priori position of English as a lingua franca or global resource and illustrate how English-related forms are manipulated as local resources. This was particularly evident in the types of resources used for creating alternative phonetic respellings: for example, users capitalised on vowel allographs that are associated with the local writing system, rather than on rebus writing (e.g. b4 'before' or 2 for 'to') that is a more globally recognised strategy for respelling English-related forms in media and advertising. At the same time, the local orientation was manifest in the type of voices and social personas represented: the respellings of English-related forms do not orient to global cultures or identities but they index local spoken uses of English and identities, such as the backward uneducated Greek, that may be opaque to a wider global audience.

The link between trans-scripting and translanguaging has broader implications for understanding how social media users grapple with fluidity and transgression in language practice on the internet (and beyond). Although the respelt forms appear to resist

categorisation in terms of languages as distinct and bounded systems, the idea that typographic transgression of rigid language norms in digital media is a manifestation of a wider language-ideological change that takes issue with modernist ideas about language boundaries is open to debate. After all, orthography has long been used as a 'linguistic boundary-marking device [and…] in that respect […] is one of the key symbols of language unity and status itself' (Sebba 2007: 108). The insights of this study about the mobilisation of local writing normativities (e.g. Modern Greek historical orthography) in seemingly transgressive writing can be usefully drawn upon to add empirical weight and evidence about facets of linguistic anarchism that 'is part of users' performance rather than a real rebellion in the linguistic culture' (Sofer 2012: 1105). We have seen how the switch to engreek in response to Romanized Greek happens in the context of a call to use the national language and, as a result, it can function less as a celebration of fluidity and more like a critique to the very practice of hybridity they (re)appropriate in their writing. Given the ambiguity often inherent in language creativity, there is scope for examining further the varying positions that the respelt English-related forms may afford for various users and audiences in different localities.

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