Recent advances in the documentation of Greek slang: The case of www.slang.gr

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1 Introduction[1]

In this paper we will explore the structure and content of an innovative online database of Modern Greek (MG) slang vocabulary ('www.slang.gr', henceforth Slang 2010). On the basis of the evident lexicographic and lexicological interest of this online list our specific task will be twofold. First, we will attempt a lexicographic description of Slang (2010) aiming at a qualitative description of its macrostructural and microstructural features, using representative examples from current slang as reported in the database. Second, we will classify the lemmas in Slang (2010) both in terms of their lexical/syntactic category and of their usage label with the view to making a tentative determination of the selection policy and the role of users.

2 Key features of Slang (2010)

Slang (2010) is presented as "an online list of, mainly, non standard terms of the Greek language along with definitions and examples, something like an online dictionary". Here, the term "non-standard" covers the so-called informal or marginal vocabulary that includes, among other things, professional jargon, dialectal vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, youth vocabulary[2], swear words, nonce words etc. (see Crystal 1980, 1995, Iordanidou & Androutsopoulos 1997, Kechagia 1997, Xydopoulos 2008, among others). Slang (2010) was first launched on 2 December 2006. In macrostructural terms, it contains *ca.* 15,000 lemmas entered by *ca.* 4,900 registered users (through a blog module) and stylistically approved by moderators. Lemmas are organized in strict alphanumeric order (i.e. according to Greek and/or Latin alphabet or non-alphanumeric / emoticon characters (e.g. 88, :(, 3A etc.). Each lemma bears a first entry date and a username. In microstructural terms, each item of the list is accompanied by one or more informal definitions (currently a total of 17,356 definitions), examples (corpus-based or editorial), cross-references to other items and a blog-like commentary by users.

3 Slang in Slang (2010)

Slang (2010) includes a great variety of slang vocabulary ranging from one-word items to multi-word expressions. In the next sections, we will attempt a quick

[1] We would like to thank the audience of the ICGL9 held in Chicago, USA in October 2009, where this research was first presented, for their fruitful comments and suggestions.

[2] For a corpus of youth vocabulary in MG see Iordanidou (1990-1995).

overview of the typology and formal characteristics of current Greek slang as it is reported in this database. In our overview we will describe and illustrate each case by using the most representative and innovative examples in the database.

3.1 One-word lexical units

Slang (2010) includes a large corpus of one-word lexical units that exhibits the richness of MG slang vocabulary. The corpus includes a variety of word types. As expected, first, we can find polymorphemic words of non-learned origin that belong to different lexical categories:

(1) *káfros, matsúki, ksíno, puró*

The database also includes sublexical units (mostly derivational suffixes), preferred in the slang variety, that in their majority are foreign loans from English and French; they are organized as independent lemmas:

(2) *-átos, -é, -iá, -man*

Given that abbreviation is a productive process in Modern Greek both standard and slang, the database reports several acronyms that are reminiscent of or refer to existing words or abbreviated units in Standard Greek:

(3) (a) *ΑΓΑ. ΠΟ.* (cf. *αγαπό* [love] <*αγanaktizmeni polítes*)
(b) *ΛΗΜΝΟΣ* (cf. *Límnos* [the island in N. Aegean Sea] < *láθos ítan mána na orkistó stratiótis*)
(c) *Τ.Α.Π.Α.* (cf. *tápa* [cap] < *tu ajíou pútsu anímera*)
(d) L.A. (cf. Los Angeles < *laikí aγorá, lekanopédιo atikís, lios ándzeles* (< Liósia [a poor suburb in Athens])

Furthermore, clipping as an abbreviatory process although it is not found in Standard Greek it used to be quite productive in lower varieties (cf. the language of street-urchins: *mágkika*). As reported in Slang (2010), clipping is present in modern slang and clipped items are of different syllabic length and structure (though mostly bisyllabic):

(4) *psi* (< *psixolóγos*), *proxó* (< *proxoriménos*), *komé* (< *koména*), *paró* (< *paroximénos*)

Slang (2010) also displays a large collection of derived slang words of different lexical categories. They are formed on the basis of a subset of suffixes[3] (as in 5)

[3] For the suffix *-ia*, see Efthymiou (1999 a, b); for *-aro* verbs, see Anastassiadi-Symeonidi (1994) and Efthymiou (to appear); for *-e*, see Anastasiadi-Symeonidi (1986); for the suffixes *-dzis* , *-iliki,* see Kiranoudis (2009); for the suffix *-i*, see Anastasiadi-Symeonidi (1996); for the suffix *-iaris*,

and prefixes[4] (as in 6) which is highly preferred in Greek slang (see Iordanidou & Androutsopoulos 1997 about the derivation mechanisms of teenage slang and Christopoulou 2010: 40-49 for a discussion of affix preferences in slang):

(5) (a) -ia: *arkuδjá, kartunjá, demekjá, splaterjá*
(b) -aro: *gugláro, saportáro, klikáro*
(c) -atos: *stekátos, γamátos, bitátos, dzamátos*
(d) -e: *dekavlé, ksekolté*
(e) -as: *asepás, iδjeterás*
(f) -iδis: *poniríδis, pendakaθaríδis*
(g) -dzis [MASC]/-u [FEM]: *ksipnidzís, tsakidzís, repadzú*
(i) -akjas: *staleyákjas, kokákjas, madalákjas, dumanákjas*
(j) -iliki: *tsatsilíki, pustrilíki, dzividzilíki, putsilíki*
(k) -i: *θesalonikí, komoδiní, ksanθemetí*
(l) -jaris: *putanjáris, sifiljáris, xuftjáris*
(m) -aδiko: *bobáδiko, partuzáδiko*
(n) -ono: *sufróno, fasóno, fistikóno*
(o) -iazo: *frapeδjázo, zabonjázo*

(6) (a) kara-: *karaklaníδi, karapistóla*
(b) kse-: *ksepsárotos, ksexabérotos, ksepareú*
(c) psilo-: *psilomalákas, psilokarjolákos*

Greek slang also includes foreign loanwords that have been incorporated into the morphological system of the language, as they bear the corresponding inflectional (as in 7a) and derivational (diminutive, as in 7b) suffixes[5]:

(7) (a) *súti* (< shoot), *spéki* (<spec)
(b) *feisbukáki* (<facebook + DIM), *bulsitáki* (<bullshit + DIM)

The fact that compounding is a very productive process in MG word-formation (see Ralli 2005, 2007 for discussion) in all varieties is further highlighted by the fact that slang includes large numbers of compounds of different structural and functional types[6] as reported in the database, e.g.:

(8) *levendomalákas, γavritíγano, munomaγnítis, venzinoγamiás, putanoδánio*

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see Anastassiadi-Symeinidi (1997); for the suffix *-aδiko*, see Anastassiadi-Symeonidi (1997); for the suffixes *-ono* and *-iazo*, see Efthymiou (2010, to appear).

[4] For this type of prefixes, see Efthymiou (2002), Giannoulopoulou (2003), Ralli (2005), Xydopoulos (2009) among others.

[5] For the incorporation of loanwords into the MG lexicon, see Anastassiadi-Symeonidi (1986).

[6] See also Bisetto & Scalise (2005) for a classification of compounds.

Blending, another rather new word-formation process in MG, is gradually becoming more and more productive in the slang variety (see Arvaniti 1998 and Ralli & Xydopoulos 2010, among others). The database contains a collection of blends that both qualitatively and quantitively reveal the creative nature of the process, e.g.:

(9) *γαmojeló, psolíst, fústis, psóliγud, mavlákas*

Slang (2010) also includes lexical items that are created for humour or ludling purposes[7]. Such items are words or lexical phrases that have been deliberately ill-formed, in morphophonological terms, to create paronymic constructions, e.g.:

(10) *ameriklános, anamuní, anaksiomatikós, apeófovos, voleftís, sinporδía*

Nonce formations in *-on, -ol, -il* and *-io*, imitating medicine brandnames or chemical elements, also serve ludling purposes[8], e.g.:

(11) *andipalevón, paleovotaníl, starxiδiamól, pustónio*

Nonce words of the same communicative purpose are those formed with learned suffixes attached to non-learned bases; a process yielding the humorous effect of the constructions (cf. Plag 1999 for English), e.g.:

(12) *piδíksimos*, *γαmjosíni, kavlosíni*

Other formations reported in Slang (2010) are produced through either conversion (as in 13a) or lexicalization (as in 13b), mostly using the suffix *-as*:

(13) (a) *píkras, valvíδas, pipílas, sáljas, sidrivanáto*
(b) *pararxíδas, pitsafértas, sasíδas, fisarúfas, demelés, selemelés*

The corpus also includes items created by syllabic metathesis in existing slang words rendering them "secret words". These "resyllabified" words form part of the Greek secret vocabulary/language known as *poδaná*, e.g.:

(14) *gafrá (< frága), ripapá (< papári), tsobá (< bátso), ropú (< puró)*

[7] For a discussion on the characteristics of MG humorous speech, see Galiti (1996).

[8] For similar remarks regarding the sociolect of Greek soldiers, see Spiliotis & Fragiadakis (2009).

Finally, the database contains numerous hybrids and ludling hybrids based either on the English suffixes *–ing, -ation* and *-less* and the semi-suffix *e-* or the French suffixes *-ment*, *-ique* or *-age*, e.g.:

(15) (a) *e-piratís, e-pútanos, e-pútsos*[9]*, pútsless, persóna non kúku, savúra- vivre, fetéison, minimatéison*[10]*, guzgúning, pefkovelóning, pútsing*
(b) *katapliktikemán, katináz, kavlotík*

Apart from common words, Slang (2010) reports a large number of proper names (both personal and place names) with ridiculed/ironic or derogatory meaning. These are generic and people's names which are based on paronymic forms of existing anthroponyms, e.g.:

(16) *otejánis, tzuzépe lugratóre, éfi θóδi, zak iv pustó, bob dírlan, γαμái láma*

A paronymic effect is also obtained with nonexistent people's surnames that are formed using the suffixes of surnames of particular countries or regions:

(17) *δebézoγlu* (Turkey), *mastúrovits* (Serbia), *pseftópulos* (Peloponnese)

Or, with nonce place names using the "oriental" suffix *-stan* referring to an unacceptable situation or context, reminiscent of Asian "underdeveloped" countries:

(18) *starxiδistán, kakuxistán, avnanistán*

Altered toponyms ridiculing a local custom of an area include:

(19) *gatzolía, eláda, tsabikjía*

3.2 Multiword expressions

Almost one-third of the lemmas in the corpus is classified as multiword expressions and is alphabetically sorted according to the initial element. Expanding Atkins & Rundell's (2008: 167-168 and references therein) typology of these items we can classify the corresponding lemmas in Slang (2010) as follows:

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[9] For hybrids with e-, see also Gavriilidou & Efthymiou (2003).

[10] For similar remarks on teenage slang and the sociolect of Greek soldiers, see Iordanidou & Androutsopoulos (1997) and Spiliotis & Fragiadakis (2009).

a. **fixed and semi-fixed phrases**[11]**:** *óso ke na xtipjése frapés δen jínese, to pníji to kunéli*
b. **transparent collocations and support verb constructions:** *stin áli zoí, sto militó, káno móko, káno bam*
c. **similes:** *san burδélo se metakómisi, san klasméno marúli, san ti xíra sto kreváti*
d. **catch phrases and quotations:** *δen ipárxun ásximes jinékes monáxa ándres pu δen pínun, δen θéli kópo θéli trópo, íne polá ta leftá ári*
e. **proverbs (altered):** *ópjos sisképtete δen sképtete, i putánes ke I trelés éxun tis tíxes tis kales*
f. **(multi-word) compounds**[12]**:** *muní tsokoláta, buγátsa me flurí, pútsa tu δjaólu, aktína psolís, festival xolisterínis*
g. **altered (humoristic) expressions:** *sa vjis ston pijemó ja tin iθáki íse tóso ilíθios pu θa vreθís sti θráki, I stísi sas prooθíte, ópu ftoxós ke i bíra tu*

h. **ludling translations/hybrids/alterations:** *mit porden nicht vafen avgen* (< me porδés δen váfis avγá), *de fuckto sxési* (< de facto), *clopy paste* (< copy paste), *windows svísta* (< windows vista), *beauty free* (< duty free)

4 Slang (2010) and lexicography

Having seen the overview of the content of Slang (2010), we will examine how this material is organized in the database by making observations on its "macrostructural" and "microstructural" characteristics as well as on its "lexicographic" policies. Our aim will be twofold. First, we will explain why Slang (2010), in its current state, cannot be considered as a proper (online) slang dictionary. Second, we will make some proposals as to how this very rich lexical database could be turned into a proper lexicographic tool.

4.1 Observations on "macrostructure"

Slang (2010) is an online/electronic database and so it has all functional advantages found in electronic dictionaries, as discussed by Dodd (1989) and later by Oppentocht & Schutz (2003), and Atkins & Rundell (2008), among others.

Slang's (2010) macrostructure is dynamic and can be approached either by entering a whole or a part of a word (minimum of three characters) or by choosing one search category as projected from a categorical label in the microstructure. If we apply the first option the system does not accept any misspellings, while it is possible for the user to search for any part anywhere in a word (e.g. a search item like "era" will yield all available distributions of the sequence: *a<u>erá</u>to, vet<u>erá</u>nos, afteró<u>era</u>*). If we apply the second option we are not always sure what search

[11] For discussion on MG fixed phrases, see also Anastassiadi-Symeonidi & Efthymiou (2006).
[12] For this type of compounds, see Anastassiadi-Symeonidi (1986) and Ralli (2007).

category to choose, as conceptual/thematic entities are mixed up with morphological entities and we cannot figure out why all options are treated as equivalent. In other words, the user is not sure about the meaning and membership of "conceptual" categories like "self-referential", "professional argot", "classic" etc. Similarly, s/he is confused about the meaning of "morphological" categories like "grammatical forms", "nonce formations" *vis à vis* "neologisms" and "initialisms".

Furthermore, the classification of lemmas under specific thematic and/or morphological categories appears to be unsystematic and inconsistent. For example, there is not a standard criterion about when a lemma is classified under the labels "neologisms" or "nonce formations". So, *jermanotsoliás*, a derogatory political term of the forties, is characterized as a neologism while all compounds with *muno-* as the first constituent are considered as nonce formations, along with blends, hybrids and ludling word-forms that do not constitute separate morphological categories.

We have also observed that the headwords are not always in proper citation form, e.g. *αγαθομúna* [FEM] and *αγαθομúnis* [MAS], *αγορítsi* [SING] and *αγορítsia* [PLUR] are discrete lemmas although they concern instances of the same lexemes. In addition, we have found that in many cases the alphabetization of lemmas in Slang (2010) is not consistent. For example, some multi-word lemmas are sorted according to the initial character and some others according to the initial character of the (assumed) head (e.g. *ksíno* < *to ksíno*), a problem that is overridden in dynamic macrostructures.

4.2 Observations on "microstructure"

As we showed in the previous section, Slang's (2010) macrostructure displays several inconsistencies that are due to incorrect setup of categories (or search routes) and wrong classification of lemmas. These problems are also related to inconsistencies in the microstructure.

Apart from the fact that headwords are not always in the proper citation form, we have noticed that, in general, grammatical information is missing, e.g. the lexical category of the lemmas is not given. In addition, the microstructure does not provide any information about the origin of the lemmas, that is whether or not the entry comes from oral or written resources. This problem is apparent in the invented examples used to further explain each lemma as they are not as illustrative as they should be to support a definition (see Lovatt 1984, Oppentocht & Schutz 2003, Svensén 2009 and esp. Atkins & Rundell 2008: 452ff):

(20) *Jaaa δes tus, mu arxísane tis αγαpútses tóra*
"Hey look at them, they have now started doing 'αγαpútses'"

Other information missing from microstructure are usage labels that in Slang (2010) are substituted with membership in one or more thematic categories

creating confusion to the user (e.g. the item *γαμάδικο* is cross-referenced to two categories: "sexual" and "names of places")[13].

The fact that there is no available information about the constituency of compounds, blends, hybrids or similar formations is another inconsistency in Slang (2010). Consequently, users cannot (easily) figure out the meaning and pragmatics of several items in the database (e.g. *δεθελονδίς*, *αγαπύτσα, kornalákas* etc.).

Definitions are a major problem in Slang's (2010) microstructure as they do not have a set form and are not consistent in their form and structure. Instead they have the form of commentaries made by users or they have a quasi-sentential form as we can see in the following definition for the lemma *αγαπύτσα* as it appears in the entry[14]:

> Η αγαπούλα, σε πρόστυχη βερσιόν. Λογοπαίγνιο-αιχμή απευθυνόμενο προς ομοφυλόφιλους ή προς ένα ζευγάρι που και καλά το παίζουν φίλοι αλλά όλοι βλέπουμε τι ήθελε προκύψει. Το υπονοούμενο σαφές: από τις γούτσου αγαπούλες, ο δρόμος μέχρι το αχαλίνωτο σεχ είναι κοντά...

Furthermore, following Geeraerts's (2003: 88ff) discussion on defining meaning, we can easily find out that definitions here cannot be classified as either denotational (i.e. enumerating defining properties), or metalinguistic (i.e. descriptive, esp. for multiword expressions or phrases), or synonymic (i.e. using synonyms).

Finally, sense relations appear to be missing from the codification of microstructure. So, polysemy is not properly treated as in many cases multiple meanings are not consistently defined and illustrated (see, e.g., the case of the f-word *γαμάο*). The same holds for synonymy and opposition as such information is completely absent in most lemmas.

4.3 Observations on "lexicographic" policies

Slang's (2010) "lexicographic" policies regarding the selection of lemmas and other related issues are not available on the site. We managed to obtain some information through personal communication with one of the moderators. It seems that the users can upload their lemmatic input (lemma, definition, examples, picture) by themselves, and their input is viewable by all users. Moreover, the input is corrected/approved by the moderators only in terms of spelling and syntax but not in terms of content and format. So, all problems with macrostructure and microstructure that we discussed earlier are completely justified. Furthermore, the fact that there are no standard criteria for inclusion or exclusion of lemmas as well as that there seems to be a rather confused idea about the meaning and range of

[13] For discussion on dictionaries usage labels see Anastasiadi-Symeonidi (2009).

[14] This is a non-translated snapshot from the microstructure of *αγαπύτσα* in Slang (2010).

the term "slang" among users justifies the inconsistencies and fuzziness in categories setup and lemmas classification, that we saw above (Boogards 2003, Mattiello 2005). The only policy that appears to be applicable in Slang (2010) concerns the deletion of lemmas from the database if they: (a) are overlapping with others, (b) are proved to be racist or offensive to individuals, (c) are not voted/approved by other users, and (d) are incomplete or incomprehensive and so useless by users.

4.4 Conclusions and suggestions

In this paper we discussed the current status of MG slang through a lexicographic examination of the Slang (2010) online database. We have confirmed our initial assumption that Slang (2010) is not an online dictionary as it lacks microstructural and macrostructural consistency according to the relevant literature. It is more of a blog where users exchange views / ideas / information about taboo language which then is only basically classified. It looks like adopting some but not all of features and functions of the American online slang dictionary (see OSD 2010). Nevertheless, as we showed in section 3, the database incorporates very useful lexical material of current MG slang which can be exploited in lexicographic terms, given also the interaction with users.

We could suggest that moderation could be a lot better if users gave their input in different (compulsory) fields that could include: a standard definition style, categorial information, context, sense, thematic category, careful treatment of polysemous items, cross-references etc. Slang (2010) can also incorporate other features like the ones it already comprises (e.g. the "slangometer") but also information about lemmas' geographic distribution and a thesaurus feature for a more conceptual/thematic approach to the variety (as in OSD 2010). Therefore, by applying a range of lexicographic principles as explained earlier in detail, we believe that the database can be transformed into a proper online slang dictionary like that by Ted Duckworth for British slang (Duckworth 1996-2010) without losing its very useful role as a forum dedicated to Greek slang.

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