Radio news and phonetic variation in Modern Greek

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ABSTRACT

Η παρούσα έρευνα εξετάζει την επίδραση κοινωνικών και γλωσσικών παραγόντων στη φωνητική ποικιλία που παρατηρείται στη γλώσσα των δελτίων ειδήσεων δύο ραδιοφωνικών σταθμών (ΕΡΑ1 και SKY 100,4). Η υπό εξέταση φωνητική μεταβλητή είναι αυτή της προερρινοποίησης των ηχηρών κλειστών συμφώνων της Νέας Ελληνικής (b,d,g) και τα αποτελέσματα που προέκυψαν ερμηνεύονται μέσω από το θεωρητικό πλαίσιο της σχεδίασης ακροατηρίου (audience design) και των κοινωνικών δικτύων.

1. INTRODUCTION

We are living in what Marshal McLuhan (1964) called "global village". Mass Media (MM) have introduced a multilevel model in which information disseminates and reproduces itself in a very complicated manner. This frees the ground for the development of various theoretical approaches which all of them share in common a twofold possibility in which we can examine the nature of MM: a) the first view is the one that examines MM in relation to the macro structures of the society, that is the social and cultural elements that form our social reality b) the second view examines the mutual influence of MM and micro structures of the society, that is the way in which MM interact with the community, the group and the individual. This mediative role of MM between the two different layers of the society functions as a special kind of active filter which links two different and extremely fluid variables, that is, the experience and the individual (McQuail 1987: 52 - 53).

2. LANGUAGE STANDARDISATION AND MM

Until the end of the seventies the study of language usage in MM had been neglected because of the its formal character and its lack of internal variability. The language of MM presumed to be stylistically uniform and indicative of the careful and prestigious speech (Leitner 1983: 5).

Moreover, by that time, it was already known the role of MM in the development and the preservation of the linguistic standard. O'Donnell & Todd (1991: 91 - 92) report that in 1926 the program managers of BBC radio station had already express their reservations about the speech quality transmitted to the public. The general opinion at that period was that the language preferred in the broadcasting should be intact from geographical and social influences and should keep its internal variability restrained. The MM language had to follow the definition of the standard language, that is, "*maximal variation in function, and minimal variation in form.*"(Leith 1983: 32)[1]. The most appropriate dialect available which met the above criteria was Received Pronunciation (RP), a dialect "*inculcated through the public schools (i.e., prestigious private boarding schools) and accepted as the correct pronunciation for upper-class English men and women.*" (Algeo 1992: 161). The prestigious characteristics of the RP were closely bounded with the dominant ideology for the role of MM in that period, which was "*to educate and to propagate 'high culture'*"(Smith 1974[2], reported in Williams 1992: 142). Both notions of "high language" and "high culture" via MM were indispensamble connected till the one presupposed the existence of the other.

The link between standard language and MM is not restrained only in the BBC case but extends in all the known speech communities that posess MM tending to be a sociolinguistic universal. A number of studies have already used the MM language as a sample of prestigious language usage in order to investigate various aspects of language standardisation (among others Bourhis, Giles & Lambert 1975, Finegan &

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[1] Leith, Dick (1983). *A social history of English*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

[2] Smith, A. (1974). *British Broadcasting*. Newton Abbott, David and Charles

Biber 1986, Biber 1988[3] etc.).The recognition of the above connection of course does not imply in any way that language standardisation results from MM since the notion of standard is incorporated in every social construction (Haas 1982: 15). What really happens is that MM enforce the standard language and propagate it to an extended base. MM function resemples to a recycling devise which follows certain steps: a) MM select the standard variants of specific linguistic variables according to the speech community's evaluation of her own language usage b) the selected forms are coded and used extensively forming a certain speech style which is idiosyncratic and creates the linguistic identity of the medium. c) the extensive use and the trasmission of these linguistic forms gives them prestige and standardises them (Bell 1983: 29-31).

In this process MM do not remain socially neutral institutions reflecting the reality in which function. Their ideological identity interacts with the interpretation of the reality. As Kress (1983: 43) puts it MM function in a way similar to the life experience. Everybody interpretes the reality through the ideological and social filters of its personality. Having this in mind we can conclude that MM language does not consist a uniform genre but is defined by the social and ideological coordinates of the specific medium which uses it.On the other hand we observe that the audience utilizes the same value system and selects the MM that correspond more closely to its socio-cultural characteristics.

3. STYLISTIC STRATIFICATION OF NEWS LANGUAGE: THE AUDIENCE DESIGN THEORY

The social and ideological identity of the medium is revealed linguistically through language variation. The enforcement of a specific pronunciation, or syntactic structure against another structurally equivalent consists by itself a ideological choise based on the assumption that language usage is a widely accepted social marker. MM consciously utilize the socio - linguistic interaction using specific language varieties in order to attach specific audiences. Bell (1984) called this kind of linguistic convergence "audience design". By this proposed "that the intra-speaker

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[3] Biber, Douglas (1988). *Variation across speech and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

or stylistic dimension of language variation can be primarily correlated with the attributes of the hearers" (Bell 1991: 105).

The audience design bases on previous research that had been conducted in the social psychology paradigm and more specifically on speech accomodation theory (as this developed in a series of publications by Giles and his collaborates - ind. Giles&Powesland 1975, Bourhis, Giles & Lambert 1975, Coupland et al. 1988 etc.). In general terms speech accomodation proposes that speakers tend to converge or diverge their speech style according to their feelings regarding the intelocutor. One of the most well documented conclusions provided by the empirical research in this framework was that the speaker exploits an 'approval seeking' strategy by adapting his speech to the interlocutor's. The same strategy seems to be operative also in mass communication even if the interlocutor and its feedback is not physically present. The broadcaster designs its language usage according to an ideal audience with the same social characteristics that correspond to the social position of the medium he works. By acting this way the broadcaster clusters its audience since people who their language style diverges from the specific will tune to another station with socio - linguistic features more similar to theirs.

With audience design theory Bell manages to show how the intraspeaker linguistic variation (style) derives from interspeaker or social variation. This connection occurs with the proposal of what he calls a style axiom.

> Variation on the style dimension within the speech of a single speaker derives from and echoes the variation which exists between speakers on the social dimension. (1984: 151)

Ôhe above axiom is supported by all quantitative research conducted within Labovian methodical paradigm. With the exception of Modaressi-Tehrani (1978) and Jahangiri (1980) - reported in Bell (1984: 154-156) all scholars prove that the degree of stylistic variation does not exceed the degree of social variation.

Audience design introduces a new dimension different from the classic Labovian conception of the one-dimensional stylistic variation of language. Labov distinguished a series of seperate stylistic layers that

vary from simple and relaxed speech (vernacular) in the speaker's familiar environment to the formal reading of isolated words or phrases. The factor that organizes the stylistic spectrum into countable variable is the attention paid by the speaker during his language production. Thus the speaker can control his stylistic repertoire by modifying the his attention to what he says. Evidently Bell's data cancel the one-dimensional conception of style and add social dynamics to its interpretation. Maybe the most striking example of Bell's argumentation (1991) is the presentation of data from a small number of broadcasters who work in up to three different radio stations. The percentages that the broadcasters achieved in different phonological variables corresponded to the prestige of the radio station they worked. These findings could not be attributed to the claim that the same broadcaster had different percentages of attention depending of the station he was broadcasting. Instead, they can be satisfactorily interpreted within the audience design framework. The same theory could also be extended to the analysis of interpersonal communication since, as Milroy (1987: 182) suggests, every research on stylistic variation can be interpreted within this framework.

In addition, Dressler & Wodak (1982: 352 - 355) reject the Labovian conception of style; summarizing 10 years of sociophonological research in Standard Austrian German and in Viennese Germanic dialect and using psycholinguistic methods, they conclude that style can not be treated in one-dimensional models because covariated with a series of intra - and extra - personal factors.

Even Labov in his recent publication (1994: 157 - 158) accepts a multidimensional conception of style and recognizes the importance of audience in stylistic variation. He stresses though that attention is a usefull methodological tool for the examination of language change in progress.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research presented here was conducted during the second half of 1994 and includes the recording of news bulletins from two radio stations (ERA1 and SKY 100,4). ERA1 is the national radio station of Greece with many years of history and state administration. On the other hand SKY 100,4 broadcasted first in 1988 at the same time with a number of other radio stations when the operation of private sector radio stations

was permitted. The reason why these two stations were selected is twofold:

a) Both stations put stress on the news reporting section of the program confining music to low rating hours.

b) Both stations represent two different trends in MM industry. ERA1 is a state radio station with international range and which is received in areas where Greeks of the diaspora exist (e.g. Germany, United States). Its ratings are low in comparison to most private stations and its administrative hierarchy is complex and up to a degree goverment dependent, while the majority of the staff has permanent contracts. In contrast, SKY 100,4 trasmitts in a geographically limited area in Greece. Its ratings are the highest among all state and private radio stations in the Athens area (data from a BARI -FOCUS - report from the period between 9-1-1995 and 2-4-1995) with a 23,74% in the age group between 13-70. It is privately funded and the personel does not hold permanent positions.

The sampling methodology followed was based on two main purposes:

a) the augmentation of periods between two different broadcasts of the same speaker so that his/her speech sample consists of news bulletins broadcasted with a period of at least a week between one another in order to sample radomness will be guaranteed.

b) the decrease of the time periods between speech samples collected from the two stations so that the news vocabulary could be relatively the same.

The obtained recordings had 40 hours of news speech but only 8 hours were selected to be further analyzed due to sampling or other restrictions. The final sample contained 58 news bulletins (with duration from 3 to 20 minutes) broadcasted by 8 broadcasters (4 from each radio station).

The linguistic variable selected was the prenasalization of voiced obstruents of Modern Greek ($[b] \sim [^mb]$, $[d] \sim [^nd]$, $[g] \sim [^{n'}g]$) which occur in word internal positions. The laters appear very frequently in Modern Greek language (nearly 7,5 times in a minute) and therefore their behaviour can be studied with relative easyness.

Moreover, prenasalization is one of the most well studied phaenomena regarding its sociolinguistic status. A number of quantitative studies (Pagoni 1989, Charalambopoulos.1991, Ìéêñùò 1995, Arvaniti1995) have conducted under different methodological frameworks but with similar - in the broad sense of the word -findings.

5. RESULTS

The factors which we presuppose that they explain the prenasalization variation observed in our data are devided intwo main categories: a) the social factors, that is the social characteristics of the stations or the broadcasters and b) the linguistic factors, that is the lingustic environment of the token, its grammatical category etc.

5.1 Social factors

- Station: The initial research hypothesis was that the difference of the social profile of each station could justify different patterns of variation which would be similar with that of its audience. Prenasalization was traditionally concerned as a prestige speech marker (e.g. Newton[4] 1972) and its lack was a sign of uneducated and vulgar speech. Thus, the station with the most educated and socially higher audience is expected to use speech with higher prenasalization rates. By examining the social profiles of the two stations and their percentages in prenasalazation usage we verify the initial research hypothesis. The audience of ERA1 consists of people belonging in its majority at the upper social and age group. On the other hand, the audience of SKY 100,4 is more widely distributed with the majority of its audience belonging in the medium age and social group (25-54). This difference in audiences' social profiles is reflected also in the prenasalization rates. All the broadcasters of ERA1 achieved a statistically significant higher proportion of prenasalized words (average 33,2%) compared to the broadcasters of SKY 100,4 (average 12,4%).
- Sex of the broadcaster: This factor does not influence the total sample. However, its examination in relation to the variable of "station" revealed two different patterns. In the sample of SKY 100,4 sex did not correlate with the prenasalization rates. On the other hand in ERA1 prenasalization variation correlated with the sex of the broadcaster (phi -Φ- correlation coefficient =0,09, p<0,007) with the women having higher prenasalization rates (37%) than men (30%).

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[4] Newton, Brian (1972). *The generative intepretation of dialect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

5.2 Linguistic variables

- Voiced obstruent: We used this variable so that we could investigate whether b,d,g behave simialrily in the prenasalization or present different accesibility to the phaenomenon. Previous work (Charalambopoulos et al. 1991:294) concluded that d is prenasalized much more frequently than b and g. The findings of the present research agree with the above mentioned study in that b,d,g behave different in prenasalization (χ^2=25,8 df=2 p<0,000) but disagree in d's higher prenasalization rates since in our sample b exhibits the highest prenasalization score(40,3%).

- Tempo: By this variable we tried to investigate whether prenasalization rates depend on the rate of our speech or not. Tempo was calculated by deviding the time needed for a sentence to be pronounced by the number of the phonetic syllables consisting the whole sentence. A series of statistical tests (ANOVA, Multiple Linear Regression) were conducted which showed that broadcasters in ERA1 speak slow (139,4 msec per syllable) without this affecting the prenasalization rates while on the other hand broadcasters in SKY 100,4 have higher tempo (124 msec per syllable) which influence them decreasing prenasalization.

- Nasal environment: The presence of nasal segments near the b.d.g position inluenced the prenasalization rates by decreasing them. This negative correlation (Φ= -0,11, df=1, p<0,000) indicates the trend of the broadcasters to operate a small scale low level phonetic dissimilation rule in nasal environment in order to constrain extensive use of the nasal pronunciation of sequencing segmants.

- Morphological status of voiced obstruents: A voiced obstruent can be in word internal position ([kabos])or can be constructed in morpheme boundaries by a prefix ending in [n] and the initial consonant of a lexical theme ([si**b**leko]<[si**n**+**p**leko]).In the later case the prenasalization rates are extremely high giving a nearly linear correlation (r = 0,90).

6. CONCLUSIONS

From the above it is evident that prenasalization is interelated with a number of social and linguistic factors each one explaining a small amount of the observed variation. Audience design framework offers us a

persuasive interpetation of our data and in addition confirms the hypothesis that prenasalization is a prestige speech marker which is validated as that by the older generation speakers. The claim that the new generations seem to ignore its social significance supports also by Frangudaki (1992: 369) and Arvaniti (1995: 209).

The fact that both broadcasters have been trained phonetically in prenasalization (personal communication with broadcasters from both stations) and realize its social prestige guides us to the intepretation of the variation as an attempt to converge their speech to their audience. In SKY 100,4 we observe that language usage is designed without formal markers and the prenasalization rates resemble these of the most people. On the other hand the speech from ERA1 is higly standardised. This is also indicated by the fact that the distribution of prenasalization in ERA1 sample is highly irregular which is typical of the formality.

In addition we can trace difference in the way the broadcasters form their ideal audiences. This formation is highly influenced by the working environment of the broadcaster. Thus, ERA1 offers a strict professional environment with a tradition of language correctness which is well known. This tradition is respected from all the broadcasters and everybody tries to produce «correct» speech forms.Thus, the working network in ERA1 is very strong and puts normative pressures on the language usage its broadcasters. On the other hand SKY100,4 does not have broadcasters by proffession. They are journalists who present the news. The focus is on the news itself and not on the language of the news.

From the above becomes evident that audience design in MM is a useful explanatory tool in the understanding of stylistic variation but has to be used in combination with other kind of social dynamics such as the working networks in the station in order to help us define the forces underlying language variation.

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