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Stress as a proclitic in Modern Greek

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Abstract

Virtually all past tense forms of the Greek verb are characterised by antepenultimate stress. This fact is problematic for standard views of the prosody–morphology interface in Greek, for which it is usually assumed that inflectional categories cannot uniquely determine the stress pattern of a word. Furthermore, antepenultimate stress is not otherwise known as an effect of affixal morphology. It is proposed that we can understand the behaviour of past tense if we assume that past tense is a proclitic consisting of a segmentally empty foot only. It is shown how this analysis fits in with our current morphosyntactic and phonological knowledge of the structure of the Greek verb.

Keywords: Phonology; Morphosyntax; Stress; Modern Greek

1. Introduction

Past tense forms of verbs in Modern Greek, such as the imperfective and the aorist, are characterised by having antepenultimate stress[1]:

(1) *ɣrafo* 'I write'

Present	Imperfective	Aorist
ɣráf-o	é-ɣraf-a	é-ɣraps-a
ɣráf-is	é-ɣraf-es	é-ɣraps-es
ɣráf-i	é-ɣraf-e	é-ɣraps-e
ɣráf-ume	ɣráf-ame	ɣráps-ame
ɣráf-ete	ɣráf-ate	ɣráps-ate
ɣráf-un(e)	ɣráf-ane / é-ɣraf-an	ɣráps-ane / é-ɣraps-an

This seemingly simple observation causes a number of serious problems for current theories of the prosody–morphology interface, which extend beyond the analysis of Modern Greek proper. In the first place, cases where the exponence of inflection is accentual are rare in the literature,[2] and the Greek case raises the question whether and how 'floating' word stress can be represented as an independent inflectional morpheme. Secondly, previous analyses of Modern Greek stress, mostly based on nouns, have suggested that lexical stress on roots always overrides lexical stress on inflectional suffixes (see Revithiadou, 1999, 2007; Burzio and Tantalou, 2006; Apoussidou, 2003, for a variety of views). Yet in the case of the past tense, inflectional stress must be strong enough to override all root specifications, since

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[2] A case in point may be Russian; but like Greek, the effects seem to be restricted to verbs. See e.g. Melvold (1990).

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all verbal roots show this behaviour for all persons and numbers. Finally, the stress triggered by the past tense morpheme is of an interesting nature: it is on the antepenultimate syllable, and if such a syllable is missing, it forces it into existence, by triggering an 'augment' *e-*. No other phonological or morphological rule in Modern Greek has this force.

In this paper, I argue that these puzzles can be solved by assuming that the phonological exponence of the functional head ([Past]) Tense in Greek is a floating foot which syntactically precedes the stem. Empirically, this paper adds a new domain to the study of prosody–morphology interaction, since the details of Greek verbal stress have not been taken into account in the literature so far. Theoretically, I concentrate on two representational implications of this proposal, both from the point of view of phonology — what does a floating stress marker look like? — and from the point of view of the phonology–syntax interface — what does the syntactic structure look like, and how is it mirrored in the phonology?

An important aim of this paper is to show that a principled analysis of stress in the past tense is possible in Greek, based on the following principles of the interface between phonology and morphology.

First, morphology is additive and morpheme-based. That is to say, we expect morphological complexity to be reflected in the phonology: if word A consists of stem B and affix C, we expect A to be more complex than B phonologically.

Secondly, morphological structure is also otherwise reflected in the phonology. That is to say, morphological headedness is reflected in phonological headedness and morphological boundaries are reflected in phonological boundaries.

These principles seem to work for Greek nouns, as will be outlined in the next section; although the data on verbs look problematic at first sight, we will argue that they actually fit into the picture very nicely in the sections that follow.

2. Lexical stress in Greek

Greek word stress has been the topic of quite some research in the past few years (Malikouti-Drachman and Drachman, 1989; Revithiadou, 1999, 2007; Drachman and Malikouti-Drachman, 1999; Burzio and Tantalou, 2006; Apoussidou, 2003). Although there is no absolute convergence on the precise analysis, it is safe to extract a few generalisations from the literature, which has thus far concentrated on stress in nouns.

There is consensus that stress is lexical in Greek, in the sense that it is largely unpredictable by phonological criteria such as syllable weight or vowel quality, and dependent on lexical specification instead. In particular, some words have stress on the final syllable, some on the penultimate, and some on the antepenultimate syllable[3]:

(2) a. aɣorá 'market'
b. stafíða 'raisin'
c. θálasa 'sea'

In this section, I will briefly discuss both the phonology and the morphology of the Greek accentual system in nouns. I cannot go into all the details, but we need this background information, since most views of Greek stress now are based on stress in nouns.

2.1. The phonology of nominal stress

There is one important observation on the lexical assignment of stress, in all categories of Greek words: it is restricted by a three-syllable window (at least in the standard language, which is discussed here). Stress can fall on any of the last three syllables, but not on any other syllable of the word.

There are two types of evidence for this generalisation: static evidence from the distribution in the lexicon, and dynamic evidence from stress shift.

As to the former, there are no words such as *[sérvitoros] (cf. [servitóros] 'waiter') in the native lexicon. As to the latter, clitics induce what is called 'enclisis of stress', when added to words with antepenultimate stress (Nespor and Vogel, 1986; Holton et al., 2006):

(3) a. ɣónðola 'gondola' → ɣónðolá-mu 'my gondola'
b. o ɣítonas 'the neighbour' → o ɣítonáz mas 'our neighbour'
c. apénandi 'opposite' → apénandí mas 'opposite us'
d. xárise 'give' (IMP) → xárisé mu to 'give it to me'
e. (cf. stafíða 'raisin' → stafíða-mu 'my raisin' without 'enclisis of stress')

[3] In this paper, I give transcriptions in IPA.