

Syntactic reconstruction of Asia Minor Greek

In this talk I discuss some of the crucial issues pertaining to the evolution and classification of Pontic Greek (PG) and I examine the extent to which PG participated in the koineization process, which, in its end result, yielded (Standard) Modern Greek. In doing so I am led to revisit the phylogeny of Asia Minor Greek.

On the one hand, affinities among Asia Minor Greek (AMG) varieties led Dawkins (1931:399) to hypothesize that a medieval AMG koine must have existed, whose idiosyncratic development possibly preceded, and was facilitated by the incipient Seljuk invasions of the 11th century AD (Dawkins 1916:205, 213, Browning 1983:130, Horrocks 2010:382). On the other hand, some claim that at least some distinctive AMG developments originate in the regional koine Greek spoken in Asia Minor and adjacent islands during Hellenistic and Roman times (Thumb 1914:199, Kapsomenos 2003:63, Drettas 1999:15). Nevertheless, according to Horrocks (2010:113–114), there is little relation between the grammatical innovations shared by the modern dialects and the region-specific characteristics of the Hellenistic (HelGr) Koine of Asia Minor recorded by Brixhe (1987).

In light of the Romeyka data (which belongs genetically to the PG group and is still spoken in North-East Turkey, see Mackridge 1987 et seq., Sitaridou 2013, 2014a/b, 2016, Schreiber and Sitaridou 2017, and references therein) and departing from the premise that ‘syntax carries a salient historical signal and cannot be discarded when producing phylogenies’ (Guardiano et al. 2016:96), I approach the syntactic classification of PG by means of (i) comparing the syntax of specific phenomena in Romeyka to the ones in Hellenistic, Medieval and AMG to see which one Romeyka matches best; and (ii) assessing whether innovations could have sprung out of a Hellenistic or Medieval Greek pool of grammatical cues (in the sense of Lightfoot 2010). Crucial to this *modus operandi* is the idea that reanalysis takes place during child language acquisition and the distinction between the abstract grammatical system and the surface output of that system. On this view, it follows that reanalysis is constrained both by pre- and post-reanalysis grammars and that it must be acquirable on the basis of the same primary linguistic data. This imposes limits on the possible hypotheses that can be entertained, as has been argued by Willis (2011).

Even though Guardiano et al. (2016) successfully demonstrated both (i) the effectiveness of the Parametric Comparison Method (PCM) in addressing microvariation and (ii) the fact that syntax carries a historical signal, it is debatable whether such a method can make redundant the need to have more ‘traditional’ explanations (such as reanalysis)—if anything, in order to rid of innovations so as to reveal the properties of the protolanguage.

Following Sitaridou’s (2014a/b, 2016) phylogeny advocating the Hellenistic Greek roots of Pontic Greek with ‘leap-frog’ contact (in the sense of Chambers & Trudgill 1980) with other Greek varieties during the medieval period, I test this phylogeny further by presenting evidence from the negation and modality systems (Sitaridou 2016, 2017) of Romeyka and HelGr to postulate the existence of a local AMG koine.

A particular case in point would be the evolution of NEG5 *t̪sen* which can only be understood as a combination of Croft’s Cycle and Jespersen’s Cycle thus revealing that the AMG koine(s) was/were conveying modality through the use of verbal periphrases (with either ‘be’ or ‘have’) in which the *na*-clauses kept the original infinitival size, thus combining with an upstairs negator, namely NEG1 *ouk*. Crucially, this sort of explanation cannot immediately

follow from the application of PCM although, *a posteriori*, it could be designed to elicit it. In a nutshell, it is not clear at this stage how the PCM can cope with seemingly non-adaptive features (such as spandrels, relics, nested grammaticalisations, etc.).

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