

EARLY MODERN GREEK /b d g/: EVIDENCE FROM REBETICA AND FOLK SONGS

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Abstract

In this study we examined the realization of nasal plus stop clusters in rebetica and folk songs from the early 20th century. The results, based on several singers of different geographical origins, show that the variation in the realization of these clusters, which was first observed in the mid-1950s, was in fact present in the early 20th century, a finding consistent with Labov's views about sound change.

Introduction

In contemporary Modern Greek, we find the following variants of nasal plus stop (henceforth (ND)) combinations: (a) ND (prenasalized voiced stop); e.g. *πέντε* 'five' pronounced [peⁿde]; (b) D (oral voiced stop); e.g. *μπύρα* 'beer' pronounced [bira]; (c) NT (nasal and voiceless stop), e.g. *την κλείνω* 'I close it' pronounced [tɪŋ klino].

In their study, Amalia Arvaniti and Brian Joseph¹ found that the choice of variant partly depends on linguistic context. Word-initially D occurred almost exclusively. Word-medially, two classes of words were found: those in which either D or ND can occur, and those with D exclusively (where phonological factors make nasal realization impossible, e.g. after a consonant, as in *σεβνράς* 'passion'). Post-lexically, i.e. between words, D, ND and NT are all found. Word-medial and postlexical variation depends on social factors and style.

Geographic variation similar to this has been reported for quite some time, e.g. by André Mirambel.² Moreover, a stylistic basis for a

¹ Amalia Arvaniti and Brian Joseph, 2000, Variation in voiced stop prenasalization in Greek, *Glossologia*, Vol. 11-12, pp.131-166.

² André Mirambel, 1933, Le traitement du groupe nasale + occlusive dans les parlers néogrecs et le problème de la classification, *Bulletin de la Société Linguistique de Paris*, Vol. 34, pp. 145-164.

similar sort of variation has been posited for the period of Greek from 1950s onwards, e.g. by Kostas Kazazis,³ and Peter Mackridge.⁴

Researchers working in the late 20th century, such as Stamatia Pagoni,⁵ and Agathoclis Charalambopoulos and his colleagues,⁶ found further sociolinguistic bases for (ND) variation. Arvaniti and Joseph, in particular, found significantly more D usage among the younger Athenian speakers (those below 40), with many young males being exclusively D users. This last finding indicates an abrupt shift away from the earlier variable situation and towards its categorical resolution.

Still, when it comes to making inferences about historical developments with regard to ND, these studies do not allow us to gauge whether the stable variation reported for the second half of the 20th century existed prior to that time (as we would expect according to the Labovian⁷ view of sound change). In other words, was the appearance of ND/D variation in the 1950s the only innovation with these sounds prior to the major shift observed by Arvaniti and Joseph, or was there even earlier (stable) variation to reckon with?

This is not an easy question to answer: written sources are of little value, as Greek orthography obscures (ND) pronunciation, while early descriptions of Greek do not provide detailed phonetic information. In contrast, sound recordings, especially rebetica and folk songs, from the first half of the 20th century provide a fairly direct window into earlier pronunciation.

There are several advantages to examining song recordings, over, for instance, radio broadcast recordings. For one thing, they are more

³ Kostas Kazazis, 1968, Sunday Greek, *CLS*, Vol. 4, pp. 130-140.

⁴ Peter Mackridge, 1990, *Η νεοελληνική γλώσσα*, Athens, Patakis.

⁵ Stamatia Pagoni, 1989, Cluster analysis and social network structure: the Modern Greek evidence. *Studies in Greek Linguistics*, Vol. 10, pp. 399-419.

⁶ Agathoclis Charalambopoulos, M. Arapopoulou, A. Kokolakis & A. Kiradzis, 1992, Φωνολογική ποικιλία: ηχηροποίηση – προρηνικοποίηση, *Studies in Greek Linguistics*, Vol. 13, pp. 289-303, Thessaloniki, Kiriakides.

⁷ William Labov, 1994, *Principles of linguistic change: Internal factors*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

easily accessible. They are also likely to reflect natural usage, while they provide some stylistic information since there are: (a) two styles of singing involved — folk songs and rebetica — both often sung by the same singer, and (b) interjections of the singer to the orchestra. Finally, the recordings of folk and rebetica songs offer us a variety of speakers and dialects, and, since the singers are well known, their place of origin can be known as well (unlike that of generally anonymous radio announcers or newscasters).

Folk and Rebetica Corpus and Methods

Our corpus consisted of several tapes and CDs of folk and rebetica songs from the period between 1910 and 1940; two songs were recorded as early as 1911 but most fell between 1922 and 1940. Our analyzed corpus (so far — this is an on-going project⁸) consisted of 34 songs, 18 rebetica (from tapes) and 16 folk songs (from CDs). In the analyzed recordings, there were fifteen different singers, four female and eleven male. Four of these (Rita Abadzi, Rosa Eskenazi, Yiorgos Papisideris, Antonis Dalgas) sing a variety of songs, in both folk and rebetica style, allowing for verification that there were no mannerisms associated with either style and affecting (ND).

Both of us listened to the tapes for potential (ND) tokens, and there was good agreement in our transcriptions. The first author listened also to the CDs, and then repeated listening to both media a year later, with her two transcriptions showing a high degree of agreement. This procedure yielded 101 tokens of (ND), of which 61 tokens are intervocalic, 28 are postlexical, and 12 are of (ND) in the “exclusively D” contexts discussed in the Introduction. Thus, the majority of our tokens are intervocalic, the context for which variation has most often been reported.

Results

Due to space limitations we present here only a brief overview of our results.

First, in word-initial position and the “exclusively D” word-medial context we found only the D variant. This is as reported for all dialects of Greek, including those using the ND variant. Exclusive use of D in this context during the singing suggests that as far as the (ND)

⁸ Amalia Arvaniti and Brian Joseph, 2002, Pushing back the clock: Early recordings and Modern Greek /b d g/, ms.

variable is concerned, the singers used a natural style of speech, thus making the possibility of a mannerism relating to (ND) improbable. Second, in the intervocalic and postlexical context, the same kind of variation occurs as was observed in Arvaniti & Joseph's earlier study: intervocalically, both ND and D variants occur, while post-lexically, NT and T are also possible, though rarer.

Most interestingly, the variation in the intervocalic position (where our sample is sufficiently large) is observed not just across singers, but also within the data of one and the same singer even during the very same song. For instance, the folk song "Σαράντα Παλικάρια" is sung by both Stasinopoulos and Dalgas: Stasinopoulos has D in all the tokens (consistent with his being from Samos), while Dalgas has exclusively ND. However, Dalgas in "Μάγκικο" uses the title word four times: three tokens have ND, but the fourth has D; in the same song he also pronounces *την καρδιά μου* 'my heart' [tigarðjamu], i.e. with D. Similarly, Rita Abadzi uses mostly ND (e.g. *άντρα* 'man' [aⁿdra], *πόντος* 'slick' [poⁿdos]) but also alternates between ND and D in "Μια κοντή, κοντούλα" 'a short one, shorty' [mja koⁿdi kodula], one of the folk songs. Variation is even more striking in the songs recorded by Roza Eskenazi, who often shifts from D to ND within the same song; in one of her songs she uses ND throughout the song (in which the word *μάγκας* 'tough guy' [maⁿgas] is repeated seven times), then finishes her performance with an interjection to the orchestra starting with *άντε* 'Go on!' [ade].

Conclusions

Our data strongly suggest the following conclusions. First, existing dialectal descriptions accurately report the main output of Ancient Greek nasal plus stop clusters (since our data largely conform to these descriptions). Second, however, speakers were not always consistent in their use of one or the other variant. Rather, third, our data are in agreement with descriptions reflecting usage in the 1950s in showing that speakers of some dialects fluctuated in their realization of (ND) even in the early 20th century. Fourth, this finding, in turn, supports the claim that (ND) had been in a situation of stable variation for considerably earlier than the mid-20th century (when this variation is first consistently noted), and is in agreement therefore with Labovian views of sound change. Finally, our findings show that it is possible to draw valid conclusions from singing data; further work is planned to extend this research to the rest of our archive.