

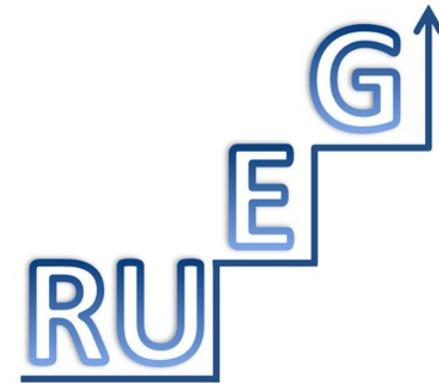


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Heritage grammars and register variation

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DeMiNeS Lecture Series



RUESHëL
Experimental Syntax and Heritage Languages

What this talk is about

- Heritage languages are important for linguistic theory and the study of language faculty, see e.g. Lohndal et al. (2019)
- This talk focuses on certain changes observed in the grammar of Heritage Greek in the US and Germany
- It addresses the question of what we learn from these novel patterns about language change and the monolingual grammar of Greek and its various registers
- Discusses the following phenomena that appear to show effects of register variation:
 - realization of quantity elements
 - realization of verbal aspect
 - relative clause formation

Who are heritage speakers?

- a. Heritage speakers are minority language speakers in a majority language environment, e.g. speakers of Greek in the US and Germany
- b. Heritage speakers are bilinguals
- c. By the time they are adults, heritage speakers tend to be dominant (i.e. more proficient) in the language of their larger national community

from Lohndal et al. (2019), (cf. Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013, Montrul, 2016; Polinsky, 2018 Rothman, 2009)

Why study heritage speakers and their languages?

- Benmamoun, Montrul & Polinsky (2013):
 - “Heritage languages (HLs) are a desirable object of investigation, and we need to learn how to use them better to enrich the debate about the nature of the language faculty
 - They help us answer the question: what do we know when we know a language?
 - Just like children, Heritage Speakers (HSs) offer us an opportunity to study a language unencumbered by too much irregularity, external factors, and non-structural confounds. Their grammar has the minimal scaffolding needed for a language to stand.”

Research Hypothesis

- Investigate both HSs and monolinguals in different communicative settings to see whether novel patterns are/variation is identified in the monolingual grammar as well but observed only in some settings
- HSs might lack some registers of the HL, especially if these are transmitted by formal education, Rothman (2009)
- HLs are spoken at home they are characterized by a casual, conversational speech style (Dressler 1991: 101-102)
- This leads to a gradual narrowing of registers among heritage speakers, Chevalier (2004), Polinsky & Scontras (2019)

HSs and the monolingual grammar

- *lack some registers:*

this presupposes that we can clearly make use of certain well-defined register features that are responsible for register variation

- But do we know which features are subject to register variation in our native language, Greek in this case?

Greek and register variation

- Greek is a very interesting language to look at, since it has been subject to diglossia, described by Ferguson (1959) as a type of register variation involving two divergent registers of the same language:
 - one register is the so-called low variety, acquired naturalistically at home and used for everyday conversation, *dhimotiki*
 - the other register is the so-called high variety, which is a formal register learned through formal instruction, *katharevusa*
 - Research has identified *katharevusa* vs. *dhimotiki* features
 - Often traditional grammars give descriptions including characterizations of phenomena belonging to formal vs. informal register

Greek and register variation

- The formal register is related to the artificial high variety, *katharevusa*, while the informal one represents the everyday colloquial speech
- Formality in MG can be expressed in different linguistic domains, e.g. the lexicon, phonology, morphology, and syntax (Anastasiadi-Symeonidi & Fliatouras 2019), characterized by the use of [+learned], i.e. archaic elements
- Such elements are actually acquired late even by monolingual speakers; Martzoukou et al. (2019): students of primary education (mean age 11;9) fail to produce and comprehend the pragmatics of the formal register, as students are introduced to it only in secondary education

Methodology

- Research Unit *Emerging Grammars in Language Contact Situations (RUEG)*: <https://www.linguistik.hu-berlin.de/en/institut-en/professuren-en/rueg/>, Project P1: AL 554/13-1, further members: Vasiliki Rizou, Fenia Karkaletsou & Nikolaos Tsokanos)
- We tested two age groups of Greek HSs in Germany, in Berlin, and in the US, in Chicago and New York: adolescents and adults; we also tested control groups in Greece that consisted of monolingual speakers of the same age
- By testing HSs in two different countries, we wanted to investigate the role of language interference
- N=26 adult HSs-Germany, N=21 adolescent HSs-Germany, N=32 adult HSs-US and 32=adolescent HSs-US, N = 32 monolingual adults and N= 32 monolingual adolescents
- A short video (00:42 minutes) of a fictional event was shown to every participant. A non-severe car accident was taking place in a parking lot and the task was to retell what happened to different people imagining that they witnessed the incident. They had to produce both an oral and a written narration in two distinct communication settings



RUEG
stimulus
film

Methodology

written
witness report

formal

voicemail
to police

written



spoken

text
to friend

informal

voicemail
to friend

Wiese (2020): 'language situation' setting is a method that allows researchers to elicit naturalistic data. This set-up provides comparable both oral and written data and in different levels of formality (data sets 2x2).

Importance of register variation

- Register variation: “variation in the form of linguistic expressions according to the formality of the social context of use” (Paolillo 2000: 215)
- To which extent do spoken and written registers vary with respect to certain features?
- The comparison between HSs and monolinguals in different communicative situations can help us identify
 - markers of register variation among monolingual speakers
 - which areas of the grammar are subject to register variation
 - the processes that might lead HSs to narrow down register variation

Indefinite counters/determiners

- We noted the following contrast:

Monolingual in formal spoken context

(1) epesan **tria** fruta tis kirias ke ena bukali nero
fell-3PL **three** fruits from the lady and a bottle of water

Monolingual in informal written context

(2) mia kiriula pu ihe **kati** fruta ke ola efigan sto dromo
a lady_{Diminutive} that had **some** fruits and everything fell-3PL on the street

Indefinite counters/determiners

Peculiarity of *kati*:

it combines uniquely with plural nouns, the item itself bears no inflection and does not agree in gender and case with the noun; this sets *kati* apart from all other Greek determiners

Recently discussed by Alexiadou (2021), Tsoulas (2021), and Exteberria & Giannakidou (2021)

What does its distribution in our corpus tell us about its function?

Use of kati

Register	Mode	HS USA		HS Germany		Monolinguals	
		Adults	Adolescents	Adults	Adolescents	Adults	Adolescents
formal	written	0	0	1	0	0	0
formal	spoken	2	0	2	1	0	0
informal	written	0	1	2	0	1	2
informal	spoken	4	1	2	1	3	4
SUM:		6	2	7	2	4	6

Results

- *kati* appears only in the informal register of monolinguals, while it is overgeneralized in the HSs' data. In the formal register, the monolinguals use ***numerals/definite articles*** in the same context
- HSs-Germany have more *kati* productions
- A strong 2 tailed Kendall's tau-b correlation coefficient with register ($\tau_b = 0.992$) and modality ($\tau_b = 0.989$) $p = 0.000$ is reported.
- 2 weak 2 tailed Kendall's tau-b correlations with some features of participants' personality were observed, i.e. conventional ($\tau_b = 0.178$) and carelles ($\tau_b = 0.153$) and one weak negative correlation, i.e. self-discipline ($\tau_b = -0.149$).
- *Kati* as a marker of social meaning, i.e. it conveys information about the social identity of its users, see Beltrama (2020)?

Kati in informal (oral) registers

- Corpus of Oral Speech in the Institute of Modern Greek Studies in AUTH.
- Instances from everyday conversations:

- (3)
- a. [...] as pume oti ehi kati magazakia
let's say that he has some stores_{Diminutive}
- b.. [...]thimame ihame gnorisi kati Olandus
I remember that we have met some Dutch people
- c. [...]ke mu elege kati istories
and he was telling me some stories

Kati in informal (oral) registers

- In the spirit of Duffley & Larrivéé (2012: 143) on English *some*
 - *the combination of kati* with plural nouns “produces, not the impression of the non-specification of the identity of the referent, but rather that of the non-specification of the number of referents referred to”.

see also Exteberria & Giannakidou (2021) for the role of plurality in vagueness

- *kati* cannot be used to convey information about precise quantity, it signals imprecision
- Speakers remain vague by using *kati*

Kati in informal (oral) registers

- Vagueness and imprecision is a feature of informal conversations (McCarthy 1998) and of the spoken language (Brown and Yule 1998), i.e. it is found in specific registers and modes → **informal**
- Sauerland (2021): Vague quantifiers generally occur in a less formal register than precise quantifiers

Kati in informal (oral) registers

- Why do HSs-Germany have more *kati* productions?
- Sauerland (2021): German has several paucal vague quantifiers that combine with plural: *einige* ('some (pl.)', *manche* ('some (pl.)', these show register sensitivity
- Interference from German?
- ?

Verbal aspect

- | | | |
|-----|----------------------|---------------------|
| (4) | agap(a)-o | agapi-s-o |
| | love.Pres.Impf.1SG | love.Pres.Perf.1SG |
| (5) | graf-o | grap-s-o |
| | write.Pres.Impf .1SG | write.Pres.Perf.1SG |

Verbs that do not take the affix /s/ in order to express perfectivity (Christopoulos & Petrosino 2018; Galani 2005; Merchant 2015) mark perfective aspect via root allomorphy:

- | | | |
|-----|----|--------------------------|
| (6) | a. | √DRAG ↔ sir- / [+PFV] |
| | b. | √DRAG ↔ ser- / elsewhere |

Verbal aspect

- Both monolingual and bilingual speakers instead of using synthetic verbal forms to describe the events witnessed in the video, they make use of periphrastic constructions (PCs)
- These involve the use of the Greek light verb *do, kano* + a bare nominal/verbal form, familiar from the literature on code-switching
- We found use of PCs in informal and oral contexts by monolinguals and overgeneralization of periphrasis by HSs

PCs	Lexical verb
Kano <u>freno</u> , <u>vazo ta frena</u> , kano brake = do brake	Frenaro= brake
perno attention = take attention	Siniditopio = realise
Perno agalia = take a hug	Agaliazo= hug
Kano erevna= do an investigation	Erevno= investigate
Kano parking= do parking	Stathmevo= park
Den ixé ora na = don't have time to	Prolaveno= catch up
Kano stop= do stop	Stamatao= stop
Kano report=do a report	<u>Katatheto</u> = testify

Verbal Aspect

Verbal Aspect

Mode	Register	HSs in Germany	HSs in the US	Control group
No PCs	No PCs	45.8%	50.8%	62.5%
oral	formal	8.3%	9.5%	3.1%
oral	informal	8.4%	6.4%	6.3%
written	formal	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%
written	informal	4.2%	0.0%	1.6%

Why PCs?

- The observation that HSs make use of periphrastic options is not novel, but it is novel for Greek HSs
- Maher (1991) considers the replacement of synthetic forms by periphrastic constructions a common restructuring process in language contact
- Polinsky (2008) notes similar effects in Russian
- Boon (2014) notices that synthetic verb forms occur less frequently in Heritage Welsh, a fact she attributes to the reduced processing load of the periphrastic construction

Why PCs?

- The use of PCs correlates with the [+learned (= *katharevusa*)] features of the verb in question:
 - HSs avoid using synthetic forms for [+learned] verbs; such verbs contain archaic prefixes, e.g. *kata-theto* 'testify' and would have to be used in past tense and in certain cases non-active contexts, creating a morphological complex form
- Importantly, monolingual speakers use PCs as well: they use PCs in informal settings and in oral mode
- The use of PCs is found in perfective aspect, as HSs overgeneralize the perfective form over the imperfective, especially in narration tasks

Relative clauses (RCs)

- Greek RCs are either introduced by the pronoun *o opios* literally 'the who' or by the complementizer *pu* 'that'. While the pronoun is inflected for gender, case and number and agrees with the nominal head that it modifies, *pu* 'that' bears no inflection:

- (7) a. *o anthropos o opios epeze me ti bala*
 the man the-who.MASC played.3SG with the ball
- b. *o anthropos pu epeze me ti bala*
 the man that played.3SG with the ball
 The man that played with the ball

RCs



	h-Greek in the U.S.	h-Greek in Germany	mono-Greek
restrictive RCs with <i>pu</i>	403 (98.5%)	340 (75.9%)	427 (68.2%)
restrictive RCs with <i>o opios</i>	6 (1.5%)	108 (24.1%)	199 (31.8%)
Total restrictive RCs	409	448	626





Register		h-Greek in the U.S.	h-Greek in Germany	mono-Greek
Informal	Pu	165 (40.9%)	150 (44.1%)	183 (42.9%)
	O opios	1 (16.7%)	33 (30.6%)	62 (31.2%)
Formal	Pu	238 (59.1%)	190 (55.9%)	244 (57.1%)
	O opios	5 (83.3%)	75 (69.4%)	137 (68.8%)



RCs

- RCs introduced by the complementizer *pu* are quantitatively more than the RCs introduced with the pronoun across groups, age groups and registers
- Monolingual speakers actually prefer them across different communication situations
- This finding is not entirely in line with the claim made by Holton, Mackridge, Philippaki-Warbuton (1997: 212) that *pu* appears mostly in colloquial speech, while the pronoun is preferred in formal registers

RCs

- No significant difference can be reported for the *pu* RCs both between and within groups in the two registers
- There is a significant difference though between and within groups with respect to *o opios* RCs and the register variation as one-way ANOVA tests report [formal: $(F (2,171) = 15.99, p= .000)$, informal: $(F 2, 171) = 8.877, p=.000)$]

RCs

- The *o opios* strategy seems to be preferred in the formal register compared to the informal one (although in lower rate), firstly by the control group and secondly by the HSs in Germany.
- HSs in the US rarely use the pronoun strategy no matter the setting, as reported by Lithoksoou (2019), who investigated part of RUEG corpus.
- Why do they almost totally lack *o opios* RCs?
 - Issues with (gender) agreement (Alexiadou et al. 2021)?
 - Formal education?

Discussion

- Our results are suggestive of register levelling in the grammar of Greek HSs, especially in the US, in line with what previous literature has suggested for other HLs
- We also observed similar patterns in monolingual speakers which helped us identify:
 - **informal register features**
 - vagueness (*kati*)
 - avoidance of morphological complexity (periphrastic aspect)
 - avoidance of complex nominal forms (*pu* RCs)
 - not clear whether besides *kati* the other cases have a social meaning component

Discussion

- Changes in Heritage Greek, register levelling in one direction: **informal -> formal**
- Register variation in monolingual Greek
- Perhaps shift in RCs: **informal -> formal**
- Differences between HSs-Germany HSs-US?
 - Formal education and contact to Greece?

How to model the change?

- Change is the result of competition between two forms, along the lines of Adger's (2006) combinatorial variability; it is about variation within a single system with respect to the realization of a particular structure
- Variability in different speech contexts is related to competition, in the sense that several lexical items compete to realize a particular syntactic structure
- As Adger (2014) argues, in processes of language change variability is lost

How to model the change?

- *Counters/Determiners*: choice of a particular realization is associated with added layer of meaning, precise counting (numeral) as opposed to vague counting (*kati*)
- *Aspect*: following Embick (2010), synthetic and analytic forms involve distinct morpho-phonological packaging of an identical structure
- *RCs*: pronoun is itself a complex form and speakers may have difficulties with tracking of agreement; this leads to the use of the unspecified form

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