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Book Review



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Greek: A History of the Language and its Speakers (2nd edn.). Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester, 2010. Pp. xx + 505.*

As the title of the book suggests, Horrocks (henceforth H) ambitiously attempts to cover both the linguistic and the socio-cultural history of the Greek language in his comprehensive work. This goal is entirely justifiable, since the linguistic development of a language is never entirely isolated from the actions of its speakers—both aspects are inseparably intertwined—even though it makes the book's scope rather vast, considering that H also sets out to discuss the history of the language in its entirety, which amounts to nearly 3500 years of recorded history, from Mycenaean times up to the present day. The work is organized chronologically into three main parts, of which the first discusses ancient Greek up to the 4th century AD, the second deals with Byzantine Greek up until the Turkish conquests, and the third covers the latest history of the language up to the present day. The book is an updated and enlarged version of the first edition published 13 years earlier (Horrocks 1997). The basic concept and the disposition remain the same—some parts have been notably expanded, while the structure generally has not been changed. Since my own expertise is very much linguistically oriented, I shall for the most part deal with aspects related to that particular field.

In the preface (p. xiii), H points out that his focus will be on the rise of Ancient Attic, the development and spread of Koine, the role and development of common Greek in the Roman and Byzantine times, and especially the devel-

* Editors' note: Although the book under review here was published in 2010 and is a second edition, we deemed it worthy of review because it is a major work of key importance to scholars; we note too that the first edition came out in 1997, well before the journal was in existence, and so it was never reviewed in these pages.

opment of Byzantine Greek into Modern Greek. By choosing such emphasis, H intends to present the history of Greek as a continuum and to address the previously little explored areas in the scholarly tradition. In other words, he focuses heavily on the later, post-classical history of the language, and consequently treats the pre-Hellenistic history in a relatively short section (pp. 1–78). This may seem unjustifiable for a classical scholar who has studied his basics in Greek language and language history with Allen (1974) and Palmer (1980), both of which deal mainly with the classical era. Therefore, in my opinion, H's work does unfortunately not entirely replace Palmer (1980) as the standard manual for Ancient Greek language history, although the present work does provide a fresher and more up-to-date view in some areas (the rise of Koine, for example).

Instead of attempting to combine linguistic and culture-historical aspects continually throughout the work, H has chosen to arrange the material under thematic sections. Additionally, before discussing each major period of the Greek civilization, he presents a short historical summary of the period in question. The order of presentation, however, could in some places have been the opposite: H usually begins with general historical considerations, proceeding then with literary historical and language historical (here mostly morphological and syntactic) topics, eventually reaching the spoken language (which seems to be his terminological preference for historical phonology). This is contrary to the traditional (and, in my opinion, more intuitive) method of discussing phonetic and phonological issues first and expounding other areas afterwards; delaying the most elemental aspects of language change (i.e. sound changes) towards the end of each section makes an unwelcome impression for linguistically oriented readers. Nevertheless, H's approach works quite neatly, and his comprehensive and detailed analysis in all relevant areas is thorough and impressive, considering the vast subject matter at hand.

Aside from the ordering of topics, phonetics is in nearly every section a key element of H's presentation; he has even included the most up-to-date IPA symbol-chart as an attachment right after his introduction (IPA is used in the phonetic transcriptions throughout the book). As an interesting feature, H has provided every text sample with a phonetic transcription in addition to the customary glosses and translation, which many readers doubtlessly find valuable. The idea as such is in fact a bit controversial, since the transcriptions are intended to reflect the actual pronunciation of the supposed writer or reader of the text in question; H even attempts to mirror the social status of the speaker or the register of speech. Although H presents the transcriptions as mere approximations and comments often on their inaccuracy and ambiguity, the results are mixed: their omnipresent nature not only makes them appear

as a central part of the content of the work, but they also compel the reader to analyze the text samples (or at least their phonetic nature) through them. However, one must compliment H on his bold attempt to blow a dead language form into life by showing that recovering the actual pronunciation of an ancient language is far from impossible.

One of the most controversial issues in Greek language history is the exact dating of certain sound changes. The general trend is that classical and Indo-European scholars (e.g. Sturtevant 1940, Tucker 1969, Allen 1974, Palmer 1980) tend to offer more conservative (i.e. later) dating, whereas Byzantine and Modern Greek scholars, especially those of Greek nationality, but also some others (e.g. Jannaris 1897, Teodorsson 1974, 1977, 1978) argue for earlier dates (significantly earlier in some cases). The dividing point here is chiefly methodological: the dating of sound changes is based on indirect evidence (the pronunciation of a dead language has to be inferred through writing), and written evidence can be interpreted in a number of different ways (for discussion, see, e.g., Lass 1997: Ch. 2). As for prehistoric times, only the comparative method offers some inferential and patchy information on phonetic details. Written records (in an alphabetic script) do represent actual pronunciation to some degree, but due to the conservative nature of writing, not all sound changes are actually recorded, and those that are, tend to surface only after a notable period of time. Additionally, scribes and engravers (as human beings) have a certain tendency for errors in such cases in which contemporary pronunciation no longer matches the written form. Epigraphic evidence, therefore, is of paramount importance here. But even scribal errors can be interpreted differently, and not all of them arise from true language change.

On p. 160, H provides a short overview of previous literature on dating changes in the vowel system, with much emphasis on S.-T. Teodorsson's studies on the phonological development of Classical Attic (1974), Hellenistic Attic (1978) and Ptolemaic Koine (1977). H does mention Ruijgh's (1978) critical review of Teodorsson 1974, but he neither follows Ruijgh's criticism nor expounds it in any way. In my opinion, Ruijgh's criticism (as well as the argument presented in Wyatt 1979) on Teodorsson's methodology provides satisfactory proof that Teodorsson's conclusions are largely untenable (i.e. his datings are too early).

On pp. 119–120, H provides a summary of his methodology. Comprehensive usage of comparative material is especially laudable, but there is one point about which I must disagree: the role of Modern Greek in the process. In my opinion, H stresses Modern Greek outcomes too much. At some points they surely give useful, perhaps even crucial information, but if overused, their use may result in serious confusion and (in the worst case) a tilted view of language

change. This is a fundamental question in historical linguistics: the *object* of research must be separated from the *methods* with which it is researched. In our case the object is the history of the language (and history of course develops with time) and the methods are comparison and reconstruction (which examine the historical evidence in precisely the opposite way). The speakers of a past language had no way of predicting what their language would look (or sound) like after, say, one thousand years, and this fact limits the possibilities of using modern material: the diachronic explanation for a form is an older, not newer form. The same kind of argumentation surfaces earlier on p. 97, where, after listing some non-classical grammatical features typical of the historian Polybius, H claims that ‘these traits all reflect developments in the contemporary spoken and written languages of educated discourse, and *a fortiori* in lower-level spoken varieties too, where they had doubtless already gone further’ [emphasis original]. How do we know this? The only explanation H gives is that they appear later in the history of the language, but the argument is insufficient.

In the following, I briefly comment on some of the particular issues that captured my attention while examining H’s work. The tone is deliberately critical to some degree; this is not to undermine H’s obvious merits but to encourage discussion.

H has treated the prehistory of Greek and its development from the Indo-European parent language extremely briefly. Considering the central position of Greek in Indo-European linguistics, a more detailed survey could have been justifiable here. The main characteristics of Greek are neatly summed up in a page-long list (pp. 9–10), but some important details, e.g. Greek’s affinity with other languages, have been entirely left out.

While discussing the Ancient Greek dialects, H criticizes the traditional methodological framework used to divide the dialects into a certain number of groups, according to the 19th century comparative tree model (for discussion on the difficulties of subgrouping within this traditional historical-comparative framework, see Lass 1997: Ch. 3.7.2). His main point (p. 16f.) is that during the critical prehistoric period the varieties of Greek were continuously in so close a contact with each other that the premises of the traditional tree model are not fulfilled, and thus the model is not suited to representing the relationships of the dialects. He even argues, that the tree model offers ‘clearly an unrealistically restricted view of language development’ (p. 16; similar arguments concerning the Uralic language family have been presented by Kaisa Häkkinen (1984); for discussion on Häkkinen 1984 and the functionality of the tree model in general, see Itkonen 1999: 128f.). H has a point here insofar as there obviously has been much contact between the dialects at that time, but he seems to have partially misunderstood the idea behind and the limitations of the tree

model. The model itself is a purely theoretical apparatus, which is only capable of indicating linguistic affinity in a way it is designed to: it is not a model of language change *per se*. To reject the application of the tree model to Greek dialects is to reject the whole idea about their common origin. The perceived '(un)realism' of language development is beside the point here. After all, the tree model has been supplemented with other models and theories, which all together offer a scientifically valid (or, 'realistic') representation of language change. H hints at the abandonment of the tree model (p. 17), but in my opinion this would be totally unnecessary, as long as the purpose and the inherent limitations of the model are taken into account.

Boeotian has indeed developed some sound changes much earlier than other dialects, and the details definitely merit investigation. However, H's comment (p. 33) on the more conservative nature of other dialects' writing systems does not suffice as a piece of evidence to support the claim that these dialects would also have had 'Boeotian' features earlier than previously assumed. The evidence points out that it is Boeotian that is truly unique in this respect. On pp. 85–86, Boeotian appears again as a pioneer regarding several later sound changes, which, despite lacking exhaustive evidence, H again assumes to have happened early in Attic as well, but the changes would have been systematically 'camouflaged' by standardized Attic orthography. But the exception here is Boeotian, not Attic. The point in question is methodological: do scribal errors directly reflect changing (or already changed) speech habits, and even if they do, to what degree (for general discussion on the role of written records in historical linguistics, see Lass 1997: Ch. 2)?

The existence of some clearly non-Attic words and word forms in Koine (especially those with [a:] instead of [ɛ:]) can, according to H (p. 83), be explained either as a tendency towards the levelling out of irregular morphological paradigms (such as the 'Attic declension' of type *λεώς* and *νεώς* in favor of more regular 2nd declension masculines ending in *-ος*), or as relatively early (5th century BC) formally non-Atticized dialect loans. The first case may be related to a principle known as *isomorphism*, i.e. analogy-driven change towards an ideal *one meaning—one form* correspondence (1M1F; for a useful overview on the effects of isomorphism and analogy in language change, see Anttila 1989: Ch. 5). The latter case may be explained as H does, since the sound law governing the Attic shift [a:] > [ɛ:] in certain environments had not been operable for a good 700 years before the emergence of Koine (p. 82, Tucker 1969: 40). Alternatively, this may be a case of simple analogy: some of the examples cited by H (*ποδαγός*, *όδαγός*) are easily identifiable as derivations from the verb *ἄγω*, and most probably were so for the Greeks as well, so that the [a]-vowel was reinstated by analogy.

On p. 93, H offers an interesting explanation regarding the decline of accusative + infinitive constructions with certain verbs. His main point here is syntactic isomorphism: as accusative + infinitive constructions exhibit subjects and semantic agents in the accusative case, resulting in a system-wide 1M2F-situation (subjects are encoded with two different cases), the construction is thus replaced by an already existing construction with nominative subjects, thus striving for the ideal 1M1F (all subjects are encoded with nominative). This seems to be a relatively common drift in the world's languages. Germanic languages, for example, show a clear tendency for comparable isomorphic levelling towards nominative subjects and accusative objects (e.g. older Sw. *mig bör* > modern Sw. *jag bör*; Wessén 1965: 198–201). A related development is observable in Greek in that accusative expands its usage over dative and becomes the primary prepositional case (p. 108; though there are other factors involved, too).

H explains the delayed placement of γάρ as a feature of 'casual conversational styles', where topic-comment types of structure are common (p. 104). A more likely explanation, however, is the old Indo-European *Wackernagel's Law*, according to which certain conjunction adverbs are placed second in a sentence (see Collinge 1985: 217 f. and the references there). On the other hand, the explanation for this particular law may well have been originally the same, but I think in this case the historical explanation is more plausible.

Word-final nasals tend to be weak cross-linguistically, especially *m* (cf. similar development in Latin, see e.g. Baldi 2002: 277; and the earlier Greek change where **m > n / _#*, thus leaving *n* as the only word-final nasal in Greek). According to H (p. 112), word-final *s* had a similar tendency, but it was oftentimes reinstated to preserve grammatical distinctions. This may well have been so, but word-final *n* also had (if not that many) grammatical functions, and its loss did lead to certain cases of ambiguity (for example, between nominative and accusative singular forms of some nouns). Therefore, the potential loss of word-final sibilants may not be a case of grammatically conditioned sound change; perhaps another kind of analogy is involved here.

In example 23 (p. 116), *λαμβάνεις μου τὰ γράμματα*, H interprets the genitive 1st person pronoun as a marker of possession. However, it can alternatively be analyzed as a separative genitive (i.e. 'you receive letters *from me*'), which would make comparison with dative much more unlikely. Moreover, the crucial factor here may not be position at all, but *function*.

On pp. 120–121, H explains that the use of digraph -ευ- (instead of -ου-) in the transliteration of the Roman name *Lūcius* would be due to the attempt to preserve long syllable quantity (the distinction in vowel length was beginning to be lost in Greek at that time). The usage can also be explained as a confusion with the Greek name Λεύκος. The two names are of course etymologically

connected (Chase 1897: 157). This may be a more plausible explanation, since contemporary spoken Latin was also beginning to lose distinctive vowel length at that time (Väänänen 1967: 29f.).

The development of $\text{v}\alpha$ into a general mood marker offers some interesting points. First, it is a clear case of grammaticalization, where the conjunction begins to lose its original meaning and gain uses outside of its original scope (this was later complemented with phonetic reduction into $\text{v}\alpha$, which is also a typical trait of grammaticalization). Second, from a typological point of view, it is notable that even though subjunctive forms are more or less lost due to sound change, the function of modality and subordination is nonetheless preserved by grammaticalizing a new marker for it (the phenomenon called *renovation* by Christian Lehmann (2002: 17–19)), which means a significant step towards a more analytic structure. Third, H analyzes (p. 129) this as a contact-induced change from Latin, which has interesting theoretical and methodological implications.

H finds it methodologically problematic to separate substrate and translation effect on Koine from ‘the natural development of Greek’ (p. 148). First, one should ask whether they even are separable, and to what extent: the idea that contact would somehow ‘distract’ the natural development of a language is obviously unfounded, as such distractions are indeed part of the natural development of any language. Second, an interesting method to tease out source language effects in a translated text is used by Wilhelm Streitberg on Gothic syntax (Streitberg 1920: 164–165): constructions in the Greek source text that are either differently translated into Gothic or not found there at all, are assumed to be of genuine Gothic origin—the method is of course too strict to present Gothic syntax in its entirety, but at least it excludes outside influence reliably. To my knowledge, there have not so far been any attempts to apply the method outside of Gothic.

H’s point (p. 216) about the regional diversification of the spoken language in the middle ages is certainly true, but his formulation implies that at some point there was a break with past language forms. This is not true: even though the spread of Koine more or less made old local dialects obsolete, it is very unlikely that there was ever a *de facto* discontinuity in a given area. It is perfectly safe to assume a net of dialect continua at all times, all over the Greek-speaking world. Thus, all areal features are more or less traceable back in time to the classical dialects and their distribution, with later language forms imposed upon them.

All in all, H’s book is a massive and thorough presentation of the history of the Greek language. It deals with all relevant aspects of language and language change: phonology, morphology, syntax, stylistics, history of literature,

and social history of the language. The scope of the work is comprehensive in that it covers literally all the history of the language from Mycenaean linear B tablets to the modern vernacular. However, due to H's focus, linguistic pre-history is treated very briefly, and even Mycenaean and the classical dialects receive relatively little attention. As to historical phonology, H follows more "radical" interpretations, whereas in a work of this magnitude a more balanced approach could have been preferable. Therefore, H's work does not replace but rather complements other manuals of Greek language history and definitely warrants its place as a comprehensive and detailed exposition of the post-classical development of the language.

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