

Language Contact and the Development of Negation in Greek — and How Balkan Slavic Helps to Illuminate the Situation¹

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1. Introduction

Contact involving different languages has long been a potent force for linguistic change in the Balkans, and Greek, in its several varieties, is a focal point in contact situations in this area. The study of language contact has tended to concentrate on lexical matters, with borrowing being the key issue, but as far as Greek is concerned, structural and grammatical matters have also been important to look at, due to the special relationship that Greek shows with other languages of the Balkans, as members of the so-called Balkan Sprachbund.

What is not clear is whether grammatical borrowing is different in nature from lexical borrowing; external influence on grammar, for instance, has been said to be a more difficult effect, one that does not happen all that often and occurs only under special contact conditions, whereas external influence on the lexicon seems to happen more easily, and actually need not involve any contact between real speakers, as the phenomenon of learned borrowing from earlier stages of a language shows.

One domain that involves grammar and structure but at the same time often involves particular lexical items as exponents of grammatical function is negation. Negation therefore is a potentially interesting area in which to explore the relationship between lexical and grammatical borrowing, and Greek, especially in connection with other Balkan languages, provides a particularly fruitful area for such exploration, since external influences have played a role in the development of at least some aspects of negation in Greek and the Balkans.

In what follows, a few specific case-studies are examined with the goal of illustrating the effects of language contact on Greek negation. This examination of the partial history of an area of Greek grammar thus necessarily goes beyond Greek itself, looking into the nature of language contact in general and in the Balkans. In this regard, facts from the role of contact in the negation systems of neighboring languages, specifically so-called “Balkan Slavic”, i.e. the South Slavic languages that show structural convergence with other languages of the Balkans as part of the Sprachbund, prove crucial, as they provide some key insights into how language contact can affect negation.

2. Case Study #1— $\delta\epsilon\nu$ in Tsakonian

In the first case regarding what can happen in contact situations with negation, the speech communities involved — Standard Modern Greek and Tsakonian (a Greek “variety” spoken in the eastern Peloponnesos) — are customarily thought of as dialects rather than as separate languages, though conceivably they could be different languages since they show numerous and very evident differences in phonology, lexicon, morphology, and syntax. Still, regardless of that issue, one can take the position that contact is contact, and as long as the speech varieties are not identical, we can learn something about what can happen when speakers of different varieties get together.

With regard to negation, as described by Pernot 1934, Tsakonian in the early 20th century was experiencing the encroachment of Standard Modern Greek $\delta\epsilon\nu$ ‘not’, the finite indicative negator, at the expense of the inherited negative \omicron (from Ancient Greek $\omicron\upsilon$) as

more and more Tsakonian speakers become bilingual/bidialectal in Tsakonian and Standard Greek. Thus, purely grammatical uses of negation can enter a speech community from external sources and gain primacy.

The spread of a grammatical morpheme from Standard Modern Greek into Tsakonian shows that grammar can be affected by language contact when the right lexical item is borrowed. In case there is any doubt as to the position that the “foreign” $\delta\epsilon\nu$ occupies in the Tsakonian system, its grammatical isomorphism with native σ is suggested by the occurrence of an interesting hybrid form $\delta\sigma\nu$, with the consonantism of standard Greek $\delta\epsilon\nu$ and the vocalism of the inherited negator σ , under the assumption that there must have been systemic parallelism between the two forms for a mixture like $\delta\sigma\nu$ to develop. This hybrid form becomes important in the context of the next case study, the etymology of $\acute{\sigma}\chi\iota$ ‘no’, discussed in the next section.

3. Case Study #2— The Etymology of $\acute{\sigma}\chi\iota$

On the one hand, the etymology of $\acute{\sigma}\chi\iota$ is straightforward, in that there is really no doubt as to what its ultimate source is; however, complications arise in working out the details of the development of its etymon.

The ultimate source must surely be Ancient Greek (Attic dialect) $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ ‘not’, a clausal negator, itself a composite — and presumably emphatic — form from $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$ ‘not’, the negator of facts and statements, plus $-\chi\iota$, an emphasizing element seen also within Greek in $\mu\acute{\eta}\chi\iota$ ‘not’ (formed with the modal negator $\mu\acute{\eta}$) and $\nu\acute{\alpha}\iota\chi\iota$ ‘yea, verily’ (cf. $\nu\acute{\alpha}\iota$ ‘yea’). Indeed, composite negation as seen in $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ is not an uncommon phenomenon at all, being widespread not only in Greek — note as well $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ ‘but/and not, nor’ from $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$ and the connective $\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ ‘but’ — but also in English, e.g. *not* from Old English *nā* ‘no’ plus *wiht* ‘thing’.

Nonetheless, there are some problems of detail that are raised by this etymology. For one thing, there is an unmotivated change in the position of the main accent, from the final syllable of $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ to the initial syllable in $\acute{\sigma}\chi\iota$; generally, the place of the Ancient Greek acute accent in a word is maintained as the syllable with primary stress in Modern Greek, so this accent shift demands an explanation.

Second, the vowel development in the first syllable is irregular. From Ancient Greek $\sigma\upsilon$, normally a Modern Greek [u] develops, so that the [o] of $\acute{\sigma}\chi\iota$ is unexpected. This problem is actually somewhat more complicated, though, for an unaccented initial vowel generally was dropped in the early Middle Ages (6th century to 12th century, see Browning 1983:57ff.), as in the form that developed into the finite indicative negator of Modern Greek $\delta\epsilon\nu$, namely Ancient Greek $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\delta\acute{\epsilon}\nu$ ‘by no means, not at all’ (an (originally) emphatic negative derived from $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\delta\acute{\epsilon}$ ‘but/and not’ plus $\acute{\epsilon}\nu$, the neuter singular of ‘one’). Thus we would expect $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ to yield (the nonoccurring) $\chi\iota^*$.

To get to a form with an initial vowel, in order to be in a position ultimately to account for $\acute{\sigma}\chi\iota$, it is probably easiest to assume that $\chi\iota^*$ was restored to $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ either by analogy/contamination with $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$, which was maintained in colloquial usage into the Medieval period before ultimately giving way to $\delta\epsilon\nu$, or by borrowing from the learned language — always a possibility within the context of Greek — since $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$ and related forms such as $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ were available in the Atticizing high-style Medieval Greek. It is of course conceivable that the (irregular) accent shift noted above occurred early enough to protect the $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}$ - of $\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\chi\iota$ from initial unstressed vowel loss (though Pontic $\kappa\acute{\iota}/\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\kappa\acute{\iota}$ might point to the accent shift

being somewhat late).

Third, taking ὄχι as a development out of οὐχί necessitates the assumption of a shift from a clausal negator, like English *not*, to an independent marker of denial and/or negation, like English *no*. Such shifts in function are not unparalleled (compare Latin *nōn* ‘not’ to French *non* ‘no’, for instance), and Modern Greek ὄχι does have a use as a simple negator in constituent negation and in ellipsis (e.g. θέλω το κόκκινο ὄχι το μπλε ‘I-want the red-one not the blue-one’); still, any given instance of such a shift ought to be motivated if at all possible.

Previous scholarship has tried to address one or both of the first two problems, the irregular accent shift and the irregular vowel development, and other possibilities exist as well.

Georgacas, for instance, posited² a general leftward accent shift associated with negation in Greek, as in dialectal (but widespread) ἀνοικτός ‘unopened’ versus ανοικτός ‘open’, where the shift is a reinterpretation of what historically was prefixation of the negative formative ἀν-, which attracted accent onto antepenultimate syllable, giving ἀνώνοικτος, a form that is still widely attested, followed by haplological reduction. This negative retraction could then have applied to οὐχί to give ούχι (later ὄχι). This proposal leaves the vowel change unaccounted for, however.

Dangitsis (1984: s.v.) suggested that the shift of οὐχί to ὄχι was on analogy with pairs of interjections for pain or surprise as οὐφ/οφ, οὐχ/οχ. Presumably, the accent shift and the vowel change are both accounted for since these interjections are monosyllabic and more like the first syllable of ὄχι. However, the basis for this analogy is somewhat tenuous at best, and Dangitsis gives no motivation for why ‘no’ should be remodeled on basis of interjections whose meanings are only vaguely emotive/affective at best.

Perhaps the standard account to date, in that it was adopted by Andriotis (1983: s.v.) is that given by Hatzidakis 1918. He suggested that ὄχι was extracted out of ἐγώ ‘I (NOM)’ + οὐχί ‘not’, which would have contracted, in Hatzidakis’s account, to ἐγώχι ([o] + [u] regularly yielding [o]). This contraction was then reanalyzed as a single unit so as to allow accent adjustment to ἐγώχι, but then re-reanalyzed as if it were ἐγ-ώχι ([-o # o-] would also contract regularly to [-o-] in Post-Classical Greek), from which the free form ὄχι could emerge. Though inventive, this account is not without problems. In particular, it is not clear why the combination of ἐγώ with οὐχί should have a special status; Landsman 1988-89, for instance, notes (p.26) that “there is no evidence that ἐγώ appeared with especially high frequency before οὐχί”. Moreover, the accent adjustment part of Hatzidakis’ account would seemingly require univerbation of ἐγώ and οὐχί, whereas the extraction of ὄχι requires the contradictory recognition by speakers (admittedly at a later stage and thus a different set from the earlier speakers) of the independent presence of ἐγώ. In any case, though, this account requires a number of ad hoc steps and seems an overly complicated set of assumptions for so common a word.

There are two further relevant facts about Ancient Greek οὐ(χί), however, that might be useful here. First, as Mark Janse (personal communication 9/99) has observed, the proclitic nature of οὐ in Ancient Greek, if it were true of οὐχί as well, would have created a situation from which an unaccented οὐχι, becoming accented as it came to have an independent use, could be initially accented. Second, as Yves Duhoux (personal communication 9/99) has noted, there is some ancient inscriptional testimony for Attic Greek of a variant of οὐ(χί) spelled with simply <ο> in the first syllable, so that the occurrence of <ο> later in ὄχι could be a matter of an early split in Greek — maybe dialectal in nature (note, e.g., Tsakonian ο above, from οὐ) — in the realization of Ancient Greek <ου>, one perhaps concealed in

Greek orthography until Medieval times.

Even so, and this is true of all of these accounts, the third problem, that of the functional and semantic shift from clausal negator to free negative form used for denial and negatives, is left unanswered. Moorhouse (1959: 17) notes some ancient uses of οὐ in isolation that suggest an interjectional value, but the only overt comment on this shift comes from Landsman, who notes the constituent negator use of οὐχί and says simply (p.25) that “given the use of οὐχί in these contexts, the derivation from the ancient interjection and emphatic οὐχί seems plausible and its extension to constituent negation is not problematic”.

Thus, each of these issues needs to be addressed before the etymology of οὐχί can be considered secure. Given that previous attempts fail to address all of these matters adequately, leaving some questions open even if they can solve one of them, other solutions must still be entertained. Landsman in fact made a relevant proposal, not previously considered, which ultimately depends on language contact and which can be further supported. In particular, he suggests that οὐχί may show the effects of influence from Turkish, but he does not develop supporting argumentation to the fullest extent. His comments, in toto, are as follows (p.25n.14):

It might not be too outrageous nevertheless to suggest the possibility of some influence from Turkish *jo* [sic, for *yo* /BDJ] ‘no’ here. The upwards movement of the head with accompanies οὐχί is often claimed to be Turkish in origin and, although contrary to the usual reluctance of speakers to borrow basic vocabulary from other languages, it is very easy to imagine the advantage of using a word for ‘no’ which was readily understood by the Turkish occupiers.

This suggestion has much to recommend it, and as it happens, a fuller defense of it can — and should — be mounted, going beyond the relatively brief remarks that Landsman himself provided.

First, there is more within Turkish to cite as a source of influence on the development of οὐχί besides just *yo*. In particular, there is also the form *yok*, which basically has an existential sense (‘there is not’) but which, as an isolated form, means ‘no’, apparently an emphatic ‘no’ moreover, to judge from the description in Redhouse (1981: s.v.) of its use as “a refusal to a request or negative answer to a question.” Moreover, the velar final of *yok* would have aligned it even more definitively with οὐχί (cf., the ancient variant οὐκί, and the Pontic forms mentioned above), providing a more solid basis for some influence of *yok* on the Greek form.

Assuming some role for Turkish *yo* and *yok* in the development of οὐχί provides a ready explanation for the difficulties alluded to above. The vowel development in the initial syllable is explained and the accent on that vowel is accounted for as well, inasmuch as both *yo* and *yok* contain an initial accented [o]. Moreover, the shift from clausal negator to free negation word seen in the development of οὐχί to οὐχί is solved by reference to Turkish *yo/yok*, since those forms are used as free negatives in Turkish, so that identifying them with οὐχί could have induced a change on the part of Greek speakers in the function of their corresponding word.

Moreover, there is a wealth of corroborating evidence that makes the positing of Turkish influence on οὐχί a wholly plausible solution to the difficulties in the details of the passage from οὐχί to οὐχί.

First, despite what Landsman says about speakers showing a “reluctance” to borrowing negatives, there are several examples that show just that in the Hellenic milieu — and see section 4 below for additional support from Slavic — including the Tsakonian

borrowing of ὄχι noted above.

Second, and even more striking here, there is the fact that Greek has borrowed Turkish *yok* outright, spelled γιωκ (phonetically [yok]), a form now used as an emphatic negative, i.e. ‘absolutely not!’, as in a Greek newspaper headline from the 1980s: τουρκική η κίπρος – γιωκ! ‘Cyprus Turkish?! No way!’.

Third, the dating of ὄχι’s first appearance is consistent with it being the result of contact with Turkish. Hatzidakis 1918 places its first occurrence to not earlier than the 14th century, and Landsman (p.25) states that “our earliest attestation of ὄχι may be in the fifteenth-century Escorial manuscript of the romance *Lybistros and Rodamne*.” Thus ὄχι (with [o] and initial stress) first appears as such during the early part of the period of Greco-Turkish contact.

Fourth, the nature of the contact and influence that is evident between Greek and Turkish in that period would have been such that influence on a grammatical element like οὐχί would be expected. The significant contact between Greek speakers and Turkish speakers in medieval times, especially after the fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 and the subsequent Turkish occupation of much of what is now Greece, was generally intense and intimate. To judge from the evidence of calques, such as the idiomatic use of ‘eat’ in the phrase τρώγω ξύλο ‘I get a beating’, literally, “I-eat wood”, based on Turkish use of *yemek* ‘to eat’ in *kötek yemek* ‘to get a beating’ (literally “to eat a blow”), there was some attempt on the part of Greeks to learn Turkish and vice-versa, even if this learning may have been imperfect. In such a context of at least limited bilingualism, Greeks learning Turkish and Turks learning Greek would have recognized functionally congruent forms. One can surmise that the influence of Turkish *yo/yok* on οὐχί resulted from such a cross-language identification of these forms as parallel.

In fact, Turkish influence on a word so linked to common everyday discourse as ‘no’ is part of a pattern of intimate borrowings in the Balkans, involving interjections, conversational markers, and the like. For example, Turkish *aman* ‘oh!, ah!, mercy!’ is the source, via borrowing, of Greek αμάν, and *de* ‘now then; come on!’ was borrowed into Greek as ντε, the particle showing impatience especially common with imperatives, e.g. έλα ντε ‘Come on, already!’. Moreover, the direction of this intimate borrowing was not one-sided, for Greek μπα, a particle indicating “surprise, rejection, negation, or assent” (Pring 1975: s.v.), is the apparent source of Turkish *ba* ‘oh, indeed!’ (so Redhouse 1981: s.v.). And, the intimate borrowing was not restricted to lexical items *per se*, for the Turkish process of *m*-reduplication, as in *kitap mitap* ‘books and such’ found its way into Greek, e.g. τζόντζαλα μόντζαλα ‘this and that’, literally, “rags and such” (Levy 1980, Joseph 1984, Joseph 1994), and there is agreement between Turkish and Greek in the affective, sound-symbolic value of coronal affricates, Turkish *c/ç* and Greek τσ/τç (Joseph 1984).

In addition, and as a final piece of suggestive corroborative evidence, there is the common gesture for ‘no’ found among Greek and Turkish speakers, namely the upward head-nod (found as well in Arabic speech communities and in parts of Africa). Morris et al. 1979 suggest that it continues an Ancient Greek gesture for ‘no’ based on its distribution of in modern-day Europe: Greece, Turkey, and old Magna Graecia only, with a boundary in Italy between the Greek-type gesture and western European one coinciding with the ancient boundary between Greek Campania and Southern Etruscan territory).³ It would thus appear that the gesture spread from Greek into Turkish (contrary to what Landsman, p.25n.14, suggests), and so it would be further evidence of the transferability in contact situations of forms signifying ‘no’. Moreover, even if the Turkish gesture is borrowed from Greek, its adoption by Turks would have meant that there would have been upward-head-nodding negation-expressing Turks saying *yo(k)* as a model for the reshaping of the word for ‘no’

by upward-head-nodding negation-expressing Greeks in the medieval period.

Thus, there is no reason to doubt that there could have been a Turkish hand in the development of ὄχι. Admittedly, given early testimony in Greek pertaining to each of the problems in the derivation of ὄχι from οὐχί, it may be that the most one can claim regarding Turkish is a later influence favoring one variant and one use in Greek over another; still the case for influence is plausible.

Moreover, the example from Tsakonian discussed above is particularly telling and bears emphasizing here; in particular, the mixed form ḡɔv found among some speakers of Tsakonian has the consonantism of standard Greek ḡεv and the vocalism of the inherited negator ο, and is thus a hybrid blending native and foreign elements in just the same way as proposed here for ὄχι, with its Turkish vowel in the initial syllable and its Greek consonantism and final syllable.

Therefore, contact appears to have played a key role in the development of Modern Greek ὄχι; since the basic use of the Turkish source was as an independent utterance for denial, presumably the first use of οὐχί to be affected by the innovative “Turkified” pronunciation (with accented ḡ-) would have been ὄχι in this innovative more discourse-bound usage, so that the new pronunciation must have been extended within Greek to the use of earlier οὐχί as a constituent negator, a more grammatical use. Thus contact ultimately, but really only indirectly, had an effect on more grammatical uses of negative marker. This assumption allows for the conclusion that so-called grammatical borrowing might actually not be different from lexical borrowing, if the grammatical effects can result from language-internal spread based on external borrowings.

4. Relevant Balkan Slavic Evidence

As mentioned above, Balkan Slavic provides some important corroborating evidence to the claim that negation can be borrowed, and does so in two ways. First, there are additional examples from South Slavic languages of the borrowing of negative elements. Second, Balkan Slavic shows evidence of the same sort of intimate contact which was found between Greek and Turkish and which was argued to be an environment in which such borrowing could readily occur. These facts show therefore that the borrowing of negation and the relevant social context for such an outcome of contact are not just a peculiarity of contact between Greek and Turkish or involving Greek dialects, but rather is a process that generalizes over all of the Balkans (and thus presumably can be extended to other contact situations).

In particular, just as Greek has borrowed Turkish *yok*, it can be noted as well that (Slavic) Macedonian has borrowed this word too, since it has the form *jok*, occurring for instance in the negative expression *jok ut tuka* ‘Get-out of here!’.

Further, Southeast Macedonian and Eastern Bulgarian dialects show the form *mi* in prohibitions. This is clearly non-Slavic in origin, to judge from both its absence and the use of other negative elements in prohibitions elsewhere in Slavic. It has plausibly been taken as having been borrowed from Greek (so Topolinjska 1995, Greenberg 1996; see also Joseph 2000c, 2000d), an attractive hypothesis given the occurrence of the modal negator *mi* (continuing Ancient Greek μή, via regular sound changes) in Modern Greek prohibitions and the evidence of intimate and intense contact between Greek speakers and Slavic speakers in the Medieval period.

Moreover, the effects of contact on Slavic negation are not found just in various borrowed forms, for there are functional effects as well. In particular, uniquely among Slavic languages, some Balkan Slavic dialects allow the negative marker that can be used to

introduce prohibitions (negative commands) to also occur independently as a one-word utterance functionally akin to English *Don't!*. As discussed in Greenberg 1996, the South Slavic prohibitive markers, especially *nemoj/nim* (< *ne mo(d)zi* 'be not able to') found in Serbian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian, *neka* (< **ne xai* 'don't bother') found in Serbian, and *nedej* (< *ne d:i* 'do not do') found in North and East Bulgarian, all show this independent usage dialectally, e.g. Southwest Bulgarian *Nemoj, ne pipaj* 'Hey, don't touch!', Southeast Macedonian *Nim bre, Argire* 'Don't, hey Argir!', and Serbian *Nekate, djeco!* 'Don't, children!'. These markers are composed of native Slavic elements, but this usage seems to be innovative. As it happens, Greek and Albanian show the independent prohibitive rather robustly, i.e. across all dialects, whereas the South Slavic examples are found in dialects most within the sphere of possible Hellenic influence. Thus, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that this novel use of native Balkan Slavic prohibitive markers is due to external influence, most likely of Greek, and thus constitutes a further instance of the borrowing of negation in the Balkans (see also Joseph 2000d).

As a final example involving negation, the Bulgarian VERB- 'not' -VERB structure, e.g. *pie ne pie* 'whether he drinks or not' can be mentioned, for it appears to have entered Bulgarian from a Greek source. Indeed, this construction has diffused, presumably from Greek, all throughout the Balkans — Banfi 1985 cites it as a Balkanism even — being found as well in Albanian, in Romanian quite productively, and even in traces in Turkish (Joseph 2000a).

Finally, Balkan Slavic shows the same pattern of borrowing of intimate vocabulary from Turkish (and other languages) that characterized the language contact situation discussed above between Greek and Turkish. In particular, forms such as *de* as a marker of impatience, especially with imperatives, from Turkish, occur all over Balkan Slavic, and forms such as *bre* as a term of unceremonial address, from Greek, are widespread. Calques from Turkish also occur in Balkan Slavic, e.g. Macedonian *kotek jade* 'take a beating' (literally, "eat a stick"), just like the Greek *τρώγω ξύλο* mentioned above, as does the Turkish *m*-reduplication alluded to earlier, as in Macedonian *knigi-migi* 'books and such' (however, with humorous connotations; see Friedman 1997 for further discussion).

Thus, contact involving negation in Greek is consistent with what emerges about the nature of language contact in the Balkans in general — intense, close, and intimate with some bi- or multi-lingualism — to judge from other types of borrowings that cross the boundaries of the lexical and the grammatical. Balkan Slavic thus confirms the picture that is seen in this regard starting just from the Hellenic perspective.

5. Conclusion

Besides what the foregoing suggests about developments with negation in Greek and about language contact in the Balkans, a couple of points of general interest regarding language contact emerge from these case-studies. In particular, lexical borrowing and grammatical borrowing can be taken to be essentially the same mechanism, with grammatical effects thus being secondary, language-internal, developments only indirectly caused by borrowing. Also, it must be acknowledged that the effects of language contact can be pervasive, even with so highly grammatical a part of a language as negation, which might be otherwise considered to be resistant to contact-induced change; this result is in keeping with Thomason & Kaufman 1988's claim that there are no linguistic constraints on the outcome of language contact .

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¹This paper draws heavily on Joseph 1999 and Joseph 2000b, and is actually a somewhat reoriented version of the former, being given a Slavic “twist”, as befits its present venue.

²In unpublished lemmata for the dictionary described in Georgacas 1981; he does not discuss $\sigma\chi\iota$ per se, but his leftward shift of accent could be applied here.

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