

The Greek dialects of Southern Italy: an overview

Io Manolessou
University of Patras

*ta dekatrīa choria, pou este isan
ennea, ce simmeri in' ofto, ce avri
methavri en isserome posa theloun
mini...*

D. Tondi, *Glossa: La lingua greca
del Salento*, Noci 1935, p. 92

The Greek dialect enclaves in Southern Italy have been a major topic of discussion (and dispute) for historians, historical linguists and dialectologists for about two centuries.¹ The present paper aims to provide an overview and evaluation of the basic data concerning these dialects, under two main headings: a) the current status and sociolinguistic situation of the Southern Italian dialects: language contact, language obsolescence and chances of survival; and b) their history and origin: the controversy surrounding their origin. The geographical and sociolinguistic facts are relatively well known (although a comprehensive survey in the English language is lacking), but, as it is argued here, the historical linguistic question is in need of an in-depth re-evaluation, in the light of our more complete knowledge of Southern Italian Greek and our better comprehension of sociolinguistics and the mechanisms of language change.

¹ To be precise, since 1821, when a German traveller in Italy came across speakers of the dialect and published a specimen of their speech in a philological periodical (Witte 1856 [1821]).

1. Synchrony

1.1 Location

The Greek-speaking enclaves are located in the southernmost edges of the Italian peninsula, “the toe and heel of Italy” in the words of Robert Browning (1983: 132), that is Calabria and Puglia respectively. The Greek-speaking enclave of Calabria (“Bovesia”) was until recently made up of nine villages, on the slopes of the Aspromonte Mountains, to the south-east of Reggio di Calabria, and covered about 230 square km. The villages are: Amendolea, Bova (superiore), the old capital of the Greek area, Gallicianò, Bova Marina, Condofuri, Roghudi, Roccaforte, Chorio di Roccaforte and Chorio Roghudi (Karanastasis 1984: ια´). A few decades ago, the size of the Greek-speaking area was three times as big, and in the Middle Ages it must have encompassed the whole of S. Calabria, as well as the opposite coast of Sicily.

Nowadays, however, even in the areas where Greek is still spoken, it is spoken by a small percentage of the population, typically of advanced age. According to recent statistics (Telmon 1992: 45), there were about 11,000 Greek-speakers in 1935, which had been reduced to 3,000 in 1980, whereas nowadays there cannot be more than 500 native speakers of the language remaining in the mountain villages (Katsoyannou 1999b: 607). Since the 1950s, the Greek-speaking population has declined by 70%. The Greek dialect has died out in Bova, Bova Marina and Condofuri, and various natural disasters, such as floods and landslides during the 70s, have caused the population of Roghudi and Chorio Roghudi to abandon their homes and settle amongst Italian-speakers elsewhere. According to Petropoulou (1995: 35), Roghudi is (or was, ten years ago) a phantom village, inhabited only by a single old man, while the native population now lives in new villages on the coast (Roghudi Nuovo, Bova Marina, Condofuri Marina, Melito di Porto Salvo). In Reggio itself there are neighbourhoods of solid Greek-speaking populations, immigrants from the abandoned villages (Petropoulou 1995: 37). Only in Gallicianò can one still find a Greek-speaking community that is

“alive”, with a strong nucleus of native speakers, mainly because of the village’s inaccessible position, high in the mountains, and the absence of roads – until recently, the only way to reach it was by donkey. This is the reason why the only modern linguistic description of the dialect of Calabria was based on the Gallicianò variety (Katsoyannou 1995a).

The Greek-speakers in the Salento area of Puglia present a similar image of rapid decrease, although they seem to be resisting more strongly: there are about 20,000 speakers reported, and no deserted villages. The Greek-speaking area, *Grecia Salentina*, consists of nine villages here as well: Calimera, Castrignano dei Greci, Corigliano d’Otranto, Martano, Martignano, Melpignano, Soleto, Sternatia and Zollino (Karanastasis 1984: ια’). In the later Middle Ages, all the area below Lecce must have been Greek-speaking. Here, as in Calabria, the native speakers of the dialect are elderly, and in some villages (Melpignano, Soleto) the dialect has died out completely. But, in contrast to Calabria, the environment is an ally and not an enemy of the Greek language: Salento is a fertile plain, currently experiencing a period of economic and touristic development, something which has repercussions on the prestige of the Greek dialect.

1.2 Speakers

The sociolinguistic environment is not at all conducive to the survival of the Italo-Greek dialects, which are dying out despite all revival efforts. In linguistic terms, one is dealing with a case of language obsolescence and death:² under the pressure of a more prestigious linguistic variety, a language undergoes massive structural change, and is slowly abandoned by its speakers. To be more precise, this is not simply a bilingual situation, a low vs. a high prestige language, but a multilingual one: the Greek dialect has to compete not only with Italian, but with the local Romance Calabrian or Puglian dialect as well. If we consider that even Italian itself is not homogeneous and has at least two registers, a standard/

² In the definition of McMahon (1994: 285).

official one and a local/everyday variety, no less than four linguistic varieties are involved. According to Martino (1980: 338), the linguistic environment in S. Calabria takes the following form:

- 1) Standard Italian
- 2) Local variety of standard Italian (*italiano regionale*)
- 3) Local Calabrian dialect (*dialetto*)
- 4) Italiot Greek.

Only form (3) is available to all social strata. The lower social classes are excluded from forms (1) and (2), while form (4) is passively known to about a quarter of the population, but used actively by only 10%, all being above 40 years of age and belonging to the lower classes. A recent survey in schools (Profili 1999b) has shown that out of 327 schoolchildren, 90% never use Greek at home, and only one claimed to know more than a hundred words. It must be mentioned, however, that other researches (Petropoulou 1995) indicate that Greek-speakers may be more numerous than those mentioned in official statistics: the locals tend to conceal the fact that they can speak the dialect, either because it is considered "inferior" or because they have had enough of being treated like "guinea pigs". The casual visitor will be unable to ascertain the level of usage of the Greek dialect. Only an extended stay, familiarisation with the locals, and participation in their everyday activities can give a true picture of their linguistic behaviour.

The linguistic situation in Puglia is similar to that in Calabria. According to Profili (1985), three linguistic varieties are involved:

- 1) Italian, used in administration, education, and the media.
- 2) The local Romance dialect of Puglia, used in local commerce and business, in street conversation, in public places and cafés, and
- 3) The Greek dialect (*Grico*) used only in the family and especially by aged members.

The main issue in such a multilingual (and diglossic) environment is that the presence of the Romance dialect denies the dying *Grico* the main reason of resistance of all minority languages:

communicative situations which require its use. Classic diglossia³ takes the following form: there is a “high” variety, the language of the state and of literature, which enjoys high prestige. This contrasts with a “low” variety, the code used in social interactions between friends and in the family, which guarantees a social identity, group solidarity, a sense of belonging and of being somebody “special”. For this reason, the low variety also has prestige, which, however, is covert as opposed to the overt prestige of the high variety. In the case of S. Italy, the linguistic roles which confer high prestige are assumed by Italian, whereas the covert prestige belongs to the local Romance dialect, which is the main instrument of everyday communication and social integration. This leaves no specific role for the Greek dialect to play, except in extreme situations of “secret” communication (Petropoulou [1995] uses the term *cryptolalie*: parents not wishing to be understood by their children, businessmen wanting to exchange a message in front of an interested third party, etc.).

In addition to that, one must consider that these dialects also lack the support of a separate national, religious or cultural identity. Sociolinguistic research (interviews and questionnaires addressed to both schoolchildren and adults) in the area shows that the inhabitants of these regions consider themselves Italians and not Greeks,⁴ and therefore do not require something that will differentiate them from the surrounding Italian society – quite the contrary.

Apart from these factors, which reduce the resistance of the Greek dialects against their competitors, there are additional ones which actively lead them to extinction. The most important one is

³ In the standard sense of Ferguson (1959), diglossia involves two varieties of the *same* language, differing in prestige and register (e.g., in the case of Greek, *katharevousa* vs. *dimotiki*). The situation of the Greek dialects of S. Italy, where *different* languages compete in prestige, can be described as diglossic in the extended sense of Fishman (1980).

⁴ On this issue see Profili 1999a. Characteristically, Dizikirikis (1968: 1), who visited S. Italy in the sixties, reports that the less educated of the Greek-speakers were not even aware that their language was of Greek origin – they believed it to be an aberrant *Italian* dialect.

that with the passage of time the Greek dialects have acquired a strongly negative social character. Because their speakers usually belonged to the lower strata of society (farmers, shepherds, manual workers), and came from poor and isolated areas, the language they spoke became a synonym of social inferiority and an obstacle to social advancement. Very frequently the speakers themselves refrained from teaching their language to their children, or even actively prohibited them to use it.⁵

We are thus dealing not simply with a case of language death, but of language suicide, a situation where the speakers themselves no longer strive to transmit their language to the next generation:⁶ the result is that whereas until the 1930s the first/native language of all the inhabitants of the area was the Greek dialect, because of the systematic avoidance of transmission to the next generation, everyone's first language is now the local Romance dialect.

⁵ The sociolinguistic situation in S. Italy is described in detail in Martino 1980; Telmon 1992; Katsoyannou 1999a.

⁶ This is not the standard definition of "language suicide": most sociolinguistic studies use this term in order to describe a situation where "the less prestigious of two closely-related languages co-existing in a community progressively borrows words and construction from the more prestigious language, until the two eventually become almost indistinguishable. The less prestigious language consequently appears to commit suicide by absorbing more and more material from its socially superior neighbour" (McMahon 1994: 287). It would perhaps be possible to apply this sense of "suicide" to the Greek dialects of S. Italy as well, since it can be demonstrated (Profili 1985) that they are undergoing "romanisation", i.e. massive vocabulary and structural borrowing from the neighbouring Italian dialects. However, a) such an application would need to extend the standard definition, which involves only closely related languages (usually a creole and its parent language, e.g. Trinidadian English vs. standard English, or a dialect vs. a standard variety, e.g. Irish English vs. standard English), whereas Greek and Italian belong to different language families, and b) it is doubtful whether this process of romanisation could ever end up in the virtual indistinguishability of Greek and Italian – Italo-Greek will disappear because it will no longer be spoken, not because it will no longer be different from Italian. In any case, Katsoyannou (1999a: 610-11) uses the term "language suicide" in a completely different sense, according to which the speakers of a language commit linguistic suicide when they consciously decide not to perpetuate it.

Furthermore, the dialects themselves are undergoing very rapid and radical changes due to the irresistible influence of Romance (Profili 1985).

Apart from the negative sociolinguistic environment, a number of additional factors contribute to the obsolescence of the Italiot dialects:⁷

Economic factors: Calabria is one of the poorest regions in Europe, and S. Italy cannot, in general, compete with Northern Italy in terms of economic affluence. Thus, the transition from a rural to an urban economy that took place in the twentieth century hit the Greek-speaking areas hard: a large percentage of their population immigrated to the industrialised north, abroad, or even to the nearby Italian cities, in search of work. Furthermore, the almost total isolation that had “protected” the Greek dialects until that time⁸ was broken after the Second World War: along with economic progress (building of roads, spread of the media) came the social progress of the Italian state; the result was compulsory school education (since 1924) and compulsory military service, which enforced the learning of Italian and the realisation that the native Greek idiom is inadequate or even inimical to social adaptation and progress.

Historical factors: The first real blow against the Greek dialects was struck at the end of the Middle Ages, when the Catholic church banned their use under threat of excommunication (1573 in Calabria, 1621 in Puglia).⁹ The transition from Orthodoxy to Catholicism denied the Greek dialects an important communicative environment. In the twentieth century, secular power

⁷ For details see Karanastasis 1974; Profili 1999a.

⁸ Karatzas (1958: 250-1), who considers the isolation and the lack of roads the most important factor in the survival of Italiot Greek, describes the following characteristic episode: when, on one of his visits to Salento, he was informed that in 1930 the majority of the inhabitants were exclusively Greek-speaking, he asked how they managed to communicate when they visited the local capital, Lecce. The answer, accompanied by an expression of surprise, was “but we never visited Lecce!”

⁹ Interestingly enough, the first Catholic bishop to impose the penalty of excommunication was of Greek origin – a Cypriot. See Longo 1988 for details.

added its strong opposition: fascism, with Mussolini's personal dislike of dialects and his constant efforts for the creation of a homogeneous national state, adopted a very negative stance towards all dialects on Italian soil (Romance or not).¹⁰ Official documents of the period characterise the dialects of Italy as relics of the past, which impede the progress of the new Italian state. Even Gerhard Rohlfs, the most important researcher of the Greek dialects of S. Italy, was refused, in 1935, when he asked permission to organise a conference on the subject (Fanciullo 1997: x).

Natural factors: Calabria is subject to frequent earthquakes and subsequent disasters (landslides etc.). In the last decades there have been several of these, something which has led to the ravaging of many villages.

1.3 Revival efforts

Despite the negative prospects of survival, recent decades have seen a concerted rescue effort, on the part of the Greek-speakers themselves, the Greek state, which has realised their historical importance, and the Italian state, which has included the Greek dialects in its recent law for the protection of linguistic minorities (1999).

First of all, the connotations of social inferiority associated with these dialects have started to recede, and to be replaced by a feeling of pride for their cultural distinctiveness. Of course, this re-evaluation originates mainly from the educated strata of the population, for which the notions "social identity" and "resistance to the centralisation of the Italian state" have some meaning, and not from the rural masses of the population, which constitute the main body of Greek-speakers. Thus one observes the contradictory phenomenon that the main supporters of a language are the social classes which were the first to abandon it (Telmon

¹⁰ Cf. Sanguin (1993: 165): "l'unité politique de l'état italien remonte à plus d'un siècle; elle s'est accompagnée par la naissance d'une action législative et scolaire ayant pour but un rigide monolinguisme. Cette action est devenue particulièrement forte pendant la période fasciste."

1992). This is indeed a phenomenon that often occurs in the case of stigmatised linguistic minorities: the local urban and intellectually higher class, which has irreversibly lost the minority language, is the one trying to “save” it, whereas its real bearers are trying to discard it.

In fact, the latest research data from Salento (Profili 1999b) show that the positive attitude towards Grico has now permeated all the social classes. Revival in Salento has taken the following forms:

1) Language teaching (Orlando 1996, Profili 1999b). Experimental classes in Grico started in 1972, and nowadays they are offered in all villages (there are about 1,000 students). The most serious problem is the lack of a standard writing system and a standard form of the language – each village has its own form, as is natural for an orally transmitted isolated dialect. As an alternative, the Italian state has often opted for the teaching of Standard Modern Greek (Petropoulou 1995: 47). The result was disastrous: first of all, Standard Modern Greek is so different from the Greek dialects of S. Italy that it causes difficulties for those Greek-speakers attempting to learn it, and also creates the impression that there is a very wide distance between them and the Greeks. Second, and more important, it threatens the distinctive form and identity of the Italiot dialects, since its structural and historical similarity with them allows for massive lexical borrowing, and leads to the introduction of hundreds of new words (especially in the cultural and scientific register) unknown to older speakers.

2) Cultural activities: the *Unione dei Greci dell'Italia Meridionale* promotes cooperation between the dozens of cultural clubs and organizations (e.g. “La Jonica” “Zoi ce glossa”, “Cinurio Cosmo”, “Jalò tu Vúa”, “Apodiafázi” and CUMELCA in Calabria, “Glossa-ma”, “Xora-ma”, “Ghetonia”, “V. D. Palumbo” in Puglia, cf. Orlando 1996: 9), and supports the publication of newspapers and calendars. For a considerable time there were a number of radio broadcasts in the local dialect, and it has long

been used for literary and translation activities. Finally, there is considerable internet activity in support of Italiot Greek.

3) State support: the Greek state tries to encourage cultural exchanges with the Greek-speaking villages of S. Italy, summer camps in Greece for Italiots, conferences, etc. The Italian state, as already mentioned, has in the last years increased monetary support, since it has included S. Italian Greek in the law protecting linguistic minorities on Italian soil.

2. Diachrony

2.1. *The debate*

The origin of the S. Italian dialects was a hotly debated issue a few decades ago. In particular, Italian scholarship is unanimous in agreeing that the Greek dialects were planted on Italian soil during the Byzantine period,¹¹ whereas Greek scholarship maintains the Ancient Greek origin of these dialects, which are considered a continuation of the Hellenism of Magna Graecia.¹² The issue is hardly ever discussed nowadays, however, as many scholars view the debate as a “meaningless medical council over a patient’s deathbed” (Fanciullo 1997: x).

The position accepted by most non-Italian and non-Greek scholars¹³ is the following: the Greek dialects of S. Italy are essentially dialects of Modern Greek which participated in the same linguistic evolution as the rest of the Greek language until the late Middle Ages. By virtue of that, they are continuations of the Hellenistic Koine, exactly as Standard Modern Greek and all Modern Greek dialects (with the exception of Tsakonian). However, they show in their structure and vocabulary a few archaic traits that point to the survival of Doric elements within this Koine

¹¹ Older accounts: Parlangelis 1953; Spano 1965. Recent re-affirmations: Carducci 1993; Seriani and Trifone 1994.

¹² Older accounts: Caratzas 1958; Kapsomenos 1977. Recent re-affirmations: Karanastasis 1984, 1992. An overview of the controversy is given in Minniti 1992.

¹³ See Browning 1983: 132; Sanguin 1993: 166; Horrocks 1997: 304-5; Ledgeway 1998: 49.

and thus attest to an uninterrupted Greek presence in Italy since ancient times.

When the S. Italian dialects first became known to the scholarly public, in the nineteenth century, their obvious similarities with Modern Greek and differences from Ancient Greek inevitably led to the conclusion that these are hitherto unknown Modern Greek dialects, relics of the Byzantine colonisation in S. Italy. This was the opinion of the first serious investigator of S. Italian Greek, G. Morosi (1870). Although this opinion was refuted by the venerable father of Greek linguistics, G. N. Hatzidakis, the Byzantine view became generally accepted. Thus, in 1924 the book by Gerhard Rohlfs, *Griechen und Romanen in Unteritalien*, which was based on extensive fieldwork and proposed the ancient Greek origin of these dialects, “exploded in Italy like a bomb” (Fanciullo 2001: 69) and caused strong reactions on the part of Italian linguists.

As it is now admitted in Italy in a more sober spirit (Fanciullo 2001), Rohlfs’s proposal of an uninterrupted Greek culture in S. Italy entailed the denial of the total Latinisation/Romanisation of S. Italy in the centuries that followed the conquest of the Greek city-states by Rome. This denial of the “Latin” and consequently of the “Italian” identity of a large part of Italy came at a historically difficult period: the 1920s and the 1930s, when the comparatively new Italian state was struggling to expand its borders and acquire the form of a contemporary homogenous nation with a single ethnic identity. Apart from the “national” issues, there were two more causes for the general adoption of the Byzantine position:

- 1) The – until recently – inadequate knowledge of the history of the Greek language. Early researchers had not realised that most phonological, morphological and syntactic phenomena that distinguish Ancient from Modern Greek originate not in the medieval/Byzantine period but in the Hellenistic period of the first centuries BC and AD.

- 2) The delayed development of the scientific discipline of sociolinguistics, which is the only one capable of investigating

and interpreting situations of bilingualism, i.e. of co-existence of different languages and nations in the same geographical area. Thus, the issue of the “Greekness” or “Itality” of S. Italy was seen as an absolute black or white distinction, with no realisation of the true situation: the simultaneous presence of both languages for several centuries, and the influence of one on the other (Fanciullo 2001: 70).

2.2 *The argumentation*

The arguments that have been put forward in order to support one or the other position are of two kinds, historical and linguistic. The main focus of the historical argumentation is the information in primary sources: whether or not Byzantine historiography mentions massive migrations to S. Italy, and whether or not one can find inscriptional evidence of Greek for the first four centuries AD (i.e. after the Roman but before the Byzantine conquest).

The first issue is more in favour of the “ancient” position, since in Byzantine sources there are only three mentions of large population movements from Greece to S. Italy during the Byzantine period, none of which sounds particularly convincing, because none involves the critical mass of speakers necessary to induce language shift (for details see Caratzas 1958, Karanastasis 1984: ιζ’-κ’).¹⁴ The second issue is more in favour of the “Byzantine” position, since there are very few inscriptions in the Greek language to be found in S. Italy during Late Antiquity, although a few more have been coming to light in recent years (cf. Fanciullo 2001 and especially Rohlfs 1997: 195-202).

The greater part of the linguistic argumentation comes from the multiplicity of Rohlfs’s publications, but especially his last large work, *Nuovi scavi linguistici nell’antica Magna Grecia*

¹⁴ It has often been argued, however, that population movements from Greece to Italy in the Byzantine period were so frequent that the historians of the period deemed it unnecessary to mention them. Since this argument is impossible to evaluate except by speculations on what a Byzantine historian would consider worth mentioning, or on how many ships and how much time it would take for, say, 15,000 Greeks to cross the Adriatic sea (Fanciullo 2001: 73), it is not further discussed here.

(Rohlf's 1972). An important point must be made here. The historical provenance of the S. Italian dialects urgently requires re-examination and further investigation, because most of the usually mentioned "arguments" are worthless. For some of them there have been recent counter-arguments which have not been properly addressed, since the "ancient" side remains faithful to the established views of past scholars: Rohlf's, Caratzas, Karanastasis etc. It is imperative that the data be re-examined on the basis of a) a more in-depth knowledge of Medieval Greek, because many of the characteristics of S. Italian Greek are medieval, and b) a better knowledge of the local Romance dialects, i.e. Calabrese and Pugliese, as well as of the history of the Italian language.

One can divide the linguistic arguments into five groups, as follows:

1) *Arguments pertaining to the archaism of the S. Italian dialects.* Being peripheral dialects of Greek, the Italiot dialects display several conservative and archaising linguistic characteristics, some of which, allegedly, go back to Ancient Greek, and have not been maintained in other Modern Greek dialects. Some of these archaic characteristics are the following:

a) On the phonological level:

– Retention of Doric long /a/ instead of Attic-Ionic long /e/ in several lexical items, such as λανό (ληνός), παττά (πηκτή), άσαμο (άσημος), κυσπάλα (κυψέλη) (full list in Karanastasis 1984: κγ'-κδ'). There are about 25 such items (four of which appear also in medieval documents from S. Italy, cf. Minas 1994: 37), mostly belonging to the rural-pastoral vocabulary. These constitute the strongest evidence of historical continuity, but they are unfortunately rather limited in number. In general, it is very difficult to pinpoint survivals of Ancient Greek dialects in Modern Greek dialects, and several connections with Doric that have been proposed in the past both for S. Italian and for other Modern Greek dialects (Cretan, Maniot, Rhodian etc.) are controversial (Kontosopoulos 1987: 118).

– Retention of geminate consonants. The double consonants of Classical Greek underwent degemination at some point in the

Hellenistic period, and the only dialects exempt from this phenomenon are the south-eastern dialects of the Dodecanese and Cyprus. Italian linguists reject the Ancient Greek origin of S. Italian geminate consonants, pointing to the evidence of medieval Greek manuscript corpora from S. Italian monasteries, which show fluctuation in the spelling between single and geminate consonants (Colotti 1978, Caracausi 1986). An additional counter-argument is the extensive existence of secondary gemination in S. Italian, i.e. the presence of double consonants where they are not etymologically justified, but are due to the influence of stress accent, to foreign borrowing or to a phenomenon common to Romance S. Italian dialects, known as “raddoppiamento sintattico” (e.g. αφήνω, σώννω, άννηθο, πόσσο, τόσσο, εμμένα, αππίδι). Secondary gemination is also a characteristic of Dodecanesian and Cypriot (Seiler 1957), and until these phenomena are better understood, it is impossible to reject outright the possibility that the geminate consonants of S. Italian do not stem directly from Ancient Greek but from medieval influence of the neighbouring, geminating, Romance dialects.

– Pronunciation of <ζ> as /dz/ and not /z/. The affricate pronunciation of <ζ> in Salento has been taken by Rohlfs as conclusive proof of ancient origin, since, according to him, the sound [dz] does not even exist in the neighbouring Romance dialects. The Italian side (Caracausi 1975) has answered with the counter-argument that this /dz/ is a late evolution from standard Koine and Medieval Greek /z/, similar to secondary evolutions of /dz/ in Dodecanesian dialects such as Karpathos, Symi etc. Here again, the data require a more thorough and unbiased examination: the medieval documents from the Dodecanese and S. Italy need to be compared, and the processes of secondary affrication of /z/ better understood.

– Absence of voicing of stops after nasal consonants. Standard Modern Greek and all of its dialects, without exception, show voicing of the clusters /nt, mp, nk/ to [nd, mb, ng] respectively, a phenomenon that must have arisen again during the Koine period (Dressler 1966; Horrocks 1997: 112). However, the Greek dialect

of Puglia does not possess this characteristic, neither word-internally nor at word boundaries. For example, the words δόντι and βροντή would be pronounced [dóndi] and [vrondí] in Standard Modern Greek and in Calabrian Greek, but [dónti] and [vrontí] in Salento Greek. Similarly, the phrase τον τόπο would be pronounced [tondópo] in Standard Modern Greek and Calabrian Greek, but [to ttópo] in Salento (all examples from Rohlfs 1976). The Italian answer to this argument is not as valid as the objections raised for the previous phenomena: it is claimed that the phenomenon of voicing after nasals in Greek should be dated not to the Koine period, but after the fourteenth century AD, something that can be easily contested. A superior counter-argument (but one that has not been put forward) would be that this phenomenon is due to Romance phonological influence, since Italian and its dialects do not display voicing assimilation after nasals.

b) syntactic archaisms (Karanastasis 1991):

– Retention of the infinitive after verbs of volition, seeing and hearing. Although the infinitive disappeared from nearly all Greek dialects (Pontic being possibly the main exception), in S. Italian Greek its residual existence is still attested, as in the following examples (from Rohlfs 1972: 76): δε σ-σώννω φάει, δεν έχω πού πάει, τον ήκουα έρπει. Unfortunately for the “ancient” side, this argument is meaningless: the last traces of the infinitive disappeared from most Greek dialects in the late Middle Ages, and not in ancient times. The last constructions to resist infinitive loss, as shown by recent studies on the Medieval Greek infinitive, were precisely the ones which still maintain it in S. Italian (Mackridge 1997). The only thing that infinitive usage in S. Italian Greek shows is that communication between S. Italy and the rest of the Greek-speaking world was interrupted in the Middle Ages.

– Non-existence of a future tense. The S. Italian dialects use the present instead of the future, e.g. αύρι βρέχει, μεθαύρι έρκομαι (Katsoyannou 1995b: 543). They do not display a Modern Greek future with θα, or its previous stage, θέλω ίνα + subjunctive or even θέλω + infinitive. According to Minas (1994: 121), θέλω-

futures are not attested even in medieval documents from S. Italy. Again, this argument shows not the ancient origin of Italiot Greek, but its non-participation in late medieval evolutions. Interestingly, the synthetic (monolectic) future tense is absent from the Romance dialects of Puglia and Calabria as well (Maiden and Pair 1997: 345, 363).

– Periphrastic usage of the verb “to stand”, στέκω, with a participle, in order to express a progressive action: στέκω γράφοντα, έστεκε τρώγοντα. This usage is attested in Hellenistic Greek but not in any other Modern Greek dialect. However, once again we are probably not dealing with an ancient survival: this is much more likely to be a result of Italian influence, i.e. of the very frequent Italian periphrasis with the verb *sto* + gerund: *sta dicendo* etc. (Katsoyannou 1995b: 549).

c) Archaisms in the vocabulary:

There is a considerable number of lexical items with Ancient Greek etymology which have not been preserved in any Modern Greek dialect. These lexical items belong to the agricultural and pastoral vocabulary, and therefore presuppose usage of the Greek language by the lowest levels of society in Ancient Greek times. Apart from the examples given above in the discussion of Doric /a/ (λανό, κυσπάλα), standard examples include άρτε (< άρτι), and the negation in Salento, which is δένγε (< ούδένγε) and ούμμε (< ούν μέν). In S. Italian Greek there also exists a series of semantic archaisms: words which, although they appear in Modern Greek or its dialects, have lost their original meaning. These include αργάτη (= ploughing ox), άτσαλο (= έξαλλος, great, wonderful), ώρα (= spring). Lexical and semantic archaisms are actually the strongest evidence of ancient survivals in S. Italian (Karanastasis 1984: κε΄-κστ΄).

2) *Arguments pertaining to the relationship between Italiot and the other Modern Greek dialects.* S. Italian Greek does not specifically resemble any other Modern Greek dialect, and therefore it is not possible to attribute to its speakers a specific geographical origin within the Greek-speaking world. For example, S. Italian presents geminate consonants, a characteristic of South-

eastern Greek, infinitive usage, a characteristic of Pontic and Cypriot, and some evidence of mid-vowel raising similar to that observed in Northern Greek dialects (but most probably due to the nearby Romance dialects, which, along with the whole of S. Italy and Sicily, have a similar type of vocalism).

From another viewpoint, it is interesting to compare the status of the Greek-speaking enclaves in S. Italy with that of other linguistic minorities. In the same area there are important Albanian and less important Croatian linguistic islands (Clauss 1979, Telmon 1992, Seriani and Trifone 1994), whose origin lies in waves of migration at the end of the Byzantine period, as a result of the Ottoman advance. These minorities a) are isolated and firmly entrenched in well-defined areas, whereas the Greek-speaking areas are the relics of a gradually receding much larger area, b) are easily recognisable as to their local provenance, since the dialect form spoken bears all the distinctive characteristics of the corresponding Balkan language at the period of separation, whereas the Greek dialects do not resemble any specific Greek dialect of mainland Greece, and c) the Albanian- and Slavic-speakers have a strong separate ethnic and cultural identity, whereas the Greek-speakers are assimilated to their Italian surroundings, something which denotes a much longer period of co-existence.

This argument is of limited validity: that S. Italian Greek does not resemble any specific Modern Greek dialect is a result of the fact that in the Middle Ages, when S. Italian became separated from the rest of the Greek-speaking world, the Modern Greek dialects had not yet assumed a definitive form. The comparison with Albanian and Croatian does indeed indicate a much longer period of existence on Italian soil, but does not provide a precise dating for its appearance.

3) *Arguments pertaining to language evolution.* The basically medieval character of the S. Italian Greek dialects is in reality irrelevant to the question of their origin. Most of the early efforts of Italian scholars, who detected medieval characteristics in S. Italian, were misplaced: the continuous linguistic history since

ancient times of peripheral areas such as Cyprus or the Pontus is not disproved because Cypriot and Pontic have medieval characteristics. In the same vein, it would not be necessary to assume a medieval immigration of Italians to Romania in order to explain the greater similarity of Romanian with Italian than with Latin.

4) *Arguments concerning the presence of Greek linguistic characteristics in the Romance dialects of S. Italy and Sicily.* Calabrian, Puglian and Sicilian display a considerable level of Greek influence, mainly in the syntax and the lexicon. However, the influence of Greek in the rest of Italy is quite small, even in the areas which had been under Byzantine rule for a period of time, such as the Exarchate of Ravenna (540-572 AD) or Sardinia. The high degree of Greek influence in S. Italy is best interpreted as a result of an extensive Greek substratum, which has undergone a shift to Romance at some period in the Middle Ages, or of extensive bilingualism between Greek and Romance for the same period.

The most frequently mentioned substratum influence of Greek on the Romance dialects of S. Italy is the loss of the infinitive. These dialects present replacement of infinitival structures by finite structures, e.g. "I want that I go" instead of "I want to go" – this is a very rare phenomenon for Romance, and recent research attributes it to Greek influence (Ledgeway 1998). As mentioned above, S. Italian Greek preserves the infinitive only in a restricted number of constructions (verbs of seeing, hearing etc.), while in Standard Modern Greek the infinitive has completely disappeared.

Greek substratum influence is also detectable in the vocabulary: Greek loanwords are very numerous in the Romance dialects of Salento and Calabria, even in areas where Greek has not been spoken for more than a century. This high percentage of Greek loans is not attested in other Greek-occupied areas of Italy. Furthermore, the loanwords belong either to basic vocabulary, which is in general impervious to borrowing except in very strongly bilingual situations, or to the pastoral and agricultural domain, and not to the administrative or military one, and they thus show "persistence from below" rather than "imposition from

above". Examples include *caùru* (< κάβουρας), *cilòna* (< χελώνα), *mantile* (< μαντήλι), *àddhu* (< άλλος).

5) *Arguments pertaining to the structure of the Romance dialects of S. Italy.* These dialects, S. Calabrian and Sicilian, contain very few Latin archaisms and in general have a "recent" and "mixed" character, according to Rohlfs (1997: 253) and Fanciullo (2001: 70). For example, for several basic terms they exhibit not the inherited local vocabulary item of Latin origin that one finds in Northern Calabria, but a standard Italian term or a Norman loan. This, according to Rohlfs, suggests that the Romanisation of these areas took place rather late, in the medieval period, much later than northern Calabria. However, this last argument has received strong criticism from specialists in Romance linguistics in later years.¹⁵

Let us summarise the issue so far and reach some conclusions. The debate on the origin of S. Italian Greek was a major issue some decades ago, when linguistic scholarship was not adequately prepared to resolve it, having an imperfect knowledge of both Medieval Greek and Medieval Italian, and being unable to recognise situations of bilingualism and language shift. The same debate is a minor issue now, and modern scholarship has turned rather to synchronic issues – but now is the time for a mature re-evaluation of the origin question. Serious scholarly work on S. Italian Greek has increased enormously in the last decades; however, it is almost exclusively synchronic, functional/descriptive, and sociolinguistic in nature. Historical linguistic thinking and research needs to rise to the challenge.

¹⁵ Cf. Trumper (1997: 355-6), with relevant bibliography. Note however that some of his arguments pertaining to the "Byzantine" nature of Greek loans in Calabrian must be re-evaluated.

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