

Syntactic change under the pressure of contact: the loss of polydefiniteness in Italiot Greek

Cristina Guardiano (Univ. Modena e Reggio Emilia) - Melita Stavrou (Aristotle Univ. Thessaloniki)

Introduction. In this study, we present a comparative description of a particular case of syntactic (micro)variation that seems to reveal effects of horizontal processes. We investigate (aspects of) adjectival modification in the Greek dialects of Southern Italy. The two areas where the (residual) speaking communities of Italiot Greek are currently settled (Calabria and Salento) epitomize a particularly interesting case of unbalanced contact situation: (i) currently, the dominant majority language in those areas is Italian; (ii) most speakers of Italian are (also) native speakers of (at least) another variety of Romance (i.e. Southern Calabrese and Salentino, respectively, both belonging to the so-called ‘Extreme Southern Group’, Pellegrini 1977): such varieties were the dominant (spoken) languages in the two areas until very recently; (iii) the (very few) native speakers of Italiot Greek are bilingual with the local Romance variety; additionally, Greek is very rarely used for everyday interaction (especially in Calabria, Martino 2009); (iv) the Greek-speaking communities settled in Southern Italy centuries ago (for a summary of the controversy on their origins cf. Fanciullo 2001, a.o.), and have been (relatively) isolated from the core of the Greek-speaking world for a long time. Here, we compare Italiot Greek with its possible sources of interference, with older varieties of Greek and with Standard Modern Greek. We explore two phenomena: (a) the presence of N-movement over ‘structured’ adjectives in Italiot Greek and its absence in the rest of the Greek-speaking world; (b) the (gradual and uneven) loss of ‘polydefiniteness’ in Italiot Greek as opposed to the rest of the Greek-speaking world. We claim that: (1) postnominal adjectives in Italiot Greek have the same underlying structure as in Romance; this structure is available in the syntax of Greek independently of contact with Romance; (2) the postnominal articulated adjectives found in (a variety of) Calabria Greek are instances of ‘polydefinite’ DPs as in Standard Greek; their erosion in Italiot Greek results from the loss of the structural conditions which (are assumed to) trigger polydefinite structures in Greek.

Background. According to the literature, adjectives that function as indirect modifiers in the DP are merged as disguised predicates inside clauses of some sort (e.g. reduced relatives or small clauses), while adjectives that function as direct modifiers (henceforth *structured* adjectives) are directly merged prenominally, and have been shown to be hierarchically ordered: [DP D [Num [AP_{quality} [AP_{size} [AP_{shape/color} [AP_{provenance} [NP [N Compl]]]]]]]]. Surface pre-/postnominal occurrence of structured adjectives is contingent on noun movement. In Italian, the noun moves to the left of *shape*, *color* and *provenance* adjectives, which therefore never occur prenominally: [DP D [Num [AP_q [AP_s N [AP_{sh/c} [AP_p [NP [N Compl]]]]]]]]. The different interpretations of the adjectives which can occur both pre- and postnominally (cf. the contrast between *ho visto una sola donna* – ‘I saw only one woman’ and ... *una donna sola* – ‘...a lonely woman’; Bouchard 2002) are due to the fact that they are initially merged in two different positions (corresponding to the two mentioned above, both available in Romance). In (Ancient and non-Italiot Modern) Greek there is no noun movement over structured adjectives (which all occur prenominally). Polydefinite structures (obligatorily articulated postnominal adjectives in definite DPs: *to pedi to kalò* ‘the kid the good’ vs. **to pedi kalò*) have been attested since the earliest stages of the language and are still productive in Standard Greek. In our analysis, polydefinite adjectives are merged postnominally, as indirect modifiers; the adjectival ‘definite’ article in polydefinites is the spell out of a complex functional head encoding predicativity (Pred⁰ in 1), and acts as a mediator of concord in definiteness, phi features and case between the noun and the adjective.

- (1) to amàksi to akrivò (the car the expensive)
[DP D [RP Spec R [PredP [NP amaksi] Pred [+N] akrivo]]]

The feature [+def] (in definite DPs) is carried by both D and Pred (by virtue of the latter being a nominal head); this (unvalued) feature on Pred is valued by the [+def] feature on D and both [+def] features are spelled out as the morpheme identified as the definite article; (*default*

realization of definiteness). That way, Pred agrees with D in definiteness along, of course, with gender and number. In (Standard) Greek, case morphology is still visible on both nouns and adjectives (despite syncretisms). When adjectives are merged prenominally they concord with nouns via spec-head agreement. When adjectives are merged inside a (small) clause it is the definite ‘article’ that mediates such a concord.

The data. The restrictions on the occurrence of prenominal adjectives in Southern Italy Romance (Guardiano & Stavrou 2014) follow from noun movement over almost all structured adjectives, with the exception of a few (*high*) ones (a difference with respect to Italian: $[_{DP} D [_{Num} [_{AP}_q N [_{AP}_s [_{AP}_{sh/c} [_{AP}_p [_{NP} [N Compl]]]]]]]]]$). Italiot Greek displays the same restrictions (thus differing from Ancient and Modern Greek). As far as polydefinite structures are concerned, Salento Greek has lost them uniformly (with few residual traces in traditional texts). Instead, some varieties of Calabria Greek are more conservative, presumably due to (geographic and social) isolation; for example, one variety attested in traditional texts regularly exhibits articulated postnominal adjectives in definite argument DPs (such as *to lleddendu tom bòvero*, ‘the brother the poor’). This variety exhibits one pattern (i.e. noun movement over structured adjectives) typical of Southern Romance and absent in Greek, and one pattern (i.e. polydefiniteness) typical of Greek and absent in Romance. One might expect such a system to have evolved in the same direction as in Salento Greek, i.e. towards the elimination of polydefiniteness. This is indeed what we see in present-day (spoken) Calabria Greek, where surface prenominal adjectives are very restricted and postnominal ones occur unarticulated (e.g. *i daskali cinùri*, ‘the teachers young’). Speakers do not produce polydefinite structures: when explicitly asked, they characterize them ‘archaic’.

The proposed analysis. Assuming the Greek system (that exhibits structured adjectives, no noun movement over them, and adjectives generated in predicational structures obligatorily articulated in definite DPs) as a starting point, we claim that two main changes happened in Italiot Greek: (A) postnominal adjectives were reanalyzed as structured ones crossed over by the noun. According to Guardiano et al (2016), the Greek adjectival system was actually permeable to this type of interference owing to the existence of postnominal unarticulated adjectives in indefinite DPs: the adoption of noun movement is the result of the combination of such structures with surface data (massive postnominal occurrence of all types of adjectives) made available by contact with Romance; (B) polydefiniteness disappeared. We assume that the drop of the definite article before postnominal adjectives was triggered by the combination of (Romance) interference data (unarticulated postnominal adjectives) with a Greek-internal change, that led to the reduction of case distinctions in the nominal and adjectival system (Melissaropoulou 2012; Katsoyannou 1996, 2001), which in turn reduced the role of the definite article as a mediator of morphological agreement between adjectives and nouns: case agreement between the noun and the adjective gradually ceased to be visible. As a consequence, Italiot Greek ended up identical to the local Romance varieties, where no case morphology (and, thus, no need of polydefiniteness) exists. In sum, it seems that convergence between Greek and Romance in this particular subdomain (namely the non-existence of postnominal articulated adjectives in definite DPs) does not result from mere superficial borrowing of word order patterns or lexical items, but is rather the product of the interaction between extensive internal mutations (reduction of case distinctions) and exposure to Romance surface patterns (no articulated adjectives), which possibly facilitated it.

Horizontal pressure and syntactic change. The patterns observed in Italiot Greek suggest that (at least some) syntactic structures are in fact susceptible to changes triggered by horizontal pressures: in the particular case discussed here, utterances produced by speakers of Italiot Greek converge with those produced by the speakers of the local Romance varieties, while at the same time diverge from what speakers of Greek produce. Yet, crucially, such changes seem also to systematically relate with some ‘intrinsic’ property, independently available in the interfered language, which makes its most internal structures ‘compatible’ with the empirical evidence coming from the interference data that ultimately triggers the change.