

Morpho-phonology and the Greek glides

In the Greek phonological literature there have been many attempts to uncover the factors regulating hiatus (i.e. vocalic sequences) and synizesis (i.e. glide formation) in Modern Greek (Kazazis 1968, Warburton 1976, Setatos 1974, Nyman 1981, Deligiorgis 1987, Malikouti-Drachman & Drachman 1990). There is a cross-linguistic tendency to avoid hiatus, as shown for example in Casali (1997), but in Modern Greek, hiatus is avoided only in some cases. These two processes, hiatus and synizesis, are seen as two opposing forces in Greek phonology yielding either words with vocalic sequences such as [io] ~ [iu], [ia] in (2) or words where a vowel turns into a glide to avoid hiatus as in [i] ~ [ju], [ja] in (1). Synizesis is also compounded by strengthening or hardening in some cases (1a-d) resulting in the fricativization of the glides. While both classes of words in (1) and (2) involve neuter nouns, it is only the former class that involves [i]~[j] alternations between the nominative singular form and the rest. The data below thus give us two types of contrast: i) an [i]~[j] alternation between the nominative singular and the rest in (1) and ii) a [j]~[i] contrast between the genitive and plural forms of (1) versus those of (2). In the latter class hiatus is tolerated.

	NOM. SING	GEN. SING	NOM. PLURAL	GLOSS
(1) a.	po.ði	po.ðjú	po.ðja	<i>foot</i>
b.	ðo.ka.ri	ðo.ka.rjú	ðo.ka.rja	<i>girder</i>
c.	ko.lo.ci.ði	ko.lo.ci.ðjú	ko.lo.ci.ðja	<i>pumpkin</i>
d.	ma.ti	ma.tjú	ma.tja	<i>eye</i>
(2) a.	sçe.ði.o	sçe.ðí.u	sçe.ði.a	<i>plan</i>
b.	sta.ði.o	sta.ðí.u	sta.ði.a	<i>stadium</i>
c.	ðo.ma.ti.o	ðo.ma.tí.u	ðo.ma.ti.a	<i>room</i>

To understand such contrasts, most of the previous accounts utilize extra-grammatical factors, such as word frequency (Petrounias 1987, Rytting 2005), or etymology (learned origin versus common origin) and ‘spelling pronunciation’ (Kazazis 1968, 1992, Warburton 1976, Rytting 2005).

We propose that there is no need to resort to extra-linguistic forces to account for the phenomena in (1) and (2). More specifically, to begin with the [j]~[i] contrast between the genitive/plural forms in (1) and (2), we propose that it is the result of an underlying contrast between different noun classes. We argue that for these nouns the genitive case supplies the base form from which the whole paradigm is built. For (1) the genitive ends in [j], eg /po.ðj + ú/, while for (2) it ends in [i], eg /sçe.ðí + u/. In other words, neuter nouns end in /i/ or /j/ which act phonemically. The existence of an underlying contrast between [i] and [j] is also corroborated by the presence of some minimal pairs in the Greek lexicon, such as those in (3).

(3) a.ði.a	'permission'	vs.	a.ðja	'empty-NEUT-PL'
lo.ji.a	'literary-FEM-SG'	vs.	lo.ja	'words'

As for the [i]~[j] alternation between nominative singular and the remaining forms in (1), we rely on paradigm uniformity, morphological considerations, syllabification and stress placement to derive it. Note two asymmetries between classes (1) and (2): (a) the genitive for [..ju]-ending nouns is always stressed on the ultima while for [..iu]-ending ones stress falls on [i] and (b) the former lack a suffix in the nominative singular while the latter add an –o suffix. In addition, paradigm uniformity prohibits other alternations, unless of course syllabification issues preclude it from doing so, e.g. complex codas are not allowed, thus favouring [po.ði] over *[podj]. In sum, we claim that the contrast /i/~j/ is enhanced by morpho-phonological factors and does not need to be attributed to less regulated, more arbitrary, extra-grammatical factors.

References

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