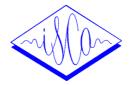
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First International Conference on Spoken Language Processing (ICSLP 90) Kobe, Japan November 18-22, 1990

CONTRASTIVE PHONETICS OF ENGLISH, FRENCH AND MODERN GREEK IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND INTERPRETING

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ABSTRACT

Based on the assumption that language is auditorily based and phonemes are auditorily perceived elements, this paper proposes a microlinguistic contrastive analysis of the vowel and consonant systems in English, French and Modern Greek. Consequently, the point of the discussion will be the three types of physical reality of these languages (articulatory, acoustic, auditory) and the functional difference in each language. This paper will also examine the implicational value of the notions of 'transfer' and 'interference' as a source for further experimental studies into the predictability of the English, French and Greek learner's difficulties and their bidirectional pedagogical potentiality: language teaching and interpreting.

I. INTRODUCTION

I shall restrict myself to the applied segmental phonology of English (E), French (F) and Modern Greek (MGr) following four steps in executing an Applied Contrastive Analysis (ACA): draw up a phonemic inventory of E, Fr and MGr, providing comparative charts; equate phonemes interlingually; list their phonemic variants and state the distributional restrictions on the phonemes and allophones of each language. I do not claim, however, that it will be an exhaustive ACA. I would rather use three different approaches, where feasible: the articulatory, acoustic and auditory ones in order to obtain a bidirectional ACA. My aim will be to show the similarities and differences can explain the transfer and interference, errors and difficulties of the Greek (Gr) learner of E and Fr and vice versa and their pedagogic aspects.

II. THE VOWELS

MGr has a very simple symmetrical five vowel system in contrast with the 15 vowels of E and the Fr inventory of 16 vowel units. The vowel sounds of MGr are remarkably pure in quality. They tend to be longer and louder when stressed, and to be nasalized before a sequence of consonants of which the first is nasal.

From a contrastive perspective, MGr vowel system lacks all the intermediary sounds of E and Fr, and vowel length is not a distinctive feature at all. Consequently, the Gr learner of E and Fr will have difficulties to distinguish sleep /sli:p/

from slip /slip/, peur /pex/ [o open] from peut /pø/ [ö closed] and s/he will tend to collapse the 15 E vowels and the 16 Fr ones as follows:

English	MGreek		French
i: } /1/	ĭ	/1/	{ y
e	e	/e/	€ Ø ∂ € Œ € Œ
a q: ^a/	a	/a/	a ۵ α
o: o o	0	/ŝ/	5 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0
u:} /u/	u	/u/	(u

The E and Fr learner of MGr will find difficult to pronounce /e/ and /a/ very open when medial and stressed.

III. DISTRIBUTIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CONSONANTS EN E, Fr AND MGr

The voiceless plosives /p, t, k/ are unaspirated in MGr as well as in Fr but they can be aspirated $[p^h]$, $[t^h]$, $[k^h]$ in E. Thus the Gr and Fr learner of E will not have any difficulties with the acoustic properties of the E aspirated plosives but rather with articulation. The consequence of this articulatory interference will be the "foreign" accent of the Gr and Fr learner of E.

The dental fricatives $/\theta$, $\delta/$ are similar only in E and MGr. The Fr consonant system lacks of these consonants. Consequently $/\theta/$ becomes /t/ and $/\delta/$ /d/. Although the Fr learner of E and MGr can distinguish the acoustic properties of these sounds, s/he cannot articulate them easily. The situation becomes more complicated when s/he encounters the following similar pairs:

We are now concerned not only with physical or physiological reality, but also with mental reality. In the above case, we can view interference from

from L_1 (Fr) as resulting from conflict set up between the mental organisational <u>disposition</u> imposed by L_1 and the mental organisational <u>demands</u> of the L_2 (MGr) and L_3 (E).

L2 (MGr) and L3 (E).

But if the Fr learner of MGr and E faces
these difficulties with /0, 3/, the Gr learner of
E and Fr has problems with the E and Fr palatoalveolar fricatives /J, 3/. Although the distribution of these sounds are quite different in E and
Fr, E and Fr do not have any problems to recognize
and after a little practice to produce these
sounds. On the contrary, the Gr learner first has
to perceive and distinguish the sound and secondly
to articulate them. S/He has a receptive as well
as productive difficulty; s/he tends to produce
rather /s, z/. In Fr s/he will be accepted as a
foreigner, but in E s/he is to misunderstood if
s/he says: seat /si:t/ instead of sheet /ji:t/.

Two of the most difficult Greek consonant phonemes for E and Fr learners are the /x, γ / and their allophonic variants. /x/ is similar to German [x] in doch /dox/ and its palatal distribution [ç] (x before i, e only in initial and medial positions) is similar to German dich /drç/. / γ / is similar to Castilian Spanish / γ / in luego / lwe γ 0/ and its palatal variation [j] (γ before i, e only in initial and medial positions) is approximant to yes /jes/. The E and Fr learner of MGr should pay attention to the articulatory and acoustic properties of these sounds because they can easily be mixed up and misinterpreted. An example of minimal pairs is the following:

/çfros/ χήροs: swine χήροs: widower κύροs: prestige, authority

/jíros/ γύροs: round

IV. CONSONANT CLUSTERS

A great variety of consonant clusters are found in E, Fr and MGr. E and Fr allow consonant clusters in initial, medial and final positios, but MGr allows a great variety of consonant clusters ONLY in initial and medial positions. It does not permit consonant clusters in word final position. In this case, we may expect the Gr learner to have problems with pronouncing the E and Fr final consonant clusters. In practice, however, the Gr learner, familiar with the rich inventory of initial and medial consonant clusters of his/her own language, can easily reproduce and transfer these sounds to the final position. What it may be difficult for him/her to articulate is these consonant clusters whose consonants are not available in the MGr consonant system, such as:

/ts/ English in all positions: s/he may pronounce
 it as /ts/ instead.

/dʒ/ English in all positions s/he may pronounce /dʒ/ French in initial position them as /tz/ instead.

/ns//
/nts//
/ntst//
position
s/he may pronounce them
as /ns/, /nts/, /ntst/.

/nd/ English in final s/he may pronounce them /ndz/ position as /nd/, /ndz/ because in MGr when /n/ occurs before /t, d, 0, 3/ it is dental; only when does /n/ occur before /k, g, x//n/ is velar /n/. We are now speaking of interference of L (MGr) into L (E)/OR L3 (Fr); this interference gives only a "foreign" accent to the Gr learner of E and Fr.

The E learner of MGr finds extremely difficult to pronounce /ps/ and /ks/ in initial position, although s/he does pronounce them in medial and final positions, eg. /e'lipsis/, /tops/; /ek'ses/: excess; /buks/: books. In /sarkoladzi/: psychology s/he drops the /p/ and pronounces only the /s/. The E learner of MGr usually has problems in pronouncing the Gr word ψυχολογία /psixolojía/: psychology not only because of the initial position of /ps/ but also because there are two other phonemes /x/ and /j/ (the allophone of /y/ which are not available in the E consonant inventory. S/He pronounces the Gr initial /ks/ as /z/:

ξενοφοβία /ksenofovía/:xenophobia / zenə fəubɪə/

because in English there is one obligatory phonological choice of /ks/ in initial position: it has to be pronounced /z/.

The Fr learner of MGr does not have the E learner's problems with the initial position of /ps/ and /ks/:

ψυχολογία /psixolojía/: psychologie /psikologí/ ξενοφοβία /ksenofovía/: xenophobie /ksenofobí/

but s/he cannot easily pronounce /x/ and /j/(allophone of / γ /) in the Gr word /psixolojía/. The Fr consonant system lacks of /x/ and / γ /, as well. Due to the lack of /x/, / γ / and their allophones in both E and Fr consonant systems, we expect E and Fr learners of MGr to have problems with articulating MGr / γ /-clusters and /x/-clusters, such as:

INITIALLY: /γδ,γn,γ1,γj/OR j/; /xt, xθ,xn,xl,xr,
 xj/OR q/

The (inter-)dental fricative /ð/, although it occurs in initial position in English (i.e. /ðən/) the E learner is expected to have difficulties to pronounce the Gr /ðr, ðj/ in initial and medial position. As it has already been stated, the Fr learner does have problems with the MGr and E / θ , δ /, but s/he is expected to have further difficulties with the MGr /ðr, ðj/ in initial position. If s/he mispronounce /ðr/ as /tr/, s/he will be simply misunderstood:

eg δρέπω /ŏrépo/: reap, gain, win τρέπω /trépo/: change, put sb to flight/rout.

To eliminate any pitfalls and misunderstandings, the Fr learner of MGr is to recognize the different sounds /ð/, /d/, / θ /, /t/ and after a long and careful practice to reproduce them.

V. SUPRA-SEGMENTAL CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

5.1 STRESS

Stress is the force of breath with which sounds are produced. This force is relative that means that the strength or weakness of the force is determined in relation to other forces of breath in the utterance(s) of a person.

Stress in English is not fixed. There is no way of knowing in advance where the different stress levels will occur in English speech. All linguists do not agree as to the number of relative stress phonemes in English. Some believe that there are four phonemic word stress levels; other linguists believe there are three phonemic word stress levels. The three-stress theory of English is, from a teaching point of view, more practical because it pays attention to the primary stress level which yields the meaning contrasts. But the stress in English when compared and contrasted with that in Greek is important but not distinctive.

Modern Greek, on the other hand, is a syllable-stressed language, that is stress is a semantically significant feature as it is not in French and sometimes in English. The position of the stress in many cases is the only distinguishable feature in the pronunciation of two different words, as shown by the minimal pairs such as:

- a) γέρος [jéros]: old man /jéros/
 b) γερός [jerós]: strong, robust /jerós/
- 2. a) διπλωμάτων [δiplomáton]: diplomas (gen. pl.)
 /δiplomáton/
 - διπλωματών [örplomatón]: diplomats (gen. pl.)
 /öiplomatón/

MGr still preserves the effect of the "antepenultimate rule" or the "law of the three syllables" of Ancient Greek, according to which the stress in Greek words falls only on one of the last three syllables: (1) on the last syllable of a word (ultimate or "oxytone" (2) on the next to the last (penultimate or "paroxytone" and (3) on the second from the last (antepenultimate or "proparoxytone").

The lack of this distinctive function of stress in English and French makes MGr rather difficult to teach and learn. The very first question which the E and Fr learner may raise is which syllable of a given word is stressed. Although there are not many precise rules for determining the primary stress of words, there are four general principles of stress which the learner should keep in mind. One more difficulty is that the words must be learned individually.

5.2 INTONATION

In English, intonation contours can be described in terms of four phonemic pitch levels (low, low-mid, high-mid, high) and three directions of pitch change. French intonation contours may also be described in terms of pitch levels and the direction of pitch movement but there are some important differences between French and English intonation contours. Modern Greek, however, does not make a distinctive use of pitch.

In English as well as in French to a certain extent intonation does have a differentiative function but it is seldom to differentiate words

and sentences from each other. In MGr intonational patterns play grammatical, syntactic and semantic function. In order to contrast the function of intonation in English, French and Modern Greek the following examples are given:

- John is here? 1 It echoes question but it mainly expresses <u>surprise</u> or <u>disbelief</u>.
- 2. Il est parti? / In this YES-NO question intonation serves two primary
 functions: (1) it is a grammatic unit and (2) it conveys
 emotive and affective meaning

In French there are two other ways of forming the same question:

- (1) by inverting the subject and the verb e.g. Est-il parti? (Has he left?/Did he leave?)
- (2) by prefixing Est-ce que before the declarative setence e.g. Est-ce qu'il est parti? (Has he left?/Did he leave?)
- 3. /0a mu ðósi to vivlío/? In MGr the rising into(will s/he give me the nation has a gramatic
 book?) and a semantic function.

 It is the ONLY possible way to ask a question.
 The MGr YES-NO questions are restricted by the
 fact that MGr has neither the variety of auxiliary verbs as English does nor the alternatives
 of French in order to form a question. If the
 E or Fr learner uses the same sentence but with
 a falling-raising intonation e.g. 0a mu ðósi to
 vivlío the native speaker will not answer the
 question but s/he will think that his/her interlocutor is simply uncertain.

VI. CONCLUSION

Clearly, much of what I have suggested is taken from my own experience in living in France and Canada and as an English, French and Modern Greek teacher. My speculations and suggestions require extensive justification which it is not pos-My main purpose has been to open sible here. discussion of Contrastive Phonetics among English, French and Modern Greek, which has not been ventured yet. In a world where mass communications bring foreign languages in constant contact (i.e. E.E.C., bilingual and multicultural countries), there is a growing-up awareness of interpreters and translators. Confining myself to interpreting, I believe that an Applied Contrastive Phonetics of English, French and Modern Greek has lots to offer; only if we consider that the interpreting of a foreign language into the target language (TL) requires a perfect ear, immediate understanding of the foreign sounds, phrases or idioms, and ability to find the appropriate counterparts of the TL at once, we can better understand the importance of such an Applied Contrastive Phonetics. This paper has been intended to be an open invitation for further experimental studies and pedagogical exploitations: language teaching (advanced level) and interpreting.