

Patterns of past tense formation in the Greek of Greek-Canadians

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We examine the usage pattern of three different morphological features in the speech of Greek immigrants to Canada during the period 1945 to 1975 in order to determine whether this pattern provides evidence of dialect contact among the population of these new communities.

Specifically, we investigate:

1. The variation between the Standard Modern Greek (SMG) variant /usa/, and the non-standard /aya/ for the 1st person singular active of class 2 verbs (Browning, 1983).
2. The variation between the SMG variant /odan/ and non-standard forms (such as /odusan/ and /osande/) for the 3rd person plural of passive voice (Kretschmer, 1905).
3. The variation between presence of the unstressed past tense prefix (/e/) (non-standard) and its absence (SMG), (Ralli, 2005).

The study utilizes a corpus of recorded sociolinguistic interviews, which were conducted for the purposes of an interdisciplinary project whose aim is to document the immigration experience of Greeks to Canada between 1945-1975, and examine it from linguistic, political, sociological, and anthropological perspectives. 443 speakers of Greek who immigrated to Canada during what is known as the second wave of Greek migration have been recorded, and approximately half of these interviews (210 at the moment) have been orthographically transcribed and time-aligned in Praat text grids. The participants represent both sexes, and 13 of the 15 dialectal areas listed in Trudgill (2003) as well as the three urban centers of (Athens, Thessaloniki, Patras). There is also a wide spectrum of educational backgrounds, ranging from primary education to university.

Up to this point we have examined 120 of these interviews, which have yielded roughly 1500 tokens per variable. Our analysis shows that there is variation between features that belong to different style registers of Modern Greek. The variation corroborates the hypothesis that, even though at the time of immigration Greece was in a diglossic state (Frangoudaki, 1992), in which the High language was an archaizing variety, the synthesis of the common vernacular had already begun (cf. Horrocks, 2010). In terms of the imperfective, we find not only the adoption of the SMG forms by dialectal speakers, but we also see examples of usage of the non-standard forms (/aya/, /odusan/) by speakers of varieties that do not employ these suffixes. Our preliminary hypothesis is that this interdialectal borrowing is caused by the preponderance of immigrants from the Peloponnese in most Greek-Canadian communities (Chimbos, 1980). The borrowed features are characteristic of that dialect, which is considered the most prestigious dialect due to its resemblance to Standard Modern Greek (Browning 1983, Horrocks 2010). The convergence of these two factors (preponderance and prestige) may have led some speakers from other dialects to interpret these features as acceptable variants of the Standard forms.

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