

## Contrastivity in Pontic Greek

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## Abstract

Efforts to impose linguistic uniformity have resulted in significant loss of dialectal variation in Greece thus rendering Greek dialectal syntax difficult to study. The present article aims to shed light on an understudied area of Greek dialectal syntax, namely the organization of information structure in Pontic Greek. Through empirical work, it is argued that [contrast] is an autonomous structural notion (in line with [Vallduví and Vilkuna, 1998](#); [Molnár, 2002](#)) in Pontic Greek rather than a sub-feature of Focus, as traditionally held for Standard Modern Greek. In particular, it is claimed that Pontic Greek (i) employs a rich particle system to express contrast; (b) CLLD does not have the same pragmatic import as in Standard Modern Greek, and; (c) “pa”-phrases are almost exclusively associated with a non-exhaustive reading, whereas focus movement is always associated with an exhaustive one; (d) information focus is obligatorily in the left periphery. On the basis of our findings we argue that there is evidence in favour of a Contrast projection in the CP domain.

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## 1. Introduction

The contribution of the present article is twofold: (a) descriptively, it aims to contribute to the mapping of syntactic microvariation by analysing a currently largely under-discussed area of Greek dialectal syntax, namely the organisation of information structure in Pontic Greek (but cf. [Setatos, 1994](#); [Drettas, 1997, 2000](#)); (b) theoretically, the central aim of the paper is to address the role of contrast in the theory of grammar and the impact of contrast on linguistic structure. In particular, we investigate the possibility of contrast combining with focus and topic, which, in turn, causes us to query the status of contrast in grammar: should contrast be treated as a sub-feature of focus and topic, or as a separate feature of information structure (cf. [Repp and Cook, 2010](#))? The answer to this question is controversial (cf. [Rizzi, 1997](#); [Molnár, 2002](#) for two different approaches). In the present article, we aim to shed some light on the issue by investigating contrast in Pontic Greek and comparing it with contrast in a cognate variety: Standard Modern Greek (SMG).

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Earlier accounts of SMG have argued for a designated focus projection in the left periphery, similar to Hungarian focus (Alexiadou, 1999; Baltazani and Jun, 1999; Baltazani, 2002; Tsimpli, 1990, 1995, *inter alios*), as in (1)a–(1)b, unless there is contrastive reading of the corrective type, as in (1)c–(1)d, in which case they can appear post-verbally too:

- (1) a. Ti efaje o Janis? (SMG)  
 what eat.Past.3SG the.NOM John.NOM?  
 Tin tiropita i tus lukumaðes?  
 the.ACC cheese pie.ACC or the.ACC doughnuts.ACC  
 ‘What did John eat? The cheese pie or the doughnuts?’
- b. TIN TIROPITA efaje o Janis (oxi tus lukumaðes).  
 the.ACC cheese pie.ACC eat.Past.3SG the.NOM John.NOM (not the doughnuts)  
 ‘It is the cheese pie that John ate (not the doughnuts).’
- c. O Janis aýorase axlaðja.  
 the.NOM John.NOM buy.Past.3SG pears.ACC  
 ‘John bought pears.’
- d. Aýorase MILA o Janis (ke oxi axlaðja)  
 buy.Past.3SG apples.ACC the.NOM John.ACC and not pears.ACC  
 ‘John bought apples (and not pears).’

On the other hand, in SMG, information focus is generally associated with an *in situ* realisation (but cf. Gryllia, 2008; Haidou, 2012 and the discussion in section 3.2 for why information focus may obtain in the left periphery as well), as shown in (2):

- (2) a. Ti efaje o Janis? (SMG)  
 what eat.Past.3SG the.NOM John.NOM  
 ‘What did John eat?’
- b. (O Janis) efaje mila (o Janis).<sup>2</sup>  
 (the.NOM John.NOM) eat.Past.3SG apples.ACC (the.NOM John.NOM)  
 ‘John ate apples.’
- c. ??Mila efaje o Janis.  
 apples.ACC eat.Past.3SG the.NOM John.NOM  
 ‘John ate apples.’

Despite the fact that contrastive and information focus have different syntactic reflexes in SMG, contrastive topics do not (cf. Alexopoulou, 1996), as shown in (3), since they combine both the OV order, typically associated with contrastive focus, and CLLD, frequently associated with topichood in SMG:

- (3) a. Pu tus iðe? (SMG)  
 where them see.Past.3SG  
 ‘Whom did he see where?’
- b. To Jani ton iðe sto sinema, ti Maria  
 the.ACC John.ACC him see.Past.3SG to.the cinema the.ACC Maria.ACC  
 sto staðmo ...  
 to.the station  
 ‘He saw John at the cinema and Maria at the station.’
- c. \*Iðe to Jani ...  
 see.Past.3SG the.ACC John.ACC

(Alexopoulou, 1996:56)

Interestingly, in Pontic Greek, the strategy which is traditionally considered to denote contrastive topics (cf. Drettas, 1997) is syntactically distinct from the one in SMG, that is, Pontic Greek employs the particle *pa*, as shown in (4)<sup>3</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> For what we demonstrate here the position of the subject is not crucial although ultimately relevant; on SVO with the subject in spec-TP/TopP, cf. Alexiadou (1999); on SVO in answering a *wh*-question that triggers object focus, cf. Gryllia (2008); on VOS, cf. Sifaki (2013) and references therein.

<sup>3</sup> Given that: (i) there is no formal writing system for Pontic Greek, and; (ii) the data come from sources which use different writing/transliteration systems or none at all (in the case of oral data), all the examples discussed here are transliterated in a uniform way.

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