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High Vowel Loss in the South-Greek dialect of Agrinio: Acoustic analysis within the framework of Dialect Contact

With this paper, we present the study of High Vowel Loss in the dialect Of Agrinio (South Greece), as well as our effort to interpret the realisation of the phenomenon within the Dialect Contact framework.

High Vowel Loss –i.e. the deletion of unstressed [i] & [u]- has been defined as one of the few stereotypical characteristics of Northern Greek dialects, the isogloss that splits Greece into two main areas, i.e. Northern Greek dialects, that delete unstressed [i]s & [u]s, even within the prosodic word (as in: /ðikos#mu/ “mine” → [θkozm]), and Southern Greek dialects, which do not show High Vowel Loss, especially in the middle of the prosodic word (as: /ðikos#mu/ “mine” → [ðikozm]), (Newton 1972 & Trudgill 2003 among others).

Nevertheless, acoustic analysis on casual speech of 60 informants (10' from each informant, or 10 hours of casual speech altogether) verified the existence of High Vowel Loss in a Southern Greek dialect, i.e. the dialect of Agrinio.

Linguistic parameters (as the variant of the deletion –four different variants of the phenomenon-, the location of the variant within the prosodic word, its location in relation to the lexical stress, the surrounding consonants –and consequently the possible consonantal clusters- the type of word's grammatical category, as well as the word itself) were taken into consideration, as well as social parameters (like age, gender, education/social group, homogenous Vs mixed origin, as well as neighbourhood status).

Our analysis shows:

- i. the existence of four different variants of the phenomenon of High Vowel Loss, from non-deletion to full deletion. The other two intermediate variants are vowel reduction and deletion with trace.
- ii. The correlation of deletion with trace of [i] with particular morphological units, (like the articles [ti] [tis] [tu]), as well as between a consonant_[+stop] and its next consonant, where the trace of the deletion seems to block the creation of an homosyllabus_{C_{+stop}C} cluster.
- iii. The gradience of the phenomenon, as it has also been found by other similar acoustic analyses on Northern Greek dialects (Topintzi & Baltazani 2012, Kainada & Baltazani 2015, Lengeris et. al. 2016, Παπαζαχαρίου 2019). Nevertheless, our study further reveals a sociolinguistic correlation, i.e. highly educated young people from new and mixed neighbourhoods produce significantly smaller percentages of deletion with trace and full deletion in contrast to middle-aged/old speakers from old neighbourhoods.

The statistically different behavior between well educated, young speakers from new and mixed neighborhoods and old people with low education from the old neighborhoods can be interpreted as part of the process of dialect levelling (Trudgill 1986), especially after 60s, when many new incomers moved in the city, mainly in the new neighborhoods that were created at that time.

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