

Contact-induced syntactic phenomena in contemporary Istanbul Greek

Istanbul Greek (henceforth: IG, also known in English as *Constantinopolitan Greek* or *Romaic*), the variety still spoken by the members of the Greek-Orthodox community of the Turkish megacity, is a non-standardized form of Greek that bears certain dialectal features common to other varieties of the Bithynian, Thracian and North Aegean regions (cf. Pantelidis 2019, Hadodo 2020); however, it may be more appropriate to regard IG as a koiné of the Greek-speaking population that kept migrating to the Ottoman capital from the 15th century onwards from all over the empire (cf. İnalçık 2012), a koiné shaped under the constant influence of the dominant Turkish language. Thus, it is no surprise that IG is mostly known for the striking influx of numerous Turkish words to its lexicon (cf. Zahariadis 2014, Mackridge 2021) and its peculiarities in phonology (Hadodo 2020), while little heed has been paid to the influence of Turkish on the morphosyntactic level, mostly because this influence was minimal, reduced to a tendency for verb-final word order, a structure documented only recently in certain literary works that aim at replicating the vernacular of the Greek-Orthodox Istanbul community, as in (1) below:

(1) Tsalidis 2005: 37

Polús Túrkus pelátes íce, i jitojá tu étsi ítane ja, ce ta turkiká polí kalá ta íksere

many Turks clients had the neighborhood his so was DISC.PRT *and the Turkish very well* CL.DOUBL *knew*

“He had many Turkish clients, this is actually how his neighborhood was, and he spoke Turkish pretty well”

The sentence in (1) is grammatical in Standard Modern Greek (SMG), yet the verb-final order, as well as the usage of the discourse particle *ja* (< Turkish *ya*) point to the Turkish influence. That the final-verb position was an indicator of “eastern” origin was a point put forward by the famous Greek novelist Stratis Myrivilis in his renowned *Life in the Tomb*, (¹⁵1956: 62, Greek edition) where he narrates: “There was one more thing. *IMchajilus* [Michael] spoke in a very oriental accent. He rang the *-n* at the end of a phrase, he was placing the verb at the end of the sentence, like what people who spoke Turkish at home do.” On these grounds, it is evident that varieties with a frequent verb-final position, albeit “non ungrammatical” in SMG, manifested the Turkish bilingualism of their speakers.

However, given the demographic decline of the Greek-Orthodox community in modern Istanbul, speakers of IG are nowadays, as expected, exposed to more intense language contact with Turkish. Due to the usage of Turkish in professional life, the mixed marriages, and the pervasive daily dominance of Turkish in the public domain, several speakers of IG may often prefer code-switching for their communication with fellow members of their community. As a result of this extensive bilingualism, contemporary IG exhibits cases of what Myers-Scotton (2002: 246–253) calls a “Matrix Language turnover”, a fact that suggests that underlying Turkish sentential structures define the output of an IG clause as in (2) and (3), cases which are ungrammatical in SMG:

(2) Interpolation of the indefinite pronoun

IG: spuðéa mja xóra ítane

great one country was “It used to be a great country”

SMG: *ítan spuðéa xóra*, Turkish: *Mükemmel/harika bir ülkeydi*

(3) Verbal valency alternation

IG: Rótise ston proeðro

ask.IPV.2SG to=the president “Ask the president”

SMG: Rótise ton proeðro, comp. Turkish: başkana sor (*president.dat ask.IPV.2SG*)

Based on ongoing ethnographic field as well as philological research, the paper illustrates some further contact-induced cases of syntactic phenomena that show the current high degree of bilingualism among the IG speakers' community. It is additionally shown that some data are reminiscent of phenomena attested in Asia Minor Greek as discussed since Dawkins 1916, phenomena which have hitherto gone unnoticed.

References:

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