

# **THE FUNCTION OF THE SET AND FROZEN EXPRESSIONS IN THE MODERN GREEK LANGUAGE IN NEWS, ADVERTISING AND MEDIA: A CORPUS BASED APPROACH.**

*George Alexandropoulos  
University of Athens*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper studies the function of the set and frozen fixed expressions in Modern Greek in news, media and advertising. Its purpose is to describe, through the building of a digital corpus<sup>1</sup>, the way that newspapers, magazines, TV programs and advertisements use these expressions and understand the reason for their stabilization and change into types.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the present paper, a Greek corpus has been created from media and news advertising. The corpus is made up of about 30,000 sentences taken from different newspapers, TV series and radio programs. Once collected an attempt will be made to explain, on the basis of the tagged corpus, the reasons for the usage and change both in form and meaning of the set and fixed expressions<sup>2</sup> of the Modern Greek language in news media and advertising.

## **2. THE USAGE OF THE SET AND FIXED EXPRESSIONS IN NEWS MEDIA AND ADVERTISING**

### *2.1. Historical Background*

In the Modern Greek language some set and frozen expressions<sup>3</sup> from the Ancient Greek Language have survived. Even though it has been years since they were first used, they have not changed at all for a variety of reasons, such

---

<sup>1</sup> For more details about corpora see Biber (1998) and McCarthy (2004).

<sup>2</sup> For more details about the stabilization of fixed expressions in languages see Ackerman (1982), Cacciari (1993), Cacciari & Glucksberg (1991), Cacciari, Rumiati & Glucksberg (1992), Cacciari & Tabossi (1993), Fernando (1996), Fraser (1970), Gibbs (1987-1990), Gross (1988), Lakoff (1993), Mel'čuk(1998), Nattinger (1988), Ruwet (1983), Saeed (2003).

<sup>3</sup> For more phrases see Kiouisis (2005), Kandirou et al. (2007).

as the diachronic route of the Greek Language, the religious and literary tradition and the linguistic dispute between demotic and official, purist language and social diglossia<sup>4</sup>. Apart from these reasons, the stabilization of these expressions is caused by their non-compositionality<sup>5</sup> and non-flexibility in the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axon, even though in many TV series these phrases are modified to give a sense of humor through hypercorrection.

In general, their forms can be thus:

- i) noun + noun, ex. αποκύημα φαντασίας: fantasy, lie, illusion,
- ii) adjective + noun, ex. γόρδιος δεσμός: Gordian knot,
- iii) preposition + noun, ex. εις μάτην: in vain,
- iv) adverb, ex., νυν και αι: now and forever,
- v) Pronoun, ex., επ' ουδενί: on no account
- vi) verb + verb, ex., φάσκω και αντιφάσκω: say and unsay,
- vii) verbal phrase, ex., τά αγαθά κόποις κτώνται: labour brings success,
- viii) infinitive, ex., αιέν άριστεύειν: always be the best,
- ix) particle, ex., γηράσκω δ' αεί πολλά διδασκόμενος: wisdom comes with age and
- x) imperative, ex., γνωθι σαυτόν: (get to) know yourself.

## 2.2. Analysis of our data from corpus

In many TV series, radio programs and advertisements formulaic sentences of the Modern Greek Language are used for a variety of reasons, as can be seen in the following analysis.

Examples from headlines of TV broadcasts:

1. Ενώπιος ενωπίω. (Face to face.)
2. Εν λευκώ. (Give somebody carte blanche.)
3. Περί ανέμων και υδάτων. (Small talk / chatting or bubbling away.)

In examples (1) and (2), we have two headlines from political broadcasts. Through the fixed expressions it is obvious that journalists create an association of ideas about the context of the broadcasts. Actually, they aim at creating the idea that they are willing to reveal the truth, clarify everything that happens around them and inform the viewers in an objective way. In

---

<sup>4</sup>For the diglossia or the coexistence of two forms in the Modern Greek Language see Alexiou (1982), Browning (1969) and Ferguson (1959).

<sup>5</sup>For Alexandropoulos (2008) the set and fixed expressions that have survived in Modern Greek from older periods of the language are retrieved from short-term memory and because of their limited compositionality in paradigmatic axon are used as prefabricated sentences for social interaction.

example (3) the headline is from a TV series and prepares us for the context of this series. In all these examples, the fixed expressions of the Modern Greek Language operate as summarizers of the context of the broadcasts and predispose us to understand what is going to follow.

Examples from headlines of articles in newspapers:

4. *Η θητεία επί τάπητος. (Laying on the table the military service issue.)*

5. *Το Μαξίμου τηρεί σιγήν ιχθύος. (PM's office is as silent as mouse.)*

6. *Δραπέτης σκότωσε εν ψυχρώ οδηγό λεωφορείου. (Fugitive kills bus driver in cold blood.)*

7. *Πνέει τα λoίσθια η ομάδα της Καστοριάς. (The team of Kastoria is moribund.)*

The above examples try to describe what happens in the social and political life of the country. In example (4) journalists inform us about the effort of the government to change things in the military service. As a result of this, we understand that the government tackles this issue with seriousness. In example (5) journalists, by using a certain fixed expression, inform us about the intention of the government to cover a special issue in the social and political life of the country. In example (6) journalists inform us about a crime in the same way. The particular expression used describes a very atrocious crime and creates the thought that the murderer was an unscrupulous person without moral values. In this way, the message becomes very penetrating in our memory and motivates our emotion more than rationality. In example (7) journalists summarize what happens in the certain team and through the fixed expression describe its end. In addition to the above functions, in all these examples through the fixed expressions journalists are able to show that they have social prestige<sup>6</sup>. As a corollary, we understand that these expressions in the Modern Greek language operate as a means of social embodiment and prestige.

Examples from radio programs:

8. *Δελτίο καιρού εν κινήσει. (Weather forecast on the move.)*

In example (8) we have a headline from a radio program, which helps the audience to be informed about the rush hours. This fixed expression describes what follows and cannot be replaced with any kind of other prepositional phrase in Modern Greek, since this totally changes the significance of the phrase. Mainly, the fixed expression “εν κινήσει” cannot be replaced by “με κίνηση” or “σε κίνηση”, because this means that the broadcast is moved.

Examples from TV shows:

---

<sup>6</sup> For social prestige see Labov (1994).

9. *Εν τάχει θα σας πω τι έχουμε σήμερα στην εκπομπή. (I will briefly inform you about what we have to deal with today.)*  
10. *Τα μηχανάκια ανά χείρας και ψηφίστε. (Get hold of your voting gadgets and vote.)*

In example (9) the journalist determines and summarizes what follows and he/she displays his/her social prestige through their fixed expression. In the same way in example (10) he/she motivates and leads the audience to a certain action and simultaneously displays his/her social prestige, as the fixed expressions in Modern Greek are an indicator of social level.

Examples from advertisements:

11. *Εξοικονομώ κατ' οίκον. (Economise at home)*  
12. *Επί ποδός άνεση. *Elite!* (Comfort at your feet. Elite!)*  
13. *Activepad... νερό εν δράσει. (Activepad... water in action)*

The above examples are used in advertisements and they aim at motivating the motion and then the rationality of the speakers. Actually, in example (11) the certain fixed expression has the same etymology as the verb “εξοικονομώ” (economise) and in this way leads the audience to the thought that in this way they can save money. As a result of this, through this fixed expression viewers make associations of ideas, because of the summarization, about how they can improve their lives by adopting the way of life or the program that is proposed by the advertisement. In example (12) through the summarization and the social prestige of the fixed expression the advertisers persuade the viewers that they can have a comfortable daily life, as part of the elite. Lastly, in example (13) the product that is promoted by advertisers makes everyone active in their daily life. As the fixed expression operates as a summarization of the basic elements and properties of the promoted product, advertiser makes clear in the mind of the watchers that this can change their daily life.

On the whole, the set and fixed expressions in the news, media and advertising in Modern Greek help TV producers and advertisers to promote their ideas and persuade the audience about everything they propose or to motivate to certain actions. By adopting the Wray and Perkins' model (2001) it could be said that these set expressions function as formulaic language, since they can be a sequence, continuous or not, of words or other language elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved wholly from the memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar. The set expressions of the Modern Greek Language are a means of benefiting the speaker, since the latter can both organise his thought and increase production speed and/or fluency. As a result of this, we could say that the set expressions are a tool for social interaction and short-cut processing, as they help the speakers, i.e. the

journalists, to promote themselves and satisfy the viewers' expectations about the lexical choices they use in the certain register<sup>7</sup>.

Examples from discourse in TV series:

14. *Είμαι τύπος και υπογαμός instead of τύπος και υπογραμμός (Be proper and nice.)*

15. *Μας ήρθε πρωκτολός χρημάτων instead of πακτωλός χρημάτων (Fund galore.)*

In examples (14) and (15) the modified expressions are from a TV series, in which they are used by a hero trying to become a member of a society through lexical choices with social prestige. The script writer modifies these expressions for humouristic reasons and tries to satisfy the expectations of the viewers about the comic series they watch.

Examples from advertisements:

16. *Εν τω polo το εν instead of εν τω πολλώ το εν (It's quality that counts)*

17. *Ουδέν κρυπτόν υπό τον κύκλον ΑΒ. Κύκλος ποιότητας instead of ουδέν κρυπτόν υπό τον ήλιον. (Murder will out)*

18. *Διαφέρουμε λόγω τιμής. (We are different in price)*

In example (16) the modified expression is from an advertisement which creates a pun through the homonym with “polo” and “πολλώ” (much), since the person who buys the given product can have the wealth and the well-being. In example (17) the modified expression is from a supermarket advertisement. This modified expression creates humor and simultaneously the association of ideas that this supermarket is reliable in terms of the quality of its products. In example (18) the fixed expression creates a pun through an association of ideas which is produced to the viewers' mind, since this structure in Greek has one more meaning besides the figurative meaning of “because of price”. Mainly, it also means that someone is of a reliable, honest character and there is no way to take anyone in. So, this formulaic phrase through the polysym and pun creates association of ideas that the certain store differs from others not only because of the price but also because of the reliability and the honesty.

The above modification and ex-stabilization is a means of creativity<sup>8</sup> in our language and it is a mistake to believe that these expressions lead to linguistic poverty and atrophy. For Tsakona (2004) the modification reverses the receivers' expectation and attracts their attention. Nakas (2003) supports the idea that the modification is a mechanism of asteism. Gkotovos (1991:24) maintains that the asteism in the ex-stabilized expressions is a result of the

---

<sup>7</sup> See Bhatia (1993) and Swales (1994).

<sup>8</sup> For Mejri (1997: 90) ex-stabilization leads to creativity in language.

incompatibility between demotic and official, purist language. Rastier (1997: 309-310) claims that the speaker, through the ex-stabilization, expresses his/her freedom. For Galisson (1995:107-108), the ex-stabilization through the puns is a way to create a new expression by breaking the fixed sequence. The same happens when the advertisers and TV producers modify the fixed expressions of the Modern Greek Language into puns in order to impress, create asteism and associations of ideas about the promoted product. As a result of the alienation, interchange between the styles, they create a new register, a register of humor as suggested by Attardo (1994).

### 3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, journalists use some set and frozen, fixed expressions in Modern Greek that come from old periods of the language. These expressions are used by them, since they operate as prefabricated sentences that help them both to summarize what they want to say and exhibit their social prestige. For this reason, they continue to survive in Modern Greek. Sometimes in the media, news and advertising these prefabricated, formulaic sentences are modified in order to create asteism and association of ideas about the quality of promoted message or product. This ex-stabilization produces a new structure which is incompatible with the official language and because of its creativity contributes to asteism and impressiveness.

### 4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My thanks to the Foundation of the State Scholarships which helped me to do this research.

### 5. REFERENCES

- Ackerman, B. (1982). On Comprehending Idioms. Do Children Get the Picture?. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology* 33: 439-454.
- Alexandropoulos, G. (2008). *The stabilization of the set and frozen expressions of the Modern Greek Language*. MA Thesis. University of Athens.
- Alexiou, M. (1982). Diglossia in Greece. In: W. Haas, *Standard Language, spoken and written*. Mont Follick Series, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 156 – 192.
- Attardo, S. (1994). *Linguistic Theories of Humour*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bhatia, V. K. (1993). *Analysing genre: language use in professional settings*. London: Longman
- Biber, D. (1998). *Variation across Speech and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Browning, R. (1969). *Medieval and Modern Greek*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Cacciari, C. (1993). The Place of Idioms in a Literal and Metaphorical World. In C. Cacciari & P. Tabossi, *Idioms: Processing, Structure and Interpretation*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 27-55.
- Cacciari, C. & S. Glucksberg (1991). Understanding Idiomatic Expressions. In G. B. Simpson, *Understanding Word and Sentence*. Amsterdam-New York-Tokyo: North-Holland, 217-240.
- Cacciari, C., R. Rumiati & S. Glucksberg (1992). The Role of Word Meaning, Transparency and Familiarity in the Mental Images of Idioms. In M. Everaert, E. J. van der Linden, A. Schenk & R. Schreuder, *Proceedings of Idioms*, Tilburg: ITK.
- Cacciari, C. & P. Tabossi (1993). *Idioms: Processing, Structure and Interpretation*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Cowie, A. P. (1998). *Phraseology: Theory, Analysis and Applications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ferguson, Ch. (1959). Diglossia. *Word* 15: 325-340
- Fernando, C. (1996). *Idioms and Idiomaticity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Galisson, R. (1995). Les palimpsestes verbaux: des révélateurs culturels remarquables mais peu remarqués. *Cahiers du Français Contemporain* 2: 43-63.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1987). Linguistic Factors in Children's Understanding of Idioms. *Journal of Child Language* 16: 569-586.
- Gibbs, R. W. (1990). Psycholinguistic Studies on the Conceptual Basis of Idiomaticity. *Cognitive Linguistics* 1/4: 417-451.
- Gkotovos, Ath.(1991). Connectives of ideological adjustment. *Theory and Society* 5: 7 – 27.
- Gross, G. (1988). Degré de figement des noms composés. *Langages* 90: 57-72.
- Kandirou, G., D. E. Paschalidis, S.N. Rizou (2007). *Linguistic Exercises in college*. Athens: O.E.D.B.
- Kiouis, E. (2005). *Lexicon of the set frozen and fixed expressions of the Modern Greek Language*. Athens: Ennoia.
- Labov, W. (1994). *Principles of Linguistic Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lakoff, G. (1993). The Syntax of Metaphorical Semantic Roles. In J. Pustejovsky, *Semantics and the Lexicon*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 27-36.
- McCarthy, M. J. (2004). *Touchstone: From corpus to coursebook*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mejri, S. (1997). Défigement et jeux de mots. *Etudes Linguistiques* 3 (Association Tunisienne de Linguistique, Tunis), 249-256.

- Mel'čuk, I. (1998). Collocations and Lexical Functions. In A. P. Cowie, *Praseology: Theory, Analysis and Applications*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 23-53.
- Nakas, Ath. (2003). Language and philology D. *Studies for the language and littérature*. Athens.
- Nattinger, J. (1988). Some Current Trends in Vocabulary Teaching. In R. Carter & M. McCarthy, *Vocabulary and language Teaching*. London: Longman, 62-82.
- Rastier, F. (1997). Défigements sémantiques en contexte. *La locution-Entre langue et usages*. Fontenay Saint-Cloud: ENS Editions, 307-332.
- Ruwet, N. (1983). Du bon usage des expressions idiomatiques dans l'argumentation en syntaxe générative. *Révue québécoise de linguistique* 13/1: 9-145.
- Saeed, J. (2003). *Semantics*. London: Blackwell.
- Swales, J. M. & J. Feak (1994). *Academic writing for graduate students: essential tasks and skills: a course for non-native speakers of English*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Tsakona, B. (2004). *Humor in written speech. Linguistic Approach. PhD Dissertation*. Athens.
- Wray, A. & M. Perkins (2000). The Functions of Formulaic language: an integrated model. *Language & Communication* 20 (2000), 1 – 28.