Palatalization and Centralization in Samothraki Greek

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Samothraki Greek, like other Greek dialects, palatalises velars (and occasionally other consonants, e.g. s, z, n, l) before the front vowels /i, e/ (Κατσάνης 1996; henceforth K) even if the latter delete in final position due to the process of high vowel deletion in unstressed positions.

(1)   Palatalization in front of /i, e/ [palatalization is marked as ' after the C in question]

feg'	/fegi/	'φέγγει'	(K: 66)
tok'	/toki/	'τόκοι'	(K: 66)
k'ima	/kima/	'κύμα'	(K: 62)
x'inu	/xino/	'χύνω'	(K: 63)
ɣ'ena	/ɣena/	'γέννα'	(K: 63)

The dialect additionally has an idiosyncratic process of r-deletion from an onset position followed by lengthening of the following vowel. This occurs independently of whether /r/ is in a singleton or complex onset.

(2)   /r/-deletion and lengthening

a.   Singleton onset   (K: 50-51)

oːɣa	from	/roɣa/	'ρώγα'
eːma	from	/rema/	'ρέμα'
iːɣan'	from	/riɣani/	'ρίγανη'

b.   Complex onset   (K: 54-55)

xoːma	from	/xroma/	'χρώμα'
mavuːs	from	/mavros/	'μαύρος'
koːtus	from	/krotos/	'κρότος'
θeːfu	from	/θrefo/	'θρέφω'

Given that /r/-deletion brings together the first part of the cluster and the following vowel (2b), palatalization could potentially occur in clusters of the type: Velar + r + Front V. However rather than palatalization of the consonant, instead the following vowel becomes centralized to [î] or [ê], sounds that according to Katsanis are central vowels, close to [ɯ] of Turkish and [ɨ] of Romanian.

(3)   Centralization in Velar + r + i/e and minimal pairs with palatalized words (K: 73)

kîːma	from	/krima/	*kʲiːma	'κρίμα'	vs.	kʲima	from	/kima/	'κύμα'
xîːma	from	/xrima/	*xiːma	'χρήμα'	vs.	xima	from	/xima/	'χύμα'
kîːnu	from	/krino/	*kʲiːnu	'κρίνω'	vs.	kʲinu	from	/kino/	'(ε)κείνο'

Derivationally, these data could be captured by first applying Consonant Palatalization, then applying r-deletion (and lengthening), followed by Vowel Centralization. In words lacking /r/ underlyingly, only palatalization applies making the consonant more forward and thus rendering centralization inapplicable. In words including /r/, palatalization fails to apply due to the intervening /r/. By the time /r/ deletes, it is too late for palatalization to have any effect, leaving space for centralization, which indeed changes the front vowel to central. This is an instance of counterfeeding opacity, as the opposite ordering between /r/-deletion and Palatalization, would create the environment for the latter to apply.

Opacity remains a conundrum for Optimality Theory (Prince and Smolensky 1993/2004). This is the first paper to explore the facts above in detail and to provide an analysis by testing the data both against various proposals for opacity in OT (McCarthy 2006, Rubach 2007) as well as representational approaches which possibly do away with opacity in the first place.

Selected References

Κατσάνης, Νικόλαος (1996) *Το γλωσσικό ιδίωμα της Σαμοθράκης*. Δήμος Σαμοθράκης
McCarthy, John (2006) *Hidden Generalizations: Phonological Opacity in Optimality Theory*. London: Equinox
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