

The expansion of a stereotype in a rural Greek community.

In Standard Modern Greek (Arvaniti 1999), the phonemes /l/ and /n/ have palatal realizations when they appear before the high front vowel (/i/), if it is followed by another tautosyllabic vowel, and alveolar realizations before all other vowels. There is [fi'li] 'kiss' whose plural (/fi- 'lia/) is [fi'la] while there is also [fi'lia] 'friendship' in which the /a/ does not belong to the same syllable as /li/. In several other varieties of Modern Greek (Newton 1972) these segments have palatal realizations simply before /i/. There we find the pronunciations [fi'li] 'kiss' and [fi'lia] 'friendship'.

This regional pronunciation is negatively stereotyped, especially by young speakers from urban centers (Athens and Thessaloniki), while the region that seems to be identified by it is that of the north-western Peloponnese, and the city of Patra (Papazachariou 2003). The present study examines the pattern of variation with respect to this variable in a small community on the island of Kefalonia, which is located near the city of Patra in the Ionian sea and whose residents maintain strong links with both Athens and Patra. The data were collected during two six-week visits, in 2005 and 2006, using a variety of methods, such as one-on-one interviews, group interviews, conversations in which the observer was also a participant, as well as conversations in which the observer was not present. The sample consists of 63 speakers (in a community of approximately 1,000 people) and every age group between 15 and 90 years old is represented; the range of educational levels and professions covered is also representative of the community.

The analysis of the data demonstrates clearly that the spread of the urban (alveolar) pronunciation is at an incipient stage, as its use is restricted to young females (under the age of 30) who are either studying in Athens or Patra, or have strong links to these cities through relatives and friends. After discussing the overall pattern of variation, the presentation will focus on the different levels of awareness about the variation among individuals of the youngest age group as well as the different attitudes that exist towards the palatal variants. It will be shown that, while both young men and young women are aware of the variation, the former express an indifference towards the stigmatized status of palatals in common popular culture and continue to use them, while the latter are extremely sensitized towards them and have learned to use the alveolar variants. The evidence gathered during the interviews, however, also shows that very few of the young female participants consider the palatal variants a feature of the Kefalonian dialect. Instead, most young females claim that this type of palatalization is absent from the local variety even though it is evident in the speech of their parents and male friends. This paradox will be explored within the context of the participants' attitudes towards their community, their view of major urban centers, and their plans for the future.

References

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