

# Distribution and use of the unaccented augment in Canadian Greek<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the realization of the unaccented *syllabic augment* (SA) in the speech of Greeks who emigrated to Canada from 1945 to 1975. The dataset was constructed from recorded interviews with 131 speakers from Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, Regina and Montreal as part of the *ImmiGrec project* (<https://immigrec.com/en>). The participants are bi-dialectal speakers of both *Standard Modern Greek* (SMG) and a dialect variety of Modern Greek, and they represent not only regions where SA seems to be retained (for example, Crete) but also regions where it is thought to have disappeared (for example, Northern Greece). Our data reflect the variability that has characterized this phenomenon, since the initial observation of Triantaphyllidis (1936) that SA was not obligatory in the vernacular of his era. We found that the unaccented SA is still present in areas where it would be expected according to the relevant literature (e.g. Chios, Crete, Ionian Islands, parts of the Peloponnese), but with some indications of retreat. In contrast, speakers who come from areas where the unaccented SA is not retained (e.g. regions of Northern Greece and Lesbos), sometimes use it in their speech. We suggest that there are two possible reasons for this: the prestige that Peloponnesian has over other dialects, because of its great similarity with SMG, and the effect of the new social networks into which the participants were integrated in their new communities in Canada.

**Keywords:** unaccented syllabic augment, dialect contact, immigrant speech, Canada.

## 1. The verbal augment in the history of the Greek language and its dialects

In Classical Greek, the verbal augment (either temporal or syllabic) was an obligatory inflectional prefix, attached to the verbal stem for the realization of the past feature. The verbal augment was classified as either syllabic or temporal. The syllabic augment was ordinarily an /e-/, as in (1):

- (1) a. 'luō (present) 'I unbind' → 'e-luon (imperf. past) 'I was unbinding'  
'e-lusa (perf. past) 'I unbound'  
b. boē'thō (present) 'I help' → e-bo 'ēthoun (imperf. past) 'I was helping'  
e-bo 'ēthōsa (perf. past) 'I helped'

The temporal augment, on the other hand, occurred with verbs beginning with a vowel. In this case, the augment appeared in the form of initial vowel lengthening (Chantraine 1961), as in (2):

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper will be included in the proceedings of the 8<sup>th</sup> *Modern Greek Dialects and Linguistic Theory Conference* (Gjirkokastër, 4-6/10/2018).



## b. Southern Chiot

'*γrafo* (Present) 'I write' → '*ιγρapsa* (perf. past) 'I wrote'  
*e'γrapsame* (perf. past) 'we wrote'

In other cases, /*e-*/ and /*i-*/ coexist, like in certain areas of Central Crete (Pangalos 1955), and occasionally in the Cyclades (Contossopoulos 2001):

## (8) Eastern and Central Cretan

'*trovo* (Present) 'I eat' → *e'fayame* & *i'fayame* (perf. past) 'we ate'

The syllabic augment /*e-*/, fared better in terms of retention. In SMG, it is retained when accented, due to a general phonological process, which deleted unaccented initial vowels (Horrocks 2010; Manolessou & Ralli 2015):

(9) '*lino* (present) 'I unbind' → '*e-lina* (imperf. past) 'I was unbinding'  
'*liname* (imperf. past) 'we were unbinding'  
'*e-lisa* (perf. past) 'I unbound'  
'*lisame* (perf. past) 'we unbound'

As a result of this process, the SA lost its clear morphemic status and became a morpho-phonological formative, whose only function is to receive stress, when there is a left-hand stress shift outside the confines of the word (Babiniotis 1972; Kaisse 1982). According to Ralli (1988, 2005), this stress shift is caused by the phonological properties of past tense inflectional endings.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the distinction between the syllabic and the temporal augment has been neutralized, and the latter is treated similarly to the former. Thus, we find '*i-ksera* ('I knew') but '*kserame* ('we knew'), and so we will refer to both as the syllabic augment.

The motivation for this study stems from the observation that the SMG pattern is not observed in several dialects (Papadopoulos 1926; Triantaphyllidis 1936). The SA is obligatorily present in the dialects of Cyprus, Smyrna, Pontus, Chios, Cyclades, some parts of Lesbos and the Peloponnese, Crete and the Ionian Islands (Kretschmer 1905; Tzitzilis 2016; Ralli in prep.):

## (10) a. Cypriot

'*γραφomen* (present) 'I write' → *e-γrαfamen* (imperf. past) 'we were writing'  
(Menardos 1925)

## b. Smyrniot

*pe'θeno* (present) 'I die' → *i-peθana* (perf. past) 'I died'  
(Liosis 2016)

## c. Pontic

'*kloskome* (present) 'to return' → *e-kloskumane* (imperf. past) 'I was returning'  
(Revithiadou & Spyropoulos 2009)

<sup>3</sup> But see Drachman (2003) and Spyropoulos and Revithiadou (2009) for a somehow different treatment, within the generative framework. More particularly, Drachman (2003) proposes that the augment in Modern Greek is only one of the potential past tense exponents, stress shift and ending being the others. On the other hand, Spyropoulos and Revithiadou (2009) claim that /*e-*/ is the surface manifestation of a segmentally empty prefix, which bears lexically-encoded accentual properties, and it stands in allomorphic relation with a set of other exponents of the Past.



participants from 8 of the 15 dialect regions of Greece identified by Trudgill (2008): Central, Northern, Southern, Southeastern, Eastern, and the three Cycladic varieties (Northern, Western, and Central). The interviews took place in 2017 and 2018, and they were based on a questionnaire (cf. Appendix of this article), which was structured on three axes: Greek origins, settlement in Canada, integration in the Canadian society. During the interviews, deviations were permitted if the participants desired to do so.

### 3. Results

Below we present some representative examples of utterances displaying the presence or absence of unaccented syllabic augment (11), as well as the temporal augment (12) (underlined forms). In most examples, the variation can be found in the same speaker. Alternations of the same verbal form are also frequent:

- (11) a. Heptanesian (A.D., Cephalonia-Vancouver)  
*e'ðuleva sto 'feri, stin cefalo'na. pi'jename 'patra-cefalo'na- 'patra – sto 'ajios je 'rasimos 'ðuleva*  
 I was working on the ferry, on Cephalonia, we were going Patra-Cephalonia-Patra – on the St. Gerasimus I was working.
- b. Peloponnesian (H.K., Arcadia-Edmonton)  
*e'yo 'idi 'ixa mja i'ðea ap a'fta, 'to ksera 'prin, a'plos 'ekana mja epive'veosi 'otan 'piya e'ci, ce e'piya*  
 I already had some idea about these matters, I had known it from before. I just confirmed it when I went there. So I went.
- c. Modern Athenian (I.K., Athens-Edmonton)  
*'ðuleve, 'ðuleve. 'para po 'li e'ðuleve*  
 He worked, he worked. He worked very hard!
- d. Northern dialects
- i. (N.P. Karditsa-Vancouver)  
*'efiya 'otan 'imuna, e'fiyame 'dio fo 'res, 'otan 'fiyame, 'otan 'imuna tri'on xro 'non 'piyame sto xo'rjo tu pa'tera mu*  
 I left when I... we left twice, when we left, when I was 3 years old we went to my father's village.
- ii. (K.P. Kavala-Toronto)  
*e'yo 'pijena 'eksi 'mines e'ci ce 'eksi 'mines e'ðo [...] 'emena, ce peri'sotero o 'loyos pu e'pijena stin e'laða 'itane ja'ti ci'tusa ti ma'ma mu*  
 I went there for 6 months there and six months here [...] I stayed, and the biggest reason I went to Greece was because I looked after my mother.
- iii. (K.K. Evritania-Vancouver)  
*'evyala to ji'mnasio ce me'ta bar'karisa sto embori'ko nafti'ko, e'pira to 'diploma tu anθipopli'arxu, ksanabar'karisa, 'pira to 'diploma tu ipopli'arxu*  
 I finished high school and then I shipped off with the merchant marines. I got my diploma as a second lieutenant, I shipped off again, I got the diploma as a captain's mate.

iv. Sporades (A.T. Skopelos-Vancouver)

*ton 'ide ce ton e'valane se 'kapço karo 'tsaki ce ton e'ferane 'mesa sto estia 'torio ce 'kaname 'oti 'eprepe na 'kanume*

He saw him and they put him in a wheelchair and they brought him into the restaurant and we did everything we could do.

v. Lesbos (M.G. Lesbos-Montreal)

*eci 'ynorisa ti... e'yno 'risame ti 'lila, ton 'jani ce ti jor 'jia, 'kati 'alus 'elines.*

There I met, we met Lila, John, and Georgia, and some other Greeks.

e. Cretan (D. G.-K., Chania-Vancouver)

*'istera to 'mathane 'oti epa 'remine to aero 'plano, e 'mathane, o pa 'teras mu ido 'piise tin ete 'ria*

Later, they learned that the airplane remained on the ground. They learned it, my father notified the company.

f. Chiot (G.V., Chios-Montreal)

*evo 'ithisa po 'li 'kosmo e 'do 'pera... ce po 'li a 'koma mu 'lene efxari 'sto pu tus vo 'ithisa 'totes ce 'vrikane mja du 'la*

I helped a lot of people here... and many still thank me, because I helped them then, and they found work.

g. Dodecanesian (B.K., Karpathos-Montreal)

*'otan epa 'ndreftika, parusi 'astika sto imi 'gresion. tus 'leo "pa 'ndreftika ce 'thelo na 'mino edo 'pera 'tora"*

When I got married, I presented myself to the Immigration Office. I say to them: "I am married and I want to stay here now."

h. Cypriot (N.C., Cyprus-Vancouver)

*stis 'vasis e 'dulepsa is tin lefko 'sian... me 'ta sti leme 'so. me 'ta to gra 'fion tis 'pu tan stin 'polin 'mesan 'eklisen, 'pijen stin episko 'pin*

On the [military] bases I worked in Nicosia... then in Limassol, then her office which was in the town closed, it moved to Episkopi.

(12) Examples with augment (*i-*)

a. Peloponnesian

i. (T.K., Helis-Vancouver)

*ar 'yotera i 'thelisan arce 'ti si 'nadel'fi na metakini 'thume a 'po e 'ci ce na 'pame e 'ci akri 'vos pu 'ine 'simera i me 'yali elini 'ci ci 'notita tu van 'kuver*

Later several colleagues wanted to move from there and go to the place where the big Greek community is in Vancouver.

ii. (I.P., Arcadia-Regina)

*'otan 'kaname e 'do to 'xol stin ekli 'sia, e 'ci i 'ferame ce er 'xomastun e 'do. den parapi 'jename*

When we made the hall in the church, we brought it there and came here. We did not go too often.

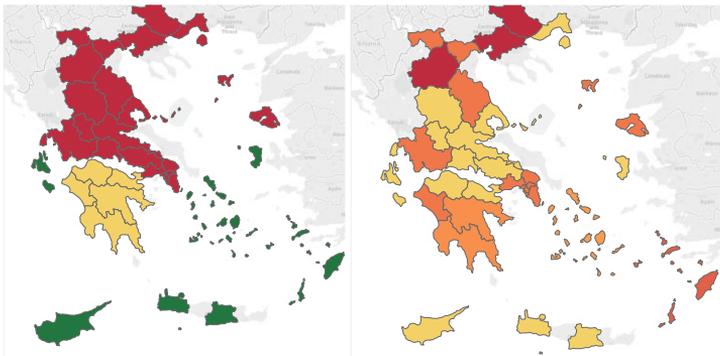
b. Chiot (M.B., Chios-Toronto)

*ti 'defteri 'mera pu 'irthame, mas 'pire ce mas 'pije sxo 'lio na mas 'yrapsi. 'piyame sto sxo 'lio ce den i 'kserame 'tipota*

The second day we were here, he took us and he went with us to the school to enrol us, we went to school and we did not know anything.

- c. Cretan (D. G.-K., Chania-Vancouver)  
*'otan 'irθame edo'pera 'istera, den i'kserame, den i'kserame, den i'kserame, 'ute 'anθropo den i'kserame*  
 When we came here afterwards, we did not know, we did not know a single person.
- d. Heptanesian (D.A., Cephalonia-Vancouver)  
*'pu 'itan o ni'kolas ce i 'popi den i'kserame. 'pu 'itan o 'ajelos den i'kserame. a 'fta ta 'maθame to penindae'fta, ar 'yotera, 'xrona ar 'yotera*  
 Where were Nicholas and Popi, we did not know, where was Angelo we did not know. This we learned in 57, later, years later.
- e. Thessalian (C.S., Larissa-Vancouver)  
*'mono stin 'larisa 'ixa 'pai mpa fo 'ra. to sxo'lio mas 'pije sto idrayo'jio na 'dume ta ne'ra 'pos kseki'nane. 'tipota den i'kserame*  
 Only in Larisa had I been once. The school took us to the water reservoir, so we could see where the water begins. We did not know anything.

What is interesting not only in the examples above but throughout our data is that there is variation in terms of the usage of unaccented SA (with various degrees). There are speakers who come from an area, where the unaccented SA is expected, but use forms without it (e.g. 11b), but there are also speakers from areas where the unaccented SA is not expected and, yet, tend to use it (e.g. 11d). This can be seen in Figure 1, where the map on the left depicts the expected presence or absence of the unaccented SA. Areas in red are regions where it should be absent, areas in green are regions where it should always be present, and the yellow areas are those for which the pattern is variable. The map on the right depicts our findings. First notice that there is no area in green, because there are no speakers that always use the unaccented SA. At most, there is variable usage, even for speakers from the Southern dialect region (cf. Crete). Areas in orange (e.g. Rhodes or Lesbos), are ones in which some speakers have a variable pattern, while others never use the unaccented SA. Overall, the maps show that the speakers are in a process of general convergence with respect to this dialect feature. It is not simply the case that non-standard speakers are converging to the standard, but even speakers from standard areas (e.g. Athens) are using the non-standard variant.



**Figure 1:** Expected (right) vs. actual (left) use of the unaccented SA among first-generation Greek-Canadians. Red indicates categorical absence of the feature, green categorical presence, while yellow and orange degrees of variability.

#### 4. Discussion and further research

The most promising approach for understanding this pattern, would be an analysis using variationist methodology (Labov 1963, 2006), and theoretically grounded in the findings of studies in koineization (cf. Siegel 1993; Bubenik 1993; Kerswill & Williams 2000; Elmentaler 2005; Trudgill 2008; Bekker 2013; Cerruti & Regis 2014). To achieve this, we would need to analyze data from many more speakers, because, as is typical with morphological phenomena, the number of tokens per participant is low. However, these preliminary results can be tentatively understood in the light of other findings within the *ImmiGrec project*.

The recorded interviews clearly show that, although the influence of SMG is not negligible in the speech of our participants, the greater tendency is for them to employ features that belong either to their native dialectal variety of MG, or to a vernacular form of *Common Modern Greek* (CMG). According to most scholars of Greek (cf. Triantaphyllidis 1936; Mirambel 1937; Horrocks 2010, among others), this vernacular CMG was a variety of Modern Greek already spoken by the majority of the Greek population at the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is, before the standardization of SMG and its teaching in the post-war Greek education. CMG had received very little influence from Katharevousa (the archaizing official variety of Greece until 1975), and was differentiated from region to region, where the spoken varieties were increasingly becoming assimilated to it. Crucially, it was characterized by variation, or the parallel use of several morphological features, something which is a common characteristic of koines, (cf. Bubenik 1993; Siegel 1993; Trudgill 2008). A typical example of this variation is the mixture of different verbal forms, such as the one we see in the case of the unaccented SA. Since all of our participants are born after 1920, it is reasonable to assume that they have not lived in a purely mono-dialectal context before leaving Greece, and that most of them used a form of CMG before their departure for Canada. We suggest then that they brought this form of the vernacular with them to Canada, and continued to use it after their settlement in the new country.

Furthermore, our investigation of the imperfect tense endings in *-ay-* and *-us-*, (Tsolakidis *et al.* in this volume), as well as the exploration of English noun and verb borrowings in Canadian Greek (Ralli *et al.* to appear, see also Ralli *et al.* in this volume) have provided evidence that the original speech of Greek immigrants in Canada, both dialectal (that is, the linguistic variety of their native place) and non-dialectal (that is, that of CMG which was carried from Greece), has been affected by mainly two factors: a) the influence of SMG due to frequent visits to Greece, where SMG prevails, and b) the increased exposure to mainstream Greek content through technology (satellite TV, the Internet) in Canada in the last decades.

Despite these pressures, the dialectal pattern with respect to unaccented SA persists, since there is no speaker coming from an area with compulsory unaccented SA who entirely avoids it, and some speakers even use the *i-* form (e.g. *ifera*), which is strictly dialectal (i.e. it cannot pass as CMG). Moreover, we see that the dialectal pattern is also used by speakers from areas that follow the standard. For instance, speakers from Lesbos occasionally use an unaccented SA of the *e-* form, something which is unknown in both the Lesbian MGD and in the CMG spoken in Lesbos.

The extension of the variable pattern to other dialectal groups may be due to the fact that the Peloponnesian variety, which is the basis for SMG and thus enjoys elevated prestige, shows a variable pattern itself, namely both the presence and the absence of unaccented SA can be found. Since in many communities in Canada, Greeks from the Peloponnese are in the majority, immigrants from other Greek areas have begun adopting their pattern of speech. Trudgill (2001) argues that the members of small, stable tightly-knit societies are likely to share more linguistic information than members of larger, more dynamic and loosely-knit communities. In the case of the sociolinguistic situation of our participants, it is likely that Greek immigrants coming from different dialectal regions adopted more variable patterns in order to downplay their differences, and emphasize their common bonds. In this context, the simultaneous use of verbal forms with and without unaccented SA, even by the same speaker and/or even in the same sequence of sentences, was and is still something acceptable. We have found a similar pattern for the parallel use of the imperfect tense endings in *-ay-* and *-us-*, in Tsolakidis *et al.* (in this volume).

Britain and Trudgill (2005) have shown how the rapid increase in the population of the city of Norwich during the 19<sup>th</sup> century has resulted in the formation of a new dialect, through the accommodation of the mutually intelligible varieties of speakers who immigrated from the rural areas around the city. In a similar sense, it is possible that upon the establishment of Greek communities in Canada, a Canadian-Greek Koiné began to develop, influenced by but essentially independent from SMG and CMG. Some other indications for the existence of this Koiné can be found in Tsolakidis *et al.* (in this volume) and Ralli *et al.* (in this volume).

As mentioned above, in order to test this hypothesis, it is necessary to examine in detail a much wider sample of our participants, in order to include immigrants from as many communities in Canada and dialectal regions in Greece. The expanded dataset will allow us to investigate further issues, which are structural in nature, such as:

- (i) Which are the verbs showing the use of unaccented SA? In other words, are there any specific verbs which can carry it, or it is a feature characterizing all verbs?
- (ii) Is there any correlation between the presence of unaccented SA and the verbal endings? For instance, we have observed that imperfect forms in *-us-* carrying an unaccented *e-* are extremely rare.
- (iii) What is the function of the *e-* (or *i-*) in Canadian Greek? Is it an inflectional prefix or a stress carrier?
- (iv) Maniakas (1991, 2016) observes that English is much more prominent in the Greek of second-generation immigrants, which raises the question of how much it affects the speech of first-generation Greeks.

## Acknowledgements

This article is the product of a research conducted within the project “Immigration and Language in Canada. Greeks and Greek-Canadians” (2016-2018). The authors would like to acknowledge the substantial financial contribution of the *Stavros Niarchos Foundation*, sponsor of the project. Moreover, the authors would like to thank their research partners Tassos Anastassiadis (McGill) and Sakis Gekas (York) for allowing them to use data of the material that has been collected in Montreal and Toronto by the local research teams.

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## Appendix: the *ImmiGrec* questionnaire

1. What is your name?
2. When were you born?
3. Which is your birthplace/ the Greek city/town or village you come from?
4. Where did you grow up?
5. When did you immigrate to Canada?
6. What made you immigrate to Canada? Had you discussed your decision with anyone?
- 6<sup>a</sup>. What did you know about Canada before moving here?
- 6<sup>b</sup>. Was there any family member/ community member, who had already immigrated to Canada?
- 6<sup>c</sup>. Did anyone help you? Was anyone waiting for you in Canada?
- 6<sup>d</sup>. Did you bring anything with you?
7. Can you tell us the details of your trip and your first impressions?
8. In which city did you first settle?
9. Please, could you describe the place you lived in, when you first came in Canada? In which neighborhood did you live?
10. What was your first employment in Canada ? How did you find your first employment? Could you tell me more about it.
11. What types of work have you done since?
12. With whom did you mostly hang out when you arrived? And today?
13. How was your relationship with Canadian society in general? And with other immigrants? Has that changed over time? Give us an example.
14. Did you face any difficulties at the beginning? Which ones? How did you deal with them?
15. Tell me about your marriage. How did you meet your wife/husband?

16. Did you keep any aspects of your life from your place of origin?
17. Did you speak English or French before coming to Canada?
18. How did you learn English or French? Did you go to school in Canada to learn English or French?
19. Has learning English (or French) helped you? If yes, how and why?
20. Do you speak Greek in Canada? Do you write Greek while in Canada? For what purposes? With whom? When? In which circumstances?
21. Do you speak the Greek of your birthplace in Canada? With whom? In which contexts/circumstances?
22. Do you think you may have forgotten your Greek after living in Canada for so many years?
23. Do you think that the Greek you speak now is (any) different from the Greek you spoke when you arrived at Canada? If so, in what ways?
24. Would you like to speak more often Greek? In which occasions and why?
25. Which school did your children attend? Why?
- 25<sup>a</sup>. (If they went to Greek school) Did they like going to greek school?
26. Did they learn Greek? Do they speak Greek now?
27. How important is the maintenance of Greek language to you? Do you consider knowing Greek an asset or an obstacle to your adjustment to Canadian culture/society?
28. How do you spend your free time?
29. Do you participate in many activities of the Greek community? Which one(s)? Why?
30. Could you narrate an incident that made a strong impression and you still remember from your life in Canada?
31. How often do you visit Greece?
32. How do your compatriots treat you?
33. How many times (if any) did it come to your mind to go back to Greece?
34. If this is the case, what has prevented you from going back to Greece? Do you feel more Greek or Canadian?