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On the Development of Modern Greek ovci 'no!'

Brian D. Joseph

The etymology of Modern Greek ovci 'no!' has never really been in doubt, as the Ancient Greek emphatic negative oujciv 'not' is surely its source. However, various details of its development from oujciv remain unaccounted for, in particular the vowel in the initial syllable, the placement of the accent, and the functional shift from 'not' to 'no!'. An explanation that seeks an answer for these three problems by positing influence from Turkish yo/yok 'no' is explored here and defended.

1. Introduction

Wolfgang Dressler — Ulli — has long had an interest in the Greek language, at all stages of its history, having contributed several significant works over the years; Dressler 1966, for instance, is the standard reference on the development of the pronominal system in Post-Classical Greek, covering the Koine period up to Modern Greek. He has, moreover, had a long-standing interest in language contact, as evidenced by his work on language death (e.g. Dressler 1996). From a personal standpoint, I have been heartened over the years by his encouragement of me and his interest in my work. It is therefore with great pleasure that I offer this brief piece, touching on both Greek and language contact, by way of thanking Ulli by way of recognizing his contributions to scholarship in general and to my own scholarship in particular.

2. The Problem

My topic here is the etymology of the Modern Greek independent negative word, the word for 'no', ovci (phonetically, [óxi]). Common discourse elements such as affirmative and negative markers often show intricacies of development, as is the case with English *yes*, whose *-s* continues an old optative form of the verb 'be', and ovci is no exception.

On the one hand, the etymology of ovci is straightforward, but complications arise in the details of the development of its etymon. The ultimate source must surely be Ancient Greek (Attic dialect) oujciv 'not', a clausal negator, itself a composite — and presumably emphatic — form from ouj 'not', the negator of facts and statements, plus -civ, an emphasizing element seen also within Greek in mhvci 'not' (formed with the modal negator mhv) and naivci 'yea, verily' (cf. naiv 'yea') and outside of Greek in the Sanskrit independent asseverative particle *(-)hi* 'for; indeed' which can also combine with the negative marker, viz. *nahi* 'surely not'. Indeed, composite negation as seen in oujciv is not an uncommon phenomenon at all, being widespread not only in Greek — note as well oujdev 'but/and not, nor' from ouj and the connective dev 'but' — but also in English, e.g. *not* from Old English *ná* 'no' plus *wiht* 'thing'.[1]

Nonetheless, there are some problems of detail that are raised by this etymology. The first two of these were recognized already by Hatzidakis 1918 and echoed in Dangitsis 1984 and Landsman 1988/1989. First, there is an unmotivated change in the position of the main accent, from the final syllable of oujciv to the initial syllable in ovci; generally, the place of the Ancient Greek acute accent in a word is maintained as the syllable with primary stress in Modern Greek, so this accent shift demands an explanation.[2]

Second, the vowel development in the first syllable is irregular. From Ancient Greek ou, normally a Modern Greek [u] develops, so that the [o] of ovci is unexpected. This problem is actually somewhat more complicated, though, for an unaccented initial vowel generally was dropped in the early Middle Ages (6th century to 12th century, see Browning 1983:57ff.), as in the form that developed into the finite indicative negator of Modern Greek den, namely Ancient Greek oujdevn 'by no means, not at all'.[3] Thus we would expect oujciv to yield (the nonoccurring) civ*.[4] To get to a form with an initial vowel, in order to be in a position ultimately to account for ovci, it is probably easiest to assume that civ* was restored to oujciv either by analogy/contamination with ouj, which was maintained in colloquial usage into the Medieval period though it ultimately gave way to den, or by borrowing from the learnèd language — always a possibility within the context of Greek — since ouj and related forms such as oujciv were available in the Atticizing high-style Medieval Greek. It is of course conceivable that the (irregular) accent shift noted above occurred early enough

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to protect the ouj- of oujciv from initial unstressed vowel loss (though Pontic kiv/oujkiv might point to the accent shift being somewhat late).

Third, taking ovci as a development out of oujciv ncessitates the assumption of a shift from a clausal negator, like English *not*, to an independent marker of denial and/or negation, like English *no*. Such shifts in function are not unparalleled (compare Latin *nón* 'not' to French *non* 'no', for instance), and Modern Greek ovci does have a use as a simple negator in constituent negation and in ellipsis (e.g. qevlw to kovkkino ovci to mple 'I-want the red-one not the blue-one'); still, any given instance of such a shift ought to be motivated if at all possible.

Thus, these three issues need to be addressed before the etymology of ovci can be considered secure. While attacking them one by one is a reasonable strategy, and proposals have been made for at least the first two problems, they are not satisfactory. Moreover, if a solution can be found that can account for all three problems with the same (set of) assumptions, then it would be preferable. In what follows, I present and evaluate some previous attempts at a solution and then propose such a multi-dimensional account.

3. Previous Attempts at a Solution

Previous scholarship has tried to address one or both of the first two problems, the irregular accent shift and the irregular vowel development. Georgacas,[5] for instance, posited a general leftward accent shift associated with negation in Greek, as in dialectal (but widespread) avnoiktoı 'unopened' versus anoiktovı 'open', where the shift is a reinterpretation of what historically was prefixation of the negative formative an-, which attracted accent onto antepenultimate syllable, giving anavnoiktoı, a form that is still widely attested, followed by haplological reduction. This negative retraction could then have applied to oujciv to give ouvci (later ovci). This proposal leaves the vowel change unaccounted for, however.

Dangitsis (1984: s.v.) suggested that the shift of oujciv to ovci was on analogy with pairs of interjections for pain or surprise as ouf/of, ouc/oc. Presumably, the accent shift and the vowel change are both accounted for since these interjections are monosyllabic and more like the first syllable of ovci. However, the basis for this analogy is somewhat tenuous at best, and Dangitsis gives no motivation for why 'no' should be remodeled on basis of interjections whose meanings are only vaguely emotive/affective at best.

Perhaps the standard account to date, in that it was adopted by Andriotis (1983: s.v.) is that given by Hatzidakis 1918, though it too is not unproblematic, as Landsman has already noted. Hatzidakis suggested that ovci was extracted out of ejgw‰ 'I (NOM)'+ oujci‰ 'not', which would have contracted, in Hatzidakis's account, to ejgw‰ci‰ ([o] + [u] would indeed regularly yield [o]). This contraction was then reanalyzed as a single unit so as to allow accent adjustment to ejgw‰ci, but then rereanalyzed as if it were ejg-w‰ci (note that [-o # o-] would also contract regularly to [-o-] in Post-Classical Greek), from which the free form ovci could emerge. Though inventive, this account is not without problems. In particular, it is not clear why the combination of ejgw‰ with oujci‰ should have a special status; Landsman, for instance, notes (p.26) that "there is no evidence that ejgwv appeared with especially high frequency before oujciv". Moreover, the accent adjustment part of Hatzidakis' account would seemingly require univerbation of ejgw‰ and oujci‰, whereas the extraction of ovci requires the contradictory recognition by speakers (admittedly at a later stage and thus a different set from the earlier speakers) of the independent presence of ejgw‰. In any case, though, this account requires a number of ad hoc steps and seems an overly complicated set of assumptions for such a common word.

Moreover, all of these accounts leave unanswered the third problem, that of the functional and semantic shift from clausal negator to free negative form used for denial and negatives. The only comment on this shift comes in Landsman's paper, where he notes the constituent negator use of ovci and says simply (p.25) that "given the use of o[ci in these contexts, the derivation from the ancient interjection and emphatic oujciv seems plausible and its extension to constituent negation is not problematic".

The solution that I would like to present and defend here for the problems in the derivation of ovci from oujciv has been anticipated in print by Landman.[6] Landman suggests that ovci may show the effects of influence from Turkish, but he does not develop supporting argumentation to the fullest extent. His comments, in toto, are as follows (p. 25n.14):

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> It might not be too outrageous nevertheless to suggest the possibility of some influence from Turkish *jo* [sic, for *yo* /BDJ] 'no' here'. The upwards movement of the head with accompanies o[ci is often claimed to be Turkish in origin and, although contrary to the usual reluctance of speakers to borrow basic vocabulary from other languages, it is very easy to imagine the advantage of using a word for 'no' which was readily understood by the Turkish occupiers.

I argue below that this is surely correct, and I present a fuller defense of this proposal, going beyond the relatively brief remarks that Landsman himself provided (above).

4. Building a Case For Turkish Influence on ovci

First, there is more within Turkish to cite as a source of influence on the development of ovci beyond just *yo*. There is also the form *yok*, which basically has an existential sense ('there is not') but which, as an isolated form, means 'no', apparently an emphatic 'no' moreover, to judge from the description in Redhouse (1981: s.v.) of its use as "a refusal to a request or negative answer to a question." Moreover, the velar final of *yok* would have aligned it even more definitively with oujciv (and recall the variant oujkiv, and the Pontic forms mentioned in footnote 4), providing a more solid basis for some influence of *yok* on the Greek form.

It is useful at this point to consider what the exact nature of this "influence" would have been. As is well known, in medieval times in the Balkans, especially after the fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Turks in 1453 and the subsequent Turkish occupation of much of what is now Greece, there was significant contact between speakers of Greek and speakers of Turkish (and indeed other languages as well). To judge from the evidence of calques, such as the idiomatic use of 'eat' in the phrase trwvgw xuvlo 'I get a beating', literally, "I eat wood", based on Turkish use of *yemek* 'to eat' in *kötek yemek* 'to get a beating' (literally "to eat a blow"), there was some attempt on the part of Greeks to learn Turkish and vice-versa, even if this learning may have been imperfect. In such a context of at least limited bilingualism, there would have been recognition of functionally congruent forms in each language by Greeks learning Turkish and Turks learning Greek in medieval times as an outcome of Greco-Turkish contact in that period. My claim is that the influence of Turkish *yo*/*yok* on oujciv resulted from such a cross-language identification of these forms as parallel.

Assuming some role for Turkish *yo* and *yok* in the development of ovci provides a ready explanation for the difficulties alluded to above. The vowel development in the initial syllable is explained and the accent on that vowel is accounted for as well, inasmuch as the [o] in both *yo* and *yok* is accented. Moreover, the shift from clausal negator to free negation word seen in the development of oujciv to ovci is solved by reference to Turkish *yo*/*yok*, since those forms are used as free negatives in Turkish, so that identifying them with oujciv could have induced a change on the part of Greek speakers in the function of their corresponding word.

Further support for the hypothesis of Turkish influence comes from the timing of the appearance of ovci, for the dating of its first occurrence is consistent with it being the result of contact with Turkish. Hatzidakis 1918 places its first occurrence to not earlier than the 14th century, and Landsman (p.25) states that "our earliest atttestation of o[ci may be in the fifteenth-century Escorial manuscript of the romance Lybistros and Rodamne." Thus ovci first appears during the early part of the period of Greco-Turkish contact.

An objection that might be raised to this hypothesis is that 'no' is a basic vocabulary item that might be resistant to borrowing and foreign influence; indeed, Landsman himself, in the quote given above in section 2, worries about such an objection. It is clear, however, that this potential objection has no merit, for there are several examples of 'no' and in particular *yok*, as well as words like it, being borrowed, even within the Balkan context and involving Greek and Turkish.

For example, Greek has borrowed Turkish *yok* outright, for giok (phonetically [yok]) can now be used as an emphatic negative, i.e. 'absolutely not!', as in tourkikovı o kuvproı -- giok! 'Cyprus Turkish?! No way!'. Macedonian, too, seems to have borrowed *yok*, since it has the form *jok* that can occur in a negative expression, as in *jok ut tuka* 'Get-out of here!'.[7] Finally, while there are other relevant examples,[8] a particularly apt one is seen in the encroachment, described by Pernot 1934, of Standard Modern Greek den, the finite indicative negator, in Tsakonian[9] at the expense of the inherited negative *o*; Pernot notes also that some speakers have a mixed form don, with the

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consonantism of standard Greek den and the vocalism of the inherited negator *o*, and thus a hybrid that shows a blend of native and foreign elements in much the same way as is proposed here for ovci, with its Turkish initial syllable and Greek final syllable. There can thus be no argument against a Turkish hand in the development of ovci based on some demontsrably incorrect notion of resistance to borrowing for such a word.

In fact, Turkish influence on a word so linked to common everyday discourse as 'no' is part of a pattern of intimate borrowings in the Balkans, involving interjections, conversational markers, and the like, and thus should not be surprising. For example, Turkish *aman* 'oh!, ah!, mercy! for goodness' sake!' is the source, via borrowing, of Greek amavn, and *de* 'now then; come on!' was borrowed into Greek as nte, the particle showing impatience that is especially common with imperatives, e.g.evla nte 'Come on, already!'. Moreover, the direction of this intimate borrowing was not one-sided, for Greek mpa, a particle indicating "surprise, rejection, negation, or assent" (Pring 1975: s.v.), is the apparent source of Turkish *ba* 'oh, oh, indeed!" (so Redhouse 1981: s.v.). And, the intimate borrowing was not restricted to lexical items per se, for the Turkish process of*m*-reduplication, as in *kitap mitap* 'books and such' found its way into Greek, e.g. tzavntzala mavntzala 'this and that', literally, "rags and such" (Levy 1980, Joseph 1984, Joseph 1994), and there is agreement between Turkish and Greek in the affective, sound-symbolic value of coronal affricates, Turkish *c*/*ç* and Greek ts/tz (Marchand 1953, Joseph 1984).

A final piece of suggestive corroborative evidence comes from the common gesture for 'no' found among Greek and Turkish speakers, namely the upward head-nod (found as well in Arabic speech communities and in parts of Africa). It is important here to note that Morris et al. 1979 suggests that it continues an Ancient Greek gesture for 'no' based on its distribution of in modern-day Europe: Greece, Turkey, and old Magna Graecia only, with a boundary in Italy between the Greek-type gesture and western European one coinciding with the ancient boundary between Greek Campania and Southern Etruscan territory). It would thus appear that the gesture spread from Greek into Turkish (contrary to what Landsman, p. 25n.14, suggests), and so it would be further evidence of the transferability in contact situations of forms signifying 'no'. Moreover, even if the Turkish gesture is borrowed from Greek, its adoption by Turks would have meant that there would have been upward-head-nodding negation-expressing Turks saying *yo(k)* as a model for the reshaping of the word for 'no' by upward-head-nodding negation-expressing Greeks in the medieval period.

5. Conclusions

Out of the foregoing, it emerges that Landsman's invoking of Turkish influence on ovci provides as good an explanation as any for the peculiarities in the development of this word, especially given the various threads of evidence that provide some corroboration and thus help to build a plausibility argument for this hypothesis. Furthermore, from a methodological standpoint as far as Balkan linguistics, this case shows that we must be prepared to use the facts of language contact in the Balkans and the Sprachbund situation that resulted not just in the examination of the gross structural features of any particular Balkan language, but also in constructing accounts of superficially quite minor details about the history of particular lexemes in a given language.

Address of the author: Brian D. Joseph
Department of Linguistics
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio USA 43210-1298
e-mail: joseph.1@osu.edu

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[1]. Admittedly, oujdev is semantically compositional, though it ultimately feeds into the development of Modern Greek den, the clausal negator for finite indicative verbs (on which see below). There are as well some semantically simplex forms involving ouj that are worth mentioning here since they appear to be morphologically complex: oujk is the form that ouj takes before vowels (with variant oujc before vowels preceded by [h-], the so-called "rough breathing"), and there is also oujkiv, seemingly a blend of oujk and oujciv, though given uncertainties about the origins of ouj and oujk, it may be that oujkiv and oujciv are the starting points for oujk and oujc respectively (as Frisk 1932 suggests).

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[2]. An example of a motivated, i.e. regular, shift in accent is -iva becoming [-já], as in paidiva '(little) children' becoming paidiav [peðjá].

[3]. This (originally) emphatic negative derives from oujdev 'but/and not' (see above) plus e{n, the neuter singular of 'one'.

[4]. The loss of initial ouj- in oujdevn shows that one cannot say that the negative morpheme ouj- was invulnerable to deletion, e.g. if one adhered to a view of sound change — incorrrect in my opinion — in which individual morphemes can block or resist the effects of a sound change. We would thus expect something similar to happen to oujciv to give civ*. The form kiv found in modern Pontic Greek is close to the putative civ*, but apparently derives from oujkiv, which also survives intact into Pontic, with the ancient accentuation, as Landsman notes.

[5]. This suggestion of a general accent retraction in negatives was made in unpublished materials that were part of the dictionary project for standard Modern Greek funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and headed by Professor Georgacas in the early 1980s, before his death (see Georgacas 1981 for a description of the project, now apparently abandoned). As a consulting editor to the project, I had the opportunity to review these materials, consisting of lemmata, mainly for words beginning with a-, with definitions, examples, and etymological information for each, and found the claim of this accent shift in various of the lemmata involving forms with privative a(n)-, though he did not specifically apply this to ovci.

[6]. Landsman's article is in an issue of *Glossologia* that is dated 1988/1989, but which appeared in 1989 or even 1990. Still, he most likely wrote the paper before 1988. Without wanting to seem contentious or self-promoting, I note that although the present version of my defense of the proposal Landsman published is appearing some 10 years after his piece, I may be able to claim priority here or at least near-simultaneity of insight, for I presented a version of this paper on May 14, 1990 (and prepared an abstract for it in the fall of 1989, based on ideas I had had prior to then) at the 7th Biennial Conference on Balkan and South Slavic Languages, Literatures, and Folklore, held at the University of Toronto. In that presentation, unaware of Landsman's work, I defended the Turkish solution to ovci discussed in greater detail here. I would like to think, therefore, that this represents a case of two scholars independently coming up with the same (correct!) idea, even though Landsman clearly deserves to be recognized for having published first.

[7]. It is worth noting here that Albanian has the form *jo* 'no, not, nay' which is unlikely to be a Turkish borrowing (Eric Hamp, personal communication Spetember 1995) since it occurs in Arbëresh, the Tosk Albanian dialects found in Southern Italy, and this Albanian *jo* could have provided another possible source of influence leading to the stressed o- in ovci in Greek.

[8]. For instance, some present-day dialects of Arvanitika (the Tosk Albanian dialects spoken in central and southern Greece for approximately the past 600 years), e.g. those around Livadia, have borrowed Greek nai 'yes', though admittedly in this case, it may be that there was no native word for 'yes' that the borrowing replaced.

[9]. Tsakonian is the highly divergent modern form of Greek (so divergent it might well be considered a different language rather than a dialect of Greek) that derives more or less directly from the ancient Doric dialect and which is still spoken in the Peloponnesos.

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