Intonation, language contact and diachronic change

Mary Baltazani mary.baltazani@ling-phil.ox.ac.uk
Joanna Przedlacka joanna.przedlacka@phon.ox.ac.uk
John Coleman john.coleman@phon.ox.ac.uk

Oxford University Phonetics Laboratory

In a new project we seek to expand the field of historical acoustic studies by examining the development of intonation patterns (target melodies). Specifically, the project investigates how contact between different languages affects the intonation of regional varieties of Greek over time. Two contact varieties i.e. Cretan Greek (CG) and Asia Minor Greek (AMG), whose speakers historically interacted with speakers of Italian (CG) or Turkish (AMG) respectively, are compared to Standard Modern Greek.

Our analysis is based on the earliest available recordings, dating back to the turn of the 20th century. Preliminary results suggest Turkish influence on the intonation patterns of continuation rises in AMG speech: a fall followed by a final rise occurs in AMG and Turkish, as opposed to Standard Modern Greek (SMG), where the initial fall is missing. Statistical analysis of the variation in the shape parameters of sentence-final rising intonation in the three varieties confirms that AMG examples cluster with Turkish rather than SMG.

Venetian occupation of Crete (1204-1699) ended four centuries ago. However, the analysis of contemporary CG recordings shows that the intonation of declaratives has a pattern which resembles modern Standard Italian. The final fall in CG, just as in Italian, starts well before the stressed syllable. This is not the case for SMG, where the final fall in declaratives occurs after the last stressed syllable. Although we are not able to demonstrate that Venetian as spoken 400 years ago had the same intonation as modern Italian, the fact that the same pattern is currently found in geographically separate contemporary varieties is likely to be due to contact factors.

This exciting new avenue of research combines data-driven mathematical modelling of the f0 shapes of intonational melodies with the insights of traditional diachronic investigations and the Autosegmental-Metrical intonational model, based on archival sound recordings from the recent and distant past. This method allows us to capture the range of variability present in corpora of naturally occurring speech and determine the shapes of intonational melodies in the past. Moreover, such results promise to shed light on questions about the role of long-term language contact in intonation change, the rate of this change, the time span of the contact influences, as well as the aspects of intonation that are subject to variation.