

Grammar analysis of spoken Greek discourse

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1. Literature review

An axiom of linguistics is that of biological, historical and functional priority of spoken discourse (Γούτσος 2014a: 211). However, despite of this axiom the systematic study of spontaneous verbal communication began only four decades ago, and its analysis was largely influenced by the analysis of the written texts. Research in English has already produced significant results so far by recording the characteristics of the spoken discourse and distinguishing it from those of the written. The interest in the grammar of spoken discourse focuses on the lexicogrammatical features of the context and the forms of the clausal structures (Beeching 2016, Biber et al 1999, Blanche-Benveniste et al. 1990, McCarthy 1998). Similarly, the research in conversation analysis has contributed particularly in describing the structure of a conversational event (turn-taking organization, self-repairs or repairs etc.) and the language strategies used by the interlocutors (Pomeranz 1984, Raymond 2003, Sacks 1987, 1992, Schegloff 1988, 2007).

In Greek literature respective studies are missing, while the newer grammars of the Modern Greek language (Mackridge 1990, Holton et al., 1999, Κλαίρης-Μπαμπινιώτης 2004) did not use spoken data to the extent that it was referred to the original goals of describing both formal and everyday speech (Holton et al., 1999). They are based mainly on material from books, magazines and newspapers, and secondarily on spoken data (Κλαίρης-Μπαμπινιώτης 2004: XII). Nevertheless, the development of corpus linguistics enabled the collection and analysis of a large volume of data, resulting in the publication of a first volume (Παυλίδου 2015) by the Institute of Modern Greek Studies focused on spoken Greek and based on its corpus of spoken discourse. This volume is the result of a ten-year research and covers a variety of categories, such as conversational structure and organization, negotiation and disagreement, repetition and rephrasing, and the identity construction through discourse. The collective work *O proforikos logos sta Ellinika* (The Spoken discourse in Greek) (Γούτσος 2014b) emphasizes more on grammar based on spontaneous conversations of the CGT (Corpus of Greek Texts) and studies specific lexical and grammatical features as well as ideological issues and educational applications.

Despite these efforts, however, a thorough study of the spoken grammar has not yet been done for the Greek language and the proposed dissertation is intended to cover this gap.

2. Data and methodology

The data will consist solely of spontaneous conversations retrieved by the Corpus of Greek Texts, as well as others that will be collected during the course of the research. CGT is an electronic base of contemporary Greek texts that covers a wide range of genres and "aims at linguistic analysis and educational applications" (Γούτσος & Φραγκάκη 2015: 49). It has a total of 30 million words, of which approximately 10% are spoken texts freely available on its website. The analysis will be quantitative on the one hand, making use of corpus analysis tools to identify the frequent occurrences of linguistic elements in absolute terms and in comparison to other genres and qualitative close analysis on the other hand for structures that are realized in various different ways and cannot be easily identified by keywords or concordances.

3. Research questions

Speech is often characterized as simple in terms of grammar with fragmentary and elliptical sentences, repetitions, and a small number of vocabulary, while the comparison with the written text characterizes it as inferior. However, the literature suggests that it is just as complex as writing (Leech 2000, Biber et al., 2011), and disagrees only as to whether spoken and written grammars are two different grammars or one with variations. Leech (2000) supports the second version, but emphasizes shared context and real-time processing, considering that they have a greater impact on conversation than grammar, to which it attaches a smaller role.

Therefore, the role of grammar in a conversational situation and its relation to speech is a matter at hand. For example, if there are fixed and stable structures or there is a dialectical relationship between structures and speech will be crucial in the course of this dissertation. The factors of time pressure and lack of design that characterize the conversation are added to the above considerations in order to be seen in this light too.

To address these questions, it will be given a detailed description of the lexicogrammatical features of the spoken discourse at the basic levels of language: in the syntactic, discursive and pragmatic. At the syntactic level, the structure of the

utterance, the basic structural component of the spoken discourse and the functions that it performs will be investigated. It should be noted that the model of McCarthy & Carter (1994) already attempts to categorize the forms of utterances. Therefore, its scope of application and further specificities that arise in Greek data will be identified. Some interesting issues here are the appearance or not of subordinate clauses on spoken discourse and their frequency, as well as the recognition of the various functions of grammatical features, such as *που* (pu) and *να* (na), which raise a variety of concerns. Another issue is to trace the initial units in each turn, their form and role, by looking at whether they are lexical or grammatical features, if they are combined with other units and what is their contribution to the conversation.

At the discursive level, I will analyze the coherent structure of the spoken discourse. Taking the most frequent coherent mechanisms, like repetition or ellipsis, I will reexamine them as part of the quantitative analysis. Conjunctions shows interest too, since in different contexts they function as discourse markers and not as connectives. Thus a question is which conjunctions change their function and in what context.

At the pragmatic level, I will examine the most frequent tenses used in spoken discourse and how they are related with communicative interaction, the role of modality and how it reflects the linguistic behavior of the speakers. In addition, deixis and presuppositions will be part of the research as their use in verbal communication is frequent.

4. Possible conclusions and applications

Some first possible conclusions that are expected from the description of the spoken grammar are the redefinition of traditional grammar, as well as the emergence of new functions of the various forms. It is also expected to show the importance of grammar and its relationship to the structure of the conversation, as well as the advantages of corpus analysis, which offer the possibility of a new, different view in the data.

A fruitful ground for applying the findings of this research is the language lesson in secondary education, in which the spoken discourse is always treated in comparison to the written and presented as its inferior form, as Μιχάλης (2015) has pointed out. However, if the aim is to cultivate the communication skills of the students, it is necessary to teach the spoken discourse with its own rules and its own

structures. In this way, students can come in contact with the forms of spoken Greek, the structural units, the reference markers and the discourse markers and their differences from the conjunctions, among others, acquiring metalanguage knowledge.

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