JANNIS ANDROUTSOPOULOS

Language Choice and Code Switching in German-Based Diasporic Web Forums

Bilingual interaction is still a neglected issue in the study of the multilingual Internet. A review of the literature suggests two main approaches, both of which adapt theories of the pragmatics of code alternation (Auer, 1995) to computer-mediated settings: (1) the study of code switching (CS) or the use of more than one language during a single communicative episode (e.g., Heller, 1988), and (2) the study of language choice, or the distribution of languages used in a bilingual or multilingual community according to factors such as participants, topic, and setting (Auer, 1998; Fishman, 1972; Li, 2000).

Work on CS in computer-mediated communication (CMC) typically draws on interactional sociolinguistics and a conversational approach to bilingual interaction (Auer, 1995; Gumperz, 1982) and investigates CS as a resource for the management of interpersonal relationships and other interactional aims. According to Georgakopoulou (1997), the aim is to examine "how, within frameworks of generic assumptions and expectations, speech communities draw upon their linguistic resources in order to maximize the effectiveness and functionality of their communication" (p. 160). Depending on setting and genre, CS in email, chat, and discussion boards has been found to contextualize shifts in topic, footing, or modality, in order to mitigate potential face threats and to perform social stereotypes (Androutsopoulos & Hinnenkamp, 2001; Georgakopoulou, 1997; Paolillo, in press; Sebba, 2003; Siebenhaar, 2005).

Studies of language choice in CMC, in contrast, operate on a macrolevel, drawing implicitly or explicitly on domain theory and the sociology of

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language more generally (Fasold, 1984; Li, 2000; Li, Milroy, & Pong, 1992). This work has tended to focus on the dominance of English in multilingual settings. English is found to be favored over indigenous or minority languages in situations of language shift (Paolillo, 1996; Sperlich, 2005); it participates in a new diglossic pattern of CMC among Egyptian professionals, whereby Egyptian Arabic is preferred for informal exchanges and English for formal ones (Warschauer, El Said, & Zohry, 2002, chapter 13 this volume); and it functions as the lingua franca of a multilingual professional network in Switzerland (Durham, 2003, chapter 14 this volume). In contrast to the fine-graded interactional analysis of CS, these studies provide only rough indications of the distribution of languages within individual messages, fore-grounding instead their correlation with speakers, genres, or topics.

The assumption of a fixed relationship between language choice and activity type has been criticized as to its theoretical and empirical adequacy (Auer, 1995). While a general tendency of bilingual communities to prefer one language over another with respect to particular situational factors may hold true, this relationship entails ambiguities and complexities, which only a sequential examination of language alternation in interaction can illumi-nate. Li et al. (1992) have demonstrated that a combined micro/macro approach can be fruitful in the study of language use in bilingual communi-ties. I suggest that this combination can be transferred to computer-mediated settings. Especially as regards the exploration of new arenas of multilingual practice, studies of language choice can provide a window into the linguistic repertoire of an online community, pinpointing contexts in which bilingual "talk" typically occurs. The micro perspective of CS in interaction will then focus on these contexts, examining how CS is creatively employed in ways that cannot be predicted in macrosociolinguistic terms.

In this chapter 1 examine language choice and CS in the discussion forums of diasporic websites—websites that are produced and consumed by members of diasporic communities. After a brief introduction to German-based diasporic websites and their discussion forums, I outline multilingual practices in the discussion forums in two steps: First, I establish the dominant language, that is, the language most commonly used in the forums. Second, I establish the conditions under which the base language of a forum departs from the dominant language, focusing on aspects of preference-related and discourse-related language choice (Auer, 1995). The remainder of the chapter fleshes out this outline with two case studies. The first isolates the topical organization of discussion forums and examines its influence on language choice. The second case study examines the local significance of CS, based on a conversational approach to bilingual interaction.

Diasporic Websites on the German-Speaking Web

The diasporic websites of interest in this chapter address members of ethnic groups that have emerged in Germany as a result of economic migration since

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the 1960s. Websites currently exist that are dedicated to German-based migrants from Afghanistan, Greece, India, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Poland, Romania, Russia, SouthEast Asia, and Turkey. These websites frame their audiences as members of an ethnic community by virtue of their names and slogans, combining an ethnic label with a term such as "portal," "community," or "forum," for example, "Indien-Portal für Deutschland," "Türkische Online-Community," "Die erste asiatische Community im deutschsprachigen Raum" ("The first Asian community in the German-speaking area"), and "Marokko Forum." This chapter focuses on three websites for the Persian, Indian, and Greek ethnic groups, respectively. The Persian website iran-now.de (figure 15.1) was established in 2000 and launched its discussion forum in 2002. It features a regularly updated news section and is currently the most widely known online resource for Persians in Germany. The same holds true for the Indian website theinder.net, also established in 2000. The Greek website greex.net (figure 15.2) was established in 2003 to compete with an older, larger website; it is less expanded and less popular than the Persian and Indian ones.

There is considerable variance in the audience size of diasporic websites in Germany, as measured by the number of registered users (registration is required to post messages in the forums). The three websites discussed here

FIGURE 15.1. Iran-Now, portal for Iranian immigrants in Germany. *Source:* http://www.iran-now.de/, retrieved August 9, 2005.

FIGURE 15.2. Greex.net, discussion forum for Greek immigrants in Germany.
Source: http://www.greex.net/, retrieved August 5, 2005.

are located in the bottom range, comprising 3,000 (Persian), 1,200 (Indian), and 600 (Greek) registered users. A Turkish website, vaybee.de, is in the top range, with approximately 370,000 registered users.[1] These differences reflect the size of the respective ethnic groups in Germany,[2] but they also partly index the popularity of a particular website in an emerging online market. In view of these figures, the cohesiveness suggested by the self-description of the websites should be viewed with caution. Their audience consists mostly of German-based adolescents and young adults from the second and third migrant generations, but it also includes some first-generation migrants and a few nonethnic members; some join from other countries, including the homeland of the diasporic group.

The production of a diasporic website is an instance of media activism, in which members of a diasporic group assume the role and responsibility of creating and maintaining a public space for fellow diasporics (Karim, 2003). German-based diasporic websites are generally commercialized, featuring advertising banners for products and services that are related to the respective ethnic group. Few can be termed a fully professional enterprise, however. The three sites discussed here are produced on a semiprofessional, nonprofit, part-time basis. Their initiators rely on a network of volunteers for content and

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the maintenance of discussion forums. For example, the Persian website is run by a copy shop owner in his thirties, and the Indian one by three students in their twenties.

Most diasporic websites feature edited content, albeit of varying size, quality, and updating frequency. Depending on available resources, they offer news about the homeland and the diasporic group in Germany, listings of diasporic events, relevant links, and background facts on the home culture. However, their main appeal lies in providing virtual public spaces such as discussion forums and chat channels, where diaspora members "can meet others like themselves, where they can discuss with them and negotiate their we-ness" (Goel, 2004). Participation in these spaces is primarily framed in terms of self-claimed membership in the ethnic group. While the diaspora experience and the negotiation of identity "between the poles of an original home and a newly acquired host culture" (Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000, p. 15) are not the only issues discussed in these spaces, ethnicity is the main frame in which other identity aspects are made relevant and a resource that participants frequently evoke in their various conversational topics.

Previous research on diaspora and new media has focused on what we may call "transnational diasporic networks," users who join a diasporic news-group or chat channel from all over the world, sharing a common ethnic identity but not a common geographical location (Ignacio, 2005; Karim, 2003; Lee & Sau-Ling, 2003; Miller & Slater, 2000; Paolillo, 1996; Sinclair & Cunningham, 2000). In contrast, the websites examined here are "local" with respect to the residence of the majority of their audiences and the reference system of their discourse. In these local diasporic networks, the border between online and offline encounters is fluid. The common location of the audience makes it easier for managers to recruit new volunteers, and to relate to the country's commercial Web industry. It also gives rise to the predomi-nant pattern of bilingualism on these websites, the result of contact between German and the respective migrant (home) language.

INVESTIGATING WEB FORUMS

Web discussion forums—also called bulletin boards, newsboards (Döring, 2003), or cyberforums (Sperlich, 2005)—were selected for analysis because they are the only form of user interaction available on all German-based diasporic websites. A discussion forum is a mode of public, asynchronous CMC and therefore similar to a newsgroup (Döring, 2003; Marcoccia, 2004). While newsgroups are stored on news servers and are part of the newsgroup hierarchy (http://groups.google.com; formerly Usenet), forums are part of a website and closely related to its edited content. Many forums use PHP-based software,[3] which provides a standardized architecture, detailed statistics, and options for the display of member information.

While newsgroups display a single list of all posted messages and visually indicate responding moves in a tree structure (Marcoccia, 2003), Web forums

group together topically related threads. The forums examined here are organized in a tripartite scheme. The administrators install a limited number of first-level *sections* that are divided into intermediate *topic groups*, in which the forum members initiate their discussions.[4] The front page of a forum lists all its sections and topic groups, as well as the number of discussion threads and total posts within each group. Figure 15.3 displays three out of five sections in the Persian forum: Kultur (Culture), Wissenschaft (Science), and Community. Figure 15.4 is a more detailed breakdown of discussion threads within Culture, Religion, and Philosophy, one of the topic groups in the Culture section.

Although most forums permit reading by unregistered guests, site registration is required to post messages. Each registered user has a profile page where self-selected information can be displayed and is indexed in a user list that can be sorted by name, location, registration date, and total posts. Participation roles in forum discussions resemble those in newsgroups (and mailing lists), that is, core posters or hosts (Marcoccia, 2003), casual posters, and readers. Web forums are subject to far greater control by administrators than are newsgroups (Paolillo, in press). Forum administrators are entitled to delete contributions that do not conform to the forum's policy and to terminate discussions that have gone off-topic or are otherwise inappropriate.

Kultur			
Kultur, Religion und Philosophie Poesie von Hafez bis Khayyam und alle kulturellen und religiösen Themen **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	1023	15099	24.07.2005 - 17:19 kimiagar ⇒▯
Reise-Forum Informationsplattform für alle Iran-Reisenden **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	166	1230	22.07.2005 - 16:28 parvana ⇒▯
Persische Küche Alles rund um die Iranisch-Persische Küche **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	123	1525	21.07.2005 - 19:28 naabakhshide ⇒▯
Farsi Talk فارسی با خط فارسی **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	59	669	04.07.2005 - 17:29 fereshteye_darvaeee ⇒▯
Wissenschaft			
Wissenschaft und Technik Alles über Wissenschaft, Medizin und Forschung **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	39	193	24.07.2005 - 16:43 O. Persi ⇒▯
Computer Hardware & Software - Fragen **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	209	1233	24.07.2005 - 15:21 Agha Pesar ⇒▯
Gesundheit Gesundheitstipps und mehr **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	118	1221	23.07.2005 - 08:04 naabakhshide ⇒▯
Schule, Ausbildung und Studium Alles über Schule, Ausbildung und Studium **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	120	1230	23.07.2005 - 00:09 O. Persi ⇒▯
Psychologie und Gesellschaft Alles über Psychologie, Psychiatrie, Therapie und Gesellschaftslehre **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	62	1208	24.07.2005 - 14:21 O. Persi ⇒▯
Iran-Now-Community			
Viele Grüsse... Grüße, Geburtstagswünsche und mehr! **Moderatoren** Arman, Bibichanoum, minah, Peyman, Sherry, Still Alive	71	974	21.07.2005 - 15:38 Ostad JY ⇒▯

FIGURE 15.3. Sections and topic groups on Iran-Now's discussion forum.

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Kultur, Religion und Philosophie
Foren-Übersicht -> Kultur, Religion und Philosophie

Themen	Antworten	Autor	Aufrufe	Letzter Beitrag
Moderatoren: Arman, Bibichanoum, Sherry, Still Alive, Peyman, minah **Benutzer in diesem Forum:** Keine				
🖿 Neues Thema eröffnen ✓ Alle Themen als gelesen markieren				1, 2, 3 … 32, 33, 34 ⊕
ⓘ Ankündigungen: Weisheiten [Gehe zu Seite: 1 … 10, 11, 12]	136	Iran-Now	3871	20.07.2005 – 21:48 Shazdeh ➔D
ⓘ Ankündigungen: Fragen statt Antworten [Gehe zu Seite: 1 … 6, 7, 8]	95	Aran	1380	10.07.2005 – 20:36 Delkesh ➔D
ⓘ Ankündigungen: ∼*° Antworten °*∼ [Gehe zu Seite: 1, 2, 3, 4]	38	golestan	530	16.06.2005 – 15:31 golestan ➔D
🗀 FRASH KART	3	kimjagar	33	24.07.2005 – 17:19 kimjagar ➔D
🗀 Hört mal rein... *seufz* :)	4	Sherry	27	24.07.2005 – 16:09 Sherry ➔D
🗎 Informationen über den Islam [Gehe zu Seite: 1 … 10, 11, 12]	134	Marianne 6	1909	24.07.2005 – 15:52 minah ➔D
🗎 Sadeq Hedayat über Khayyam [Gehe zu Seite: 1, 2, 3]	33	Hormoz	274	24.07.2005 – 14:29 shekarchia_music ➔D
🗎 °∼*Tagebuch, Gedanken und Erinnerungen*∼° [Gehe zu Seite: 1 … 29, 30, 31]	366	Sherry	6329	24.07.2005 – 04:57 Sherry ➔D

FIGURE 15.4. Threads within Kultur, Religion und Philosophie (Culture, Religion, and Philosophy) on Iran-Now's discussion forum, with number of postings and views.

Forum discussions may range from just a couple to hundreds of posts and may be sustained from several days to several weeks. Some threads remain "idle" for longer periods of time and are "revived" at specific occasions, for example, a national holiday or news on a particular subject. A discussion will often start with a series of replies to the initiating post, which sets the topic for the whole thread, and develop into stretches of interaction, as users start responding to previous posts. These interactions are the site for the management of interpersonal relationships, and their frequency is an indication of the liveliness of a community; however, they tend to get "off-topic" and therefore disrupt the coherence of a thread. As in newsgroups, forum discussions may display conversational fragmentation (Marcoccia, 2003)—simultaneous multiple conversations by several subgroups of users. Forum posts cannot be equated with conversational turns, because one post may convey two or more conversational moves, for example, reply to two or more previous messages (Herring, 1999, 2001).

The findings presented in this chapter are based on data collected from autumn 2004 to spring 2005. Drawing on methods of online ethnography (Döring, 2003, pp. 223–227; Hine, 2000; Miller & Slater, 2000), systematic

observation of forum activities on the three websites was conducted. This involved browsing on a regular weekly basis through the forums' sections, locating discussions containing bilingual interaction, and using the statistics and search options of the forums. I examined lists of all posts by member (where available) to determine individual linguistic preferences and used the search function to locate fixed expressions in the home languages or relevant key words such as "language" or "language mixing." The tripartite scheme outlined above was used as a grid for the quantitative analysis of language choice, and a nonrandom sample of approximately 10 discussions from each forum was stored and printed out for sequential analysis. Background information was obtained by offline guided interviews with webmasters.

MULTILINGUAL PRACTICES IN DIASPORIC WEB FORUMS

Systematic observation reveals a broad distinction between home-language–dominant and German-language–dominant forums. In some forums, such as the Russian and the Polish ones, most discussions are carried out in the home language. The Turkish forum features separate language sections for Turkish and German. In the majority of diasporic forums, however, including the ones examined here, German predominates in most discussions.

The predominance of German in the Persian, Indian, and Greek forum seems to depend on different factors. First, it may reflect an ongoing language shift in the respective ethnic groups. Although sociodemographic data are not available, the members of these forums are overwhelmingly young second- and third-generation speakers from ethnic groups of comparatively small size in Germany, which means they have few chances of socializing offline in the home language.[5] This assumption is supported by the metalinguistic discourse of some members who point out their poor competence in the home language or comment on its loss in parts of their ethnic group (similar findings are reported by Paolillo, 1996). To what extent a lack of *written* competence in the home language inhibits its use online is an open question. Moreover, German seems to respond to aspects of ethnolinguistic diversity of the audience. This is particularly salient in the Indian forum, in which German is the common denominator of a community that consists of native speakers of Hindi, Punjabi, Bengali, and other languages of India. German, and to a lesser extent English,[6] helps sustain a national identity, which would possibly collapse with the use of various home languages by member subgroups (Goel, 2004).

Finally, the use of German in the forums mirrors its predominance in the edited sections of these websites. Interviews with site producers confirm that they consciously select German as the main language of their websites. Although there is no evidence of overt pressure by producers on members to use German in the forums, there is evidence of group pressure in favor of German in the discussions themselves. In the Indian forum, for example, users of home languages are occasionally requested to use German or English

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in order to be understood by everyone. In one case in the Persian forum, a speaker who switches into Persian in the course of a discussion in German is reminded to use German without any further explanation.

In sum, the dominance of German in these three forums appears to be the combined result of several factors that interrelate in specific ways in each forum: ongoing language shift in the ethnic communities, accommodation to the ethnolinguistic diversity of the member population, and producers' language preferences. However, we should be cautious in interpreting German as the "we-code" of these forums (Gumperz, 1982; Sebba & Wootton, 1998) or as a straightforward index of "German" identity. For instance, in the Persian case mentioned above, the user who reminds his fellow discussant to use German declares in the same discussion his disdain of the "hollow" German way of life.

The dominant language of a forum establishes a general frame of expectation for the base language (Auer, 2000) of particular discussions but does not completely constrain members' choices. Native alphabets—Arabic script for Persian, Devanagari (as well as scripts for other languages of India), and Greek—are replaced by romanized transliterations, called "Fenglish" by Persians (see Warschauer et al., 2002, this volume) and "Greeklish" by Greeks (see Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou, chapter 6 this volume; Tseliga, chapter 5 this volume). Whether these transliterations inhibit use of the home language is outside the scope of this chapter. Crucial to our focus is the observation that the home languages are not restricted to a few isolated instances of CS, as in the Hindi and Punjabi newsgroups studied by Paolillo (1996, in press) and the Assyrian ones studied by McClure (2001). In contrast, users sometimes switch to the home language and stick to it for the rest of a discussion, or they conduct a discussion in the home language right from the start, temporarily reversing the default expectation of German and establishing the home language as the base language of interaction.

To explore further such local departures from the forums' dominant language, I draw on the sequential patterns of language choice proposed by Auer (1995, 1998, 1999, 2000). According to Auer's conversational approach, language choice in bilingual interaction is preference related, discourse related, or both. In the first case, "a speaker may simply want to avoid the language in which he or she feels insecure and speak the one in which he or she has greater competence. Yet preference-related switching may also be due to a deliberate decision based on political considerations" (Auer, 1995, p. 125). This pattern also comprises instances of "language negotiation" in which a speaker consistently opposes, or eventually aligns with, the interlocutor's language choice. In discourse-related language choice, on the other hand, switching within a conversational episode "contributes to the organization of discourse in that particular episode" (Auer, 1995, p. 125). This covers a range of well-documented functions of conversational CS such as marking reported speech, change of topic, emphasis, disagreement, specification of addressee, and use as a device for the internal organization of complex turns (Clyne, 2003; Dirim & Auer, 2004; Gumperz, 1982; Li et al., 1992).

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With respect to diasporic forums, both patterns of language choice are relevant. My observations suggest that some members indeed prefer the home language throughout their forum activities; if they dominate a particular discussion, they may establish the home language as the base language of interaction. This is not just a matter of language competence. In a discourse environment dominated by German, bilinguals' decision to stick to their home language may be an instance of everyday language politics, a symbol of commitment to the ethnic identity a forum is supposed to represent (McClure, 2001). The case study described below in the section titled "Pragmatics of CS in a Forum Discussion" is illustrative of this.

Analysis of selected discussions from the Persian, Indian, and Greek forums suggests that the discourse functions of CS in diasporic forums comply with established classifications of conversational CS. The direction of the switch is generally (although not exclusively) from German to the home language. Greetings, wishes, and other formulaic uses of the home language are frequent for all diasporic forums. This is congruent with findings on switching between English–Hindi and English–Punjabi (Paolillo, 1996, in press), English–Niuean (Sperlich, 2005), English–Caribbean creole (Sebba, 2003), English–Assyrian (McClure, 2001), English–Egyptian Arabic (Warschauer et al., 2002, chapter 13 this volume), and, German–Turkish and German–Greek (Androutsopoulos & Hinnenkamp, 2001). The home language is also used to enact particular genres such as songs (Paolillo, in press), to mark obvious exaggerations as jocular (Sebba, 2003), and to mitigate face-threatening acts (Georgakopoulou, 1997). CS within a contribution sometimes marks addressee specification, responding to language choices in preceding contributions (Paolillo, in press). This evidence goes against Sperlich's (2005) claim that, in Web forums, "it is virtually impossible to say that any specific member of the . . . audience . . . has any specific influence on the code-switching of a message" (p. 75). CS in the present data is furthermore used to represent direct speech and to emphatically repeat directive or expressive speech acts. The case study further below illustrate some of these discourse functions in context.

TOPIC-RELATED LANGUAGE CHOICE IN THE PERSIAN FORUM

Since diasporic forums are organized in sections delimited by topic, they lend themselves to a quantitative analysis of the relationship between topic and language choice (Sperlich, 2005). Bilingualism research has established topic as one of the main factors influencing language choice in bilingual communities, alongside participants and setting (Auer, 1998; McClure, 2001; Fasold, 1984; Fishman, 1972). We expect that discussion topics associated with the home country and culture tend to favor the home language, whereas topics associated with the host society favor the majority language, which is also the

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dominant language of the forums. This is supported by Paolillo (1996) and Sperlich (2005), who suggest that politics and technology disfavor the use of home/minority language in newsgroups and Web forums, while music and traditional poetry favor it. However, it is important to understand this as a broad tendency, not a fixed relationship. As Gumperz (1982) points out, the association of different codes with different activities is a symbolic one and "does not directly predict actual usage" (p. 66; similarly, see Auer, 1995, p. 118).

Focusing on topic departs from usual practice in the study of bilingualism, which takes participants as the predominant factor in language choice, and examines effects of topic and setting only secondarily. My decision is motivated not only by practical necessities but also reflects the particular organization of discourse in Web forums with thousands of registered users and dozens of new contributions every day. The topical organization of Web forums is relevant to the structure of user activities. Users join the sections and topic groups that happen to be active at the moment, or they regularly join a specific section, perhaps with the expectation that certain fellow users also happen to contribute there. This study does not exclude the possibility that language use in a particular forum section is shaped by specific subgroups of users who regularly join this section; rather, it proceeds on the assumption that if there is a pattern of language choice in these forums, its relationship to topics is the most practicable way to find it out.

The relationship of language choice and topic was examined in a sample from the Persian forum, which is divided into five sections and 21 topic groups (as of March 2005). These are listed on screen in the following order: (1) Section General comprises discussions on Iran, world news, sports, politics, economics and law, and history; (2) Entertainment is devoted to music and events, movies and pictures, jokes, and ethnic radio; (3) Culture (see figure 15.3) offers topic groups on religion and philosophy, travel, Persian cuisine, and Farsi talk, for discussions in the Persian language; (4) Science is about computers, health, psychology, and education; and (5) Community is for greetings to community members, and there is another group on trends and fashion.

A total of 2,084 messages from 49 discussions from all topic groups were coded for language choice, distinguishing between posts that contain *any* items in Persian, regardless of their structure and length, and, as a subset of these, posts that are completely or dominantly in Persian.[7] The difference between the two counts indicates how often Persian is limited to insertional code switches for less than half of a post, or to isolated words and expressions (e.g., proper names of any kind, borrowings, or single-word switches; no further distinction was made in this respect.). Table 15.1 presents an overview of the results. Sections and topic groups are arranged from less to more use of Persian. For instance, the third line from the top indicates that in three discussions on "health" within the Science section, 15 out of 115 posts contain Persian, but only one of these is predominantly in Persian.

TABLE 15.1. Topic-related language choice in the Persian forum (German headings translated into English and partly abridged).

Section	Topic group	No. threads	No. posts	Any Persian		Dominantly Persian	
				N	%	N	%
Science	Computers	2	79	0	0	0	0
	Technology	2	33	2	6.1	2	6.1
	Health	3	115	15	13	1	0.8
	Psychology	2	95	19	20	8	8.4
	Education	2	90	27	30	8	8.9
	Section average	11	412	63	15.3	19	4.6
General	Sports	3	127	13	10.2	1	0.7
	World	3	149	21	14.1	4	2.7
	History	2	96	39	40.6	2	2.1
	Iran	3	159	44	27.7	9	5.7
	Politics	3	143	52	36.3	22	15.4
	Economy	2	72	35	48.6	11	15.3
	Section average	16	746	204	27.3	49	6.6
Community	Trends	2	99	10	10.1	4	4
	Greetings	2	33	22	66.7	8	24.2
	Section average	4	132	32	24.2	12	9.1
Culture	Religion	3	146	41	28.1	22	15.1
	Travel	2	96	67	69.8	7	7.3
	Kitchen	3	135	100	74.1	47	34.9
	Farsi talk	3	95	79	83.1	58	61
	Section average	11	472	287	60.1	134	28.4
Entertainment	Radio	2	89	29	32.6	23	25.9
	Music	2	96	61	63.6	39	40.6
	Pictures	1	42	36	85.7	32	76.1
	Jokes	2	95	87	91.6	85	89.4
	Section average	7	322	213	66.1	179	55.6
Grand total		49	2,084	799	38.3	393	18.9

The overall frequency of posts with any kind of Persian (38.3%) suggests a strong presence of the home language in the forum. However, the frequency of predominantly Persian posts is half that much (18.9%). The average scores by section reveal significant differences across the forum.[8] In both counts, Persian is lower than average in the Science, General, and Community sections and considerably higher than average in the Culture and Entertainment sections. Only within the latter sections do predominantly Persian posts occur.

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There are obvious differences by topic group within each section. In the Entertainment section, the groups Jokes and Pictures have the highest frequency of Persian and are unique in their close match between the two counts, suggesting that the activities of joke telling and posting and commenting on photographs (which, as the header of this discussion indicates, happen to be erotic pictures) basically take place in the Persian language. Talk about ethnic radio and music is less rich in Persian, although the proportion of predominantly Persian posts is still quite high compared to other sections. In the Culture section, the home language prevails, expectedly, in the area dedicated to Farsi and in talk about Persian cuisine. However, the gaps between the two counts point to a high frequency of Persian words and expressions related to food, religion, and places in Iran.

In the Community section, the striking difference between the two topic groups is consonant with my hypothesis. Greetings, an interpersonal and phatic activity, display a frequency of Persian that is quite close to its use in the culture and entertainment sections, whereas talk about trends and fashion has one of the lowest scores for Persian overall. In the General section, scores for Persian are lowest in discussions on sports and world news, higher in talk on Iran and its history, and highest in politics and finance. At the top end of the table, Persian is completely absent in computer talk (Compare Sperlich, 2005) and slightly present in the remaining topic groups on Science.

Despite considerable variation within sections, these findings provide some support for the hypothesis of a broad association between language and topic. Talk about the homeland and its cultural traditions, as well as joke telling and greeting, scores higher for Persian than does talk about sports and world politics, science and technology, or trends and fashion. The differences affect not only the frequency of Persian words and expressions, in part undoubtedly due to referential necessity, but also the occurrence of complete contributions in Persian. However, an examination of variance within topic groups reveals that several groups that are quite low in Persian contain discussions rich in Persian, and vice versa. A selection is given in table 15.2.

TABLE 15.2. Language choice in selected discussions in the Persian forum (German headings translated into English and partly abridged).

Section and topic group	Discussion topic	No. of posts	No. any Persian	No. dominantly Persian
Science > **Education**	What do you study?	48	26	8
	A question to all students	42	1	0
General > **Politics**	I flew from Islam	48	9	0
	Does Islam give love?	48	6	0
	Niveau	47	37	22
Culture > **Farsi talk**	Loftan Faghat Farsi!	70	57	51
	Shahnameye ferdosi!	13	12	7
	The Persian language	12	10	0

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The two threads in the education group have a similar subject and an almost equal number of posts, yet Persian is virtually absent from the first and well above group average in the second. Two out of three discussions on politics contain no dominantly Persian posts at all; this is consonant with findings by Paolillo (1996) and Sperlich (2005). Yet in the third one, Niveau ("Level of discussion"), almost half of the posts are in Persian. In the "Farsi talk" area, posts in Persian predominate in two out of three discussions but are completely absent from the third, the subject of which is phrased in German. A detailed examination explains these differences in terms of shifts in topic and footing. In the Farsi talk area, posts *in* Persian are absent in talk *about* Persian. Niveau is a heated argument about the level of discussions in the forum. Significant differences in the distribution of Persian by section and topic group notwithstanding, these data challenge the notion of an unambiguous association between language choice and discussion topic. The distribution of German and Persian is not fully determined by placement of a discussion in a particular topic group but is negotiated by participants, in ways that only a detailed examination of code alternation in its sequential context can reveal.

PRAGMATICS OF CS IN A FORUM DISCUSSION

I now examine a discussion from the Greek forum, to demonstrate how CS into the home language fulfills different discourse and preference-related functions for different speakers, including the negotiation of the language of interaction.

The overall dominance of German in this forum is due both to its being preferred by ethnically Greek members and to the participation of a few non-Greek members who have an interest in Greece or personal relationships with Greeks but are themselves not competent in Greek. The need to accommodate "foreigners" is not met with general acceptance, and some complain that not enough Greek is used in this forum. This tension is part of the group's background knowledge and is indexed by CS in a part of the discussion thread examined here.

This thread was initiated by the webmaster, who has modified some technical features of the forum and now seeks feedback from the community. The excerpt presented here is the first half of the full thread and occurred over nine days. Although Greek does not become the base language of interaction at any time, several posts in Greek occur, as well as some insertional switches within German posts, for example, an addressee specification in (24). Greek is first used in (2), right after the webmaster's initiative move, and again in (10) by the webmaster himself.[9]

> (1)   Webmaster
> *VOTING NEU GESTARTET!*
> *Da die alte Umfrage nicht besonders repräsentativ ausgefallen ist, starten*
> *wir das Voting erneut! Diesmal gibt es ja auch auf der Startseite einen*

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kleinen Hinweis darauf! ;-) Wer will kann zusätzlich zu seiner Stimme auch gerne einen Kommentar schreiben!

"VOTING RESTARTED!

We're restarting our voting, because the old voting wasn't quite representative. This time there's a small notice on the homepage! ;-) Feel free to post a comment besides your vote!"

(2)   Angel

Ftou kai ap'tin arxi! :-)

"Once again the same thing! :-)"

[Posts 3 through 6 omitted.]

(7)   Dennis

und habe ich jetzt was gewonnen? 8-) und was ist es?

"now did I win anything? 8-) and what is it?"

(8)   Fay

eine woche all inclusive mit dem webmaster fidchi-inseln :-) :-) :-)

"a week all inclusive on Fiji islands with the webmaster :-) :-) :-)"

(9)   Dennis

cool :-) also habe ich bald urlaub?

wo ist der webmaster? und die blumen?

"cool :-) that means I'll be on vacation soon? where's the webmaster? and the flowers?"

(10)   Webmaster

Pame pareoula i protimas na fero kamia Webmeisterin? :-)

"Shall we go together or do you want me to bring along any female webmaster? :-)"

While the webmaster's initial announcement is in German, Angel uses Greek to disapprove of the voting. Since she prefers German in other discussions, a preference-related choice of Greek can be ruled out. Because disapproval is clearly the dispreferred response here (Levinson, 1983), the switch seems to mitigate the potential face threat to the webmaster, foregrounding a reading of the utterance as "playful rejection," enhanced by a laughing emoticon.

Most subsequent switches are rooted in an off-topic discussion that starts in posts (7) through (9), when two regulars, Fay (female) and Dennis (male), playfully reframe the voting as a winning game. Dennis asks whether he has won anything by voting (7). Fay suggests a fictional prize, a holiday with the webmaster (8). Dennis accepts the scenario and elaborates it (9). While this is all done in German, in (10) the webmaster addresses Dennis in Greek, asking about his preferred company on the holiday trip. Taken at face value, the webmaster ratifies the holiday plan. However, his choice of Greek is marked both with respect to the language of the preceding turns and his usual "voice" as webmaster, which is German. I suggest that the choice of Greek marks the propositional content of this post as fictional, as part of the holiday scenario. Greek therefore contextualizes a switch into a fictional, playful modality.[10]

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The community continues to elaborate the holiday scenario in (11) through (20). Greek appears again in the following extract from (21) through (28), in a dialogue between Fay and another regular male, Insatiable, and in two contributions by Mr_Magic:

(21)   Insatiable
ich will auch, bitte bitte . . . darf ich ? <u>tha eimai</u> ganz lieb ["devilish" emoticon]
"I want too, please please . . . may I? <u>I'll be</u> very endearing ["devilish" emoticon]"
(22)   Fay
was willst du? mit dem webmaster auf die fidschi-inseln??
"what do you want? join the webmaster on the Fiji islands?"
[Post 23 omitted]
(24)   Insatiable
fay ich glaube du bist einfach nur neidisch weil du nicht mit kommen kanst. . . . . <u>oso gia sena</u> dennis [refers to #23] deine ideen sind superspitzemegaultrageil.. . . . insel ohne frauen ist kaffe ohne koffein oder so. . . . . . .;-)
"fay I think you're just jealous because you can't come along . . .
<u>as for you</u> dennis [refers to #23] your ideas are super-duper . . .
an island without ladies is like coffee without caffeine . . . . ;-)"
[Post 25 omitted]
(26)   Fay
*Insatiable, wieso sollte ich neidisch sein? und vor allem worauf? *kopfkratz* *grübel**
"Insatiable, why should I be jealous? and above all, of what? *scratches head* *wonders*"
(27)   Mr_Magic
<u>An kai imaste endelos</u> "off topic"—<u>Thelo kai egooooooooooooooooo</u>! :-)
"<u>Although we're completely</u> "off topic" – <u>I want too</u>! :-)"
(28)   Mr_Magic
   Insatiable wrote:
   (quote of 24)
   <u>E, normal</u> pou tha sou aresoun teteies idees esena!
   <u>Afou ise</u> Mutschi! :-)
"<u>Well</u>, [it's] normal <u>you'd like this sort of idea!</u>
<u>You're a</u> Mutschi! :-)"

Let us first consider the use of Greek in (21) and (27). These posts have the same communicative intent—they convey in an expressive manner the users' wish to join the fictitious holiday trip. In (21), Greek occurs as an insertional switching. The first two clauses of this turn (expression of desire, request for permission) are in German; the third clause (promise of good conduct) switches into Greek for the verb phrase and returns to German for the adjective phrase. In (27), Mr_Magic's turn is entirely in Greek (except for *off-topic*,

which can be viewed as a borrowing). A look at other posts by these speakers suggests frequent use of Greek and fondness for switching and mixing. However, their use of Greek here is not entirely preference related, but has a discourse function: to signal their alignment to the webmaster's jocular approval of the holiday scenario in (10). By choosing Greek, in full or in part, speakers contextualize their messages as part of the same fictional frame.

The second post by Mr_Magic (28) is in Greek, interspersed with two German insertions. He quotes Insatiable's post in (24), qualifies his ideas as "normal," and calls him *Mutschi*, a German female nickname, the contextual meaning of which is unclear. I read this as a jocular attack, which signals by code choice that the face-threatening act posed by the evaluation of the addressee's statement and his labeling with a female nickname is to be taken as nonserious. Again, CS joins with an emoticon to signal playfulness.

Up to this point, the use of Greek is discourse related. However, this changes in the remainder of the excerpt, as Greek becomes itself the focus of attention. In (29), Fay shifts to a metalinguistic level by complaining about Mr_Magic's language choice in the previous posts.

(29)   Fay
*hey,Mr_*
du weißt genau,daß ich net so gut griechisch kann
mennoooooooooooooooo
"hey Mr_
you know perfectly well that my Greek is not that good
gosh!"
[30]   Mr_Magic
<u>*Aaaaa, na matheis!*</u> *:-P*
"<u>Well, then learn some</u>! :-P"
[31]   Fay
"*na danke . . . . ["devilish" emoticon]*
"thanks indeed . . . ["devilish" emoticon]"
[32]   Insatiable
hei mr. Magic du kennst mich doch ich kann ohne nicht leben (ich heisse
nicht um sonst "insatiable":-)
@*fay*
<u>*allh fora tha sou grafo mono ellhnika*</u> *muahahahaha . . . .*
"hey Mr. Magic you know me, I can't live without (that's why my name's
"insatiable" :-)
@fay
<u>next time I'll write to you in Greek only</u> muahaha_haha [en] laughter]"
[33]   Fay
ich sag jetzt nix mehr
"I'm not saying anything more."

Fay frames her post as a protest with an attention-getter, *hey*, that has

adversative meaning in German, and rounds it off with an interjection that

conveys irritation. She explicitly refers to her poor competence in Greek and to knowledge of this fact by her interlocutor (the adverb *genau*, "precisely," increases the force of this reminder). There follow two adjacency pairs between the two males who address Fay in Greek, while she replies in German. Mr_Magic urges her to learn Greek (30), and Insatiable promises to address her only in Greek in the future (32). This is a remarkable instance of addressee specification, in that Insatiable selects German for his fellow coethnic and Greek for its nonspeaker, Fay. Both Insatiable and Mr_Magic mitigate their aggression with paralinguistic devices, simulating sticking out a tongue via an emoticon in (30) and laughter in (32), thereby demonstrating that they are making fun of Fay, who responds to the first attack with ironic thanks (31) and explicitly quits the conversation in (33).

These are participant-related switches to the extent that they reflect the current speaker's awareness of the linguistic competencies of the recipient (Dirim & Auer, 2004). Both propositionally and by CS, these speakers reject Fay's incompetence in Greek, evoking tension between the predominantly German-speaking reality of this forum and expectations that result from its ethnic alliance. Fay is a native German, a fact that is well known among forum regulars. Her protest occurs precisely at a point where Greek could turn into the base language of interaction, and evokes norms of democratic participation in CMC: Being a regular, she has the right to be addressed in a language she knows well. In contrast, the language choice of Insatiable and Mr_Magic evokes what they presumably perceive as a "natural" link between language and the ethnic character of the forum. Their use of Greek is a symbol of their resistance to the factual dominance of German. In episodes such as this, CS becomes a resource for the negotiation of language norms in a way that no quantitative analysis of language choice can capture.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Diasporic websites are an increasingly popular form of CMC in diasporic communities in Germany. They attract second- and third-generation diasporics and integrate online interaction with edited content in ways that go far beyond newsgroups. They must therefore be taken seriously in considering how the Internet is appropriated for the construction of diasporic identities and how it reflects the diversity of societal bilingualism. In this chapter I have presented an exploratory analysis of language use in the discussion forums of three German-based diasporic websites and argued for an integration of quantitative and qualitative methods in the sociolinguistic study of bilingual CMC.

Language use in diasporic online practices is structured in complex ways, the overall predominance of the home language or German depending on the historical depth of migration, the size of an ethnic community, and the audience and policies of each diasporic forum. The predominantly German-speaking forums studied here inevitably raise the question of language

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maintenance (McClure, 2001; Sperlich, 2005). These forums contribute to the maintenance of home languages to the extent that they provide ample opportunities for use online. Evidence suggests that not only is CS into home languages widespread in these forums, but members also establish niches, as in the Persian case, in which the home language regains dominance. At the same time, the home language undergoes transformations, the most visible aspect of which is its romanized transliteration. The possible effects of this on the literacy skills of young diasporics ultimately depend on their use of the home languages outside the Internet, a consideration outside the scope of this chapter.

The case study of the Persian forum illustrates the usefulness and limitations of a quantitative approach to language choice. Auer (1995) argues that migrant communities in Europe "are too young and culturally unstable to have developed shared norms of language choice" (p. 127). Yet the findings of this chapter suggest a tendency to favor the home language for particular forum activities, while warning against treating this tendency as fixed or restrictive. I see no contradiction in assuming that participants have broad expectations as to where in a given forum the home language is more likely and appropriate yet feel free to depart from this pattern to meet the dynamic requirements of unfolding online interactions.

It was suggested that bilingual "speech" in diasporic forums is comparable to conversational CS in terms of its typical discourse functions. This is not surprising, since forum discussions consist of verbal interactions. What might be surprising is the amount and functional diversity of CS in this asynchronous mode of CMC. Paolillo (in press) predicts that interactional CS will be more frequent in synchronous modes of CMC, because they are more conversationlike than asynchronous ones. Whether this is the case for online diasporic discourse in Germany remains to be investigated. However, unlike the Indian and Punjabi newsgroups studied by Paolillo, diasporic forums in Germany are not restricted to fixed uses of the home language, but contain many instances of interactional CS. Moreover, other cases of rich CS in asynchronous CMC have been documented (Georgakopoulou, 1997; Sebba, 2003). It therefore seems that in addition to interactivity, factors such as the strength of the home language in the repertoire of a user population, the nature of users' relationships, and the discourse genres they engage in are also decisive for the frequency and function of bilingual talk on the Internet.

Classifications of the discourse functions of CS in the forums offer a valuable point of entry into the functions of CS in a community and allow for much-needed comparisons across computer-mediated settings and speech communities. However, the interactional meaning of CS emerges in its sequential context (Auer, 1995). Therefore a sequential analysis is required that takes into account details such as the precise direction of switch, "the place *within* the interactional episode in which languages alternate" (Auer 1998, p. 3), the way switches align to previous code choices by other speakers (Georgakopoulou, 1997), and the way they index participants' background knowledge and language norms.

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I examined these issues in a sequence from the Greek forum, in which playfulness is the most conspicuous aspect of home language use. By choosing Greek, participants signal that their utterance should be understood as non-serious, as part of a play frame. In particular, Greek contextualizes contributions as nonthreatening to recipients (jocular attacks, bold disapprovals) and noncommitting to speakers (e.g., the ratification of and subsequent wishes to join the fictitious holiday trip). This parallels the playful use of stylized Jamaican Creole (Sebba, 2003), the use of Egyptian Arabic for humorous or sarcastic expressions within English messages (Warschauer et al., 2002, Chapter 13 this volume), and the use of English and varieties of Greek to signal a shift from a professional to an informal frame of interaction, as well as to mitigate face-threatening acts (Georgakopoulou, 1997). While CS has not previously been discussed in studies of playfulness in CMC (Danet, 2001; Danet, Ruedenberg-Wright, & Rosenbaum-Tamari, 1997), it fits well with what Danet et al. (1997) identified as play with frames of interaction. More specifically, the switches into Greek in this excerpt frame as playful portions of a discussion forum that is not ordinarily intended as such. However, explicitly playful discussions do occur in diasporic forums, and it would be interesting to examine the kinds and functions of CS that occur in them.

In conclusion, this chapter suggests that it is fruitful to combine language choice and CS analysis in the exploration of multilingual practices in CMC. While sequential analysis is essential for understanding the pragmatics of CS, the language choice approach provides the "big picture" and prepares the ground for analysis of particular online interactions. Often studied separately, their combination can contribute to a more coherent picture of the multilingual Internet.

Notes

1. These figures are based on manager information and Web statistics, as of December 2004. The number of registered users does not reliably reflect the effective number of active participants.

2. According to the German Federal Statistical Office, 39,000 Indian, 65,000 Persian, 315,000 Greek, and 1,765,000 Turkish citizens lived in Germany in 2004. These figures do not include naturalized first- or second-generation individuals. From Statistisches Bundesamt, www.destatis.de/basis/d/bevoe/bevoetab10.php, retrieved July 25, 2005.

3. Widely used Web forum software packages include these from phpbb.com and vbulletin.com (retrieved July 25, 2005).

4. "Section" and "topic group" are etic rather than emic labels; participants' naming practices are variable and ambiguous; for example, "forum" is used both for the whole forum and its parts.

5. In contrast, the strong presence of Turkish in the Turkish forum corresponds to a high level of home language maintenance in the German-Turkish community, supported by its size and the resulting density of everyday contacts with coethnics (Dirim & Auer, 2004).

6. Many members of the Indian forum are fluent in English, an official language in India; however, it is much less frequent than German; see Paolillo (1996, in press) on the predominance of English in Indian and Punjabi newsgroups.

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7. Although I acknowledge that this is a crude distinction from a conversational analysis perspective, it is inevitable for a quantification of this kind; Sperlich's (2005) Web forum analysis, for instance, distinguishes between "English with Niuean greetings" and "English and Niuean."

8. A chi-square test performed on table 15.1. is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 54.21$, $p < 0.001$, 4 df).

9. In the following excerpts, each post is followed by an English gloss, and Greek is underlined throughout. All screen names have been anonymized; original spelling has been kept throughout; the graphic emoticons used in this forum are replaced by typographic smiley equivalents, unless otherwise indicated.

10. The German word *Webmeisterin* ("female webmaster") is a neologism that perhaps enhances playfulness.

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