

# Teasing in contact encounters: Frames, participant positions and responses

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## *Abstract*

*Even though teasing has been extensively examined from an anthropological and sociolinguistic perspective, as a rule, studies on teasing have explored teasing episodes among linguistically, culturally and ethnically homogeneous groups. The present study presents cross-sex teasing episodes between the members of a multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group (comprised of majority Greek children and minority Turkish-speaking children of Roma heritage) during break-time in a primary school in Athens, Greece. Drawing on the micro-analysis of key teasing episodes, it explores the emergence and development of teasing frames in discourse by probing the contextualization cues, participant positions and responses to teasing. To this end, it draws insights from interactional sociolinguistics and Conversation Analysis complemented by ethnographic data on the peer group. It illustrates how peer group members make use of recurring clusters of contextualization cues that draw upon the majority (Greek) and minority (Turkish) languages and cultures to frame their teases. In doing so, they exploit various participant positions and responses to teasing, including silence, which has previously received limited attention in teasing research. The findings of this study are grounded in existing research on Greek and Turkish culture and discourse with special reference to verbal play, verbal duelling and humour.*

## **1. Introduction**

Teasing as a topic for research has received extensive coverage: anthropological studies have investigated verbal play and teasing between children and their caregivers (whether parents or older siblings) as a socialisation practice at home across different cultures (Eisenberg 1986; Miller 1986; Réger 1999; Schieffelin 1986). These studies have focused mainly on teasing as a verbal means of social control to achieve particular goals

(e.g. to send messages regarding the children's inappropriate behaviour or the nature of social relationships with caregivers and other adults).

While the anthropological studies on teasing mentioned above exhibit a strong bias towards investigating adult–child interactions and focus on adult initiations of teasing exchanges at home, sociolinguistic studies have shifted the research agenda to exchanges among peers in the school setting. Overall, the focus of these studies has been to unravel and shed light on teasing practices among peers as a means of accomplishing ‘multiple peer objectives, such as strengthening female friendships, communicating liking to males, and experimenting with gender roles’ (Eder 1993: 18; see also Eder 1995; Scarborough Voss 1997; Tholander 2002). Moreover, teasing among peers has been explored as a means ‘to convey social concerns and norms’ by bringing to the fore violations of normative conduct (Eder 1991: 185; also Tholander and Aronsson 2002).

A significant bias of this line of sociolinguistic research is that it has been primarily concerned with investigating teasing practices in the context of linguistically, culturally, socially and ethnically homogeneous peer groups. These have been portrayed as sharing a common set of rules, understandings and linguistic and cultural repertoires. As Pratt (1987) argues in her article on ‘linguistic utopias’, the underlying assumption of such research is that peer groups are seen as self-contained entities, thereby glossing over social difference on the basis of language, culture, ethnicity, class and failing to address the issue of the ‘blurry frontier’ in instances of contact (1987: 56).

To this end, taking on board Pratt's call for a ‘linguistics of contact’, I present a micro-analysis of cross-sex teasing episodes between members of a multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group comprised of majority Greek and minority Turkish-speaking children of Roma heritage (age 10) during break-time in a mainstream primary school in Athens, Greece. Contact encounters among peers from the majority and minority languages and cultures is a recent phenomenon in Greece. It has been spearheaded by extensive immigration from abroad as well as by the continuous flow of linguistic minority groups from the periphery to urban centres accelerated from the early '90s onwards.

In this context, mainstream primary schools have been transformed into principal sites for contact, where children from diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds engage in processes of hybridity based on the sharing, mixing but also the appropriation, transformation and contestation of resources and practices in peer talk (cf. Ramp-ton 1995; Heller 1999). Teasing (along with other speech genres, such as swearing, telling jokes, using verbal aggression) has been identified as a central social practice in the talk of multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic peer groups (Lytra 2003a, 2003b; Pujolar 2001). In this re-

spect, teasing episodes can provide a unique point of entry into these processes of hybridity by focusing on the diverse forms of participation, the use of different contextualisation cues and the response strategies available to peer group members. Zooming in on these particular contact encounters becomes all the more pertinent given the near absence of sociolinguistic studies that look into contact encounters between majority and minority children in the Greek context (but see Lytra 2003a, 2003b) and the marginalised status of Turkish language and culture in Greek society at large (Embeirikos *et al.* 2001; Tsitselikis and Mavromatis 2003).

In addition, this investigation of teasing in contact encounters is further enriched by the focus of the paper on cross-sex teasing episodes between children who are part of a close-knit peer group. This analytical focus allows us to draw upon the peer group members' dense interactional history, rich in shared assumptions, which peers consistently exploit to suit their local interactional projects. This in turn allows us to explore how through teasing children engage in jointly constructing a multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group culture at school.

To this end, in this paper, I focus on the micro-analysis of key cross-sex teasing episodes<sup>1</sup> among peers and probe into how teasing is framed in talk by exploring its initiation, development and closing. I demonstrate how this is achieved through the use of linguistic and cultural resources, which function as framing devices or 'contextualization cues' (Gumperz 1982) and are available to interactants from the majority and minority languages and cultures. In addition, I explore the 'participation frameworks' developed, as interactants navigate different participant positions (Goffman 1981), and experiment with an array of responses to teasing (i. e. responding to teasing playfully, silently and seriously). For this purpose, I draw on insights from two approaches to discourse, interactional sociolinguistics and Conversation Analysis. Both approaches are concerned with the investigation of human conduct as meaningful, rule-governed and influenced by background cultural knowledge. These insights are complemented by ethnographic data about the peer group, its long interactional history spanning a period of four years as well as its linguistic and cultural resources and practices.

## 2. The data

The data are part of a larger pool of data that I collected during fieldwork for my PhD thesis in an urban linguistically, culturally and ethnically diverse mainstream primary school in Athens, Greece (January–May 1999 and on subsequent one-day visits to the school between September 1999 and June 2001). The data consist of approximately 30 hours

of tape-recorded interactions among peer group members, their teachers and the researcher across school settings.<sup>2</sup> They were enriched by participant observations, semi-structured qualitative interviews with peer group members, their teachers and parents, self-reported questionnaires (completed by the children) and pupil profiles (completed by the teacher).

The peer group was comprised of 6 majority Greek children and 5 Turkish-speaking minority children. All children were attending 4<sup>th</sup> grade at the time of the initial fieldwork (January-May 1999). The composition of the peer group had remained relatively stable over the four years they had been at school together (indeed, a few children had also been together since kindergarten). Regular socialisation at school over a long period of time had resulted in building strong and enduring ties among peers. These took the form of having developed an elaborate nicknaming system (often with multiple nicknames for each peer) and of having established what appeared to be particular cross-sex teasing practices. As will be shown, the latter relied on exploiting specific participant positions and clusters of contextualisation cues.

The high percentage of Turkish-speaking minority children in the school has been directly linked to the settlement of a Turkish-speaking community of Roma heritage in the neighbourhood since the early '70s (at present approximately 3,000 people). Historically, the members of this community belong to the Greek Muslim minority of Western Thrace. This is regarded as an indigenous religious minority whose members' legal status, linguistic, cultural and religious rights are determined by the Lausanne Treaty (an international treaty signed between Greece and Turkey in 1923) (Divani 1995). Moreover, since the early 1990s, there has been a steady influx of immigrant children in the neighbourhood from the Balkans and the Middle East, thereby further contributing to the school's multilingual, multicultural and multiethnic character.

### 3. Framing teasing

A review of the literature on teasing demonstrates that it has been invariably subsumed under the super-ordinate categories of 'humour' (Fine 1984; Hay 2000), 'conversational joking' (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Norrick 1993), 'play' (Straehle 1993) and 'insulting' (Tannock 1999). Nevertheless, all understandings of teasing as a social practice whether among peers, adults or in interactions among children and their caregivers converge on its multi-functionality in discourse and highlight its dependency on shared assumptions and associations among interactants for interpretation.

According to Eisenberg (1986: 183–184), teasing is defined as 'any conversational sequence that opened with a mock challenge, insult or

threat'. A central feature of teasing is that 'the teaser did not intend the tease to be understood as true' (*ibid.*). On this issue, Drew (1987) points out that 'teases are designed to make very apparent what they are up to – that they are not intended as real or sincere proposals – by being constructed as very obviously exaggerated versions of some action' (1987: 232). Based on the sequential analysis of a rich corpus of naturally occurring conversations over the telephone and in informal settings (e.g. dinner table conversations, visits to relatives or friends' homes), Drew identifies certain features that make teases recognisable. Teases can be built around the selection of specific lexical items used in an exaggerated manner (e.g. 'yacking' instead of talking). The recognisability of teases can also depend on the overdone formulaic character of the whole turn (e.g. 'you probably got at a least a week [to live]' is an exaggerated prognosis for a minor illness). Lastly, teases may be designed in such a way so as to exhibit a certain degree of 'contrastiveness' (e.g. teasing that one will be home at nine in the evening contrasts with the proposal to get home at a decent hour for a family function that starts at seven) (1987: 231–232).

Designing teases as humorous rather than sincere proposals is due to the fact that if taken literally, the recipient could regard the content of teasing as hostile or negative: this implies that teasing is considered as an inherently ambiguous activity and one that can produce uncertainty in talk. As Schieffelin (1986: 166–167) notes, 'teasing creates tension, as one is never completely sure which way an interaction might swing, owing to the unstable nature of the teasing frames'.

Building on Eisenberg's definition of teasing and Drew's discussion of the recognisability of teases, in this paper, teasing is seen as an activity that is framed as such via recurring clusters of 'contextualisation cues' (Gumperz 1982). Frames, in general, are regarded as mechanisms through which participants structure their social and personal experiences, thereby providing us with an interpretation of what is going on in a given interaction (Goffman 1974: 10–11). In this respect, contextualisation cues function as framing devices to signal how utterances, movements or gestures are to be interpreted (*ibid.*). In doing so, they mark off periods of talk devoted to a particular activity (in our case teasing) from talk about other matters (e.g. talk about a school task).

According to Gumperz (1982: 131), contextualisation cues are linguistic, paralinguistic and extra-linguistic signs that co-occur and associate what is said to assumed background knowledge. In addition to mock challenges, threats, insults, lexical items produced in an exaggerated manner and overdone formulaic expressions peer group members consistently use clusters of the following cues to initiate and construct their teases:

- teasing names and in particular nicknames
- clapping
- prosody (volume, pitch, rhyme and rhythm, sing-song intonation), laughter, giggling
- repetition
- code and style switches
- formulaic expressions (one-liners, cries, nonsense cries)
- terms of verbal abuse
- mock acts of aggression (hair pulling, nape slapping, pushing)
- untranslatable particles (i.e. *re*, *vre*)

The co-occurrence of these cues aims at signaling to peer group members the meta-message that ‘this [teasing] is play’ and should be taken as such (Bateson 1972; also Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Eisenberg 1986; Straehle 1993, to mention a few).

An important criterion for identifying teasing in the data is that teases were always directed at a present party.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the examination of the sequential environment of teasing foregrounded that teases did not usually emerge as topic-initial utterances; instead, they most often came about as a second or a response to a prior turn (cf. Drew 1987). In this context, some teasing sequences were minimal containing one tease (in the form of a single initiation with no uptake). For instance, in excerpt (1), Bahrye and Vasia are giving Babis a much needed hand with his overdue grammar homework. Prior to the frame shift to teasing, Bahrye is going through Babis’ folder filing past grammar exercise sheets, when she teases him for the poor condition it is in (line 2). In this short teasing episode, Bahrye marks off the tease from the preceding talk by pumping up the volume and making use of a mock challenge coupled with the use of the untranslatable particle *re*. Her tease, however, does not elicit a response by Babis. Instead, Vasia shifts the topic back to Babis’ unfinished grammar homework by volunteering to write the answers on the blackboard for him to copy:

Excerpt (1)

((Participants: Bahrye: minority Turkish-speaking girl; Babis: majority Greek boy; Vasia: majority Greek girl))

- |     |         |   |
|-----|---------|---|
| 1   | Bahrye: | ((to Babis)) give me this ((folder)) .. I’ll put this ((grammar exercise sheet)) in there .. <i>ff</i> your folder (re) <sup>4</sup> it’s a real mess |
| → 2 |         | [3 sec]   |
| 3   | Vasia:  | ((to Babis)) I’ll write the past tense for you on the blackboard .. what’s the first ((verb in the grammar exercise sheet))?                          |

Other teasing episodes were more complex containing multiple teases (in the form of an initiation followed by co-initiations and any number of

responses). In excerpt (2) below (which is part of the same break-time interaction as excerpt [1]), Vasia is now going through some of the grammar exercises Babis has finished, meticulously checking for errors. She identifies a gross spelling error in the homework and she introduces a frame shift to teasing (lines 3–4). Her tease is built on the co-occurrence of specific prosodic cues (stress and rising intonation) and a mock threat ‘ah- I’m gonna kill him ah-’ produced in an exaggerated manner.<sup>5</sup> In the next turns, Vasia repeats her tease in the same overdone manner inviting Bahrye to participate as a co-teaser (lines 6–7). Bahrye rises to the occasion by repeating the offensive word in a similarly exaggerated fashion (by shifting to a high pitch choking voice) (line 8). Subsequent to Bahrye’s tease, the teasing is temporarily put on hold as she and Vasia engage in identifying more spelling errors in Babis’ homework and correcting them:

## Excerpt (2)

- 1 Vasia =ff let me have a look (vre)<sup>6</sup> .. at what you’ve written  
 2 ((reads aloud)) I’ll be ho::lding . you’ll be ho::lding .. he’ll be  
 → 3 ho::lding with no stress we .ff we::? acc ah- I’m gonna kill him →  
 4 ah=  
 5 Babis =p acc ((reads out the pronouns he has written)) I you we ..  
 → 6 Vasia uh uh f Bahrye I’m gonna kill him .. uh uh .. ..  
 7 acc have a look how he’s spelled ((the pronoun)) we ..  
 → 8 Bahrye ((making a high pitch choking voice)) ff we::?  
 9 Vasia ((what about)) you? p have a look  
 10 Bahrye ((what about)) f you?  
 11 Vasia again ((the same mistake))  
 12 Bahrye ff uh::: ? .. isn’t it spelled like this ((writes on the blackboard))

One important finding regarding the framing of teasing that diverges from previous studies (e.g. Eder 1991; Eisenberg 1986; Réger 1999) is that peer group members rarely – if ever – resort to making use of disclaimers, such as ‘just joking’ or ‘I was only teasing’. Such disclaimers have been classified as ‘discourse-related’ contextualisation cues whose purpose is to make apparent that the tease was not intended to be true and resolve any possible ambiguity regarding its interpretation (Réger 1999: 291).

This finding is not surprising when seen in the context of research on Greek verbal play in general. More specifically, Hirschon (1992) argues that ‘in the case of Greek the explicit setting up of a [play] frame is rarely done’ and one does not often hear disclaimers, such as ‘σου κάνω πλάκα’ (‘just kidding’). Instead, interactants need to decipher the relevant contextualisation cues in order to understand and interpret playfully what has been said (1992: 42). This line of argument points to the existence of

specific cultural norms regarding the framing of verbal play in Greek that discourage the use of disclaimers. Such practices leave interactants to their own devices in negotiating possible ambiguities and dealing with confusion and misunderstandings.

Besides the existence of such norms, the rarity of disclaimers in the data can be further attributed to the pervasiveness of teasing as a social practice among peer group members in this study. In her discussion of the use of disclaimers in teasing among peers, Eder (1991: 189) asserts that making intent more explicit becomes pertinent in cases where interactants are not close friends and do not know each other well enough to know how the tease will be interpreted. In the case of the members of a close-knit peer group, however, teasing is seen as a relatively 'safe' activity (Eisenberg 1986: 193; see also Holmes 2000), rendering such disclaimers superfluous. This suggests the development of habitual 'teasing relationships' among peers which are reminiscent of the 'customary joking relationships' established among friendship pairs or groups discussed by Norrick (1993: 3; see also Archakis and Tsakona (2005) on in-group targeting humour among members of a close-knit all-male group of Greek young adults).

#### 4. Participant positions

To probe into the various participant positions available, I draw on Goffman's notion (1981) of 'participation framework'. A 'participation framework' is taken to mean the 'participation status' or participant positions of all those who happen to be in the perceptual range of a spoken event relative to that event (1981: 3). The data revealed the following participant positions:

- initiator
- target or recipient (these two terms are used interchangeably)
- audience (i. e. co-initiators, co-respondents, over-hearers)

Members of the audience can be co-participants and take up the participant positions of co-initiators or co-respondents, or they can have limited or no participation (i. e. act as over-hearers). Limited participation refers to members of the audience who, through giggling, laughter, clapping and other gestures, align themselves with the teasing without, however, taking sides (i. e. siding with the initiator or the target). On the basis of these participant positions, the following participation frameworks were identified:

- two-party participation (featuring initiator and target who alternate in these positions) with no audience or limited audience participation
- multi-party participation (including (co-)initiator(s), multiple target(s) and (co)respondents).

#### 4.1 Two-party participation

Teasing can be strictly confined to two children only with no audience participation or it can trigger limited audience participation, as in the case of excerpt (3) below. On this occasion, Tuncay and Nontas tease each other in front of Bahrye. The teasing is triggered by Bahrye's request to Tuncay to speak into the researcher's microphone, which she was holding at the time. Tuncay obliges and in line 4 embarks on teasing Nontas. The subsequent teasing episode is based on the lexical repetition of nicknames: Tuncay makes references to Nontas' nickname 'Babaki' (i. e. cotton) and its phonetic variant 'Vamvaki' (lines 1, 6, 9, 12)<sup>7</sup> and Nontas exploits references to Tuncay's nickname 'Tudza Mudza' (lines 3, 7, 14):<sup>8</sup>

##### Excerpt (3)

((Participants: Nontas: majority Greek boy; Tuncay: minority Turkish-speaking boy; Bahrye: minority Turkish-speaking girl)).

- 1 Bahrye: ((holding the mic)) *ff* *Tuncay* . *acc* *konus* *konus* ..  
Tuncay talk talk ((in the mic))
- 2 Tuncay: ((speaks in the mic)) *f* *Kurdistan*=
- 3 Bahrye =hhhhhhh  
((Tuncay moves closer to Bahrye who is still holding the mic))
- 4 Tuncay: ((to Bahrye)) come on come on [Babaki hhhh  
5 Bahrye: [hhhhhhh
- 6 Nontas: *acc* (h)Tu(hh)dza Mu(hh)dza .  
7 Bahrye: *Tunca* . *a* . *sen* ( ... ) *birakmayin ben birakmacayim*=  
Tudza a- you ( ... ) don't let me neither shall I=  
→ 8 Tuncay: =Vam[vaki .  
→ 9 Nontas: *acc* [Tudza Mudza=  
10 Bahrye: =hhhhhhh .  
→ 11 Tuncay: Vam[(hh)va(h)ki  
12 ( ) (...)  
13 Bahrye: [hhhh .  
→ 14 Tuncay: Babaki:: .  
15 Bahrye: hhhh  
((Nontas moves away from Bahrye and Tuncay)).
- 16 Nontas: *pp* Tudza Mudza  
17 Tuncay: ((directly into the mic)) *pp* Nontas is a really nice kid

As excerpt (3) illustrates, the teasing is confined to two antagonists (Tuncay and Nontas), who alternate in the positions of the target. To signal their mutual engagement in the activity, the two antagonists do not focus so much on the content of the cues they use (they both employ each

other's nicknames), but on the mode of delivery (pace, volume and laughter) of their contributions. As a result, the mode of delivery sets the playful, yet competitive tone of teasing, as one turn quickly succeeds the next, thereby aiding in maintaining the teasing frame (cf. Lytra 2003b). As far as the role of the audience is concerned, while not contributing actively in the teasing as a co-participant, Bahrye plays an important role in sustaining the activity, by interspersing it with giggling and laughter.

The fast pace and high volume in the delivery of the retorts between the two antagonists and the use of highly routinised cues (the repetition of each other's nickname) is reminiscent of verbal duelling activities among African American (Labov 1972; Kochman 1983) and Turkish (Dundes, Leach and Özkök 1972) young males. While the antagonists in the data are not obliged to use a rather limited set of traditional retorts (as in the case of verbal duelling) and can creatively appropriate or make up new retorts, the emphasis of such teasing seems to be on outperforming one's opponent in a game fashion. As Dundes, Leach and Özkök (1972: 131) postulate in their study of Turkish boys' verbal duelling rhymes, 'the actual communicative intent seems to be to put one's opponent down or to test his ability to maintain presence of mind in interaction'.

Moreover, the importance of the audience as witness and evaluator of the on-going activity is a common theme that emerges in both the data and research on verbal duelling. In Labov's (1972: 146–147) discussion on ritual sounding among African-American young males, audience response can take the form of laughter as well as positive or negative evaluations of a preceding retort and it is sequentially positioned right after each of the antagonists' turns. Lack of audience response, on the other hand, is usually interpreted as negative evaluation of the preceding sound and a clear indicator that the antagonist in question is losing ground. Although the audience in the two-party teasing episode discussed above overwhelmingly refrains from joining in and evaluating (positively or negatively) the preceding tease, she consistently makes use of laughter and giggling to signal her engagement in the teasing and indirectly evaluate the antagonists' performance.

#### 4.2 *Multi-party participation*

In the data, multi-party teasing episodes appear to be the norm: opening up participation for co-initiators and co-respondents to make bids for the interactional floor is prevalent among peer group members.<sup>9</sup> This results in co-constructing the teasing activities and maintaining teasing frames. Co-participants have free-for-all participation rights. This means

that they can take part in the development of teasing at any point in the interaction, giving rise to the following interactional options:

- A participant self-selects and takes up the participant position of co-initiator or co-respondent with the purpose of collaboratively teasing the same target.
- A participant self-selects to become a co-respondent and address the teasing on behalf of the target.
- The initiator calls in another participant to take part in the teasing.
- More than one participant (e.g. a co-initiator or co-respondents) self-select to simultaneously take part in teasing. By overlapping with one another, participants join forces against a common target. Such overlaps, however, are usually limited to a turn only, which strongly suggests that this is a dispreferred option. In other words, overwhelmingly participants make individual rather than collective bids for the interactional floor.

Moreover, the negotiation of the target for teasing emerges as the norm in multi-party participation. As a rule, participants have two options available to trigger a shift in target:

- The target self-selects and introduces a new target in discourse.
- A co-respondent addresses the teasing on behalf of the recipient, thereby shifting the target either to the (co-)initiator(s) or to a third party.

To illustrate some of the above-mentioned interactional options, the following teasing episode is examined. In this teasing episode Meltem, Maria, Vasia, Tuncay and Nontas are engaged in a painting task while Babis, Giannis and Husein are hovering about. There is a lot of noise (including intermittent banging on desks, shouting, the loud singing of snippets from popular songs and the humming of various rock tunes). The teasing episode is triggered by Nontas' threat to tell on his classmates, because they are making too much noise. In the first part of the teasing episode (lines 1–5) Maria and Vasia team up to tease Nontas, while in the second part (lines 6–13), Vasia collaborates with Meltem to tease Tuncay, who earlier came to Nontas' defence:

Excerpt (4)

((Participants: Nontas: majority Greek boy; Maria: majority Greek girl; Vasia: majority Greek girl; Tuncay: minority Turkish-speaking boy; Meltem: minority Turkish-speaking girl))

- 1 Nontas *f acc* I'll tell the teacher you're making so much noise .  
 → 2 Maria *ff what* do you want no::w (re) Nontas?=  
*ff* what

- 3 Vasia =what do you want now (*re*) Nontas? (hh)you want  
 4 (hh)something(hh)?=  
 → 5 Tuncay =*acc* shut up (*re*) Va[sia  
 6 Nontas [ʃ he ((Babis)) hasn't done the homework.  
 7 the teacher told him to do .. ok?=  
 → 8 Meltem =and that's none of your business .. *p* you nutty::=  
 9 Maria =it's he who hasn't done his homework not you .  
 → 10 Tuncay *p* come off with it (*re*) Cumbul=  
 → 11 Meltem =*f* leave us alone (*re*) Tunzda Mundza:: Mundza Mundza=  
 12 Tuncay =*be:n mi suledim*? .  
 =did I say that? .  
 13 Vasia be::m sule bemi sule?  
 [4sec]  
 ((background noise))  
 14 Tuncay look .. I painted a very nice flag  
 ((background noise))

As excerpt (4) illustrates, in the first part of the teasing activity, Nontas' unwarranted threat to tell on his classmates triggers Maria's teasing remarks.<sup>10</sup> She frames her tease by exploiting a cluster of recurring cues: a mock challenge coupled with the untranslatable particle *re* which is delivered in a particularly loud voice, thereby setting the tease off from the preceding talk (line 2). In the next turn, Vasia reinforces Maria's teasing as co-initiator by making use of lexical repetition and recycling the latter's position (cf. Tannock 1999). She intersperses her mock challenge with laughter, thereby somewhat lightening up her tease (lines 3–4) (cf. Norrick 1993). Instead of Nontas responding to the successive teasing, it is Tuncay who retaliates on his behalf (line 5): the latter builds his tease by issuing a mock order followed by the untranslatable particle *re* delivered in fast pace. This he directs at Vasia thereby re-negotiating the target for teasing.

In the second part of the teasing episode, Nontas puts his foot in his mouth again. His alleged interest in Babis' unfinished homework (lines 6–7) generates a dismissive remark on Meltem's part (line 8). Once again, Tuncay takes the floor to respond on behalf of Nontas: he issues a mock challenge to Meltem coupled with a reference to her nickname 'come off with it (*re*) Cumbul' (line 10).<sup>11</sup> In the following turn, Meltem latches onto Tuncay's talk and issues a counter-tease in a loud declarative voice. She repeats the mock challenge followed by a sing-song rendition of his nickname: 'leave us alone (*re*) Tundza Mundza Mundza' (line 11). In response to Meltem's teasing, Tuncay makes a code-switch to Turkish that marks a clear shift from the teasing frame. In the following turn, however, Vasia makes a bid for the floor, by taking up the position of co-respondent and siding with Meltem against Tuncay. She builds her tease, by trying to imitate twice Tuncay's previous utterance in Turkish (line 13) (cf. Tannock 1999).

Excerpt (4) above strongly suggests that multi-party teasing episodes exhibit a high degree of joint construction and participant collusion. Teasers and targets alternate in different participant positions (e.g. teasers, co-teasers, targets, co-respondents coming to the target's defence) through a series of shifting alignments.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, teasing provides peer group members with a particular kind of sociability, where participants join in of their own accord by making use of the various participant positions available to them.

Besides helping us understand how teasing is framed in talk among peers, the investigation of speaker alignments aids us to probe into the nature of the participants' personal and social relationships, roles and social identities (cf. Straehle 1993; Tannock 1999). Participant observations corroborated the cross-sex teasing practices observed in the excerpt above: girls usually sided with girls against their male peers and vice-versa. Moreover, co-respondents addressed teasing remarks on behalf of a same-sex target (often against a teaser(s) of the opposite sex). This is evident in Vasia's siding first with Maria and then Meltem against Nontas and Tuncay respectively as well as Tuncay's repeated attempts to come to Nontas' defence and reciprocate for the girls' relentless teasing on his behalf. In this context, such teasing episodes become the arena where cross-sex teasing practices are (re)produced and reinforced, thereby contributing to the peer group members' sense of group identity and belonging (cf. Archakis and Tsakona, 2005; Holmes and Marra 2002).<sup>13</sup>

## **5. Responses to teasing**

As discussed, teasing is a highly ambiguous and context-dependent activity and it is not always possible for the recipients of teases and other co-participants to distinguish between combat and play. How a tease is interpreted, however, can be gleaned by the types of responses it elicits. In this paper, I build upon and extend Kochman's investigation of response work on sounding among African-American young males (1983: 332–333) by focusing on both target and co-participant uptakes in order to identify whether teasing is taken to be playful or serious.<sup>14</sup> In other words, it is the responses of targets and co-participants to teasing that determines whether a teasing frame is sustained or whether an activity is redefined and brought to a close (cf. Drew 1987; Eder 1991; Tannock 1999).

The data illustrate that participants have the following response options to teasing at their disposal:

- responding playfully (via playful retaliations, playing along)
- keeping silent
- responding seriously (via frame shifts)

These types of responses are not mutually exclusive: participants may exploit any combination of responses to address teasing remarks within the same teasing episode. Overwhelmingly, the data indicate that targets and co-participants favour responding to teasing playfully. The second most common option is keeping silent, while the last option (responding seriously) is the least preferred one.<sup>15</sup>

### *5.1 Responding playfully to teasing*

Responding playfully to teasing is not surprising when seen in the context of research on the centrality of humour, joking and language play in Greek society in general (e.g. Hirschon 1992; Mackridge 1992) and in Greek oral and written discourse in particular (e.g. Antonopoulou and Sifianou 2003; Archakis and Tsakona 2005; Canakis 199; Georgakopoulou 2000). More specifically, in their study on humour in Greek telephone opening exchanges, Antonopoulou and Sifianou (2003: 747–748) identify a certain ‘readiness to play’ on the part of callers and answerers, who are close friends. This is manifested from the very first opening sequences of the telephone exchange. For instance, answerers who are expecting a call from a close friend may answer the phone playfully (e.g. by using a summons in Italian rather than in Greek). Callers on these occasions rarely ignore this invitation to play and respond equally playfully (e.g. by teasing the answerer for attempting to adopt an Italian identity) (2003: 748).

In the data, responding playfully to teasing can take the form of a playful retaliation directed at the teaser(s). Playful retaliations have a combative, agonistic quality where participants strive to outperform one another by engaging in a game of sorts over who produces the last turn (see Labov 1972; Kochman 1983 for similar findings regarding verbal duelling contests). For instance, in excerpt (3), the two antagonists (Tuncay and Nontas) are engaged in an exchange of nicknames, as they try to score over one another, in the presence of a receptive audience (Bahrye) who signals her involvement through extended laughter and giggling.

Such playful retaliations between antagonists coupled by audience participation strongly suggest the participants’ mutual engagement in the teasing. They illustrate that the activity is taken as play and corroborate findings in the literature regarding the entertainment value of teasing (cf. Strahle 1993). The shared enjoyment appears to be manifested in the

recurring clusters of contextualisation cues participants employ, such as the exchange of nicknames at a fast pace and the elicitation of giggles and laughter on the part of the audience. Consequently, such playful retaliations point to the fact that the content of teasing may be less important than simply having the pleasure of engaging in teasing among peers (Eisenberg 1986).

Besides playful retaliations, responding playfully to teasing can take the form of playing along. According to Tholander and Aronsson (2002: 158), these are seen as responses in which the target generally appears ‘unperturbed’ by the teasing. In his continuum of serious–non-serious responses to teasing, Drew (1987: 225) situates ‘playing along’ on the non-serious end of the continuum: this means that these responses are positioned in opposition to po-faced responses (i.e. serious responses to teasing) and are characterised by the target’s implicit or explicit acceptance of the tease (e.g. the target may laughingly agree with the teasing and even go so far as to add something more to the teasing).

The following excerpt provides a good example of this type of response. Prior to the frame shift to teasing, Bahrye and Babis, who are sitting next to each other, have been working fast to complete unfinished school homework before the end of the break. This is taking place under the watchful eye of Vasia, who is hovering over them ready to dispense help and constructive criticism (but who does not feature in this excerpt). At one point, Bahrye breaks the silence by turning to Babis and teasing him in a sing-song intonation produced in a loud provocative manner that she is well ahead of him in finishing the homework on time (line 1):

Excerpt (5)

((Participants: Bahrye: minority Turkish-speaking girl; Babis: majority Greek boy))

- |     |        |   |
|-----|--------|---|
| 1   | Bahrye | <i>f</i> ((sing-song intonation)) oh Babis I’m ahead .                        |
| 2   | Babis  | huh? .. ..  |
| 3   | Bahrye | <i>ff</i> ((sing-song intonation)) I’m <u>ahead</u> of you du=-               |
| → 4 | Babis  | = <i>acc</i> that’s ok .. we’re not competing . <i>f</i> if we were competing |
| 5   |        | ((to finish the homework)) I would have won by two thousand                   |
| 6   |        | <u>mistakes</u>   |
|     |        | [4 sec]   |

In response to Bahrye’s initial taunt (line 1), Babis asks a clarification request (line 2), which results in Bahrye repeating her tease in a louder, more provocative tone (line 3). Babis plays along with Bahrye’s teasing by resorting to self-denigrating humour. In instances of self-denigrating humour the target not only accepts being cast in the participant position of the recipient of the teasing but also reinforces this through self-directed remarks (cf. Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997; Drew 1987). On this

occasion, Babis acknowledges the teasing and further elaborates on it by claiming that ‘if we were competing I would have won by two thousand mistakes’ (line 4).

By playing along with the teasing and acknowledging his shortcomings as a pupil, Babis successfully brings the teasing to a close (as indicated by the four-second pause succeeding his self-directed remark). In other words, playing along seems to have the effect of ‘protecting’, so to speak, the target of the teasing of any further assaults (cf. Tholander and Aronsson 2002). Moreover, by addressing the teasing playfully, Babis attempts to conjure up a positive self-presentation, i. e. that of someone who has a good sense of humour and can laugh at his shortcomings. Similar to the recounting of funny personal anecdotes discussed by Norrick (1993: 47; see also Kotthoff 2000 for a discussion of self-mockery in women’s humorous narratives), self-deprecatory humour serves to ‘present a self with an ability to laugh at problems and overcome them’.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, given that teasing was a well established practice among peers, the use of self-denigrating teasing can serve to enhance further one’s status in the peer group (cf. Holmes 2000).

Overall, the literature on teasing has repeatedly shown that, while often having an agonistic quality, playful responses have a strong bonding function among friends (e.g. Antonopoulou and Sifianou 2003; Straehle 1993). The bonding function of teasing becomes all the more important in contact encounters, that is, in interactions among participants from diverse linguistic, cultural, ethnic or social backgrounds where shared assumptions guiding the interpretation of play in talk cannot be taken for granted (see Bekkers 2002, for similar findings among members of an expatriate community in Japan). In the excerpts discussed above, the bonding function of teasing is manifested in the peer group members’ ability to engage in teasing without needing to resort to disclaimers or without causing offence or triggering a row as well as in their use of self-denigrating remarks. Playful teasing, therefore, provides the interactional space for participants to work towards strengthening peer group ties and enhancing teasing relationships further without at the same time jeopardising their existing close relationship.

## 5.2 *Keeping silent*

As research in pragmatics and sociolinguistics has clearly demonstrated, silence is multi-functional and can thus serve a variety of communicative purposes in different types of discourse (e.g. Jaworski 1993; Tannen and Saville-Troike 1985; Sifianou, 1995; Sifianou and Tzanne 1998). Giles *et al.* (1992) argue that silence is frequently seen as a marker of embarrassment, shyness or even hostility and may be interpreted as unwillingness

on the part of the silent party to communicate or as exhibiting lack of verbal skill (reported in Sifianou and Tzanne 1998: 299). Due to its multi-functionality, however, silence can be ambiguous. This indicates that rather than treating silence as ‘a monolith and absolute’, it would be more fruitful to differentiate among ‘many types of silence’ (Jaworski 1993: 24).

Firstly, silence as a response to teasing can be seen as perhaps talk not taken seriously enough to warrant a response. This interpretation becomes evident when one examines the talk preceding and subsequent to the response work. For instance, in excerpt (6) below, a group of children (and the researcher) are hanging out in the classroom on a wet day. The children are dabbling in a series of drawing tasks from their English language exercise book while exchanging sweets, savoury snacks and comments about the progress of each other’s drawings. It is in the backdrop of these leisurely activities that Vasia’s exaggerated singing emerges (line 1). Vasia’s singing, amplified by being produced directly into the researcher’s microphone that was in front of her, triggers teasing. Tuncay builds his tease by exploiting a recurrent cluster of contextualization cues delivered in fast pace (e.g. excerpt 4, line 10), namely a mock order followed by a playful reference to her nickname ‘Vasilopita 999’ (line 2):<sup>17</sup>

## Excerpt (6)

((Participants: Vasia: majority Greek girl; Tuncay: minority Turkish-speaking boy; Giannis: majority Greek boy; Vally: the researcher))

- 1 Vasia: ((sings in the mic)) *f* my hea::rt is thro::bbing=  
 2 Tuncay: =*acc* go away . Vasilopita 999  
 → [2 sec]  
 3 Giannis: let’s have a look (*re*) Nonta ((to see what you have drawn))  
 4 Meltem: this ((marker)) is a good one .. take it .. .. I used the same one  
 5 .. look ..  
 6 Vally: *p* ( ... ) with *typ-ex*  
 7 Nontas: *acc* it can’t be done now ((this way)) . he’s done it that way=  
 8 Meltem: =it looks nice this way ..  
 9 Nontas: I’m re-writing it .  
 10 Vasia: ((she sings)) *f* atsoumeke::ti meke::ti ..  
 11 Giannis: ((he sings)) *ff acc* ta::rara- ta::raran .  
 ...

Vasia, however, ignores the tease and continues drawing instead. Later in the interaction, she produces another spurt of loud singing, this time eliciting the participation of Giannis (lines 10–11). By keeping silent yet introducing more singing further along, Vasia appears to be treating Tuncay’s tease (line 2), as if it never occurred. Vasia’s silence seems to

suggest a willingness to continue with the drawing task rather than respond to the teasing, thereby bringing the teasing frame to a close (Jefferson 1972). This does not mean, however, that by ignoring the tease she does not recognise it as such. As Drew (1987) persuasively argues, recognising a tease and displaying recognition of it can be two separate activities (1987: 230). By suspending usual conversation rules according to which a reply is very often expected to a prior turn addressed to a particular recipient, Vasia treats the prior turn as not requiring a response, perhaps as if it were not worth addressing.

Indeed, Vasia's silence appears to imply an unwillingness to engage in play and attempt to top Tuncay in a game fashion with a suitable response. When juxtaposed to her overall volubility and active participation in teasing episodes elsewhere (e.g. excerpt [4], lines 3–4), her silence on this occasion need not be interpreted as a marker of embarrassment, shyness or hostility towards teasing. Rather, it can be seen as a lack of interest in the activity at that particular point in time. Indeed, participant observation corroborates that Vasia was a proficient teaser who frequently conjured up teasing alliances with other girls against her male peers (e.g. excerpt [4]) as well as skilfully initiated and sustained teasing episodes (e.g. excerpt [2]).

Secondly, targets can use silence as means of responding strategically to teasing. Targets may exploit silence to 'get back at' initiators at another point further along the interaction, when they have thought of an appropriate comeback, or they may use silence to elicit the support of other participants who will come to their defence (Tholander and Aronson 2002). A case in point is Vasia's initial silence followed by her swift retaliation in excerpt (7) below (for a complete transcript see excerpt [4]). At the beginning of this excerpt, Vasia refrains from responding to Tuncay's taunt ('shut up *re* Vasia', line 5):

Excerpt (7)

((Participants: Vasia: majority Greek girl; Tuncay: minority Turkish-speaking boy; Meltem: minority Turkish-speaking girl; Nontas: majority Greek boy)).

- 5 Tuncay: ...  
 =acc shut up (*re*) Va[sia]  
 6 Nontas: [f he ((Babis)) hasn't done the homework.  
 7 the teacher told him to do .. ok?=  
 8 Meltem: =and that's none of your business .. . *p* you nutty::=  
 9 Maria: =it's he who hasn't done his homework not you .  
 10 Tuncay: *p* come off with it (*re*) Cumbul=  
 11 Meltem: =f leave us alone (*re*) Tunzda Mundza:: Mundza Mundza=  
 12 Tuncay: =be:n mi suledim? .  
 =did I say that? .  
 → 13 Vasia: be::m sule bemi sule?

- [4sec]  
 ((background noise))  
 14 Tuncay: look .. I painted a very nice flag  
 ((background noise))

In the subsequent turns, however, she seizes the opportunity to side with Meltem, when Tuncay teases the latter (line 10). On this occasion, she exploits Tuncay's previous turn, which is delivered in Turkish, by imitating what he says ('bem sule bemi sule' line 12). In other words, Tuncay's prior turn (line 12) seems to furnish her with the necessary contextualisation cues to build her tease and ultimately outperform him (cf. Drew 1986). At the same time, her response in line 13 could be seen as belatedly 'getting back at' him for his taunt at the beginning of the teasing episode (see line 5).

Lastly, silences as responses to teasing can also occur when majority Greek children transform linguistic elements from Turkish into contextualisation cues for teasing, through repetition. These occasions tend to generate 'notable unresponsivity' (Tholander and Aronsson 2002: 156): both the target and the other co-participants seem to ignore the tease rather than use it as a spring-board for a counter-attack or for collaborative response work.

For instance, in excerpt (7), Vasia aligns herself with Meltem (the target of teasing) and makes a bid for the interactional floor by repeating Tuncay's prior Turkish utterance twice: 'bem sule bemi sule?' (line 12). Although imitations of a language style, dialect or language have been shown to function as contextualisation cues in teasing and insulting routines among peers (Tannock 1999), on this occasion, Vasia's shadowing of Tuncay's utterance does not trigger any response. Instead, it is followed by silence (four seconds pause) and Tuncay's frame shift back to the drawing task at hand, which brings the teasing to a close.

Elsewhere (Lytra 2003a), I have claimed that the use of certain contextualisation cues from the minority language and culture, such as nicknames, one-liners, nonsense cries, serve to make Turkish more visible in the context of this multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group. Through the introduction of linguistic and cultural elements from Turkish, minority Turkish-speaking children stake a claim for their home language and culture in peer talk. On the majority Greek children's part, by appropriating these cues or introducing new ones, they indicate their willingness to experiment with aspects of their peer's home language and culture. Consequently, through such processes of sharing and appropriation, Turkish becomes one of the building blocks for constructing a shared linguistically, culturally and ethnically mixed peer group culture. These processes lead to increasing the visibility of Turkish at the local

peer group level, which is in stark contrast to its, otherwise, low visibility in broader Greek society (Embeirikos *et al.* 2001; Tsitselikis and Mavromatis 2003).

The repetition of utterances in Turkish as a contextualisation cue for teasing, however, can be highly ambiguous. As Norrick (1993: 16) postulates, sometimes repetition in the mouth of the second speaker ‘skews the frame introduced by the original speaker’ and ‘the words come out as caricature or a sarcastic comment’. In this respect, repetition could be interpreted as caricature or sarcasm. By keeping silent and avoiding sustaining the teasing frame, targets and co-participants appear to be signalling their discontent *vis-à-vis* the teasing as well as perhaps implicitly indicating the unsuitability of such cues for teasing.

Therefore, silence as a response to teasing is multi-functional: through silence, targets signal that a particular taunt is not worth responding to or that they are in the process of generating a suitable comeback. At the same time, silence can function in a similar manner to serious responses to teasing: targets and co-participants may signal their resistance regarding the use of specific contextualisation cues, as the repetition of prior Turkish utterances seems to suggest. In this respect, such silences resemble Drew’s (1987) ‘po-faced’ (i. e. serious) responses to teasing.

### 5.3 *Responding seriously to teasing*

In his study on responses to teasing, Drew (1987: 232) found that even though teases were designed as playful jibes in the context of mainly informal encounters and recipients seemed to recognise them as such, they responded to teasing remarks seriously, through what he termed ‘po-faced’ responses. In particular, he found that recipients frequently resorted to rejections or corrections of the teasing. Although these were often couched with laughter and a jokey mode of delivery, they were immediately followed by serious accounts and explanations (1987: 222–223). By the same token, Tholander and Aronsson (2002: 148) identified accounts and denials as serious responses to teasing among teenage peers.

In the peer group data, serious responses to teasing appear to be marked by the extensive use of frame shifts to non-play, through the initiation of topic shifts to a previous task, activity or topic or via the introduction of a new topic in discourse. Such topic shifts and changes indicate that targets avoid openly going on record and acknowledging the teasing, either by defending themselves against it (via an account or a denial) or by counter-attacking (via playful or serious retaliations). The investigation of topic shifts and changes across the data set strongly suggests that peer group members routinely use them to bring the teasing

to a close and re-negotiate the interactional frame away from play (cf. Jefferson 1972). In doing so, they attempt to remove themselves from the position of the target of teasing. Participant uptakes to such instances of topic shifting or changing, however, point to the fact that if the aim of recipients is to bring the teasing to an end and remove themselves from the interactional limelight, this may not always be achieved.

For instance, in excerpt (8) below, Nontas becomes the butt of teasing by threatening to tell on his classmates for making too much noise during the break. As discussed, his threat is viewed as a violation of normative peer conduct and immediately elicits teasing remarks by Maria and Vasia. The two girls collude to trivialise the threat ('what do you want now (*re*) Nontas?'). As Tuncay comes to Nontas' defence by responding to the girls' teasing on his behalf, Nontas refrains from engaging in the teasing and initiates a topic change instead (lines 5–6).

Excerpt (8)

((Participants: Nontas: Greek-speaking monolingual boy; Maria: Greek-speaking monolingual girl; Vasia: Greek-speaking monolingual girl; Tuncay: Greek-Turkish bilingual boy; Meltem: Greek-Turkish bilingual girl)).

- 1 Nontas: *f acc* I'll tell the teacher you're making so much noise .  
 2 Maria: *ff* what do you want no::w (*re*) Nontas?=  
 3 Vasia: =what do you want now (*re*) Nontas? (hh)you want  
 4 (hh)something(hh)?=  
 5 Tuncay: =*acc* shut up (*re*) Va[s]ia  
 → 6 Nontas: [f he ((Babis)) hasn't done the homework.  
 → 7 the teacher told him to do .. ok?=  
 8 Meltem: =and that's none of your business .. . *p* you nutty::=  
 9 Maria: =it's he who hasn't done his homework not you .  
 ...

Through topic change, Nontas attempts to distance himself from the teasing and shift the focus of the interaction to what he perceives as a normative transgression by one of his peers (Babis): he loudly reveals that Babis has not done the homework the teacher had assigned (line 6–7). This revelation, however, does not have the desired effect. Even though it appears to bring the teasing temporarily to a halt, Nontas remains in the conversational limelight, as his revelations trigger deprecatory remarks by Meltem and Maria. In counter-arguing that it is none of Nontas' business to meddle in Babis' affairs (lines 8–9), the two girls seem to be sanctioning the former's talk and sending the message that such talk is not viewed as acceptable. Therefore, as Meltem and Maria's uptakes suggest, topic shifts and changes as responses to teasing can easily backfire and undermine the target's attempts to shift the focus of the exchange to another topic or peer.

## 6. Concluding discussion

Research on teasing from a sociolinguistic perspective has been primarily concerned with the investigation of linguistically, culturally and ethnically homogeneous peer groups. Taking on board Pratt's (1987) call for a 'linguistics of contact', I discussed cross-sex teasing episodes between members of a multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group in a primary school in Athens, Greece.

The data analysis suggested that cross-sex teasing episodes were characterised by a high degree of joint construction and participant collusion. More specifically, peer group members seemed to repeatedly make use of the participant positions of co-initiator and co-teaser or self-select and respond on behalf of the party being teased, thereby often functioning as conversational duets (e.g. excerpts [2] and [4]). Moreover, they appeared to consistently build their teases by exploiting recurring clusters of contextualisation cues. These included the use of nicknames, mock orders, threats and challenges, repetition as well as a wealth of prosodic (e.g. laughter, loudness, sing-song intonation) and extra-linguistic cues (e.g. clapping). Peer group members seemed to skilfully draw these cues from the linguistic and cultural resources that circulated and had high purchase in the context of their school-based peer group; that is resources from both the majority (Greek) and minority (Turkish) languages and cultures. One could claim that the sharing, appropriation and (re)production of these cues resulted in increasing the visibility of Turkish locally leading to the co-construction of a shared multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group culture (see Lytra 2003a, for further discussion).

The centrality of teasing as a social practice among the members of this peer group pointed to the development of what appeared to be particular teasing relationships among peers, where, for instance, same-sex peers joined forces and teased peers of the opposite sex (e.g. excerpts [2] and [4]). Moreover, these teasing episodes seemed to be characterised by a strong agonistic quality (cf. Leary 1980). As discussed, this agonistic quality was reminiscent of verbal duelling routines among African-American (Labov 1972) and Turkish (Dundes, Leach and Özkök 1972) young males, thereby pointing perhaps to the strong performative aspect of teasing (cf. Bauman and Briggs 1990). The agonistic quality of teasing episodes was not surprising, as similar findings have been reported in research on Greek culture (Hertzfeld 1985; Hirschon 2001) and discourse with special reference to argumentative talk (Georgakopoulou 2001; Georgakopoulou and Patrona 2000; Tannen and Kakava 1992).

Concerning responses to teasing, the salience of playful responses to teasing (via playful retaliations or playing along) seemed to corroborate

findings by previous studies on the centrality of humour, joking and verbal play in Greek culture and discourse (Antonopoulou and Sifianou 2003; Hirschon 1992; Georgakopoulou, 2000 to mention a few). Similar findings regarding the positive value attributed to one's ability to carry out jocular conversation have also emerged in studies on the Turkish language and culture (see Zeyrek 2001).

Avoiding responding to teasing and keeping silent had previously received limited attention (but see Tholander and Aronsson 2002). Taking as the point of departure the multi-functional nature of silence, the data analysis suggested that rather than signifying embarrassment or lack of verbal skill silence appeared to be used strategically for the benefit of the target of teasing. In particular, children tended to exploit silence to prepare an appropriate comeback later in the exchange (excerpt [7]), or to elicit the support of others who would come to their defence (excerpt [4]). More importantly, silence seemed to function as a marker of discontent, especially, it appeared, in cases where particular linguistic elements from the minority (Turkish) language and culture were appropriated and creatively transformed into cues for teasing (excerpt [7]). On this issue, it was claimed that the repetition of Turkish utterances as cues for teasing by majority Greek children appeared to be ambiguous as such imitations could be perhaps misinterpreted as caricature. By keeping silent, it was argued, Turkish-speaking minority children could be highlighting the unsuitability of these cues and implicitly raising issues of entitlement (i. e. who has the right to use which cues in teasing among peers). Such competing perceptions regarding what constitutes appropriate cues for teasing seems to suggest that the processes of constructing a linguistically, culturally and ethnically mixed peer group culture can be fraught with contradictions (see Lytra 2003a, for further discussion).

Contrary to previous research (e.g. Drew 1987; Tholander and Aronsson 2002) serious responses to teasing seemed to be limited to recipients' attempts to revert to non-play (not always successfully), by employing topic shifts to a previous topic or activity or by introducing a new topic in discourse (excerpt [8]). The dispreference for overtly serious responses to teasing (such as serious accounts, explanations or denials), however, seemed to be counter-balanced by what appeared to be a preference for silence.

In view of the above findings, this study can shed light on the ways teasing is orchestrated in talk among peers from diverse linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In doing so, it highlights the need to investigate both staging and response work to teasing further, especially given the lack of parallel case studies on teasing practices in close-knit multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer groups. Moreover, it brings to the fore the importance of grounding findings in previous research on

Greek and Turkish culture and discourse. Lastly, the examination of teasing as a social practice can provide the point of departure for exploring how teasing relationships among peers from different backgrounds are developed and how a common multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group culture can be creatively constructed and renewed.

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### **Transcription key**

(( )):	transcriber's comments
[	overlapping speech
. (...)	pause(s)
h(hh):	laughter
=	latching
-	marks abrupt cutting off of sound
<i>f</i>	spoken loudly
<i>ff</i>	spoken very loudly
<i>p</i>	spoken softly
:(::)	lengthened vowel sound
<u>underline</u>	emphatic stress
<i>acc</i>	spoken quickly
<i>italics</i>	Turkish

### **Notes**

1. The paper is intended to focus on the qualitative micro-analysis of key teasing episodes rather than on a quantitative analysis of the entire data set. Nevertheless, the key teasing episodes discussed are representative of the entire data set.
2. The data have been translated from Greek into English by the author. To avoid confusion with the Greek data, Turkish data are presented in Turkish accompanied by an English translation.
3. Overall, 127 teasing episodes were identified. These were sub-divided into the following contexts: 58 teasing episodes during break-time (which is of interest to us here), 63 teasing episodes during instruction and 6 teasing episodes during lunch-time.

4. *Re* is an untranslatable particle in Greek. It is regarded as a marker of solidarity in informal exchanges among friends (Tannen and Kakava 1992).
5. Such mock threats have been identified as key elements of Greek verbal play. They are seen as 'ritual threats' (a statement of intention of some kind of violent action that is seldom carried through) and are routinely used between adults (producers) and children (recipients) (Hirshon 1992: 39). The use of the mock threat in this excerpt then needs to be seen in the context of Vasia and Bahrye's scrutiny of Babis' admittedly rather poor academic performance (haphazardly filed grammar exercises, unfinished grammar homework, gross spelling errors) and the casting of themselves as teachers/experts and Babis as the pupil/novice.
6. *Vre* is a variant of *re* and it's also an untranslatable particle. Similar to *re*, it is used as a marker of solidarity in informal exchanges among friends.
7. Both words *vamvaki* and *babaki* mean 'cotton'. The first is considered more gentrified, while the second is regarded as its more common variant (cf. Kazazis 1992). Both words have been transliterated rather than translated into English so as to reflect that they are phonetic variants. As far as the construction of the nickname 'Babaki' is concerned, it was formed by adding the suffix [-aki] to the root of Nontas' surname.
8. Tuncay's nickname was formed through rhyme (both words end in 'dza') and rhythm (both words were stressed in the first syllable).
9. Out of the 127 teasing sequences produced across school contexts, two thirds elicited the participation of co-initiators and/or co-respondents.
10. Based on informal discussions with the children telling on one's peers was viewed very unfavourably. There was general consensus that children deal with any inter-personal problems directly rather than seek teacher or adult mediation. By threatening to tell on his peers, Nontas is violating peer group norms. It is not surprising, therefore, that his threat triggers teasing remarks. On this issue, Archakis and Tsakona (2005) discuss how humorous narratives among Greek youths can also be used to register critical evaluation or corrective intent concerning what is viewed as deviant peer conduct.
11. Meltem's nickname was formed by an allusion to a Turkish TV personality, Meltem Cumbul, a popular actress and singer.
12. For similar findings in teasing among peers as well as among pupils and their teachers, see Tholander and Aronsson (2002); in teasing among adult friends, see Bekkers (2002), Straehle (1993) and in teasing between children and their caregivers, see Eisenberg (1986).
13. Elsewhere (Lytra 2003a, 2003b), I have discussed in detail how such teasing practices contribute to the construction of the peer group members' situated sense of group identity and more specifically to the construction of a multilingual/multicultural/multiethnic peer group identity and its co-articulation with the children's gender and youth identities. A discussion of teasing and identity work, however, falls outside the scope of this paper.
14. Kochman (1983) focuses exclusively on recipient responses to sounding.
15. Out of the 127 teasing episodes 167 teases were responded to playfully, 45 teases elicited silences and only 30 teases triggered serious responses.
16. On this issue, Lockyer and Pickering (2001) argue that having a 'good sense of humour' is perceived in Western societies as a positive attribute and they discuss the rhetorical devices writers use so as not to appear as lacking this desirable quality in letters of complaint about comic offensiveness.
17. Vasia's nickname was formed by adding the word 'pita' ('pie') to her name and the year (1)999. 'Vasilopita' is a special cake made for the New Year in Greece – the New Year is written on the cake.

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