

**DEVELOPMENT OF SYLLABLE  
STRUCTURE IN HELLENISTIC KOINE**  
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Κατά τη διαμόρφωση της κοινής Ελληνικής έγινε πλήρης αναδιάταξη του προσωδιακού συστήματος της γλώσσας. Λόγω των γλωσσικών επαφών, καθώς και της εσωτερικής τάσης προς ανοιχτές συλλαβές χάθηκε η αντίθεση μεταξύ τριών συλλαβικών δομών (CV:=CVC=CVCV), η λειτουργική ισοδυναμία των οποίων δημιουργούσε περιβάλλον για τη διαφοροποίηση δυο τύπων τονισμού. Ο βασικός μηχανισμός της εν λόγω αλλαγής ήταν η μετακίνηση του συλλαβικού ορίου προς την αρχή των συμφωνικών συμπλεγμάτων, γεγονός που επίσης προκάλεσε μερικές μεταγενέστερες αφομοιώσεις και ανομοιώσεις.

The formation of the Greek State and spread of the Attic dialect as a language of administration over vast territory populated by non-Greek speakers led to a certain linguistic unification of this territory and the development of a common Greek Language, the so called Koine, whose main features can be traced back to the Attic dialect<sup>1</sup>.

However the Koine, which developed as a result of intensive language contacts<sup>2</sup>, substantially differed from the ancient Attic dialect. Thus the phonological system of Attic underwent significant

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<sup>1</sup> Certainly Koine was not the same in all parts of the Greek world. In this paper the sociolinguistic situation in the Greek-speaking world of the first centuries AD is represented in fairly simplified way. For more detailed analysis see V. Bubenik, 1989. *Hellenistic and Roman Greece as a Sociolinguistic area*. Amsterdam, Benjamins.

<sup>2</sup> J. Frøsen, 1974. *Prolegomena to a study of the Greek language in the first centuries A.D.: the problem of Koine and Atticismus*. Helsinki, Frøsen

changes usually described as loss of vowel length and shift to stress accent.

There are two basic opinions as to how these two processes could have been related to each other, whether the loss of vowel length resulted from the shift to the stress accent or provoked this shift itself. Some authors mention also the loss of syllable weight, which Devine and Stephens<sup>3</sup> for example regard as a result of the loss of vowel length.

It is generally known that Attic distinguished light and heavy syllables. Light syllables were open syllables (i.e. syllables with no coda) containing a short vowel, while syllables containing a long vowel and closed syllables (i.e. syllables with coda) were heavy. It is important that the notion of syllable structure in the Greek language is necessary not only to account for the distribution of vowels and consonants: the whole rhythmical pattern of Attic dialect was based on the contrast of three functionally equivalent syllable structures<sup>4</sup>: #CV:# = #CVC# = #CVCV#<sup>5</sup>.

Functional equivalence of these structures can be proved by the evidence from historical grammar:

#CVC# = #CV: \*γνόvς (# CVC#-) > γνούς (-#CV:#-)

#CV:# = #CVCV#: \*γέ-vecoς (-#CVCV#-) > γένους (-#CV:#-);

It is also evidenced by metrics that was based on rules of quantity: all these structures could occur in the strong position of metrical foot.

It was the equivalence of structures #CVCV# = #CV:# that created the environment for the distinguishing of two types of syllable accent<sup>6</sup>: the possibility of double accentuation in CVCV (C'VCV vs. CVC'V) presumes possible double accentuation in the functionally equivalent structure CV: - (C'V vs. CV')<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> A.M. Devine, Laurence D. Stephens, 1994. *The Prosody of Greek Speech*. New York, Oxford. Oxford university Press. p. 216.

<sup>4</sup> See also Yu. Kleiner, 1999. Syllables, Morae and Boundaries. *IJGLSA 4,1*. (Spring 1999). p. 1-17.

<sup>5</sup> "C" stands for "Consonant", "V" – for "Vowel" and "V:" for "Long vowel".

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Horrocks, 1997. *Greek: a History of the Language and its Speakers*. London, Longman. p.111.

<sup>7</sup> This does not necessarily mean that phonetic realization of the circumflex accent in Ancient Greek was similar to the acute accent on the second syllable of disyllabic structure. The phonetic features of

In the course of the development of Koine, the decline of this system starts. This might have been provoked on one hand by the fact that new non-native speakers of Greek transferred to it the rhythmic pattern of their mother tongues (cf. evidence by R. Dauer on the peculiarities of syllable structure in Jamaican English<sup>8</sup> and the suggestion by Yu. Kleiner and N. Svetozarova about possible reasons for loss of vowel length in Yiddish<sup>9</sup> as a result of Slavic influence). Note also the evidence of K. Krumbacher<sup>10</sup> that the decline of quantitative metrics might have been partly conditioned by the large number of non-Greek authors, who composed Christian hymns without observing the rules of quantity.

On the other hand, the internal tendency towards open syllables can be attested throughout the whole history of the Greek language<sup>11</sup>, this tendency showed itself in weak nasals, loss of digamma, correptio attica etc.

In papyri and inscriptions<sup>12</sup>, we can also find numerous examples of the tendency to avoid consonant clusters, which created closed

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circumflex could have been substantially different from those of acute: what is important is that a stressed heavy syllable could have been contrasted according to the type of the accent.

<sup>8</sup> R. Dauer, 1983. Stress Timing and Syllable-Timing Reanalyzed. *Journal of phonetics*, London, Seminar Press, 11. pp. 51-62.

<sup>9</sup> Yu. Kleiner, N. Svetozarova, 2000. Quantity loss in Yiddish: a Slavic Feature? D.G. Gilbers, J. Nerbonne, J. Schaecken (eds.) *Languages in Contact (Studies in Slavic and General Linguistics*, vol. 28). Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA: Rodopi. pp. 193-197

<sup>10</sup> K. Krumbacher, 1897. *Geschichte der Byzantinischen Literatur*. München. p. 653

<sup>11</sup> M. Lejeune, 1972. *Phonétique historique du Mycénien et du grec ancien*. Paris, Klincksieck

<sup>12</sup> F.T. Gignac, 1976. *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods. I. Phonology*. Milan, Istituto editoriale cisalpino-La goliardica. P. Kretschmer, 1849. *Die Attischen Vaseinschriften*. Gütersloh. K. Meisterhaus, 1888. *Grammatik der attischen Inschriften*. Berlin. E. Schweizer, 1898. *Grammatik der Pergamenischen Inschriften. Beiträge zur Laut- und Flexionslehre der gemeingriechischen Sprache*. Berlin. S.-T. Teodorsson, 1978. *The Phonology of Attic in the Hellenistic Period*. Göteborg. Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis

syllables, by means of anaptyxis (*δράχμας* (*δράχμας*), *ταίκενα* (*τέκνα*), omission of consonants (*πέμτου* (*πέμπτου*), *μιθούς* (*μισθούς*) or degemination.

Still in view of their irregularity these processes could hardly have been the cause of such crucial change, it should also be mentioned that most of the consonant clusters have been preserved in Modern Greek. On the contrary, we can possibly assume that the simplification of consonant clusters attested in papyri and inscriptions and partly paralleled in the Greek vernacular might have resulted from the restructuring of the prosodic pattern.

The main mechanism of the loss of closed syllables and prosodic rearrangement in the Greek language might have been syllable boundary shift (or, in the terms of generative grammar, implication of new rules of syllabification), when most consonant clusters that used to be divided by a syllable boundary became tautosyllabic, in other words the principle of *correptio Attica* spread over all consonant clusters. The fact that at this period preferable syllable structure in Greek was #CCV# rather than #CVC# can be also confirmed by the loss of initial unstressed vowels that occurred in most Greek words as well as omission of final consonants. Certain subsequent phonological processes (voicing of stops after nasals NT>ND, dissimilation in manner of articulation FΘ, PT > FT) can also be explained by change in the nature of syllabification and the application of constraints on the distribution of consonants in the syllable.

Although closed syllables are not forbidden in Modern Greek, the processes described have resulted in collapse of the equivalence of the three syllable structures that, as has been already said, created an environment for the contrast of several types of syllable accent. In Modern Greek, stressed syllables are not distinguished according to the type of syllable accent. This is traditionally called “dynamic stress” although the stressed vowel is distinguished not only by intensity, but also by duration and pitch, and the latter is more important for the perception of stress<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> A. Botinis, 1989. *Stress and Prosodic Structure in Greek*. Lund. Lund University Press.