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B. KURZAUFsätze

Watkins' Law and the Modern Greek Preterite

A problem in the development of the Modern Greek preterite endings concerns the ending found in the second person singular (2 SG). As is well-known (cf. for example, Meillet (1975: 300)), Modern Greek has given up the Ancient Greek distinction between "weak" (athematic) and "strong" (thematic) preterite endings and instead has a single set of endings in the aorist and imperfect tenses. Thus the endings of the Ancient Greek strong active preterite have in general been given up in favor of the Ancient Greek weak aorist endings in -α-, and the endings in the weak aorist have in general remained unchanged¹:

	ANCIENT GREEK	MODERN GREEK
(STRONG) AOR.	ἔφυγον ἐφύγομεν ἔφυγεσ ἐφύγετε ἔφυγε ἔφυγον	ἔφυγα φύγαμε ἔφυγεσ φύγατε ἔφυγε ἔφυγαν (/φύγανε)
IMPF.	ἔφευγον ἐφεύγομεν ἔφευγεσ ἐφεύγετε ἔφευγε ἔφευγον	ἔφευγα φεύγαμε ἔφευγεσ φεύγατε ἔφευγε ἔφευγαν (/φεύγανε)
(WEAK) AOR.	ἔγραψα ἐγράψαμεν ἔγραψας ἐγράψατε ἔγραψε ἔγραψαν	ἔγραψα γράψαμε ἔγραψες γράψατε ἔγραψε ἔγραψαν (/γράψανε)

The spread of the α-endings at the expense of the thematic endings had its origins in late Classical Greek (cf. Attic εἶπα occasionally for εἶπον 'I said'), and was no doubt enhanced in the Post-Classical era by the functional need

¹ The other differences apparent in the Ancient and Modern paradigms are due to the loss of the syllabic augment in Standard Modern Greek, when unstressed (see Thumb (1964: 117–118)) and the loss of final -ν in the 1 PL ending. For the 2 PL ending, Thumb (1964: 152) also cites -ετε as the preferred ending in the aorist, with -ατε as a by-form, and -ατε as the preferred ending in the imperfect with -ετε as a by-form. The question of this fluctuation is taken up again below and in footnote 3. Finally, the change of 2 SG weak aorist ἔγραψας to ἔγραψες is discussed in detail below.

to distinguish present from preterite forms, especially in the first person and second person plural (1 PL/2 PL). With the loss of the augment when unstressed (as part of the general loss of unstressed initial vowels in the period roughly 600–1100 A.D.), a putative imperfect *φεύγομε(ν) or *φεύγετε would easily have been confused with present φεύγομε(ν)/φεύγετε. The generalization of the endings -αμε/-ατε would then have served a differentiating function.

The question that arises with the 2 SG ending is why the ending is the old strong preterite ending -εσ and not the weak ending -ασ. This is the case not only in the Modern Greek continuation of the strong preterite (e.g. ξφυρες), but also in the continuation of the weak preterite as well (e.g. ξγραψες, not ξγραψας still). Given the general spread and adoption of the α-endings throughout the preterite, the problem of why -εσ has been maintained in the 2 SG strong forms and generalized over -ασ in the old 2 SG weak aorist is a real one indeed. Having α for ε in this ending would not disrupt any functional distinction (i.e. ε alone in the 2 SG ending serves no differentiating function), and in fact it would allow for a more cohesive paradigm:

-α	-αμε
-ασ	-ατε
-ε	-αυ(ε)

Furthermore, 2 SG imperfects of the expected type (with -ασ for -εσ) are attested in the κοινή period – Browning (1969: 36) notes that forms such as ξγραψας occur in early κοινή (though he gives no exact citations). Thus it is all the more interesting to determine why -ασ did not become solidly entrenched in the paradigm, and why as likely a change as -εσ being replaced throughout by -ασ should have been checked in mid-stream.

Blass-Debrunner (1949: 38) give an explanation for this development which is reasonable but at the same time incomplete. Furthermore, the additional factors that can be called into play to complete their account have some interesting implications for diachronic theory.

They suggest that -εσ has been retained in the 2 SG preterite forms due to the influence of the 3 SG ending -ε. That is, the influence of the 3 SG vocalism ε has enhanced the retention of the ending -εσ, with the same vocalism, against the encroachment of the innovative ending -ασ, with a different vocalism. Furthermore, this matching of vocalism presumably would have encouraged the spread of -εσ into the old weak preterite, giving forms like ξγραψες for older ξγραψας. This account is a reasonable one, a priori, for forms in a paradigm are known to influence one another in such ways, yet it can be made even stronger. In particular, other analogies within the system of verbal endings are possible which would have supported the connection between 3 SG -ε and 2 SG -εσ in the strong preterite. Specifically, the 2 SG

and 3 SG endings match in vocalism in the present (-εις versus -ει, phonetically [-is, -i]), so that a proportional analogy linking these forms, as in:

PRESENT		PRETERITE	
-ει	: -εις	::	-ε : X, X → -εσ
3 SG	2 SG		3 SG 2 SG

could strengthen the retention of the 2 SG preterite ending -εσ or even oust a potential alternate form in -ασ².

That both of these factors, the influence of the 3 SG alone and a proportional link with the present, were at work in the shaping of the preterite endings, and not just the first as Blass-Debrunner suggest, is shown by the fate of the 2 PL preterite ending. In contemporary Standard Modern Greek, the weak ending -ατε has prevailed over the earlier strong ending -ετε and is currently the only ending for the 2 PL preterite. However, Blass-Debrunner (op. cit.) report that for New Testament Greek, -ετε is maintained over the encroachment of the α-endings, and fluctuation between -ετε and -ατε is reported for Modern Greek of the late 19th century (Thumb (1964: 152))³. The fact that the 2 PL ending -ετε held out longer than other plural forms against rival α-endings has been attributed indirectly to the 3 SG ending -ε (Blass-Debrunner (op. cit.)) through its influence on the 2 SG ending. The ultimate generalization of -ατε over -ετε that has occurred in contemporary Modern Greek, as opposed to the persistence of the 2 SG -εσ over -ασ, seems to be a function of there being a weaker link between 2 PL and 3 SG than between 2 SG and 3 SG. Furthermore, no analogy based on matching vocalism between present and preterite can be formulated for the 2 PL – the 2 PL ending in the present (-ετε) does not match either the 2 SG or the 3 SG ending in vocalism, viz. -ετε : -ει : -εις. Therefore, the absence of such a supporting analogy seems to be the crucial factor differentiating the 2 SG preterite ending -εσ, which is maintained to this day, from the 2 PL preterite ending -ετε, which has been given up in favor of -ατε.

² Warburton (1973: 214) posits a similar explanation for 2 SG -εσ in forms ξγραψες, drawing on the "symmetry of both imperfective /-a-es-e/ and non past /-o-is-i/". She did not, however, address the additional question taken up here of why an analogy of this sort should be a particularly appropriate and apt one.

³ See footnote 1. The difference noted there between 2 PL aorist and imperfect endings is probably a function of the stem change between aorist and imperfect. The imperfect stem is the same as the present, so that a 2 PL imperfect with the ending -ετε could easily be confused with the 2 PL present form. Thus -ατε would be the preferred ending in the imperfect. The aorist stem, however, is generally different from the present/imperfect stem, so that a 2 PL aorist in -ετε would be differentiated from the present/imperfect by the stem difference. Thus -ετε could be maintained longer as the principal 2 PL aorist ending since -ατε would have served no differentiating function in the aorist.

Thus the influence of the 3 SG ending has been responsible for the retention of the 2 SG ending $-ες$ in the Modern Greek preterite in at least two ways – through an analogical connection made internally within the preterite system ($-ε$ supporting $-ες$) and through proportional analogies made between present and preterite endings ($-ει : -εις :: -ε : -ες$). However, it is not enough simply to posit analogical influence, in this case, of the 3 SG ending, as an explanation of a particular historical development; whenever possible, one must motivate the analogy as well, providing reasons why the proposed analogy is an apt one, and more important, is one that speakers themselves might well have made. In this instance, such motivation for the analogies is possible, and moreover has certain implications for a general theory of morphological influence in paradigms.

The motivation for the analogies posited above lies in a principle of historical linguistics which has come to be called Watkins' Law (e.g. by Arlotto (1972)). It has been formulated as follows (Arlotto (1972: 156)):

The third person occupies the pivotal position in the historical development of a verbal paradigm

and explains the development of certain verbal paradigms of Polish, Persian, and other languages, in which the functionally unmarked 3 SG has been re-interpreted as formally unmarked and has served as the basis for the constitution of a new paradigm (see Watkins (1962: 90–96)). In the case under consideration in Greek, this principle can explain why the influence of the 3 SG ending should have been decisive for the retention of the 2 SG $-ες$ (as opposed to the influence of the 1 SG ending $-α$, for example), and also why the analogy $-ει : -εις :: -ε : -ες$ should have provided support for the $-ες$ ending. Given the pivotal position of 3 SG forms in a paradigm (Watkins' Law), the 2 SG preterite ending $-ες$ could be retained because it is more clearly built on and formally related to the 3 SG ending $-ε$ than the innovative ending $-ας$ would be. Furthermore, the aptness of the $-ει : -εις :: -ε : -ες$ analogy in checking the spread of $-ας$ can be seen as a function of Watkins' Law, since an analogy based on 3 SG forms would be, according to this principle, a particularly appropriate and consequently strong analogy.

Furthermore, other similar analogies within the verbal ending system either have been or still are possible, yet they have not had the same effect as the $-ει : -εις :: -ε : -ες$ analogy, in part, it may be hypothesized, because a 3 SG form was NOT one of the principal terms in the analogy. For example, in the preterite now, the 1 PL ending $-α-με$ and the 1 SG $-α$ agree in (pre-)desinential vocalism, but that has not kept the 1 PL present ending $-ο-με$, which agreed in vocalism with the 1 SG present ending $-ω$ (phonetically [-o]), from changing to $-ου-με$ (= [-u-mE]) for many speakers. That is, the analogy:

$-α : -α-με :: -ω (= [o]) : -ο-με$

was not a particularly strong one, and did not prevent the change of $-ομε$ to $-ουμε$ – the absence of a 3 SG form from the analogy seems to be the crucial difference between this analogy and the $-ει : -εις :: -ε : -ες$ one posited above.

The view of Watkins' Law advocated here is a somewhat novel interpretation of the principle. In order to invoke Watkins' Law here, it is necessary to see it as a "negative" force, one which can prevent certain possible, perhaps even likely, changes from occurring or being generalized. In this sense, Watkins' Law can be seen as a constraint holding on possible diachronic developments.

This new interpretation of Watkins' Law would be in addition to its standard interpretation as a "positive" force in the shaping of new verbal paradigms. It is interesting that Watkins' Law in this standard view has also been operative in the development of Modern Greek verbal paradigms. Householder and Nagy (1972: 44) point out that "the 2nd and 3rd singular of contract verbs like $ρωτάεις, ρωτάει$, extant in Epeiros, Central Greece, Ionic Islands, Peloponnesos . . . [show] the addition of the productive 2nd and 3rd singular endings $-εις$ and $-ει$ to the old 3rd singular form $(\acute{\epsilon})ρωτᾶ$, still preserved elsewhere in Greece along with 2nd singular $ρωτᾶς$ ". One can add, in the same vein, 1 SG forms such as $ρωτάω$ which are prevalent in Thessaloniki and Northern Greece, and are built on the old 3 SG form in the same way as $ρωτάεις$. The fact that the positive side of Watkins' Law occurs elsewhere in the history of the Modern Greek verb lends support to the extended interpretation given here for the retention of $-ες$ in the preterite, for it shows that Greek speakers indeed recognized the importance of the 3 SG form in the verbal paradigm.

The development of the personal endings in the Modern Greek preterite, therefore, has been shaped by a number of factors, such as the need to differentiate past from present forms, cross-paradigmatic analogies, and, most importantly for the question of why the 2 SG ending $-ες$ has been so tenacious, the influence of the 3 SG ending $-ε$. It has been argued that the importance of the 3 SG ending in these developments is a reflection of a general principle sometimes referred to as Watkins' Law, interpreted in a novel but nonetheless motivated manner. That is, Watkins' Law should be viewed both as a negative force by which certain possible changes might be prevented⁴ and by which paradigms might to some extent be kept intact

⁴ One potential counter-example to this new view of Watkins' Law can be readily explained in other terms. At first glance, the endings in the Modern Greek middle imperfect singular:

- 1 $-όμουν(ε)$
- 2 $-όσουν(ε)$
- 3 $-όταν(ε)$

in an older state, and also as a positive force by which new paradigms are shaped. The development of the Modern Greek preterite endings thus shows that the range of applicability of Watkins' Law extends beyond the cases of re-interpretation and constitution of new paradigms upon which it was based.

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appear to run counter to the proposed explanation for -εξ in the 2 SG active preterite, for the 1 SG and 2 SG agree in vocalism and differ from the 3 SG form. In fact, if -ουον is a phonetic development of the inherited ending -ουην by the sporadic rounding and backing of [i] around labials (and velars) and sonorants (Hatzidakis 1905: 1.237); see Joseph (1979) for further references regarding this sound change), then it might appear that the 2 SG has taken over the vocalism of the 1 SG, being influenced in a way not envisioned by the new view of Watkins' Law advocated here.

However, it seems best to view the 2 SG ending -ουον as having the vocalism of the Ancient Greek 2 SG thematic imperfect/aorist middle ending -ου, < *ε-σο,



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