

Verbal aspect in Heritage Greek across majority languages

Vicky Rizou
Humboldt University, Berlin

This paper investigates to which extent the varieties of heritage Greek in Germany and in the US deviate from typical monolingual speakers of Modern Greek in the domain of grammatical aspect in formal and informal register.

Aspectual distinctions are realized in different ways in Greek, English and German. Greek distinguishes between perfective and imperfective aspect (progressive and habitual) whereas in English there is a morphological distinction between the perfective and the progressive aspect (Comrie 1976). On the contrary, verbal aspect in German is not morphologically marked, it is solely lexically marked with aspectual modifiers. The critical age of the acquisition of grammatical aspect is the 7th and the 8th year in L1 Greek (Kaltsa 2012) while in L1 English the acquisition of grammatical aspect begins earlier, at the age of 5 (Wagner 2002).

A number of studies have been conducted testing the acquisition of aspectual distinctions by heritage bilingual and monolingual children in Greek. Andreou and Tsimpli (2017) claim that bilingual Greek-English and Greek-German children (8-12 y.o.) prefer to use the perfective aspect with telic activities and the imperfective with atelic motions. The authors state that the bilingual children are driven by the semantics of the verbs in their aspectual preferences and that the lexical aspect is acquired before the grammatical one. Dosi (2017) observed difficulties with the production of the habitual value in (non) heritage Greek- English bilingual children (8-12 y.o.) while the perfective aspect is more prevalent. Similar evidence comes from Zombolou (2011) who shows that the perfective aspect is acquired first and it is overused and overgeneralized by Greek Heritage Speakers (henceforth HS) who speak Argentinean Spanish (participants 13-97 y.o.)

The present study investigates the aspectual distinctions in two different Greek HS age groups namely adolescents (14-18 y.o.) (N=43) and adults (24- 35 y.o.) (N= 36). Methodology: A narration task of a fictional event in both formal and informal register accompanied with the respective setting in oral and written form was held. An elicited production task followed (designed by Agathopoulou and Papadopoulou 2009 and modified by Dosi 2016) which is targeted to elicit perfective- imperfective distinctions in specific environments.

Our results thus far suggest that HS face problems with the aspectual distinctions. Similarly to what was found in previous studies, we observe that HS with American English (AE) as dominant language (DL) tend to overgeneralize perfective especially in habitual environments. However several of these speakers in the elicited production task seem to also have problems with perfective environments using imperfective forms instead. HS tend to use the imperfective aspect (in alliance with the semantics of the sentences) with telic events and the perfective aspect with the atelic events.

During the narration task participants often produce *na-* subjunctive complement in the context of perception verbs (1) instead of the required factive complements introduced by *pu* 'that' (2) (Roussou 1992). *Na* is a mood marker for subjunctive and the main verb controls the Aspect realisation of the verb of the embedded *na*-clause. (cf. Malagardi 1994).

(1) * <u>Ida</u> ton anthropon na treksei	(2) <u>Ida</u> ton anthropon pu etrekse
Past Perf.	Past Perf.
Saw the man to run	Saw the man that run
I saw a man running	

Overall, we find that HS with German as their dominant language perform better than HS with AE as their DL. This is surprising in view of the fact that German does not mark Aspect morphologically. This suggests that the critical factor is not the cross-linguistic differences (Internal dynamics Hypothesis- Pires 2012) I argue that it is related to the literacy level. The curriculum in the German- Greek bilingual schools is quite enriched with lessons that are held in Greek (20 hours per week) in comparison with the curriculum at schools in the US which don't exceed 5 hours per week. Consequently, adults and adolescents who have visited those schools in Berlin perform like the control group in comparison with the participants in the US whose accuracy is lower. The

importance of literacy level is shown by the fact that HS in Germany with less exposure to Greek (from school and family) perform similarly to HS in the US.

Across register variation the participants performed in the same way and they made similar errors in terms of accuracy.

References:

Comrie, B. (1976) *Aspect. An introduction to the study of verbal aspect and related problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dosi, I. (2017) *Asymmetries in grammatical aspect in (non-) heritage Greek-English bilingual children: Evidence from comprehension and production tasks*. *Studies in Greek linguistics* 37, 213-226.

Andreou, M. & Tsimpli, I. (2017) *Aspectual distinctions in the narratives of bilingual children*. *De Gruyter Mouton* 55 (3), 305- 324.

Kaltsa, M. (2012) *The production of aspect by L1 Learners of Greek*. *De Gruyter Mouton* 20 (2), 233-246.

Malagardi, I. (1994) Problems of Greek aspect morphology and the identification of projection for tense and aspect. In *Themes in Greek Linguistics*. John Benjamins, vol. 117, 161-167

Wagner, L. (2002) *Understanding completion entailments in the absence of agency cues*. *J. Child Lang.* 29, 109-125.