

Subjunctive mood in Griko: A micro-comparative approach

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Abstract

We present an analysis of subjunctive complements in Griko, a Modern Greek dialect spoken in Southern Italy. Despite the obvious similarities with the properties of subjunctive clauses in Standard Modern Greek (SMG), introduced by *na* in both varieties, we capitalize on the contrasting distribution of verbal forms in each case: while in SMG all temporal-aspectual combinations are allowed in *na*-clauses and no specific subjunctive morphology is used, Griko only features perfective non-past in the same context. This fact is argued to instantiate the specialization of aspectual morphology in Griko for the marking of subjunctive on the verb. We propose that the morphological marking of subjunctive that had been lost in earlier stages of the diachronic development of Greek re-entered Griko as a result of contact with Salentino, the southern Romance variety spoken in the same area, which also exhibits mood concord between a subjunctive complementizer and dedicated subjunctive morphology on the verb. Although the realization of subjunctive in Griko and in SMG appears to be an instance of microvariation in the syntax (mood concord in the former, no mood concord in the latter), we argue that it ultimately reduces to the feature specification of particular elements, namely inflectional morphemes.

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1. Introduction

The topic of this paper is the realization of the category “subjunctive” in Griko, an indigenous Greek variety present in Southern Italy till the present day. Griko is spoken in an area known as *Grecia Salentina*, in the province of Lecce, in a subset of the villages that officially constitute the Union of the Towns of *Grecia Salentina*.¹ Salento represents one of the two Greek-speaking enclaves in Italy, the other one being Calabria, where *Greko* or *Grecanico* has been spoken (see [Katsoyiannou, 1995](#) for Grecanico; see also [Ledgeway, 2013](#) for a more recent overview). Griko and Grecanico, referred to jointly as Italiot Greek or Italo-Greek, have been recognized as minority languages by the Parliament of Italy since 1999. They are both under the threat of extinction, the latter more imminently than the former.

We adopt a micro-comparative approach (cf. [Kayne, 1996](#)), which aims to characterize parametric variation by examining closely related varieties (as opposed to historically unrelated languages), as a new research tool resembling

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¹ The Union of the Towns of *Grecia Salentina* officially consists of 12 villages in the province of Lecce. However, Griko is actually still spoken only in some of them. According to [Sobrero and Maglietta \(2005\)](#), the Griko-speaking villages today are: Calimera, Corigliano d'Otranto, Martano, Sternatia, Castrignano dei Greci, Zollino. Unless otherwise indicated, the data discussed in this paper are from Calimera, Corigliano d'Otranto, Martano and Sternatia, and are contained in the database available at <http://griko.project.uoi.gr/>.

actual experiments: altering a certain morphosyntactic feature helps determine with which other properties it correlates, if they are linked by some abstract parameter. Specifically, we compare Griko to Standard Modern Greek (henceforth SMG), in particular in connection to the realization of subjunctive clauses. The vast majority of researchers concur on the fact that SMG encodes subjunctive mood not through verbal morphology, but via the choice of complementizer. The lack of designated subjunctive morphology entails that verbal forms inside subjunctive clauses can vary, giving rise to distinct interpretations, depending on their tense and aspect specification. By contrast, in Griko we argue that subjunctive is encoded in both the complementizer and the verbal morphology. The central observation in favor of this claim is the attested restriction on a particular verbal form inside subjunctive clauses. We implement the concord between complementizer and verb in terms of a syntactic agreement relation. The directionality of agreement is in this case upward, in the spirit of Zeijlstra (2012) and related work.

The attested morphosyntactic microvariation manifests itself in the syntax: SMG shows no mood concord, whereas Griko does. However, the locus of variation is arguably the lexicon, namely in the feature specification of particular functional elements. Our work thus bears on the question of the nature and locus of syntactic (micro)variation (lexicon, syntax, or PF), namely questions that have been at the forefront of (micro)comparative syntactic research (see e.g. Kayne, 1996; Baker, 2008; Barbiers, 2009, 2013).

Interestingly, mood concord has been argued to exist also in Italo-Romance varieties spoken in the larger area of southern Italy, namely in Salentino and Calabrian (Damonte, 2010). We propose that this is no accident; on the basis of different sets of data, including other Greek varieties, we argue that mood concord in Griko is a grammatical feature induced by contact with Salentino. Our work thus interests the body of research surrounding contact-induced change in general, and in particular relations between Italo-Greek and Italo-Romance (cf. Ledgeway, 2013 and references therein).

Our paper is structured as follows: in Section 2 we describe the properties of subjunctive clauses in SMG, and motivate the structure of their left periphery which we adopt, originally proposed by Roussou (2000). We also show that the distribution of verbal forms inside *na*-clauses is as expected, on the basis of the non-existence of a morphological category ‘subjunctive’. In Section 3 we turn to Griko, and show that *na*-clauses are very similar to those of SMG, except for the distribution of verbal morphology inside them. We argue that a particular aspectual form has been re-analyzed as subjunctive morphology in Griko, which thus encodes subjunctive mood in two ways: via the choice of complementizer and on the verb. In the spirit of Damonte (2010), we propose to analyze this as a manifestation of mood concord, i.e. as agreement in terms of mood features, which we implement in terms of Zeijlstra’s (2012) operation of Upward Agree. In Section 4, we argue that mood concord arose in Griko through contact with Salentino, on the basis of evidence from Salentino, but also from Medieval Greek and from Pontic Greek of Of (Turkey). Both varieties are relevant in ruling out other potential sources for the emergence of mood concord in Griko. Section 5 summarizes and concludes.

2. Subjunctive in SMG

As is well known, SMG lacks infinitives and employs finite complementation instead, which is a well-known feature of the Balkan Sprachbund (Joseph, 1983; Terzi, 1992; Rivero, 1994). In the realm of complement clauses, *oti* introduces declaratives, *pu* factives and relative clauses, *na* so-called subjunctive complements, and *an* embedded interrogative clauses (as well as conditionals). The examples in (1)–(5) illustrate.

- (1) Ksero oti o Janis agapai ti Maria.
know.1SG that the Janis love.3SG the Maria
‘I know that Jani loves Maria.’
- (2) Lipame pu i Maria den agapai to Jani.
regret.1SG that the Maria NEG love.3SG the Jani
‘I regret that Maria doesn’t love Jani.’
- (3) Pandreftike ton andra pu agapise.
married.3SG the.ACC man.ACC REL loved.3SG
‘S/he married the man s/he loved.’
- (4) I Eleni bori na agapai to Jani.
the Eleni may.3SG SUBJ love.3SG the Jani
‘Eleni may love Jani.’
- (5) Anarotjeme an i Eleni agapai to Jani.
wonder.1SG if the Eleni love.3SG the Jani
‘I wonder if Eleni loves Jani.’

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