

LOCAL ANTHROPOGENIES - LINGUISTICS

LOGICS OF TEN INDO-EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

10. GREEK AND THE WHITE LIGHT

*Oti mia méra tHa thagásis més sto néo lemóni / ke tH'apothesméfsis / terásties posótites
íliou apó mésa tou. (That one day you will fully bite into a fresh lemon / and you will
untie / monstrous quantities of sunlight from its centre. Othiséas Elítis, María Neféli
(Marie Dark Cloud)*

10A. The language

Neo-Hellenic, or Common Modern Greek (CMG), comprises a language that is spoken spontaneously, the demotic, etymologically language of the people, and that is taught today at every level. But it also comprises an intense relation of this *demotic* with most of the anterior states of the Greek language, which fundamentally remained itself for the past three thousand years, in demanding writings, and also in certain moments and aspects of daily speech. Current Greek speakers thus practice, not two languages, as the term ‘diglossia’ too often gives it to think, but a language with two polarities – sometimes even three, when dialectal resources are activated.

10A1. Phonosemics

Phonetically, demotic is a frontalisation machine, where speakers move forth in endless *starts* and *restarts* towards a *forth*, and more precisely towards a *forth-top*, in an epiphany. “<Modern> Greek sounded like a star appears in the night”, notes Goethe, having heard, at the propaganda fide Congregatio in Rome, some young people read sacred languages each in their own language.

Indeed, where ancient Greek said and wrote ‘i’, ‘ü’, ‘ei’, ‘oi’, ‘è’, demotic Greek pronounces ‘i’, the most frontal of vowels. Moreover, where ancient Greek said and wrote ‘äi’, ‘é’, it pronounces ‘è’, once again pushed further towards the front. The true ancient diphthongs have been suppressed, ‘ai’, ‘oi’, ‘èi’, ‘own’, too insistent, and the too applied ‘é’ and ‘ü’, being too insistent, remain the five most direct vowels: a, è, i, ou, o, with transitory diphthongization resulting from the coincidences of flexion. Consonants followed the same movement. What was always said and written ‘b’, ‘d’, ‘g’ moved forward and up in ‘v’, ‘English th’, ‘gH’, the latter being very mediopalatal, as confirmed by the fact that, before what is said ‘è’ and ‘i’, it realises with a yod. No more reduplication consonant, ‘ll’ or ‘ss’, which would insist like diphthongs.

The semi-vowel 'w' also moved forth in a 'v': an evzone (foot soldier) is written 'eu-zonos' (well girdled), but is said 'évzonos' rather than 'éw-dzonos' used before.

However, whether feminine or masculine, the voice is warm, fed of honey, like the pastry that nourishes it. Its resonance is enriched with the rolled 'r', but also with the frictions of the 'th' and 'tH' (thêta) or of gH' et 'kH': 'égHo ékHo' (I have). Besides, if there is never a sentimental nasalization of vowels like in Latin, the nasalization inherent to the consonants m, n, ng is warm enough to lead to the voicing of the occlusive following it. Whence the very clever 'Greek' trick that consists in representing the sound 'b' by 'mp', 'd' by 'nt', 'g' by 'gk': *gkamparntina* = gabardine.

The phrasing completes this topology by opening it up. Syllables go forth, equal, standing out like contiguous events (Portuguese think they hear the Japanese) in a horizontally of the whole (we find *recto tono* songs), but on which point the accents, which have always become acute, acute/grave/flexuous accents that they were originally. However, these accents of pitch and force are laterally mobile, affecting one of the three last syllables depend on the words. This has a rhetorical effect, since the oxytones may appear more questioner ('parakaló', if you please); paroxytons, more centred, ('neféli', heavy cloud); the proparoxytones, more initiating ('évzoni' pointing the finger forward with every step). but it particularly give the diction a movement that is not only vertical but lateral, a sort of diagonal swerve that Cretan dancers, witnesses Zorba, display the paroxysm. Our transliteration tried to keep something of it. Everywhere, the letters naively figure the sounds of either English or French. But if for the ancient Greek the accentuated syllable is in bold, we have avoided bold characters in Common Modern Greek texts, since they would alter the high pitch. In short, the acute accent (´) marks the pitch; 'e' is pronounced 'è'; 'é' figures the sound of the 'è' in French with its pitch accent.

This multiply proversive party finds confirmation in the prepositions, where we note the omnipotence of 'se' (towards), previously 'éïs', whose intermediary state 'is' can be found in Istanbul 'éïs-tèn-pólin' (towards-the-city). Not only does this vector operator is combined constantly with the article, 'stin AtHína' (towards or in <the> Athens), but complex prepositions of various orientations include it as a second term: epáno *sto* trapézi (on *to* the table); anámesa *se* thio kímata (between *to* two waves). The other dominating preposition is 'apo' (outside of), correlative of 'se'.

10A2. The verb

We then expect the verb to realise the same topology, and in this aim shows four characters: (a) of privileging the active at the expense of the passive, (b) to strongly sever the aspects continuous/momentary, (c) to privilege a mentalising mode but one that has a voluntarist coefficient, (d) to have the standing out forms of the future. And it is very much the case.

(a) Not only are the passive and the medial merged since the koinè (language from the antiquity of the second century, hence a language of commerce and scriptures), but truly passive sentences have become rare: to 'the dog was run over by the bus' corresponds 'the dog, ran over by the bus', where 'dog', which first stands out like a subject, is immediately taken over as a direct object.

(b) The couple of aspects continuous/momentary, which replaced almost everywhere, at the beginning of our era, the couple imperfective/perfective couple, here fulfils itself with a

particular vigour that stems from the fact that since Homer, Greek verbs have kept two distinct morphological themes, one per aspect.

(c) The subjunctive, mentalist mode that absorbed the too-vague optative, consists of ‘na’ followed by the indicative (present for the continuous aspect, aorist for the momentary aspect). However, this ‘na’ is the old conjunction of aim ‘ina’ (so that). We are a long way away from the evasion subjunctive of Portuguese, Italian and French. And the finalising subjunctive intervenes in many subordinating conjunctions where other languages are content with an infinitive or an indicative: ‘who can do it? = “pios borí na to káni? ».

(d) The impulsion, even the impulsiveness, culminates in the future indicative, formed of ‘tHa’ followed by the indicative (present for the continuous aspect, aorist for the momentary aspect), which ‘tHa’ frankly derives from ‘tHéléi ina’ (we want that), and warns with the hard alveolar fricative ‘tH’ followed with the most compact vowel ‘a’. The French future tense ‘aimer-ai’ (infinitive + to have) seems very sober in comparison.

And the perfect completes the latent activism under the honeyed voices. Whereas the French past perfect is formed by ‘to have’ followed with a passive past participle – so passive toward the direct complement that it adjectively agrees with it if it follows it, - the perfect demotic consists of ‘to have’ + active infinitive + direct complement’ in a double cascade of activations: “ékHi thési aftó (he have tied this).

10A3. Syntax

We shall now calculate the function of cases. Like in most other places, they were planed down according to the analytical party of the Christian era, and sometimes even more than elsewhere because of the phonetic confusions due to the frontalisation. However, many were maintained. In their way, they support a proversive perception of things by allowing the adoption of an order of words that can make the perceived stand out like events, adverts, apparitions, epiphany, which are mobile like the accents. Hence, the determinative complement alone has four syntactic possibilities: (1) it can follow the determinatum in the accusative, without preposition, like dry stones: ‘mia stagHóna éma (a drop of blood)’; (2) it can precede it by subjecting to it using the genitive: (3) it can follow in the genitive: such is the case of all the postposed personal and demonstrative pronouns that accomplish in an almost sharply addressing, sometimes polemic manner – like when one says ‘her son is hers’, - the function that our possessive fronted adjectives complete almost surreptitiously; (4) it can enter in composition with the determinatum.

In this bulimic curiosity, the most diverse, determinative or juxtaposed (dvandva) compositions are allowed. This, in conjunction with numerous borrowings or copies of foreign phrases (Italian for navigation and commerce, French for politics and law, Turkish for food, English for contemporaneousness), produces an infinitely rich vocabulary, but one that is also blurred, calling for the frequency of the ‘ke’ (and) joining synonyms.

To the extent that, with all these liberties, the grammatical grouping of words, ‘parsing’, is very fleeing. In spoken language, the problem is partially resolved by the gravitation of enclitics and proclitics around the main words that are alone in being accentuated. In written language, the etymological distinction of the ‘I’, ‘è’, ‘ai’, ‘oi’, ‘e”’ (which are all pronounced ‘i’) and sometimes of acute, grave and flexuous accents (whereas since recently only the acute accent subsists), or even ancient spirits, helping the eye recognise and group words. We can

see, Common Modern Greek does not archaïse solely by poetic research or political purism according to the principles of the (“i katHarévousa thiálektos, the clean, sometimes right-wing, language”), but by structural necessity.

In turn, these archaisms give way to a polygraphic spelling, such as it is not rare that a dictionary should give two or three versions of one same word, and that another will be read in a good author. This nourishes the Common Modern Greek readers with an etymological and semantic conscience that is unknown to French speakers, and even to German or Russian speakers, and that even to the illiterate for whom it is enough to hear the literate speak, the pope for instance. Hence, 'epifánia' means surface, but, when it is written or spoken with a certain tone, it is 'épi-phanie' (apparition on top). 'Parousía' means presence, but it also means the last judgement if it comes second (deftéra). without doubt, today's Greeks no longer have the cheek of yesteryear's Greeks who saluted each other with 'kHaïre!' (rejoice!), but their 'kHeretismoús' (greetings!) continues to go hand in hand with 'kHéro' (I rejoice). (efkHaristiméni), they are 'well graced'. And if they simply say 'good' (kaló), the word still finds its roots in 'beautiful'. The endless 'parakaló' comprises as much command as it does prayer (parakaléo). Twelve different terms define light.

Here, we touch at the virtually explosive, potential energy of the Common Modern Greek. Indeed, through the means of etymological and polygraphic perception, it has always used the resources of Greek. And first, of this stupefying Dorian, Ionian and Attica language that, arising in Hellas in around 1300, engendered, between 700 and 300, all our traditional genres: the epopee, the elegy, the ode, the tragedy, comedy, history, the philosophical, mathematical, physic, biologic discourse. It achieved this through the three voices of the verb (active, passive, medial); its five major modes (indicative, subjunctive, optative, declinable participle, temporal infinitive); its two distinct perfective/imperfective themes; its sectional endings (+sis, +ma, +tès, +tos, +ticos, +teos, etc.) distributing a same seme in every operating type; its two negations, one real (ou), the other mental (mè); its defined article inviting to nominalize every phrase (“the being is, the non-being is not”) Parmenides, its characterisation and adverbation without restriction (“to ontôs on’ from which came neo-Platonism and the participation of the Thomism being); the incredible obligation of articulating every sentence on the former by a particle (oûn, dé, gar) ; the constant seasoning of the discourse by reduplicative, precisive, metalogical operators (“to on ê on, The being as being’); a verbal morphology that is verbal to disorder; three high/low/flexuous tones; a firelight of five brief vowels, seven long vowels, true diphthongs, amongst very conflicting consonants, but excluding sentimentalising nasal vowels. In a word, the most formidable curiosity machine that was ever activated, right to the mental heroism of the paradoxes of Xenon, of Plato's self-criticism philosophy, of the unforgiving geometrical demonstration according to Archimedes.

And we have not finished. Indeed, using the same etymological and polygraphic written form, Common Modern Greek is still united with the koïnè 'i kiní thiálektos', this common language that, from the conquest of Greece by Rome to its conquest by the Arabs, during seven centuries, provided the whole western part of the empire with a lingua franca sufficiently powerful that it should convey the two formulas: “En arkHè èn o logos » (in the beginning was the word) and ‘Kaï o logos sarx égéneto’ (and the word became flesh), whose detonation fed the thousand dogmas, heresies, logical and erotic seductions of the Western Church, right to this *Life of St Anthony* by Athanasius of Alexandria, whose extravagant spiritual Odyssey Flaubert shared with the French reader.

Nothing best enlightens the nature of Greek in general than the koïné. What is necessary to become a koïné? Political power? Latin had it. Commercial power? When Marcus Aurelius, Roman emperor of the 2nd century, writes his meditations in scholarly koïné, it is not a question of commerce but of feeling, a little as though Gorbachev had taken pleasure in writing his journal in English. In fact, and the current status of English confirms this, a koïné is above all else an opened language, which is phonically, morphologically, syntactically capable of assimilating, without any cramps or periphrases, any ambient concept, and particularly a new one, through borrowings, copies, agglutinations, derivations (particularly sectional), by transplantation of roots, but also by endings and infixations. In this regard, the antique koïné, western but orientalized, was particularly more apt to win over Latin than the latter, because of its abstractive qualities, was so intro-reverberating, therefore so inadaptable, that everywhere, not being able to assimilate exterior influences, it gave way to descendents, the Romanic languages, where it disappeared as such.

However, we would underrate important virtuality of Common Modern Greek if we did not mention its writing. Let us remember that it was originally the first united and complete phonetic writing, meaning that it noted not only consonants, like Semitic languages, but vowels, indispensable in an inflection language. As a result, the written designators seemed to be the copies of linguistic designators, which in turn seemed to be the copies of the real or imaginary designated, by there supposed to be intelligible. In short, these capitals, then these lowercases, joined to the other powers of the language, supported a metaphysic of the one and multiple being, a social knowledge (*doxa*), a verifiable knowledge (*épistèmè*), finally, a hermeneutic (*érmènēia*) of truth as an unveiling (*a-lètHéia*) very different than the sculptural, Semitic (Jewish, Arab) and psychoanalytical interpretation. No one has ever been more unaware of Freud's Oedipus complex than the Oedipus of Sophocles, who kills Laertes and marries Jocasta not because they are his father and his mother, but because his 'hubris', his excess (ransom of proversion), made him blind to the fact that they were.

In any case, the forms of this writing concord with the curious and startled, at times even eristic, momentum. Roman characters are so bluntly efficient that they disappear as such in the reading; at the other end, Cyrillic characters are so lateralising that they captivate in themselves. Greek characters, in particular lowercases, are both stable and unstable, dancing and swerving like the accentuation that they bear, to the extent that they remain visible as such without trapping within them. Awakening to the accidents of the discourse. Poking polygraphy. Plastically etymological.

10B. Cultural consonances

If Common Modern Greek is hence the current moment of a language that spreads out over three millenniums, to the extent that its speakers can still attend a Sophocles tragedy whose pronunciation has only been frontalised, any Greek cultural activity, whether literary, sculptural, pictorial, theatrical, also has a dimension that is three thousand years old.

This situation is even more meaningful that, in all the orders of human activity, it is here that, in around 500 BC, during the perception-construction by aggregative and pulsating elements that ruled since the origins (WORLD 1), perception-construction by 'integrated forms' (*eïdè*, from ideas), was substituted, meaning by 'wholes consisting of integral parts' (WORLD 2), which ruled until the late 19th century, a time when the human being started to

perceive-construct using functional elements (functioning), according to mechanisms and processes that were opened onto other mechanisms and processes (WORLD 3). We see the problem in every Greek cultural production today. How is it possible to play a part in WORLD 3, while still communicating with the WORLD 2 in its most powerful accomplishments, and even in its sudden appearance from WORLD 1, - WORLD 1 that is even more palpitating with Homer and Archilochus, or in the vases, then the sculptures that fill the initial rooms of the Athens Museum?

Theatre, 'tHéatron', particularly in its essential part, the chorus, 'kHoros', which is danced, sung, spoken, is probably the practice that is most favourable to these ultimate confrontations. It is undeniable that it was the exercise of WORLD 2 per say: the verb corresponding to 'tHéatron', 'tHéâstHai', designated the apprehension of a thing or a thought precisely in this medial distance of the 'skènè' (scene) that allowed understanding them as wholes consisting of integral parts, whether they were actor-statues on their buskins, the protasis and apodosis of the periods, the two tetrachords of the Heptatonic scale, or even the three angles of a triangle as being equal at two rights for this exemplary 'tHéôros', crazy for 'tHéôria' and 'tHéôrema': the geometer. There is therefore some abuse in continuing to use the term theatre today to define the productions of WORLD 3, which renounce to the totalising embracing of the 'tHéâstHai', nodal verb of the 'Greek miracle', and only keeping the perilous confrontation of living bodies that are present with other living bodies in the 'théatron'. But the fact that this radicalisation, in the manner of Grotowski or Beckett, is possible testifies of the agnostic capacity of generalised theatre to activate (through the 'drama') and purify (through the 'katHarsis') the relations of the three great fundamental moments of human history.

Thus, it is probably the musicians Xenakis and Théodorakis, more than painters or sculptors, who are exemplary of the today's Greek creation, if it is true that their referential is the generalised chorus, which breeds dance, music, voice, speech, sculpture, painting, architecture, light processes (laser), hence exploiting a structure that allowed Pindar, 2500 years ago, to decisively move from World 1 to World 2 to encourage us to go in a fragile manner from World 2 to World 3 not without remembering World 1. The breadth of the Greek orthodox music also plays a great part in this merging confrontation.

Poets also claim their adherence to the Choragic mould. Elitis warns that his *María Neféli* (Marie Dark Cloud) is a scenic poem (skinikó píma), a Pindaric antiphony where María and her Antiphonist (Andifonitís) each occupy one of the facing pages according to the alternation: M-A, A-M, M-A. In their tensions of shadows and lights, the two protagonists are New Modern Greek itself. María is said 'irrefutably acute girl' (anamfisvéteta korítsi oxí), according to a stridulant íiii tongue (tsirízonas íiii); she shines like a cutlass (lámbi san makHéri); true menace of the future (alitHiní apilí tou mélondos), every time that she says 'I <will> lie with him' (tHa kimitHó m'aftón), she things that she will once again kill history (ennoí óti tHa skotósi akómi mia forá tin Istoría). Because 'purity can only be represented in impurity', using German to say it: 'Das Reine, Kuríes ke Kirií,/ kann sich nur darstellen im Unreinen'. She lives at the antipodes of Ethic, she is ethos absolutely (zi stous andípodes tis ItHikís / íne ólo ítHos). Her end can only be Empedoclean: 'Flux of the sea and you / distant epiflux of the stars – help me' (Roés tis tHálasas ke sis / ton ástron makrinés epiroés - parastatHite mou!). And, as in WORLD 3, amongst the cosmic fluxes, we can read 'PHILOP MORRIS KENT CRAVEN A', transforming an entire verse into a neon tube. The writing crosses its destiny 'and a drop of blood above her / has the appearance that yesterday / had the

Lambda of the Iliad' (ke mia stagHóna éma epáno tis / ékHi tin ídia simasía pou íkHe álote / to Lámbtha tis Iliáthas).

Common Modern Greek will first have been poetry because of its demotic core and its choral propensity, but it also has a prose. New novel *To tríto stefáni* (the third crown) drags, over two hundred pages, the interior monologue of a trice-married old woman (a crown being a marriage) who rants and raves against her daughter, an old maid who never knew what to do, and prays the Lord that he will keep her ill third husband, while all the time saying that she would be perfectly capable of finding a fourth if she had to. It is therefore always the inbred re-departure of New Modern Greek, that this time goes right to the shout, the demand, the gouching against the Gods, which are as old as Euripides, to whom TákHtis irresistibly makes us think: 'The boró, ókHi, the boró na tin ipoféro pia' (I cannot, no, I can no longer stand her). The monologue, polylogue is stronger than, in this language, there are only emotions, no sentiments; there are levels of discourse, very little unconscious/ We==0

To conclude, let us come back to this permanence of three millenniums. We shall put forward the solidity of the pitch accent, as with the case of Italian. And the elasticity of a language that provided a koiné. But we must see the stage (skènè, skiní) of the Cyclades and the Sporades on the Aegean Sea. This sea is practicable and difficult. White islands on a blue background that plunges and emerges like dolphins whether we leave it or we approach it, again and again. Lonely or few, thus autonomous, sailors, meaning that each finds his standard within himself. With the necessity of insurance contracts for the freight, of constitutions for the colonies. Hence, with the need for a complete writing to set all this. Thus.

In that case, the basic institution here is the voyage. 'Perí-plous', the cyclic, uneasy circumnavigation, that goes so well with the raw hedonism since Archilochus, the cultural homosexuality since Sappho, the ultimate cruelty since the Atrides, the sophism of Sophists, the political agón (combat) of Demosthenes, the religious agón of the Concils. The journey is not the Diaspora, the more or less unhappy dispersion from a transcendent unity. It is a horizontal, swerving exploration all around, even if this circle has the dimension of the Earth. Hence, Homer traced the *Odyssey* two thousand and seven hundred years ago. And Odyssey is still a first name in New Modern Greek.

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Translated by Paula Cook

Note: This study was published by 'Le Français dans le Monde' in July 1990. The reference readers were Georges Lurquin and A. Yannopoulos.