

Epistemic modality out of ‘playfulness’: Modern Greek *pezi*

The emergence of epistemic constructions is a well-known and much-discussed issue, with various claims regarding the possible sources, the directionality of changes and the morphosyntactic properties of such modals and constructions (cf. e.g. Traugott & Dasher, 2002, Narrog, 2012, Hilpert, Cappelle & Depraetere 2021, among many others). The article aims to contribute to this trend of research by presenting the emergence of a novel epistemic construction in Modern Greek, which had escaped notice till now and is based -rather surprisingly- on the verb *pezo* (=play), as illustrated below:

- (1) O Mike Flanagan ... ***pezi na ine*** to mono atomo pu bori.
The Mike Flanagan ... plays that be the only person that can
“Mike Flanagan... may be the only person that is able to”.
(*watchandchill.gr*, retrieved 19/1/23)

Based on an examination of available corpora of Modern Greek (TextCorpora, Corpus of Modern Greek), as well as an online search, the article shows that:

- a) The epistemic construction ‘*pezi na*’ emerged recently (last 10-15 years), most probably in spoken varieties of Modern Greek, and has gained considerable token frequency in everyday registers
- b) The morphosyntactic properties of the construction follow closely well-known typological (and Modern Greek) trends, for instance the verb is attested only in 3rd person singular, it exhibits only two tense forms (past / non-past) etc.

As far as the diachronic origin of the construction is concerned, the article argues for a multiple-source causation, illustrating the inter-relationship between the epistemic ‘*pezi na*’ and specific constructions involving the very same verb with different but related semantics (‘*dhen pezete*’ = you cannot beat this! / ‘*pezete*’= something is at stake / ‘*pezete*’= something is not finalized or is not certain yet) that were already at place.

Drawing on the observations mentioned above, the article:

- a) Broadens our perspective on the possible sources of epistemic constructions cross-linguistically
- b) Discusses the complex inter-relationship between constructions and its possible outcomes, drawing on recent Construction Grammar insights (cf. e.g. Sommerer & Smirnova, 2020)
- c) Attempts to draw on its usage-based approach to answer the elusive actuation question: Why ‘*pezi na*’ develops into an epistemic construction in 21st c. Greece?

References

- Hilpert M., B. Cappelle & I. Depraetere (eds.), 2021. *Modality and Diachronic Construction Grammar*. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
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- Traugott, E. & R. Dasher. 2002. *Regularity in Semantic Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.