Prosody and meaning variation in matrix Subjunctive Questions of Greek

joined work with Onur Özsoy

Subjunctive Questions (SQs) of Greek as in (1a) can be used to request permission, advice or instruction. A natural response comes with an imperative or subjunctive (1b). The interpretation of SQs varies depending on the context and the prosody. According to an original observation by Iatridou (2010) and further elaboration in Oikonomou (2016), when the stress (Nuclear Pitch Accent, NPA) falls on the verb, the question is understood as permission seeking whereas when the NPA aligns with the rightmost stressed syllable (broad focus), the question is understood as instruction seeking.

(1) a. Na   paro   ton Niko tilefono?
        SUBJ take.1SG   the Nick telephone
        Can/should I call Peter?
    b. Pare ton./ Na ton paris.
       Call.IMP him / SUBJ him take.2SG
       'You can/should call him.'

In this talk, we present experimental evidence for the key role of prosody. At the same time, we show that the semantic content of the question plays an important role in the way speakers interpret the question. Taking as a starting point that this type of SQs in Greek has a bouletic modal interpretation varying in strength, we analyze the role of accent in their interpretation based on the notion of *biased questions* (Romero and Han, 2002). In particular, we show that in biased *yes/no*-questions of Greek, the NPA is located in the rightmost questions, and thus SQs with rightmost NPA carry a bias which prevents a pure permissive interpretation. Further evidence for the role of bias in the interpretation of SQs is provided by the fact that questions with the particle *mipos* which has been associated with bias (e.g., Giannakidou & Mari 2019) as in (2a) and negated SGs as in (2b) cannot have a permission-seeking interpretation:

(2) a. Mipos   na   paro   ton Niko tilefono?
        PARTICLE SUBJ take.1SG   the Nick telephone
        Should I call Peter?/ #Can I call Nick?
    b. Na   min ertho   avrio?
       SUBJ not come.1SG   tomorrow
       Should I not come tomorrow?/ #Can I not come tomorrow?