

CLITICS AND DETERMINERS IN THE GREEK L2 GRAMMAR*

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Περίληψη

Σκοπός της παρούσας μελέτης είναι η εξέταση της ανάπτυξης της ελληνικής ως ξένης γλώσσας από Σλαβόφωνους ομιλητές (Ρώσους και Σέρβους), οι οποίοι έμαθαν τα ελληνικά ως ενήλικες και χωρίς διδασκαλία. Συγκεκριμένα, εξετάζουμε τη χρήση του οριστικού άρθρου και του αδύνατου τύπου των προσωπικών αντωνυμιών, το τρίτο πρόσωπο των οποίων θεωρείται ότι έχει μορφολογικές και συντακτικές ομοιότητες με το οριστικό άρθρο σε αιτιατική. Με βάση το εμπειρικό υλικό από συνεντεύξεις με είκοσι συμμετέχοντες -χωρισμένους σε ομάδες ανάλογα με την ηλικία άφιξης και την διάρκεια παραμονής τους στην χώρα- συμπεραίνουμε ότι υπάρχει συσχέτιση στην κατάκτηση των δυο αυτών κατηγοριών, οι οποίες προκαλούν προβλήματα μέχρι και στα τελευταία στάδια εκμάθησης της γλώσσας.

Keywords

clitics, determiners, interpretable and uninterpretable features.

1. Introduction

The SLA literature reports numerous studies of highly proficient L2 speakers with long immersion, who diverge significantly from native speakers (NS) in the production of definite articles (Tsimpli 2003, White 2003) and pronouns (Tsimpli op.cit.) despite the positive evidence offered by the target L2. Recent SLA theories have attempted to explain NS/ Non-NS divergence by arguing for a dissociation between syntactic knowledge and morphophonology: highly proficient learners have knowledge of the abstract properties of the target language but cannot associate them with the correct phonological forms (Lardiere 2000, Prevost & White 2000). Other theories argue for a problem in the syntax: formal uninterpretable features (e.g. Case on clitics and D) of the target language, not instantiated in L1, cause learnability problems (Hawkins and Chan 1997, Tsimpli 1997, in press-a) while LF interpretable features are accessible in L2 grammars (Tsimpli op. cit.).

This paper aims to test the hypothesis that interpretability of morphological features affects their learnability, by analysing data from an on-going study into the acquisition of the L2 Greek pronominal and determiner systems. The participants in the study are all native speakers of a Slavic language (Russian or Serbo-Croatian) with no prior knowledge of the target language who have acquired Greek through immersion in a Greek-speaking context. Primarily, the study seeks to investigate the development of the definite article and 3rd person object clitics, which are arguably identical in morphosyntactic terms. In addition, the comparison of four groups of participants, divided according to age of arrival and length of exposure to the L2 helps to shed light on the question of ultimate attainment and the effect of variables extraneous

to language on linguistic performance.

2. Theoretical background

Within the generative framework there has been a long-standing debate over the involvement of UG (see White 2003, Hawkins 2001 for discussion) and the nature of syntactic representations in adult SLA. Especially with respect to the morphology/ syntax interface, there is considerable disagreement over the relationship between overt morphology, relating to verbal / nominal inflection or the use of function words such as determiners, and the knowledge of the abstract properties of the L2 syntax. Variability with respect to the use and omission of forms in L2 production data has given rise to various theories that seek to account for it. Theories assuming full access to UG would fail to account for the continuing problems in the morphosyntactic domain. However, according to one approach which argues for a dissociation between overt morphology and abstract syntax in L2 acquisition (Haznedar and Schwartz 1997, Lardiere 2000, Prevost and White 2000), absence of surface morphology does not entail the absence of the syntactic representation of a feature.

For other researchers the dissociation in performance on L2 syntax and L2 morphology reflects a syntactic deficit and thus the unavailability of UG (Clahsen and Muysken 1986, Meisel 1997, Beck 1998), while apparent target-like performance is accounted for by reference to other cognitive mechanisms. A third approach maintains that UG-constraints are still operative in UG but the L2 parametric values cannot be acquired due to the inaccessibility of the functional lexicon after the Critical Period (Tsimplici and Roussou 1991, Smith and Tsimplici 1995, Hawkins and Chan 1997). As a result the L1 parametric choices are transferred to the L2 grammar, giving rise to non-target like performance even in advanced stages of development. Furthermore, Tsimplici (1997), drawing upon the distinction between interpretable (semantic) and uninterpretable (purely formal) features, argues that it is only uninterpretable features, responsible for parameterization, that are subject to the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and thus become inaccessible to the language learner. This being the case, the implication is that where L1 features differ in parametric values from L2, L1 transfer effects will still be seen even at advanced stages. However, near-native linguistic performance has been attested among L2 learners (Birdsong 1992), something which is not readily accounted for by the theory.

An alternative approach which tries to provide a principled explanation both for near-native performance but also for cases of divergence from target forms has been formulated by Tsimplici (2003, in press-a) on the basis of the role of interpretable features in SLA. Given that some L2 properties cannot be analyzed due to their specification for uninterpretable features, she proposes that L2 learners misanalyse the L2 input, thus showing non-target performance even in advanced stages of development.

2.1 Determiners and clitics in Greek

Greek is a language with a morphologically rich determiner system, including a definite and an indefinite article, which inflect for case, number and gender. Agreement or 'concord' is always

required between N, any adjectives appearing in the DP, and D:

- (1) a. Enas/ o apetitikos dhaskalos.
one_{masc.sing.nom} / the_{masc.sing.nom} demanding_{masc.sing.nom} teacher_{masc.sing.nom}
 "A / The demanding teacher."
 b. Mia/ I ekseretiki embiria.
one_{fem.sing.nom} / the_{fem.sing.nom} extraordinary_{fem.nom.sing} experience_{fem.sing.nom}
 "A/ The extraordinary experience"

It has been argued that the definite article differs from the indefinite one in terms of feature-specification. Specifically, while the definite article is a cluster of case and phi-features only, the indefinite article is intrinsically specified as [-definite] (Karanassios 1992, Stavrou 1996, Tsimpli and Stavrakaki 1999). This distinction is based on the possibility of the definite, but not the indefinite, article to be used as an expletive, i.e. in syntactic contexts where no definiteness is conveyed, such as in proper names, generics, nominalised clauses, and other phrases.

Furthermore, the definite article is morphophonologically identical with the 3rd person object clitic (see Table 1). This similarity has been argued to extend to the analysis of the clitic as an element that lacks semantic content and grammaticalises uninterpretable agreement and case features. In this respect, the 3rd person object clitic differs from 1st and 2nd person object clitics, which are inherently specified for the interpretable [person] feature (cf. Tsimpli and Stavrakaki 1999, see also Torrego 1998, Manzini and Savoia 2001). On the basis of the morphological, syntactic and semantic similarities between the definite article and the object clitic it has been argued that the two elements share categorial features, i.e. they are both D elements¹ (Sportiche 1996, cf. Tsimpli and Stavrakaki 1999, Marinis 2000, Tsimpli 2003). Furthermore Tsimpli and Stavrakaki (1999) attribute the referentiality associated with these elements to a syntactic feature-matching process between the article and an appropriate Def(initeness) head, and between the clitic and an antecedent.

Table 1. The definite article and the 3rd person object clitic paradigms

	Article		Clitic	
	Nominative	Accusative	Subject	Object
<i>Singular</i>	<i>o(m), i(f), to (n)</i>	<i>ton(m), tin(f), to(n)</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>ton(m), tin(f), to (n)</i>
<i>Plural</i>	<i>i(m), i(f), ta (n)</i>	<i>tus(m), tis(f), ta(n)</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>tus(m), tis (f), ta (n)</i>

Regarding the use of 3rd person clitics, note that these are always obligatory in the absence of a DP object. Thus, null objects with specific reference are disallowed in Greek due to a spell-out requirement of object (case and *phi*-) features in Greek:

- (2) Speaker A: Eklises tin porta?
 "Did you close the door?"
 Speaker B: *(Tin)-eklisa.
Her_{acc} closed_{1st.sing}
 "I closed it"

Since null objects with specific reference are disallowed in most Romance languages as well as in English, it could be argued that the impossibility of object drop is an effect of a licensing requirement of objects related to their formal status as D elements (Kowaluk 2001).

With respect to the relationship between interpretability of features and learnability, it is expected that learners whose L1 lacks a D system will have consistent problems in the use of D elements even in advanced stages of L2 development. Previous studies (Kowaluk (2001), Parodi *et al.* in press) on the acquisition of English and German determiners and pronouns by speakers of languages which lack a D system (Polish, Korean and Turkish) show the expected non-target performance even at advanced stages. Tsimpli (2003) investigated the acquisition of Greek clitics and determiners by adult speakers of Russian and Turkish (languages that lack a determiner system), who had been living in Greece for 10 years and had not received formal instruction in the L2. The data was spontaneous and elicited in an unstructured interview. The results of the study showed a target-like performance in the use of the indefinite article and the 1st/ 2nd person clitics, but persistent problems in the use of the definite article and 3rd person clitics. The similar pattern of these two elements attested in Tsimpli's L2 data is accounted for by the feature-specification associated with them and in particular their LF-uninterpretability. Furthermore, Tsimpli's (2003) study into Greek L2 clitics and determiners revealed individual variation among subjects. Since the only variable controlled for in her study was the length of residence in Greece, it may have been the case that other variables also affected performance.

In the present study, we consider age of arrival as a possible variable affecting L2 performance. This has been shown to be the case in previous studies on L2 acquisition (Coppeters 1987, Johnson and Newport 1991). In these studies, a correlation was found between performance and initial age of exposure to the L2.

The present study is an attempt to further investigate the development and the end-state of L2 Greek in speakers of Slavic (Russian and Serbian), concentrating on the acquisition of the definite article and the 3rd person clitic, as well as the features (gender, number, person, case) which are relevant to agreement within DP.

2.2 Features of the L1

Both Russian and Serbo-Croatian (the L1s in our study) lack a determiner system that distinguishes between a definite and indefinite article (Franks and King 2000), as in (3).

- (3) ja pisal pis'mo
I was-writing letter
"I was writing a/ the letter."

Furthermore, they both allow for null objects with specific reference (Russian examples from Motsiou, p.c.)²:

- (4) (a) Speaker A: Ty kupil knigu?
you bought book
"Did you buy a/ the book?"

Speaker B: (Da), kupil. *OR* B: Niet nie kupil.
 yes bought-1s no not bought-1s
 "I bought it." "I didn't buy it."

(b) Ja ejo kupil
 I her-bought-1s
 "I bought it"

Note that the possibility of including an overt weak pronoun is also available in Russian, as shown by the example in (4b). However, this utterance is not acceptable as a response to Speaker A's question in (4a), which favours object drop. Instead, it would be an appropriate response to a wide-focus question of the type 'What happened with the book?'/ 'What did you do about the book?'

3 Research questions

On the basis of the discussion so far about (i) the availability of UG operations (Agree, Match and Merge), and principles such as Full Interpretation (FI), which constrain natural grammars, (ii) the effects of uninterpretable features on learnability, and (iii) the categorial identity of clitics and determiners as the spell-out of agreement and case features, the following research questions are addressed:

- a. Is non-target performance (clitic/ determiner omission) attested in advanced stages of acquisition, and, if so, does it correlate with initial age of exposure to the L2?
- b. Is there a developmental correlation between clitics and determiners in L2 acquisition due to the assumed categorial identity between these elements?
- c. Is there a degree of difficulty in the acquisition of features found in the D system (Case, Gender, Number)?

4 The study

The subjects were twenty adult speakers of a Slavic language (Russian or Serbian), most of whom were also speakers of Georgian and/ or Turkish. At the time of arrival in Greece, they had no prior knowledge of the language, and they have learnt Greek without any instruction or any other form of structured input. Ten of the subjects had been living in Greece for at least ten years at the time of the interview while the other ten had a shorter length of stay in the country (3-4 years). All subjects have been working in Greek-speaking environments but not all of them use Greek as a home language. More information about the subjects is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Information on L2 learners (N=20, males=4, females=16)

	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Range</i>
Age	39.9	22-61
Age at arrival	32.5	18-57
Length of residence (in years)	7.3	3-12

In order to test the possible effects of length of residence and age of exposure to the L2 on linguistic performance, 11 subjects were selected as representative of these two variables (Age at arrival/ Length of residence) and were accordingly classified into four small groups (Table 3):

Table 3: Classification of the 11 subjects of the representative group*

Age at arrival in Greece	Length of residence in Greece
18-23	3 years
32-47	10-12 years

*Group 1: Age 18-23 / Length 3 ys (N=3)

Group 2: Age 32-47 / Length 3 ys (N=3)

Group 3: Age 18-23 / Length 10-12 ys (N=2)

Group 4: Age 32-47 / Length 10-12 ys (N=3)

The data was collected in the period between October 2002 and July 2003 and comes from spoken production in the form of one-to-one interviews, which were tape-recorded and transcribed. The interviews consisted of four parts: i) questions regarding biographical details relevant to the subjects' exposure to the L2, length of residence, education etc., ii) story-telling through the description of eight sets of pictures, iii) instruction-giving tasks (2 sets), and iv) general discussion. The interviews lasted 10-20 minutes, depending on the fluency of the participants.

4.1. The data

The percentages of the use and omission of the definite article and 3rd person clitics were calculated from the number of obligatory contexts created, presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Use and omission of the definite article and 3rd person clitics

	Use in obligatory contexts		Omission in obligatory contexts	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Definite article	1409 / 1912	73.7	503 / 1912	26.3
3 rd person clitic	299 / 483	61.9	184 / 483	38.1

One of our research questions concerns the variables (length of residence, age of exposure to L2, level of education, use of Greek as a home language and knowledge of other languages) that may affect linguistic performance. A stepwise multiple regression test was used to test the effect of the aforementioned variables on language performance on the basis of the use of articles and clitics by all subjects and, independently, by the 11 subjects of the representative group. The results of the factorial analysis carried out on all subjects showed that the use of Greek as a home language is responsible for 25% of performance³ ($F_{1,18} = 7.273$, $p < .01$). As for the 11 subjects of the representative group, the test showed that length of residence is responsible for 57% of performance ($F_{1,9} = 14.377$, $p < .01$) while the age of exposure is responsible for another 25% of performance ($F_{1,8} = 13.867$, $p < .01$). Based on this finding, we decided to classify all the subjects in four groups according to their age of exposure and length of stay in the country. The resulting groups, which were used for further statistical analysis, were the following:

- Group 1: 3-4 years, age at arrival 19-23 (N=3)
- Group 2: 3-4 years, age at arrival 24+ (N=7)
- Group 3: 10+ years, age at arrival 19-23 (N=2)
- Group 4: 10+ years, age at arrival 24+ (N=8)

Table 5 shows the use and omission rates of the definite article and 3rd person clitics by the 20 subjects classified in the aforementioned groups.

Table 5. Use and omission of the definite article and 3rd person clitic according to group

	Definite article		3 rd person clitic	
	Use	%	Omission	%
Group 1	155	(69.5)	68	(30.5)
Group 2	358	(54.6)	297	(45.5)
Group 3	203	(95.0)	10	(5.0)
Group 4	693	(84.4)	128	(15.6)

Considering the acquisition of these elements, we notice that there is a developmental pattern since the rate of omission for both categories decreases with the amount of exposure to the L2. A chi-square test performed on the subjects according to length of stay (groups 1 and 2 compared to groups 3 and 4) revealed a significant difference among the two groups regarding both the production of the definite article ($\chi^2 = 195.123$, $p < .01$) and the 3rd person clitic pronoun ($\chi^2 = 26.643$, $p < .01$). When the variable of the age of exposure is taken into account, we see that within the group of learners residing in Greece for a short period of time, the group of learners who came as early adults fares better than the group of older adults in the production of the definite article ($\chi^2 = 15.104$, $p < .01$). A similar pattern is observed within the group of learners residing in Greece for more than 10 years. More specifically, the young adult learners have a higher successful rate in the production of definite articles ($\chi^2 = 17.361$, $p < .01$) than the group of older learners, while there is no significant difference between the two groups in the production of clitics.

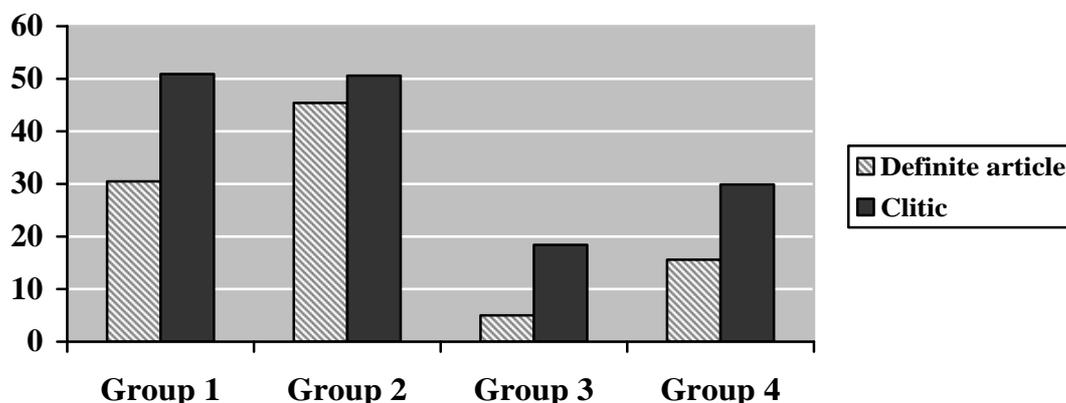
Considering the developmental correlation between determiners and clitics, the results presented in Table 6 show that a positive correlation is indeed found in all but group 1 (see also Figure 1):

Table 6. Correlation between omission of definite article and 3rd person clitics

	Definite article - 3 rd person clitic	
Group 2	$r = .852$	$p < .01$
Group 3	$r = 1.000$.
Group 4	$r = .745$	$p < .01$

Note, however, that the omission rate of the clitic is higher than that of the definite article across groups. A chi-square test performed for each group revealed a significant interaction between performance and the type of D element in group 1 ($\chi^2 = 8.525$, $p < .01$), group 3 ($\chi^2 = 11.072$, $p < .01$) and group 4 ($\chi^2 = 21.069$, $p < .01$).

Figure 1: Omission rate of the definite article and clitic pronouns



The second research question concerns the degree of difficulty in case, number and gender (also person in the case of clitics) as features on D. Tables 7 and 8 present results on error analysis across groups with respect to these features in use.

Table 7. Error analysis in DPs: mismatches between the definite article and N

	Case	Gender	Number	Mismatches / Number of DPs (+def.art) produced
Group 1	2	20/23 (87%)	1	23/155 (15%)
Group 2	2	23/27 (85.2%)	2	27/358 (7.5%)
Group 3		8/8 (100%)		8/203 (4%)
Group 4	3	31/39 (79.5%)	5	39/693 (5.6%)

Table 8. Error analysis in 3rd person clitics: mismatches between the clitic and its antecedent

	Gender	Number	Person	Mismatches / Number of DPs (+def.art) produced
Group 1	3/4 (75%)	1		4/29 (13.8%)
Group 2	10/16 (62.5%)	2	4	16/86 (18.6%)
Group 3	1/2 (50%)	1		2/40 (5%)
Group 4	11/13 (84.6)	2		13/134 (9.7%)

In total, the agreement errors found on either the article or the clitic are very low when compared to the number of correct production of those elements. As for the features that cause most problems, errors on the definite article are primarily found in the use of gender, while the number of case and number errors is similar. In the case of the clitic, gender⁴ seems to be causing the most problems while the number of person and number errors is almost the same, ignoring variation among groups. It should be noted, however, that in the case of the definite article, errors are ‘agreement’ errors within the same DP whereas clitic errors are ‘agreement’ with an antecedent either present in the preceding discourse or in the context. Thus, the slightly lower error rate in agreement within the DP might be due to the locality of the dependency formed.

5. Conclusions

As shown by the data presented in the previous section, there seems to be a developmental correlation between 3rd person clitics and the definite article. This points to some similarities in the representation of the two items in the L2 grammar. We cannot, however, claim that these similarities can be described as identity in the underlying feature-specification of the two items – as in the case of native speakers of Greek – because the clitics show a statistically significant higher omission rate (with the exception of group 2). We can, then, assume that it may be the surface morphological identity which is responsible for the correlation found. Having argued that both clitics and determiners instantiate similar abstract syntactic properties in the target grammar, we need to account for the different pattern in the L2 data. Recall that the definite article and the 3rd person clitic are D elements which are not intrinsically specified for an interpretable feature. This, by assumption, causes learnability problems to L2 learners. As a result, the definite article and the clitic are misanalysed by the L2 learner as elements which also bear an interpretable feature drawn from the repertoire of *interpretable* features that can be associated with the function of these elements. Specifically, specificity for D and referentiality for clitics are possible candidates for these items in the L2 grammar. Note that this misanalysis leads learners to assign a richer functional structure to the clitic and the definite article in Cardinaletti and Starke's (1999) terms.

If the above is correct, then clitics are interpreted as weak pronouns and can, therefore be omitted in the Slavic L1s in contexts with specific reference. Thus, L1 transfer of null objects is expected due to the misanalysis of features associated with Greek (L2) clitics. If this is correct, then L2 acquisition is UG-constrained and proceeds on the basis of morphological (mis)-analysis of L2 input which, in turn, leads to a non-target-like abstract representation. The L2 development of clitics and articles in these learners (with the exception of Group 1) develops in parallel, presumably by the introduction of the categorial D feature. However, although the development of D in L2 Greek improves faster than the use of object clitics in contexts where L1 would favour a null object, L1 transfer of the null object option is found even in the best performing group (Group 3). Overall, then, the persistent problems in the use of definite articles and clitics show a long-lasting (possibly fossilised) effect of L1 properties due to the misanalysed features borne by these elements.

Notes

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¹ The categorial identity between the two is also reflected in L1 acquisition, where a parallel development of the 3rd person clitic and the definite article is attested (Tsimplici 2003b, in press-b).

² We are grateful to Victoria Motsiou for providing us with the Russian examples.

³ This might account for the individual variation observed among subjects (e.g. Subjects 4 and 5 who came to Greece after the age of 23 and had lived in the country for 4 years at the time of the interview had an over 85% successful performance in both clitics and articles).

⁴ Previous studies on SLA (Hawkins 1998, Bruhn de Caravito and White 2000) also reported higher frequency of gender mismatches in DPs.

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