



Universiteit Leiden

Proposal Title

Istanbul Greek: documenting a language variety of early cosmopolitanism in danger of extinction

Applicants

Supervisor Name	Discipline
Prof. Dr. Marina Terkourafi (LUCL)	Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Greek Linguistics
Dr. Deniz Tat (LIAS)	Morphology, Syntax, Turkish Linguistics

Project description

The 1923 population exchange between Turkey and Greece resulted in massive forced migration between these two countries. While Istanbul Greeks were exempt from this migration, continuing discrimination in various domains of business life, financial difficulties incurred by a new wealth tax in 1942, and the infamous September Riots of 1955 targeting Istanbul Greeks resulted in further Greek migration from Turkey to Greece. Of 110,000 Greeks living in Istanbul in 1923, by 1992 only about 2500 remained (Whitman 1992). As this community continues to shrink, language death of a unique, cosmopolitan variety of Greek, through shift to Turkish, is imminent (Komondouros & McEntee-Atalianis 2007).

Istanbul Greek is partly documented in newspaper archives. However, the use of the language in everyday life is under-documented and under-studied. This project will document and analyze the language of a set of ± 60 letters of ± 6 pages each written by a Greek mother living in Istanbul to her daughter in the Netherlands in the 1950s and '60s. The letters are preserved in the personal archive of the daughter, now in her eighties and living in Voorschoten, which both facilitates access to them and their context through personal interviews with the recipient, and renders their preservation rather urgent. Personal correspondence is a genre placed halfway along a continuum of "speech vs. writing" and "orality vs. literacy," correlating with a continuum of (in)formality (Koch and Oesterreicher 1994) and this is reflected in the letters to be analyzed. The letters are written in *frangochiotica* (Greek in Latin alphabet), crucially demonstrating how the writer's pronunciation of individual words differed from Standard Modern Greek, which will allow us to make inferences about phonological properties of the dialect. This study will not only provide a first description of informal Istanbul Greek but also help us gain insight into the ways in which Turkish has influenced its (grammatical) structure.

Research Trainee Profile

The Research Trainees will be primarily responsible for preparing digital versions of the letters and analyzing the grammatical properties of the language used therein, such as word order in simple and complex sentences, grammatical gender and agreement as well as phonological differences from Standard Modern Greek as can be derived from spelling choices. Applications by both BA and MA/ResMA students are welcome. Eligible applicants should have a sound knowledge of Greek. Basic knowledge of Turkish and

experience in language description is a plus. Applicants at the MA or ResMA level should have taken courses in morphology and/or syntax and preferably in phonology offered by the Department of Linguistics or elsewhere.

Collaboration

The language used in the letters reflects not only the ways in which Turkish has influenced Istanbul Greek (i.e. *contact-induced language change*) but also the ways in which Istanbul Greek has preserved earlier forms of the language given its distance from Standard Modern Greek (i.e. *isolation-induced language preservation*). To provide a complete description and analysis of these two aspects of Istanbul Greek, the expertise of the two applicants in this project is complementary and necessary. The expertise in Turkish linguistics available at LIAS will be crucial for understanding and explaining contact-induced language change while the expertise in LUCL will be necessary to document and to explain isolation-induced language preservation. Together, the researchers will be able to answer bigger questions pertaining to language change: Which aspects of language are more vulnerable to change and why? Conversely, which aspects tend to be preserved and why? We expect that both linguistic and extra-linguistic (socio-demographic) reasons will provide answers to these questions.

The proposed project will offer trainees a unique opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the field of language description and analysis in Leiden, making use of our combined research expertise and the research facilities available here. The fact that the letters are preserved in the personal archive of a former Istanbuliot in her eighties, now living in Voorschoten, makes their preservation both feasible and a matter of urgency.

Deliverables

Results will be presented at international conferences (e.g., the series of Modern Greek Dialects and Linguistic Theory conferences) and written up in the form of an article submitted to a peer reviewed journal, in which the research trainees will be included as co-authors. Since this will be one of the first analyses of informal Istanbul Greek in the light of modern theories of language structure and change, it will provide a basis for further theoretical questions, some of which can only be answered by eliciting language data directly from individual Greek speakers. This is highly important considering the fact that there is still a critical mass of Greek speakers living in Istanbul. The researchers have access to this community through personal contacts and through the local Greek schools (Zografeion).

The results of the current project will therefore furnish the springboard for a doctoral or post-doctoral proposal on this topic, which will be submitted to funding schemes such as the NWO PhD in the Humanities (or similar NWO follow-up scheme) or ERC MCSA Independent Fellowship. Other suitable platforms for follow-up funding include the NWO Vrije Competitive (or similar NWO follow-up scheme), an ERC starting grant and other interdisciplinary grants (as announced).

Planning

Month 1: Digitizing of the letters; literature review
Months 2-3: Description and analysis of word order
Months 4-5: Description and analysis of morphosyntax
Month 6: Description and analysis of phonology
Months 7: Data interpretation and results write-up

Student Application

Interested students should send an academic resume, indicating relevant courses they have taken, as well as a motivation paragraph (max 100 words) to m.terkourafi@hum.leidenuniv.nl and to d.tat@hum.leidenuniv.nl

References

Koch, P. & Oesterreicher, W. (1994) 'Schriftlichkeit und Sprache.' In: H. Günther & O. Ludwig (eds.), *Schrift und Schriftlichkeit*, 587-604. Berlin & New York: de Gruyter.

Komondouros, M. & McEntee-Atalianis, L.J. (2007) 'Shifting Patterns of Language Use in the Greek Orthodox Community of Istanbul.' *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 28 (5): 365-384.

Whitman, L. (1992). *Denying human rights and ethnic identity: the Greeks of Turkey*. Human Rights Watch.