

The deletion of final /s/ in Mani and Corsica

Nick Nicholas, University of Melbourne

nickn@unimelb.edu.au

2nd International Conference on Modern Greek Dialects and Linguistic Theory

- Corsica: Greeks from Mani settled in 1676 (Cargèse since 1775); last native Greek speaker died 1976. Minimal contact with Greece in the interim.
- Linguistic work by Gerhard Blanken (1930s fieldwork, 1947 PhD published in 1951), and Dikeos Vayacacos (unpublished fieldwork in 1964–5).
- Maniot little studied until fairly recently, outside André Mirambel's PhD (1929 text collection) and 1929 grammar. Covers Inner Mani, whereas Corsica settled by Outer Mani.

Corsican Greek deletes final /s/:

- Το βράδυ ένε αέρα της θάλασσα
'at night there is a wind from the sea'

At first sight, this looks like Romance influence, reminiscent of final /s/ deletion in Italiot Greek. Richard Dawkins rushed to that judgement in 1926.

But final /s/ deletion characteristic of Mani, and many other Greek dialects. (Universal in Tsakonian.) In 1929 Dawkins recants.

So is Corsican Greek /s/ deletion the same as Maniot /s/ deletion, or does it show added Romance influence, as Blanken surmised?

1. Maniot

/s/ deletion first attested in Crete and Mani 17th century.

Mainstream account of /s/ deletion in Greek (Hatzidakis) is dissimilation: the prototypical domain for deletion is the context *o aðerfo(s) mas*. Most Cretan dialects have *o aðerfo mas* but *o aðerfos mu*.

Some analogical extension to other contexts: Agia Varvara, Crete has *o aðerfo mu; ðos mu > ðo mu*; occasional instances like *tis panayias > ts panaja* in Karditsa recorded by Triantafyllides.

1920s account of deletion concentrates on phonological conditioning: acc. to Mirambel, deleted frequently before fricatives, almost always before stops, at phrase ends, before pauses—and was preserved only before vowels.

Extrapolating: /s/ deletion obligatory at phrase boundary (NP, VP, AdvP). Which means one would predict Maniot *o aðerfos tus > o aðerfos tu*.

But not so: dissimilatory /s/ deletion (*o aðerfo tus*) more frequent than phrase-final deletion (*o aðerfos tu*) in Mani.

Evidence:

- Dissimilatory loss the only kind mentioned in Kassis' 1982 sketch grammar: (*o jani mu*)_{NP} 'my John' vs. (*o janis*)_{NP} (*mu*)_{NP} *pe* 'John told me'.
- Kassis also reports /s/ deletion in determiners—proclitic, so not phrase-final.
- Text counts.

/s/ deletion undone by standard Greek influence. In Kyriakos Kassis' publication of *tsatires* from Mani, /s/ inserted by collector though it disrupts rhyme, and even though facsimiles of manuscripts are without /s/. But Mirambel's songs (often reproduced by Kassis) best evidence we have:

Excluding patriotic songs (more liable to standardising influence):

End of NP (noun)	86%	
N POSS-(s)	79%	Phrase final context
Overall phrase-final	87%	
Proclitic-(s) V	42%	
Det-(s) N'	60%	
N-(s) POSS	100%	Dissimilatory context
Overall phrase-medial	64%	

2. Southern Italy

The Greek of Southern Italy, long exposed to Romance, patterns differently. Best described by Gerhard Rohlfs for Calabria:

- No phrase-final /s/; either deleted, or epenthetic /e/: *o ximona, o ximonase*
- Phrase-medial /s/ retained, but assimilated to consonant: *olos o kosmos > ullos o kosmo, o fillos mas > o filomma, posus lykus > possu lliku, tes nyxtes > te nniste*. (Exceptionally, /s#/ is retained: *o kyris tu > o tfiristu*)
- Similar rules for final /n/: *me enan allon > me nan aqdone*.

So Italiot has phonotactic imperative to avoid phrase-final closed syllables, motivated by Italian. But **no trace** of dissimilatory loss. As result, /s/ is retained on proclitics: *tis, tes, tus, mas, sas, tris/tres, is*—again like Italian, which allows closed syllables on proclitics.

A diagnostic test: Dissimilatory loss: Greek. Phrase-final loss: Italian. Maniot has both kinds, but dissimilatory is stronger.

3. Corsica

So which occurs in Corsica?

Early records show occasional deletion, mostly in proper names; the few exceptions to this are dissimilatory loss, patterning with Greek—as we would expect (although regressive not anticipatory):

Baptismal registry §5, 1693–12–13: Ἐγὼ παπαῖ Ἰωάννης Στεφανόπουλος,
ἐνορίτη τῆς ἐκκλησίας.

Baptismal registry §202, 1722–04–29: Χίλιους **ἐφτακοσίου** ἑκοσιδύο
 Ἀπριλίου εἰς τὶς ἑκοσιενέα.

Funeral registry §78, 1721–04–15, καὶ ἐθάπτη εἰς τὴ Κοιμήσεως τῆ
 Θεοτόκου τὴν ἄλλη μέρα.

Of later texts, 1860 Prodigal Son text by native speaker is corrected: /s/ deleted only when writer would not have realised etymological /s/ (*ipe tu(s) dulone* ‘he told the slaves’). /s/ deletion optional in dialect.

Blanken’s description:

- deletion usual phrase-finally
- /s/ retained before pause
- /s/ retained phrase-medially before possessives
- /s/ never deleted in proclitics, except for *mas* > *ma*

Thus: *i dulia tis manas mu o fillos mu o filo*

Blanken is claiming **no dissimilatory loss**.

Blanken texts brief and poor sample: he himself notes the speakers are inserting /s/ they would otherwise be dropping in their careful speech. Control against Vayacacos’ collection of phrases in glossary.

	Mirambel	Blanken	Vayacacos
End of NP (noun)	86%	32%	80%
N POSS-(s)	79%	17%	60%
Overall phrase-final	87%	33%	79%
Proclitic-(s) V	42%	33%	0%
Det-(s) N'	60%	17%	68%
N-(s) POSS	100%	14%	100%
Overall phrase-medial	64%	26%	78%

(Blanken: discount orthographic deletion before *su*: *o yios su* > *o zio(s) su*.)

What is going on?

- /s/ deletion relatively much likelier phrase-finally than medially in Blanken. compared to Mirambel.
- Dissimilatory loss pretty much absent in Blanken—proclitics as well as before possessives.
- Blanken’s record favours final over medial deletion—moves closer to Italiot than Maniot model.
- Though deletion started like Maniot (registry data), increasingly matching Italian phonotactics.

But what is going on with Vayacacos’ data?

- Deletion levels comparable to Mirambel: presumably more spontaneous discourse.

- But Vayacacos has obligatory dissimilatory loss: *o afedi mu* ‘my father, *tis kira mu* ‘my grandmother’s’. Contradicts Blanken’s “regulièrement”, which even extended /s/ analogically before possessives: > *to spiti tu barbas mu*.

Very suspicious, and Blanken did stay much longer in Corsica, when dialect was healthier.

Novel tendency to dissimilatory loss in final generation unlikely: Vayacacos also has strong deletion in proclitics, which should also be subject to dissimilatory loss. Again, his records pattern with Maniot instead of Italiot.

As a Maniot himself, Vayacacos may have been Manioticising Greco-Corsican.

On the other hand, Vayacacos records /s/ deletion before vowels.

- Sporadic in earlier records:
Funeral registry §143, 1724–10–06, Χιλίους ἑφτακοσίους ἑκοσιτέσσερους Ὀκτωβρίου στί<ς> ἔξι
Funeral registry §2297, 1927–01–20: Roman Catholic priest Xanto Mattei officiated, ὁ Ἀρχιμανδρίτη ἄρρωστος (Written by Mattei, who learned Greek in Cargèse)

- Found on occasion by Blanken: lyric *azjəs vasiłi erfete*
- Assuredly not a feature of Maniot, and hiatus generally avoided in Greek; so Vayacacos cannot be emending his text towards Maniot.
- Yet near obligatory in Vayacacos’ texts:

ἔκεδρώσανε τόσε ἐλιές, ἦτανε οὔλε ἄγριαι, εἴχανου τόσα σπίτια

81% of /s/ before vowel phrase-medially deleted; 77% of /s/ before consonants and ‘pauses’ (phrase boundaries). i.e. In final generation of Cargèse, vowels no longer privileged as environment preserving /s/.

So generalisation of earlier prevocalic loss, resulting in rule simplification:

- Maniot, Early Greco-Corsican: privilege CV syllables. Avoid V#V and s#C:
s > Ø / _#C
- Late Greco-Corsican:
s > Ø / _#

/s/ deletion no longer phonologically conditioned, only syntactically (likelier at phrase-boundary than phrase-medially).

So /s/ deleted from all appearances of words. Suggests adaption to open word-final syllables under Romance influence.

Even late Greco-Corsican looks remarkably well-preserved. This suggests it underlyingly wasn’t.