

A non-finite period in early Cypriot Greek?

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1. Introduction

Children acquiring Romance and Germanic languages produce matrix sentences with an infinitive as the main verb of the sentence, (see 1, quoted from Clahsen, Penke & Parodi 1993). This phenomenon appears in the language of children around the age of 1;8 and is known by the term *Optional Infinitive* (Wexler 1994).

- (1) Mina einer gucken.
Mina one see-INF¹
'Mina sees someone'

A number of people have studied the stage of early language and have offered their analyses as to what is responsible for the occurrence of such forms. In what follows, we present these views in brief, for reasons of space, and discuss at some length only the mostly relevant to the issues raised by this work.

Boser et al. (1992) hold that the Optional Infinitive (OI) corresponds to adult finite clauses which lack the auxiliary verb or the modal verb along with related particles. For Rizzi (1994), children's linguistic expressions, such as the above, are the result of a truncated syntactic tree (Truncation Hypothesis), which, in turn, is due to the optional specification of TP or higher nodes. Wexler (1994), on the other hand, attributes this stage to lack of knowledge of Tense and/or Agreement features, predating his *Unique Checking Constraint* (Wexler 1998). Finally, Hyams (2002) labels the phenomenon Root Infinitive (RI) and associates it with a number of characteristics; she notes that the subjects of the sentences that contain these non-finite forms are typically null, see also Wexler (1998). Moreover, she holds that OIs (RIs) are exclusively eventive (Eventivity Constraint) and have modal meaning, excluding past or ongoing activities (Modal Reference Effect). Hyams also points out that subject-verb Agreement is present from the very first stages of children's language, that is, Agreement errors occur only at a rate of 4%, and this explains the optionality of OIs. Finally, she also points out that the OI stage does not occur in languages with strong subject Agreement, namely, null subject languages such as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Catalan (Sano & Hyams 1994; Hoekstra & Hyams 1995; Rizzi 1994; Rhee & Wexler 1995).

2. The Greek Optional Infinitive

2.1 Adult and early infinitives in Standard Greek

Before we concentrate on Cypriot Greek, the variety of Greek on which this work focuses, let us ask ourselves what we would possibly consider as an infinitival form in Standard Greek. We ask this question because it is known that in earlier forms of Greek there was a counterpart of the Romance and Germanic type of infinitive, i.e. λέγειν 'to say', λαβεῖν 'to receive', etc., but it has long become extinct in the Balkan languages (Joseph 1983). What has replaced this form, as a sentential

¹ In this paper the following abbreviations are used: INF = infinitive, SG = singular, PL = plural, PERF = perfective stem, IMP = imperfective stem and 1/2/3 for person.

complement at least, are the finite forms of the verb introduced mainly by the particle *na*, a particle that occupies the lower CP domain (Terzi 1992; Roussou 2000, among many others).

In Standard Modern Greek, the closest form to an infinitive, namely, a form of the verb that does not inflect for Tense or subject Agreement, can be found as the second part of the periphrastic Tenses, see (2) below. These forms have actually been considered infinitives by some traditional grammars (Triantafillidis, 1941), and are often referred to as (active) participles.

- (2) a. Exo peksi.
 have-1SG play
 ‘I have played.’
 b. Exete peksi.
 have-2PL play
 ‘You have played.’

Work on the early finite forms of Greek has led to the discovery of forms such as the participles above in early Greek (Katis 1984; Stephany 1981, 1986; Tsimpli 1992). The most extensive and influential research on the topic, however, has been conducted by Varlokosta, Vainikka and Rohrbacher (1996, 1998) and Varlokosta (2005), who use the term ‘non-finite verb form’ for the above form of the Greek verb.

Varlokosta, Vainikka and Rohrbacher (1996, 1998) found that the non-finite parts of the forms in (2) occur in early Greek precisely at the ages when OIs occur in Romance and Germanic languages. The basic properties of these forms in early Greek are:

- (a) They are identical to the 3sg form of the verb, but do not occur in 3sg contexts.
 (b) In the majority they are perfective, namely they bear the morphology of the perfective aspect.
 (c) In the majority they are Modal, i.e. they have an irrealis interpretation.

Since the inflectional morpheme associated with them, i.e. the 3sg morpheme, is *-i*, they were labeled *i*-forms.

- (3) a. Fai
 eat-PERF-3SG
 ‘I (want to) eat’ (Mary, 1;9)
 b. Nitsi tola!
 open-PERF-3SG now
 ‘(You) open (it) now!’ (Janna, 1;11)

Hyams (2002) revisits the data on which Varlokosta, Vainikka and Rohrbacher (1996, 1998) drew their conclusions and undertakes a second analysis. She calls forms such as the ones in (3) Bare Perfectives, and considers them to follow from her *Semantic Opposition Hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, children first grasp the realis/irrealis distinction, and irrealis is expressed in MoodP, as in (4) below. Since children do not have Mood particles, such as *na* yet, they use the perfective feature of the verb in order to license MoodP. This can only be accomplished in a local relation, however, with the consequence that Tense and Agreement remain underspecified, hence, do not intervene.

- (4) [... [Mood [Tense [Agr [Asp _[+perf] ...]]]]]

Varlokosta (2005) further investigates the interpretive properties of early Greek non-finite verbs, providing additional arguments in favour of the position that they are equivalent to the OI stage of the Germanic and Romance languages. She discovers that the Perfective forms of her earlier joint

work are eventive and future oriented, in a way to be described in some detail later in the paper, when we compare our findings with hers.

2.2 Cypriot Greek and its relevance

Cypriot Greek (CG) is a variety of Standard Modern Greek (SG), spoken by approximately one million people, as either their first or their second language. It differs in a number of ways from SG as far as its morphosyntax is concerned, but the difference the most relevant to our purposes is that it does not have either Present Perfect A (the form in 2), or the Pluperfect, although the latter is not entirely absent (Menardos 1925/1969).² Recent studies have shown that, although speakers of CG may use Present Perfect A in specific environments, such as in conversations with speakers of SG, the form does not appear in their spontaneous speech or conversations with other CG speakers (Melissaropoulou et al. 2013). The Pluperfect, which is the other form that employs the non-finite form in (2), although not radically absent, is by no means used to the same extent as in SG (Vasileiou 2014). The previous studies have also shown that both forms are often used in a manner that is ungrammatical in SG, and judging their grammaticality in SG is also inaccurate.

Given the above state of affairs, it is entirely reasonable to believe that Cypriot children receive less input of the non-finite verb forms in (2), as compared to SG-speaking children. But these are precisely the forms that correspond to the OI in SG. As a result, a number of questions arise:

- (a) Is there some non-finite verb form produced by children acquiring CG? Does that form appear at the age when OI appears in Romance and Germanic languages?
- (b) If yes, what is this form?
- (c) Is the non-finite verbal form of early CG identical to the one of SG, namely, is it also an *i*-form?
- (d) If yes, what is the source of this form and what does it tell us about the OI stage in both varieties of Greek, and, perhaps, cross-linguistically?

With the above questions in mind, this work is set to investigate the early language stage of CG-speaking children. It should be added that, despite the absence of the non-finite verbs from CG (see 2), the two varieties are similar in all relevant respects: CG is also a null subject language, and lacks the infinitival forms in complement position that earlier stages of Greek had.

3. The current study

3.1 Participants and Methods

This study followed the spontaneous speech of three children raised to speak CG, over varying periods of time, in Nicosia (Cyprus). Philippos was recorded twice, at the age of 1;7 and 1;8. Petros was also recorded twice, at the age of 2;0 and 2;2. Aris was recorded seven times, at the age of 1;8, 1;9, 1;10, 1;11, 2;0, 2;1 and 2;2.

The children's parents had 16 years of education, except from Aris' father who had 12. Petros' and Philippos' parents graduated from Greek Universities, and Aris' mother from a Cypriot University. However, all of them used only CG in their daily interaction, as well as in the interaction with their children.

All three children had typical speech and language and hearing development, as was concluded after parents were asked to fill in a questionnaire on the milestones of their children's language and communication development. Questionnaire was based on the typical developmental milestones of

² It is fairly accurate to say that the form that is used instead of the Present Perfect A in CG is the aorist.

the *American Speech Hearing Association* (ASHA). Moreover, all three children were examined by the first author of this paper, who is a graduate of Speech and Language Therapy and native speaker of CG, and no language problems were detected.

Our data consist of the verb productions of these three children, listed in chronological order, and annotated with the following information for each form: (a) production of the child, (b) corresponding production in adult SG, (c) presence or absence of an overt subject, (d) person feature of the produced verb, (e) person feature of the verb in adult CG/SG, and (f) aspect of the verb.

The following verb forms were excluded, as they could not offer information related to our purposes: (a) non-productive utterances, i.e. imitations/echolalias of parents' verbal productions or parts of songs, (b) the copula *be*, and (c) imperatives.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 MLU

The graph below provides the MLU of the children we followed, as well as of other children whose MLU is available in the literature on the Greek OI that we will discuss. Spiros, Janna and Mary are from the *Stephany corpus* (Varlokosta et al. 1996, 1998), while Eva and Maria are from Doukas and Marinis (2012).

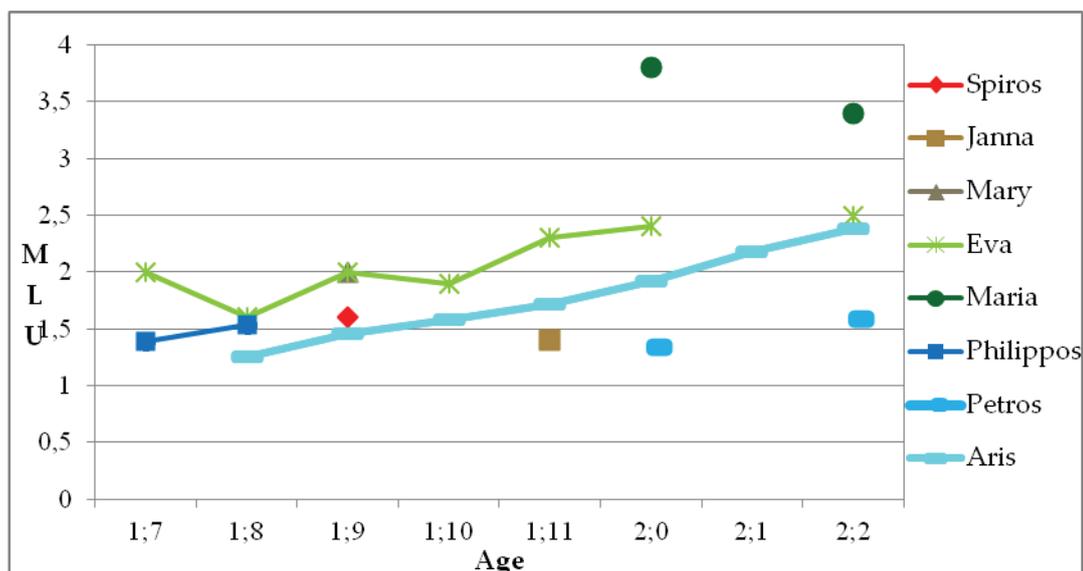


Table 1: MLU

The Table shows that the MLU of the children we studied is comparable to the MLU of the children of similar age that had been studied with respect to this phenomenon before (with the exception of Maria (Doukas & Marinis 2012)). We also notice that Philippos seems to have slightly faster development, while Petros seems to have a lower MLU (half MLU unit lower compared to all other children at the age of 2;0). Aris, the child that gave us the longest sample, follows a perfectly gradual increase of MLU.

In what follows, we will analyze the verb forms of the sample taking into account various factors. In the end of the previous section, we mentioned which verb forms will not be included in the analysis, hence, what follows refers to the rest of the verbs of the children's spontaneous speech.

3.2.2 Characteristics of the verbs produced

Table 2 below contains all the verb forms produced by the children of the current study in each of the meetings we had with them, and notes the number of 3SG forms in particular. We set apart this

specific form of the verb because, as pointed out in previous sections, it is identical to the non-finite form that corresponds to the OI of some languages (including SG).

Name	Age	Verbs N	Verbs in 3SG	
			n	%
Philippos	1;7	26	13	50,0
	1;8	34	21	61,8
Petros	2;0	16	5	31,3
	2;2	19	6	31,6
Aris	1;8	16	10	62,5
	1;9	21	9	42,9
	1;10	39	12	30,8
	1;11	63	38	60,3
	2;0	42	22	52,4
	2;1	51	17	33,3
	2;2	63	36	57,1
		390	189	48%

Table 2: Occurrence of 3SG

In Table 2, we see that there is a very high percentage of 3SG forms in the verbs of all three children. In particular, the ratio of 3SG verbs is always above 30%, while for half of the months is above 50%. The results are in accordance with findings from other languages, i.e., Standard Modern Greek (Doukas & Marinis 2012), Spanish (Grinstead 2000; Buesa Garcia 2007), and Romanian (Avram & Coene 2007). Comparing the ratio of 3SG forms, i.e. 48%, with that of other persons, we find that 1SG appears 130 times (33,3%), and 1PL appears 43 times (11%).

A notable phenomenon is that in some instances children used 3SG even when referring to themselves. This phenomenon has also been reported in other languages (Grinstead 1998).

The property of the children's verbs/sentences that we would like to look into next is what type of subject they are construed with. In particular, we want to see whether the subjects of the above verbs are overt or null, given that one of the characteristics of the OI forms is that their subjects are typically null. These results appear in Table 3. Table 3 demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of children's subjects in the sentences we collected are null. In particular, in the earliest recordings, the rates of verbs with null subjects exceeded 90%; more precisely, they were 92,3%, 93,8% and 100% for Philippos, Petros and Aris, respectively. The preference for null subjects declines over time, and overt subjects increase, but never reach the rate of null subjects.

Name	Age	MLU	Null subjects		Overt subjects	
			n	%	n	%
Philippos	1;7	26	24	92,3	2	7,7
	1;8	34	22	64,7	12	35,3
Petros	2;0	16	15	93,8	1	6,3
	2;2	19	16	84,2	3	15,8
Aris	1;8	16	16	100,0	0	0
	1;9	21	19	90,5	2	9,5
	1;10	39	38	97,4	1	2,6
	1;11	63	51	81,0	12	19,0
	2;0	42	34	81,0	8	19,0
	2;1	51	47	92,2	4	7,8
	2;2	63	43	68,3	20	31,7

Table 3: Distribution of overt and null subjects of all verbs

(6)	pekete play-2SG-PERF 'I/we play' (Philippos, 1;8)	me pjon na peksis with who to play-2SG 'With who you are to play?' (mother)
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Importantly, while the ratio of Agreement errors that involve *i*-forms is 86,5% (45/52) of all Agreement errors, the ratio of 3SG verb forms is 48% (189/390) out of all verbs. This shows that the ratio of Agreement errors with *i*-forms is not proportional to the ratio of 3SG verb forms out of all verbs, but much higher, suggesting that there is something special about subject-verb Agreement errors and *i*-forms.

What we would like to propose is that subject-verb Agreement errors that involve *i*-forms are not Agreement errors, but represent instances of non-Agreement, that is, they are non-finite forms of the verb. True Agreement errors, namely Agreement errors with other than *i*-forms, were 7 out of a total of 390 verbs and they constitute only 1,8% of all verbs produced. This finding is in line with findings and subsequent claims according to which there are no Agreement errors in child language (*Full Clause Hypothesis*, Wexler 1998; *Early Morphosyntactic Convergence*, Hoekstra & Hyams 1998; Hyams 2002). But why do we believe that the non-agreeing 3SG verb forms of our study are not Agreement errors? There are several reasons to think so on the basis of both SG, which has been studied more extensively than CG, and cross-linguistic data.

For SG, in particular, it has been claimed that the unmarked form of the verb is 3SG (Tsimpili 1992; Varlokosta et al. 1996, 1998; Klairis & Babinotis 2004). This is so according to the above people, because the 3SG (form of the verb) is the form encountered in impersonals, and (the form that appears in) active participles, which are forms of the verb that do not inflect for Tense or subject Agreement. The very same criteria can be used to characterize 3SG as the unmarked form of the verb in CG; impersonals are expressed via 3SG verbs in CG as well and the same form is used in the active participle of CG (albeit, by far less often than in SG). In addition, as mentioned earlier, it is believed that there are no Agreement errors in child language.

Then, cross-linguistically, 3SG has been considered as the unmarked form of the verb for person, by virtue of the fact that it refers to person(s) other than the speaker or the addressee (Harley & Ritter 2002). Moreover, it is found that children overgeneralize this form of the verb in many languages (Spanish, Catalan, French, SG), and the same can be concluded for CG, if we look at Table 5.³ If we are on the right track, CG, just like SG, has early non-finite forms, i.e. the *i*-forms above. Having proposed that the *i*-forms of CG correspond to the *i*-forms of SG and to the OIs of other languages, we turn to their characteristics in the following sections.

4. The properties of the *i*-forms

In this section, we will look into the morphosyntactic and semantic properties of the CG *i*-forms, i.e., of the non-agreeing 3SG forms, and see how they compare to OIs cross-linguistically. In particular, we will look into the ratio of null *vs* overt subjects, and their aspectual and modal properties. Recall that OIs are associated with null subjects cross-linguistically, and they have modal/irrealis interpretation. Moreover, the counterpart SG forms are associated with perfective aspect.

³ A question that often arises in this context is whether some of the non-agreeing 3SG forms of the verb are in fact agreeing forms with a 3SG null subject, because children often use their name to talk about themselves, instead of the 1SG pronoun, i.e. *tragouda Aris* 'sings Aris'. Two pieces of evidence argue against this idea: first, if this were true, we would expect the same phenomenon, that is, 3SG verb forms with a null subject in the past Tense as well. This is not the case, however: out of 95 verbs in the past in our corpus, there were only 3 Agreement errors (2 of them involving 3SG). Then, if what we see in CG early non-finite verb forms is Agreement with a null 3SG pronoun, we would expect to find the 3SG verb form in abundance in other languages as well, such as English for example, that, is to find forms as *-sits*, for instance. Such findings have never been reported, however.

4.1 Null subjects

Table 6 below presents a breakdown of the CG *i*-forms according to whether their subject is null or overt. We see that all subjects associated with non-agreeing 3SG forms are null, a state of affairs very much reminiscent of OIs cross-linguistically.

	Total	Null subjects		Overt subjects	
	N	N	%	N	%
Perfective	45	45	100	0	0

Table 6: i-forms: null subjects

It is interesting to compare Table 3, which presents the ratio of null and overt subjects of all the verbs of our sample, with Table 6. Although null subjects are the predominant pattern in Table 3, it is by no means the case that all subjects are null. By contrast, the subjects of the non-agreeing *i*-forms are exclusively null, offering support to the idea that the non-agreeing *i*-forms stand a very good chance of being the forms that correspond to the OIs of other languages.

4.2 Aspectual and interpretive properties

Let us now look into a property that characterizes the SG *i*-forms, which are the forms that have been claimed to correspond to the OI of other languages. Recall that, according to Varlokosta et al. (1996, 1998), the standard Greek *i*-forms are exclusively perfective and have a modal/irrealis interpretation. Things are different in CG, however, as the following Table indicates:

	Total	Perfective		Imperfective	
	n	N	%	n	%
<i>i</i> -forms, non-agreeing	45	22	48,9	23	51,1
<i>i</i> -forms, agreeing	72	29	40,3	43	59,7
non <i>i</i> -forms	273	176	64,5	97	35,5

Table 7: i-forms: Aspect

Table 7 shows that the non-agreeing *i*-forms of CG, which -according to what we proposed- are the early non-finite forms of CG, and are split with respect to their aspectual features. That is, they are divided between perfective, see (5), and imperfective, see (7). Agreeing *i*-forms show a preference for imperfective aspect, while non *i*-forms for perfective. The latter is somehow expected because non-*i*-forms contained verbs in the past, and were all perfective. The behavior of the non-agreeing *i*-forms, however, is less expected, on the basis of the findings of Varlokosta et al. (1996, 1998) and Varlokosta (2005).

- (7) fori pandoflitses
 wear-3SG-IMP slippers
 ‘I’m wearing slippers’ (Aris, 2;0)

We continue below with the interpretation of these forms, both perfective and imperfective.

	Total	Eventive		Non-eventive	
	N	N	%	N	%
Perfective	22	22	100	0	0
Imperfective	23	8	34,8	15	65,2

Table 8: i-forms: eventivity

	Total	Realis		Irrealis	
	N	N	%	N	%
Perfective	22	0	0	22	100
Imperfective	23	23	100	0	0

Table 9: i-forms: modality

What the above two Tables demonstrate is that the CG non-agreeing *i*-forms are not overwhelmingly eventive and modal -contrary to SG. Nevertheless, there is an one-to-one correspondence between aspect and eventivity, as well as between aspect and modality. Thus, perfective aspect is associated exclusively with eventive predicates and irrealis interpretation, while imperfective aspect is associated primarily with non-eventive predicates and exclusively with realis interpretation. What are we to conclude from the above, as well as from the previous findings?

5. Conclusions

This aim of this study was to investigate the early non-finite stage of CG, that is, to find out what the form of the CG verb that corresponds to the Optional Infinitive stage cross-linguistically is, and what its properties are. Although CG is similar to SG in many (relevant) respects, i.e. they both are null subject languages and are characterized by the absence of infinitives of the Romance and Germanic type, we thought it was not obvious that the two languages would be similar in the area of the early non-finite form of the verb. Such an expectation followed from the fact that the early non-finite forms of SG, in addition to being identical to the 3SG person of the verb, bear exclusively perfective aspect, a property that renders them identical to the non-finite forms of the verb that are encountered in the perfective tenses -the latter being absent from CG.

Our expectation was borne out, since the early non-finite forms of CG demonstrated an important difference when compared to SG: although the non-finite forms of CG make use of 3SG as well, they are not exclusively [+perfective]. Instead, aspect was equally distributed between perfective and imperfective. It is conceivable that the much lower preference of CG-speaking children for perfective aspect, as compared to the children who grow up acquiring SG, is a consequence of its low presence in CG, for the reasons explained. It should be noted, however, that recent data from early SG (Doukas & Marinis 2012) do not show preference for perfective aspect either (Marinis, p.c.), although it should be added that the children they referred to had highly higher MLU than those of Varlokosta et al. (1996, 1998).

Recall that, upon revisiting the data of Varlokosta et al. (1998), Hyams (2002) points out that the early non-finite forms of SG are crucially associated with irrealis interpretation. Mood Phrase is activated and checked by the Mood particles, but children have not acquired the modal particles yet and produce the non-finite forms with perfective aspect instead. This particular form can check aspect on Mood, but only in a local relationship, cf. (4), and as a consequence, Tense and Agreement features of the verb remain underspecified. As a result, only non-finite forms of the verb may be encountered. Despite its plausibility, we believe that this hypothesis cannot account for the non-finite forms of CG, as they bear either perfective or imperfective aspect, equally. Moreover, CG early non-finite forms do not have modal or irrealis interpretation exclusively.

Our understanding is that the early CG non-finite forms cannot be explained by the *Unique Checking Constraint* (Wexler 1998) either, since, according to the UCC, one feature of the verb can be checked in early language, and hence, presumably, must be checked and cannot be left underspecified. Both Tense and Agreement of these CG verb forms are underspecified however. That this is the case for Tense is evidenced by the fact that we hardly encounter non-agreeing verbs in the past, while for subject Agreement is evidenced by the fact that the 3SG forms are non-agreeing forms of the verb, as argued earlier in the paper. Our own thoughts, pending future refinement, as to why this particular form of the verb is employed in the early language of children acquiring CG can

be described as follows: it is well understood that CG, along with SG, does not allow for bare verbs, therefore, no bare verb form has the chance of ever surfacing in the language. On the other hand, there is not in the language some non-finite verb suffix either -unlike the Romance infinitives, for instance. The 3SG person of the verb employed at this stage of CG is the only form able to offer a solution to the needs of early language, because it is the form that has been argued to be the least specified, or unmarked, not only in Greek, but also cross-linguistically, on the basis of a number of considerations (Tsimpli 1992; Varlokosta et al. 1996, 1998; Harley & Ritter 2002; Ferdinand 1994; Grinstead 2000).

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