

SUBDIALECTAL DIVERSITY IN THE TSAKONIAN-SPEAKING AREA OF ARCADIA*

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This paper presents the results of the field research, launched in the Tsakonian-speaking area in 2010-2012 by the Hellenic Institute in Saint-Petersburg. Geographical and social differences in the dialect area have been studied; a correlation between them has been revealed. Two varieties of the Southern Tsakonian dialect have been distinguished: the palatalized variant of Prastos, and the non-palatalized one of Melana. Nowadays this distinction is influenced by two dialect descriptions (Kostakis, 1951; Deffner, 1881), assumed by the community speakers.

1 Purpose of study

The aim of this paper is to present geographical and social varieties of the Southern Tsakonian dialect and to analyze different linguistic and extralinguistic factors that contribute to the emergence and increase of the dialect diversity in the region. The analysis is based on the materials of a number of expeditions in the Tsakonian-speaking area in 2010-2012, organized by the Hellenic Institute in Saint-Petersburg and lead by my colleague Ass. Prof. Maxim Kisilier. In the first phase of the study the materials were collected by narrative interviews in Tsakonian and sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic questionnaires in Modern Greek. After having revealed the key local dialect variation, a number of phonetic, morphosyntactic and lexical questionnaires were compiled.

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2 Dialect speaking community

The Tsakonian dialect spoken on the eastern Peloponnese nowadays has a relatively small area of extension and is usually divided in two subdialect groups:¹ northern² and southern. The northern variant is spread in the villages of Kastanitsa and Sitena, and the southern one is used in the city of Leonidion, and some villages to the North: Vaskina, Melana, Pragmatevtis, Tyros, Sapunoikeika, and Agios Andreas. Melana and Pramatevtis are situated one above the other and constitute a geographical microregion, so that they were united in one separate geographical point, as well as Tyros and Sapunoikeika. The village of Prastos should be mentioned apart, because it is situated in the mountains and is distinct and isolated from the main southern dialect area. The population of Prastos spends there only a few months in the summer and leaves to Agios Andreas during the winter period. Thus, the following geographical points were chosen as relevant for the study:

Tsakonian is supposed to be a critically endangered language because of its relatively small number of fluent speakers which are estimated to be 2000 to 4000 and because of the lack of a younger generation. The southern Tsakonian area speakers form quite a heterogeneous bilingual community. The percentage of population which doesn't speak Tsakonian is high in the town of Leonidion and very low in the surrounding villages. The mountain area is inhabited by the rural shepherd and agricultural population. Sailors constitute an important part of the inhabitants in the coastal villages.

The Tsakonian dialect is usually presented in relevant dialectological sources as the only Modern Greek dialect that doesn't derive from the hellenistic koine, but has traces of the ancient Greek Dorian (Laconian) dialect.³ It is considered to have undergone a morphological reduction due to its long isolation in the mountain area of the eastern Peloponnese. Nevertheless, according to historical researches the dialect speakers maintained contacts with the mainland during the Middle Ages until the early part of the 19th c.⁴ Therefore, the isolation of the community during this period can be questioned. Contacts with other languages and Greek dialects are confirmed on the synchronic level by the Tsakonian lexical borrowings (Dragunkina, forthcoming). The Tsakonian community gets relatively isolated from modern development in the first half of the

¹ Besides the Peloponnesian Tsakonian idiom the variety of Propontis (villages Viatka and Khavusi) has been defined (see Kostakis, 1979). This variety wasn't included in the data of the present study due to its geographical remoteness.

² According to (Kondosopoulos, 2001: 4), the northern variety of the Tsakonian dialect was subjected to SMG interference. That is the reason why the southern area was chosen as the subject of this study.

³ This description of the Tsakonian dialect seems to be a simplified one and neglects the following facts: from the one hand, different ancient features ascribed to Tsakonian can be found in some other Greek dialects, e. g.:

1. Ancient Greek /y/ < /u/

Tsak. čuraká 'Sunday' < SMG Κυριακή

cf. Cyp. γrusós 'golden' < SMG χρυσός; Griko čýri 'mister, Lord' < SMG κύριος, Karpathos kryfós < SMG κρυφός.

2. Doric long ā < a

Tsak. améra 'day' < SMG ημέρα

cf. Karpathos axúsa 'sounding (toponym)' < SMG ηχούσα.

From the other hand, some important innovations, typologically comparable with other Greek dialects, can be also revealed in the Tsakonian, e. g. palatalization of /r/ ↔ /r'/.

⁴ See e. g. about relationships between Prastos and Constantinople in the 15-18th c. (Balta, 2009).

20th c., the main road to Leonidion was built only in the 1960s. Thus, it can be suggested that the isolation of the Tsakonian-speaking area is a recent phenomenon, but this hypothesis is to be proved.

3 Subdialectal variation

3.1 Phonetics

3.1.1 Geographical diversity

The main researcher of the Tsakonian dialect, Aphanasios Kostakis, was a native Tsakonian, who contributed to the popularization of the language and fostered the speakers interest in their own language variant. Tsakonian speakers have been influenced by Kostakis dialect researches.

Due to its rich phonetic particularity, the Tsakonian dialect appears to be incomprehensible for other Modern Greek speakers. It falls out of the main current classifications of Greek dialects (Newton, 1972; Kondosopoulos, 2001; Trudgill, 2003), because the majority of Tsakonian phonetic features doesn't coincide with the isoglosses that are valid for other Greek dialects.

The scientific study and description of the Tsakonian dialect was started by Michael Deffner, who lived for a long time in Tsakonian villages and worked with the informants. M. Deffner worked mostly in Prastos, and, as he mentions in his "Dictionary of the Tsakonian dialect", his study is based on the Prastos version of the dialect. The most complete study of the dialect in the XX c. was written by Hubert Pernot (Pernot, 1934) and his disciple Aphanasios Kostakis, born in the Tsakonian village Melana (Pernot, Kostakis, 1933; Kostakis, 1951). Having few local informants, Pernot gives preference to Kostakis' dialect variants, and namely to the variant of Melana. Kostakis' grammar has more prescriptive tendencies, than the descriptive ones, and is based on the southern materials from Melana and Leonidio.

The two different descriptions of the Tsakonian dialect have been opposed to one another and the scholars related to one another very critically. In his "Dictionary of the Tsakonian dialect" M. Deffner (Deffner, 1923) corrects Pernot's mistakes, and A. Kostakis (Kostakis, 1956), in his turn, presents corrections and additions to Deffner's list of the Tsakonian flora (Deffner, 1922). These corrections deal mostly with some phonetic features. Thus, the most problematic feature appears to be the use of the sound /r/ and its palatalized or non-palatalized versions. Two types of corrections can be observed:

1. A non-palatalized /r/ is substituted by a palatalized one:

Deffner 1922	Kostakis 1956
armiriθra ⁵	armižiθra
afría	afšía
vroxístra	vroxíša

Table 1. Correction of non-palatalized /r/ by A. Kostakis.

⁵ I present the examples not in the original orthography, but in a unified transcription.

2. A palatalized variant /rʲj/ is substituted by another result of the palatalization of /r/ – /ž/:

Deffner 1922	Kostakis 1956	
	Leonidio	Kastanitsa
ayržokúmare	ayžokúmare	ayržokumaría
axžía	akxšía	kxžía

Table 2. Corrections of palatalized variant /rʲj/ by A. Kostakis.

The substitution of palatalized /rʲj/ by /ž/ in Kostakis' corrections is very regular. This fact leads us to assume that in this case some subdialectal differences can be observed and their pronunciation should be checked through the whole southern area. The main points of inquiry we have chosen were the villages of Vaskina-Leonidion (the Tsakonian dialect isn't spoken in Leonidion today, it is used only by shepherds from villages around who come to the kafenio), Melana, Tyros, Sapunokeika and the area of Agios Andreas-Prastos.

According to M. Deffner, in the Tsakonian dialect a non-palatalized /r/ can be used before /i/ (Deffner, 1881: 108f) in several words only, for example:

ambria 'Easter',
 voria 'North',
 yria 'old woman',
 krie 'meat'.

In these examples the use of the non-palatalized /r/ has been constantly observed in the speech of the informants. It has never been palatalized neither by men nor by women of different ages.

Palatal consonants, their status and mutation still remain a matter of discussion. In other cases the distribution of palatal and non-palatal consonants is unclear. The same informant (Masc., 70, born in Vaskina, and now living in Leonidion) can use in the same narrative two different variants: a palatalized one (pažiu) and a non-palatalized one (pariu).

3.1.2 Gender differences

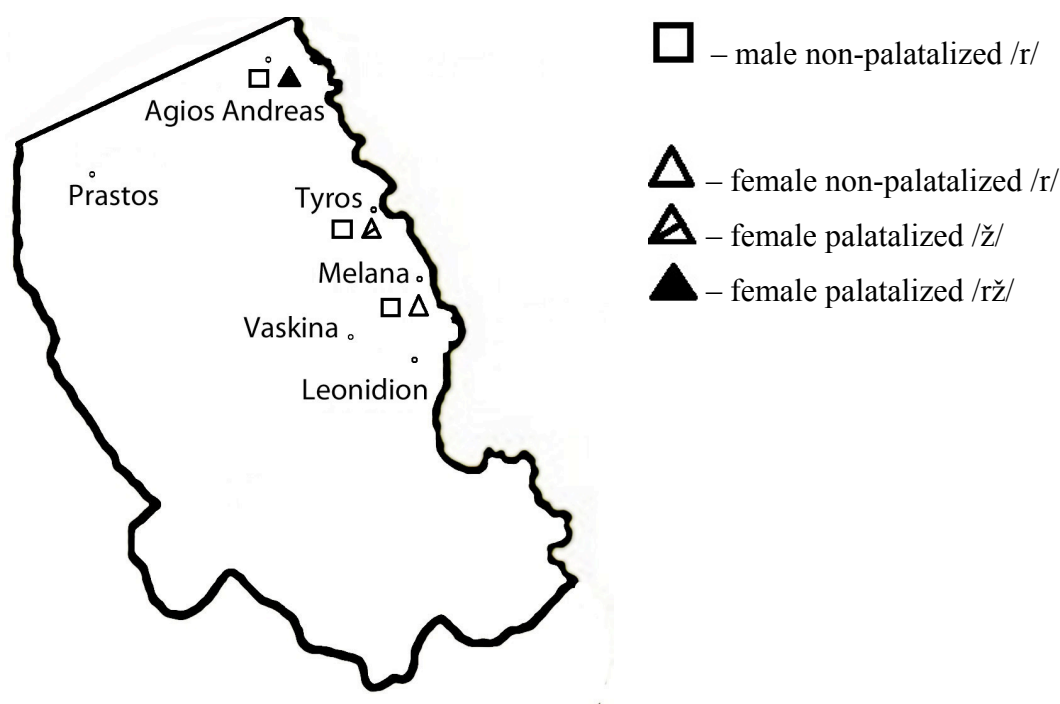
Another problem is linked to the conditions of mutation, it is often not clear if the mutation depends just on the phonological environment or is also affected by certain extralinguistic factors, like the sex of the speaker. Nevertheless, we have been able to reveal also a geographical distribution of the forms which coexists with the social distribution.

It has already been observed by Pernot (Pernot, 1934) and Charalambopoulos (Charalambopoulos, 1980) that women usually use the palatalized variant of /r/, but no geographical distribution of this phenomenon has been presented yet, and the villages of Prastos and Agios Andreas were often excluded from the area in study.

Analyzing together gender and geographical distribution of palatalized /r/, we get the following results:

Place	Male variant	Female variant	SMG
Melana – Pravamtevtis	muár`ja	muár`ja	μουλάρια
Tyros – Sapunakeika	ér`ifo	éžifo	έριφα
Agios Andreas – Prastos	monascír`i	monascírži	μοναστήρι

Table 3. Male and female differences in using palatalized /r/.



Map 1. Male and female differences in using palatalized /r/.

We can observe that in the southern area of Leonidion-Melana-Pravamtevtis the women don't use the palatalized variant of /r/ and pronounce: muárja (Fem, 85, Melana). In the region of Tyros-Sapunakeika, Prastos-Agios Andreas two variants of palatalized /r/ remain: érifó (Masc., 81, Tyros), éžifo (Fem, 80, Tyros), monastsíri (Masc, 61, Agios Andreas), monastsírži (Masc., 70, Agios Andreas).

(Deffner, 1881) describes two variants of palatalized /r/ in the Tsakonian dialect that can be transformed into /rž<i>/, or into /ž<i>/, for example:

máža / márža 'mules' — SMG μουλάρια,

kžáða / kržáða 'cold' — SMG κρυάδα,

[éni] ðakržízu / [éni] ðakžízu 'it tears (3SG)' — SMG ðakρίζω.

The palatalized variants /rʒ/ is preferred by the informants from Prastos and Agios Andreas. This fact confirms once more that M. Deffner's dialect description was based primarily on the dialect version of Prastos. Therefore it can be supposed that the two variants of palatalized /r/ were at first opposed one to another as isoglosses of the local varieties.

It is worth to mention that the palatalization of /r/ into /rʒ/ is common for the northern Tsakonian dialect of Kastanitsa (for example: istorʒia). Kostakis' corrections and additions (Kostakis, 1956) to Deffner's work (Deffner, 1922) reveal the same tendency. This observation leads us to suppose that the Prastos area can be expected to have common features with the northern Tsakonian dialect and to be a transition zone between the two dialectal varieties. The differences in male and female use of language can be interpreted as a result of SMG influence.

3.1.3 Geographical and gender differences

As we trace other palatalization phenomena in the area discussed, we observe similar tendencies. There has been a disappearance of palatalized forms in the South of the Tsakonian-speaking area (Leonidio, Vaskina, Melana). We observe an occasional palatalization, especially in the women's use, in the town of Tyros (to the North of Leonidio), and a frequent palatalization in Prastos.

Palatalization of the velar /k/ or tsitakismos has a similar distribution:

tseftéde (Fem., 55, Tyros),

keftéde (Masc./Fem., 80, Melana).

We observe this palatalization also in the relatively new words, e. g.: ameritsí, afritsí, so that it can be concluded that it is still a living process.

The lack of palatalization can be explained as an innovation, which emerged in the South of the Tsakonian-speaking area due to contacts with the Standard Greek language in the town of Leonidio and the coastal villages. The influence of Standard Greek leads also to a phenomenon of depalatalization. In the speech of one informant from Melana, aged 50 years, the sibilants are usually depalatalized: we have *atse* instead of *ače*, *asa* instead of *aša*.

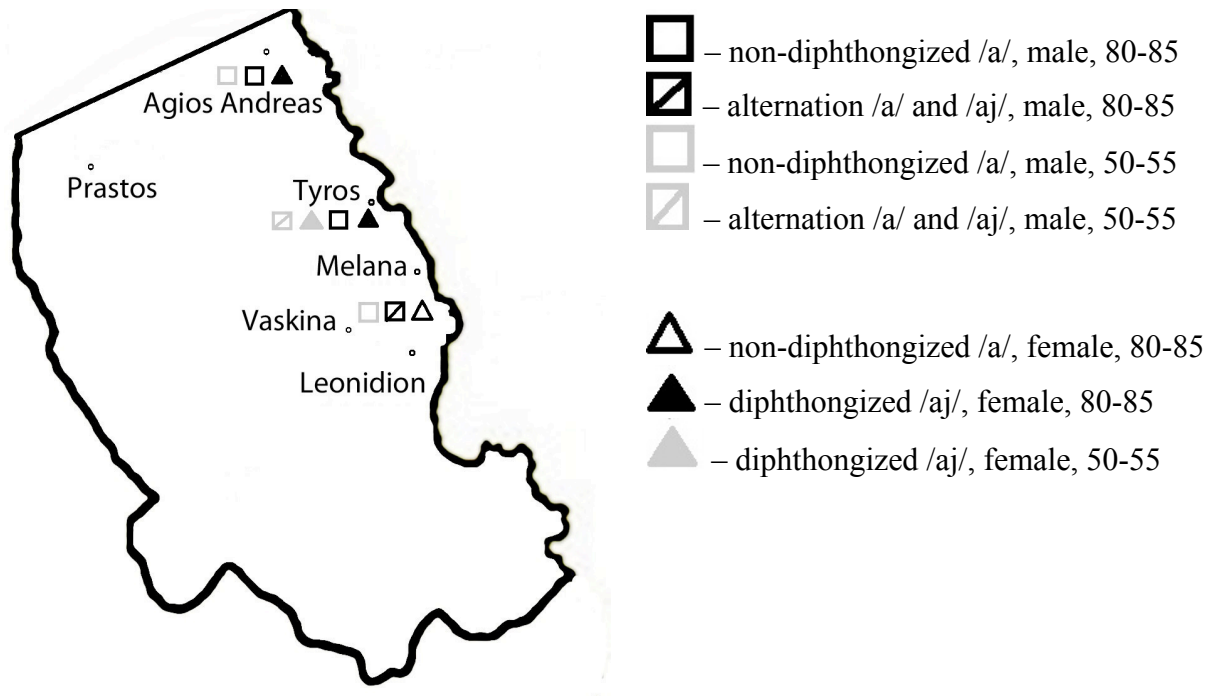
Another phonetic feature is worth to be mentioned – the diphthongization of the back vowels in the position before dental fricatives. A. Kostakis corrects in Deffner's list the form *ayrʒoródiko*, and proposes another form – *ayʒorójdiko*.

In his dictionary M. Deffner prefers non-diphthongized forms like: *čaθía* (Deffner, 1923: 370) that has even no parallel diphthongized form, and *úθi* (Deffner, 1923: 294) that has a variation – *újθi*. Deffner describes this process as diphthong simplification under the influence of Standard greek, but in this case the innovative diphthongization seems to be more probable.

During our field research in southern Tsakonia we have collected the following results:

Place	Age: ~ 80-85		Age: ~50-55	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Melana	kiyáði, čajθía	kiyáði	kiyáði, čaθía	–
Tyros	čaθía, tiyáði	čajθía	čajθía, kiyájði, θa naθí	čajθía, kiyájði, θa najθí
Agios Andreas	čaθía, kiyáði	kiyájði	čaθía, kiyáði	–

Table 4. Diphthongization. Geographical and gender distribution.



Map 2. Diphthongization. Geographical and gender distribution.

It can be concluded that we observe in this case an innovation which has been spreading from the North, because it is well preserved in the female speech, independent of the age, and is likely to be stopped by the interference with the Standard Greek language. The interference is strengthened by the gradual loss of the traditional life style. The gender distinction disappears, while the men in the age of 50-55 in Tyros start to use female diphthongized variant as the more ancient and the right one.

3.2 Morphology

The most variable morphological phenomena have appeared to be the use of genitive forms and irrealis constructions.

3.2.1 Genitive forms

(Kostakis, 1951) contains a number of distinct genitive forms. (Deffner, 1923), on the contrary, gives a restricted number of nouns that are able to build these forms. A list of nouns was compiled and checked with the informants from different villages, of different age and sex. The following feminine nouns preserve a distinct form of singular genitive:

a ghuneka 'woman' – ta ghuneci,
 a ghidha 'goat' – ta ghide,
 a kotxa 'han' – ta kotxe,
 a kulika 'cow' – ta kulice,
 a nytxa 'night' – ta nytxe,
 a kacua 'cat' – ta kacule,
 a dzea 'house' – ta celi,
 a mira 'fate' – ta mire,
 a sati 'daughter' – ta sateri,
 a mera 'day' – ta meri.

From the masculine nouns have been conserved only the following forms:

o achopo 'husband' – tu achupu,
 o athropo 'man' – tu athrupu,
 o kue 'dog' – tu kune.

The forms listed have no subdialectal varieties. They are preserved in the dialect and have different degree of conservation which can depend on geographical or social factors (age, sex). Elderly women who have been living for a long time in the mountain villages appear to be the most competent dialect speakers. Male informants from coastal villages and from the town of Leonidion substitute the genitive singular forms by the accusative ones, e. g.:

- (1) i pue ta kotxa
 the-ART.NOM.PL legs-NOM.PL the-ART.ACC.SG han-ACC.SG
 'han's legs'
- (2) eni oru tar avutane ta kacua
 see-PRS.1SG ART.ACC.PL ears-ACC.PL ART.ACC.SG cat-ACC.SG
 'I see cat's ears'

3.2.2 IRREALIS

The Tsakonian irrealis constructions have been successfully studied in (Liosis, 2010), but the typological approach of this study ignores geographical and social specificity of the phenomenon. Having detected a high variability of the irrealis constructions, we checked them up and got the following results:

Melana, masc.: θa + IMPV.

- (3) θa éma paríu, an m<i>' ésa aú: éa!
 come-IRR if 1SG tell-IMPV.2SG.M come-IMP
 'I would come, if you told me: come!'

Melana, fem.: $\theta a + kja + SBJV$

- (4) θa kja <nd'> $alíu$ $éa,$ o θa $mólere$ $mazí$ $mi.$
 tell<2SG>-IRR come-IMP NEG come-FUT.2SG with 1SG
 'I would tell you: come, <but> you won't come with me'

Vaskina, masc.: $be-AUX.IMPV + \theta a + SBJV$

- (5) $éki$ θa $líu$ tan $alí\theta ja,$ $alá$ o' <e> ni $ború.$
 tell-IRR ART truth but NEG can-PRS.1SG.M
 'I would tell the truth, but I cannot'

Vaskina, fem.: $want-AUX.PRS.F + na + SBJV$

- (6) e $\theta éa$ na nd' $alíu$ tan $alí\theta ja,$ $alá$ o' <en> i $bor=ua.$
 tell<2SG>-IRR ART truth but NEG can-PRS.1SG.F
 'I would tell you the truth, but I cannot'

Tyros, masc.: $\theta a + IMPV$

- (7) θa $éma$ $paríu$ $t^x on$ $teré,$ $áma$ o' <e> ni $ború.$
 come-IRR PREP=ART Tyros but NEG can-PRS.1SG.M
 'I would come to Tyros, but I cannot'

Tyros, fem.: $\theta a + IMPV$

- (8) an $éma$ $pažía$ tse $ezú$ $t^x a$ $xóra$ $n'úmu,$ θa m' $éki$ $arésa$
 if come-IRR.F and 1SG PREP=ART land our like<1SG>-IRR

 a $xóra$ $n'úmu.$
 ART land our
 'If I came in your land, I would like your land'

Agios Andreas, masc.: $\theta a + IMPV$

- (9) $áma$ $éma$ $ború,$ θa n' $éma$ $píu.$
 if can-IMPV.1SG.M tell<3SG>-IRR
 'If I could, I would tell him'

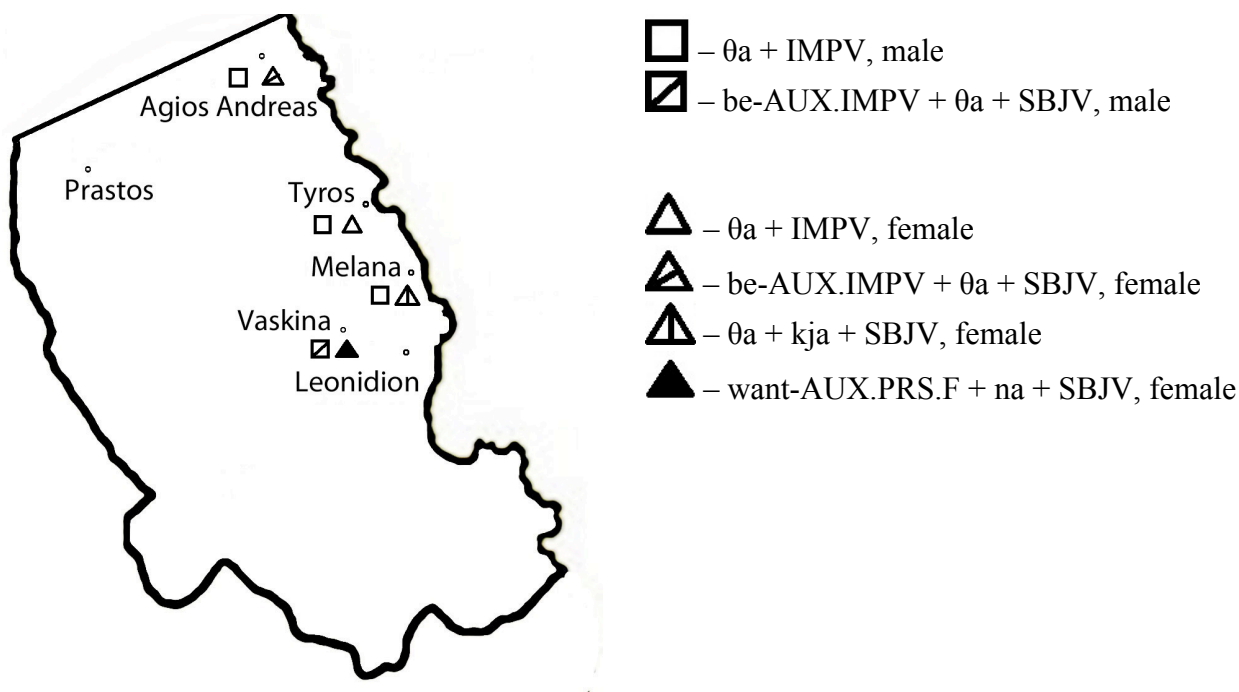
Agios Andreas, fem.: $be-AUX.IMPV.3SG + \theta a + SBJV$

- (10) $éki$ θa nd' $alíu$ tan $alí\theta ja,$ $alá$ o' <e> ni $borúa.$
 tell<2SG>-IRR ART truth but NEG can-PRS.1SG.F.
 'I would tell you the truth, but I cannot'.

The information about irrealis constructions can be summarized in the table below:

Place	Male variant	Female variant
Melana	$\theta a + IMPV$	$\theta a + kja + SBJV$
Vaskina	$be-AUX.IMPV + \theta a + SBJV$	$want-AUX.PRS.F + na + SBJV$
Tyros	$\theta a + IMPV$	$\theta a + IMPV$
Agios Andreas (Prastos)	$\theta a + IMPV$	$be-AUX.IMPV.3SG + \theta a + SBJV$

Table 5. Distribution of irrealis constructions.



Map 3. Distribution of irrealis constructions.

The construction θa + IMPV is a recent innovation, influenced by SMG Irrealis forms. It is frequent in the speech of both male and female informants from the coastal village Tyros. Gender differences are no more relevant for this geographical group. In Agios Andreas and Melana a Tsakonian variant of irrealis constructions is used only in female speech, which can be explained by the fact that the villages have a high percent of shepherd population and a relatively traditional life style. In the village of Vaskina, situated high in the mountains above the town of Leonidion, both female and male Tsakonian forms are used. These are the most archaic variants.

3.3 Lexicon

The differences revealed in the southern Tsakonian dialect are, essentially, phonetic and morphological. The lexical varieties confirm the division of the area into the coastal and mountain zones. The study of the lexical borrowings in the same points reveals that Albanian and Slavic animal husbandry terminology prevails in Vaskina, while informants don't recognize the Venetian and Italian borrowings of sailing terms. The inhabitants of coastal villages, on the

contrary, demonstrate a good knowledge of the last one and a worth competence in agricultural lexicon.

4 Dialect experts

Observing the Tsakonian subdialectal diversity, we have also detected some phenomena of local language standardization in the southern Tsakonian-speaking area. A concurrence between two dialect variants can be revealed: the dialect of Prastos and the one of Melana-Leonidion. In these two centers, in Leonidion-Melana, in particular, the language elites are formed nowadays.

Prastos is supposed to be the ancient capital of Tsakonia according to a widespread view within the dialect speaking community. It is called “the center of Tsakonia” by its citizens. The speakers of the palatalized variant of Prastos, in general, do not acclaim Kostakis’ works and prefer the earlier dialect description of the German scholar Michael Deffner. A priest from Prastos has even created his own graphic system for the Tsakonian dialect, alternative to the Kostakis’ system, and tries to teach it to children on his lessons of Tsakonian.

Two different print traditions of Tsakonian literature have been created by the speakers of the two different dialect versions from Melana and from Prastos. For example, the author of Tsakonian narratives Artemisa Panajotu Merkuriadu, born in Prastos, mentions in her book’s introduction that the book’s orthography is based on Deffner’s graphic system, and namely on the orthography of Deffner’s dictionary (Deffner, 1923).

The speakers from Melana believe their dialectal variety to be the most ancient and the most “correct”. A. Kostakis’ attempts of dialect standardization appear to be much more influential than those of Deffner.

There are very frequent cases when the informants correct the forms of their own language or the forms that their parents used and substitute them by Kostakis variants. For example, one informant gave us two subjunctive forms of the verb *díu*: *na si dí* and *na si δ(ú)i*. The first one is given by (Kostakis, 1951) and the second one was used by his mother. He himself chooses the first variant.

The same thing happens with the subjunctive aorist form of the verb *nému*: *na nemaixúni* and *na nemaθúni* (SUBJ.AOR.PASS.REFL.3PL). The last one is correct according to (Kostakis, 1951), and the first example is a diphthongized form, a rare example of diphthongization before /x/. Commenting his text, the informant corrected the “wrong” form.

Not only separate forms are corrected, but also the informants try to reintroduce whole morphological phenomena into the dialect due to Kostakis’ influence. Some traces of this influence can be found in the morphological diversity of the Tsakonian dialect, namely in the formation of the irreal conditional clauses. The model prescribed by (Kostakis, 1951) (with the particle *kja*) was reproduced only by two informants from Melana, which are expert dialect speakers that, obviously, had learnt it from Kostakis’ works. One of them is Kostakis’ granddaughter and the other is a philologist. Other informants, including the elder ones, use other models of irreal conditionals, mentioned above, and even do not recognize the construction with *kja*. They interpret it as the question word “*kja*” ‘where’.

5 Concluding remarks

The subdialectal variation in Southern Tsakonian has emerged and continues developing nowadays due to both internal structural and external extralinguistic factors. We can distinguish two varieties of the Southern Tsakonian dialect: the palatalized variant of Prastos, and the non-palatalized one of Melana. The progress of innovations can be tracked from Prastos. The informants from Melana mention a lack of contact between their village and Prastos, the relationship is maintained mainly with the neighboring village of Tyros.

There are two different and sometimes contradictory descriptions of the Tsakonian dialect which are based, on the one hand, on different subdialect varieties and, on the other hand, are assumed by the subdialect speakers as prescriptive dialect grammars. Therefore we cannot exclude the impact of this local standardization on the further development of the Tsakonian dialect because we have been able to observe the influence of the scholar dialect description on the community behavior. The discussions about the choice of a correct word form or an appropriate lexeme are very frequent among the dialect speakers; jokes about language are widespread. A group of authoritative experts have been formed. Handbooks, children literature and small novels in the dialect have been published recently.

A correlation between the gender and the geographical differences can be observed in the dialect: the gender distinction tends to disappear in the coastal variant, while it remains relevant for the shepherd population of the mountain settlements.

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