Variation in word formation in situations of language contact: evidence from Cappadocian Greek

Dimitra Melissaropoulou
University of Patras
dmelissa@upatras.gr

Variation as a fundamental property of language is strongly related to diversification and language change resulting from either external or internal motivation. Undoubtedly, recent linguistic research, possibly as a reaction to the traditional historical linguistics approach, has favored greatly the value of external, i.e. contact explanations as a source of variation and change (for relevant discussion see among others Thomason 2001, 2010, Matras 2010, Heine and Kuteva 2010). Nevertheless, although variation and change in inflectional morphology as a contact induced phenomenon has been treated and various claims have been put forward (see among others Gardani 2008, Hickey 2010 and references therein), there is little or no awareness on the existence of studies treating grammatical replication in the domain of word formation and more specifically, in derivational processes, i.e. prefixation and suffixation.

The aim of this paper is to put prominently under scrutiny the issue of variation in the process of derivation i.e. prefixation and suffixation in situations of language contact. As a case-in-point, we examine Cappadocian Greek, a Modern Greek dialect that is often highlighted in the relevant literature as a prototypical example of heavy borrowing, referring to ‘overwhelming long-term cultural pressure’ (Thomason & Kaufman 1988: 50) due to contact with the agglutinative Altaic Turkish.

To this end, the phenomena that are put under scrutiny are the following: a) the process of prefixation. While prefixation is a very productive word formation process in all different varieties of Greek, including the standard, (e.g. trooV ‘to eat’ > paraPref-trooV ‘to eat to exaggeration’), Cappadocian Greek does not display productive -but rather very few lexicalized- prefixed word forms under the influence of the suffixing Turkish language. b) The restricted number of derivational suffixes in use (focusing on deverbal and evaluative suffixes). For example in South Cappadocian the range of deverbal suffixes denoting action or the result of an action denoted by the verbal base have been dwindled to –ma suffix. E.g. the deverbal noun that is formed from the verb pījeno ‘to go’, in Ulagats Cappadocian pījeno is not *peni mos ‘going’ in correspondence with the elsewhere found pījemos but pēnima (cf. Janse forthcoming).

Our data show that language contact cannot account equally adequately for both phenomena. Whilst loss of prefixation can be alluded to the contact factor in relation with typological affinity and markedness, confinement of the range of the suffixes in use and minimization of rivalry among suffixes is accounted for as one of the lesser or greater rearrangements of the specific system paving the way into simplification in the paradigmatic relations in the spirit of Trudgill (2009, 2011), i.e. loss of redundancy, through minimization of rivalry among suffixes with similar function. In this direction, naturally the pressure that was exerted to Cappadocian by the dominant system intro regression was significant.

1 The data under investigation are extracted from the available written sources (cf. Dawkins 1916, Kesisoglou 1951, Fosteris & Kesisoglou 1960, Mavrochalyvidis & Kesisoglou 1960, Sasse 1992, Janse forthcoming, etc.) and the corpora of the Laboratory of Modern Greek dialects at the University of Patras.
The above discussion aims to contribute, on the one hand, to the research on the role and the limits of the contact factor to a word formation process in terms of grammatical pattern replication, while, on the other hand, to lend further support to the thesis that combinatorial accounts, addressing both internal and external developments widen the perspective and offer the most plausible explanations for linguistic innovations in language contact settings (see among others Poplack & Levey 2010, Matras 2010, Heine and Kuteva 2010, Azucena 2013).

Selected References