

Problems in Greek-to-English Transliteration

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The language of the Greek immigrants' gravemarkers reveals their process of acculturation; in the initial stage, the markers are monolingual Greek; during the conflict stage, they are bilingual; finally, in the acculturation stage, they are predominantly monolingual English. The low literacy level of the early immigrants is revealed through morphological and spelling errors; the tension between the two languages is reflected in the various transliterations of Greek names; the increasing acculturation of the immigrants is evident in the abbreviation and translation of their original Greek names. In fact, close examination of the markers reveal the successive loss of overt ethnic variables (last name) and replacement by covert ethnic variables (such as first name since according to the name-giving cultural practices, children are named after their grandparents).

The first Greeks to arrive to the United States came with Columbus; they came in such small numbers, however, that no community was established in the US. It would take another 400 years before the onset of the first large scale immigration from Greece to the United States. Around 1890, the first immigration wave began, when 15,000 Greek men left their homeland. This first wave was followed by two more: 1900 to 1910 and 1910 to 1920, when 167,000 and 184,000 Greeks, left the country. By 1923, then, 350,000 Greeks had immigrated to America, roughly 8% of the total Greek population (Hasiotis 1996, 3). After the passage of the Immigration Quota Act in 1923, the number of immigrants from Greece fell sharply: 50,000 immigrated in the 1921-1930 decade.

The immigration waves were possible because of three factors (Danelt 1990, 17): the push of the homeland (political and economic reasons which included crop failures, heavy taxation, the dowry system, military conscription and the wars

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of 1897, 1912-1913, 1917-1922), the pull of the new country (the promise of prosperity in the new land where roads were reportedly paved in gold) (Kopan 1990, 33, 35), and the means (transportation was available and barriers were absent). Steamboat companies, in fact, encouraged Greek peasants to immigrate by providing "medical examination free of charge" (Daskarolis 1995, 16); furthermore, there were "no effective barriers at the destination (Daskarolis 1995, 16), quotas not coming into existence until 1923.

The first Greeks to arrive were "...mostly of the poorest and most illiterate class" (Danelt 1990, 16) largely illiterate since education was not obligatory in Greece until 1911. The illiteracy rate of the newcomers was 27%, the highest of any other immigrant group (Kopan 1990, 75). Like all immigrants, the newcomers had to acculturate to the new country. Their process of acculturation, resembling that of Italians, is separated into three distinct phases: the initial stage, where there is minimal integration of the newcomers to the environment; the conflict stage where the two cultures/traditions collide, the immigrants becoming "alienated from [the home country]" (Kopan 1990, 82); and the accommodation stage, where we see integration of the newcomers to society, with the second generation achieving economic and social success. In fact, by 1952 it was claimed that "the professional commercial and intellectual prominence of the Greek was impressive" (Kopan 1990, 99). Active assimilation of the immigrants was encouraged by one of the two national organizations (AHEPA) whose purpose was to "establish Greek prestige in the American community" (Kopan 1990, 125) while, at the same time, retaining their separateness, their Hellenic heritage. They promoted, for example, Greek classes so second-generation immigrants could learn the language, thus maintaining Hellenization ("maintaining a heritage of [the Greek] ideals and culture") (Kopan 1990, 130). Even today, when fewer third-generation Greeks speak Greek and church service is conducted mainly in

English, Greeks preserve “their separate cultural heritage” (Kopan 1990, 139).

The early immigrants left no common texts - except for the texts surviving in cemeteries - their gravemarkers. Cemeteries, according to Richard Meyer, are “open cultural texts, there to be read and appreciated...., revealing “evolving patterns of ethnicity in American culture” as well as the “tension between cultural retention and acculturation” (1993, 3, 4). Death, Jill Dubisch (1989) claims, is an opportunity to display wealth, social accomplishments, status and membership in a community.

In most cases, the gravemarkers of Greek immigrants form closely-knit clusters, family or religion forming the crucial bond. Considering that the majority of the early immigrants came without their families, it was through church that social ties were established since church preserved their language and customs (Kopan 1990, 84). Additional help came from the practice of endogamy—Greeks had the lowest intermarriage rate (Kopan 1990, 62).

As Baird has repeatedly noted “cemeteries provide a natural language community” (Baird 1992, 113) and gravemarkers “provide unique data for linguistic research...because gravemarker language uniquely reflects societal usage. (Baird 1996, 217). The language of the immigrants’ gravemarkers clearly reveals their literacy levels and their process of acculturation; in the initial stage, the markers are monolingual Greek; during the conflict stage, we see an emerging bilingualism and finally, in the acculturation stage, we find predominantly monolingual English markers. The markers, in other words, form a linguistic continuum which reflects the change in the Greek community’s acculturation process, from monolingual Greek to monolingual English through an intermediate stage where the two languages often are in conflict. Since each family went through these stages at different time periods, it is almost impossible to place exact dates along the continuum. In

general, we claim that there is successive loss of overt ethnic variables (last name) and replacement by covert ethnic variables (such as first name since according to the namegiving cultural practices, children are named after their grandparents).

The Initial Stage

In the majority of monolingual markers, all significant information appears in Greek: name, birthplace, kinship, birthplace, and an epitaph. The literacy level of the family (since it is the family that determines the markers) is clearly revealed in the spelling conventions: the few, highly educated families not only provide correct spelling but also word-endings appropriate for the formal variety of Greek, the only acceptable written form. From the late 1800's until 1974, Greece was diglossic - "a situation in which in addition to the standard [spoken] language, there is a divergent, highly codified, superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of literature....which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written...purposes." (Ferguson 1959)

In the following name, for example, ΣΑΛΟΠΟΥΛΟΝ the ending 'N' denotes the accusative form of the masculine name in the formal variety.

The large majority of the immigrants, however, were not literate; this information, too, is reflected in the markers, where spelling errors in both first and last names are revealed (the correct form is given in parentheses):

ΧΡΗΣΤΟΦΟΡΟΣ (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΦΟΡΟΣ)
ΑΡΓΗΡΙΟΣ (ΑΡΓΥΡΙΟΣ)
ΚΑΠΑΝΤΑΙ (ΚΑΠΑΝΤΑΗ)
ΣΑΜΠΟΥΡΔΑΝΙΣ (ΣΑΜΠΟΥΡΔΑΝΗΣ)
ΣΜΙΡΝΙΟΤΙΣ (ΣΜΙΡΝΙΟΤΗΣ)
ΛΑΓΟΓΙΑΝΝΙΣ (ΛΑΓΟΓΙΑΝΝΗΣ)



Figure 1. Monolingual Greek Marker

The Conflict Stage

In the conflict stage, tensions arise from the contact between the two languages. These tensions involve the transliteration of names and the nature of the name itself. With respect to transliteration, it is generally true that if the literacy level is high, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the Greek original and its transliteration into English. If, however, the literacy level of the immigrant in the native language is low,

the spelling of the name follows American conventions and restrictions since from early on, Greeks took English classes because they realized that they needed to learn English for “economic competence” (Kopan 1995, 125).



Figure 2. Bilingual LANGAS

In the following cases, for example, the original Greek spelling of vowels, diphthongs, consonants and consonant clusters is reflected in the transliteration: Themistokles, Michaelides, Stavrides Keriazes (the -es ending is the closest, traditionally accepted transliteration of the original Greek spelling -ης which marks the ending of male names).

In general, the choice of ‘e’ or ‘i’ to transliterate η can be used as a literacy variable: literate immigrants chose to transliterate η as –e (Demetrios) whereas less literate immigrants chose symbols to reflect pronunciation, in this case ‘i’ (Dimitrios).

The Greek diphthong ou appears to be particularly troublesome in the transliteration: for highly literate Greeks, it is rendered in English as ‘ou’ in an attempt to establish a one-to-one correspondence between the symbols of the two languages: Theodosopoulos. For immigrants with low literacy

levels, however, the diphthong appears in two distinct forms: either as 'oo' [Genoozis], which is the obvious convention for English, or as 'u' [Barkulis], which conveys the Modern Greek phonetic value of the diphthong.

Similarly, transliterating the Greek diphthong αυ as 'au' reflects the original spelling of the last name—a high literacy marker: Staurou. On the other hand, in the name 'Stavropoulos,' the diphthong αυ is transliterated so as to reflect its pronunciation [av] rather than its correspondence with the original spelling.

Further evidence of the correlation between transliteration and literacy comes from the rendering of the nasal + consonant clusters (μν, ντ) as 'mp' and 'nt' respectively, which reflects their original spelling rather than their pronunciation in Greek ([b] and [d], respectively): Haralampopoulos, Korompilas, Kontos, Ntovas, Kωνstantinos (in this last case, the writer, as a way to ensure he is perceived as highly literate, has chosen to include the Greek letter 'ω' in the transliteration of the name)

On the other hand, the transliteration of the following name reveals the pronunciation of the cluster rather than its original spelling, thus indicating low literacy skills: Dovas. Similarly, the following two names Costadina, Epthemios indicate low literacy skills since in both cases the transliteration reflects pronunciation only rather than the original spelling of the name—Constantina and Epthemios, respectively.

Greek sounds that do not exist in American English proved challenging for transliteration: thus, the voiced fricative [ɣ] has been rendered either as 'g' or as 'j' [Kougias, Janoula, Karagianni]. We can argue that the official, literate transliteration is 'g' since that is the one appearing on the marker of a deceased priest Zoganas Geroulis.

Similarly, the cluster τσ and its voiced counterpart τς appear in various spellings, underlined in the following examples: Maroutsos, Voutirichas, Tchakanakis, Sfatτcos, Keratzedes, Janakas, Gianacopulos, Kalαnges. Often, the English spelling

not in one-to-one correspondence with Greek reveals a common dialect variant pronunciation of the cluster in Greek, namely [ch] and [j], respectively.

Nowhere is the tension between the two languages clearer than in the case of the initial k/c choice to reflect the sound [k]. Adhering to Greek spelling, K is used (since Greek does not have the letter 'c'): Kavooras Kurtides Keratzedes Karamichos. Indicating their literacy in American English and their acculturation in the new country, however, leads immigrants to chose 'C': Callas, Calamaras, Constantopulos Constantine.

The contact between the two cultures is clearly seen in the abbreviations practices of the Greek immigrants; because their last names were often difficult to spell or pronounce, the newcomers had to shorten their names to conform to English practices:

Alexopulos/Alexander; Angelkas/Angell;
 Konstantopulos/Noplos; Kokinis/Keane;
 Gianakopulos/Gianas; Kasidogiannis /Kass;
 Panagoulas/Pane; Stefanopoulos/Stephens;
 Pavlatos/Paulson; Lambropoulos/Paul; Koulogeorge;
 Papageorgiou/Papageorge; Markopoulos/Marks;
 Athanasopoulos/Athens.

This shortening, however, is largely unpredictable and the same abbreviation often corresponds to different original Greek names:

Papaeleftheriou/Pappas; Papademetriou/Pappas.

Even though the Greek immigrants quickly went through acculturation, they preserved their "separate cultural heritage" (Kopan 1995, 139). This dual identity is clearly evidenced in the bilingual rendering of the family name:

Kappas/Καποπουλος; Paras/Παρασκευαιδης;
 Pete/Προκοπιος; Triandafil/Τριανταφυλου; Karas-
 Καρανδρεας; Phillos/Χριστοφλου; Τσαρουχας/Charwhas;
 Langas/Λαγογιαννις; Deonesos/Διονυσοπουλος;

Stathis/Σταθουλίας; Anast/Αναστασάκης; Delis/Δελακής;
Chicos/Τσακοπούλος; Rummel/Ρουμελιώτης.

Not only last names became Americanized, but also first names. The Americanized version of the name may reflect its Greek heritage (Dionisios/Denis; Vassilli /Bill) or it might be completely unrelated to the original (Steve/Στεργιος; Anargiros/Harry; Angelis/William).

The Americanization of the name often involved not shortening but complete translation of the original into English: thus, Φωτεινός became Brilliant, a loan translation of the original name.



Figure 3. Brilliant

The Accommodation Stage

Most monolingual, English markers are recent - after the 1950s. It is important to remember, however, that it is better to think of them as the last stage along the acculturation continuum rather than attempt to place them on a particular time period. One of the typical characteristics of this stage is the leveling of endings; often, the male name loses its distinctive singular/masculine ending -s : Aristomeni (instead of Aristomenis); Spiro (instead of Spiros); Vassilli (instead of Vassillis). Or the female name acquires -s in the ending, thus losing its traditional possessive ending ('belonging to') since in American English, both male and female names have identical endings: Vasiliki Gianakakis; Bessie Konstantopoulos; Dena Kanatas; Eftyhia Demos; Argiro Papoutsakis; Serafima Damopoulos; Smaro Zaferakes; Irene Calapos; Uranie Bicouvaris; Olga Salopoulos; Mary Siavelis; Lambro Skufis.

In geographical areas where there is not a significant, strong Greek community, we find that markers of the immigrants are not grouped together by family or church affiliation. In addition, the last name—through abbreviation and changes in spelling—has lost its overt ethnic association. It could be argued, then, that this is evidence of the complete assimilation of the group. However, that is not the case: the overt, explicit marker (the Greek last name, birthplace and/or grouping based on family or church affiliation) is replaced with a covert, implicit marker, the first name since most Greeks still follow the traditional practice of naming their children after the grandparents.

Thus, in Figure 4: Monolingual English: Fote, neither the last name (Fote) nor the first name of the male reveal the immigrant background; the female name, however (Janoula) is

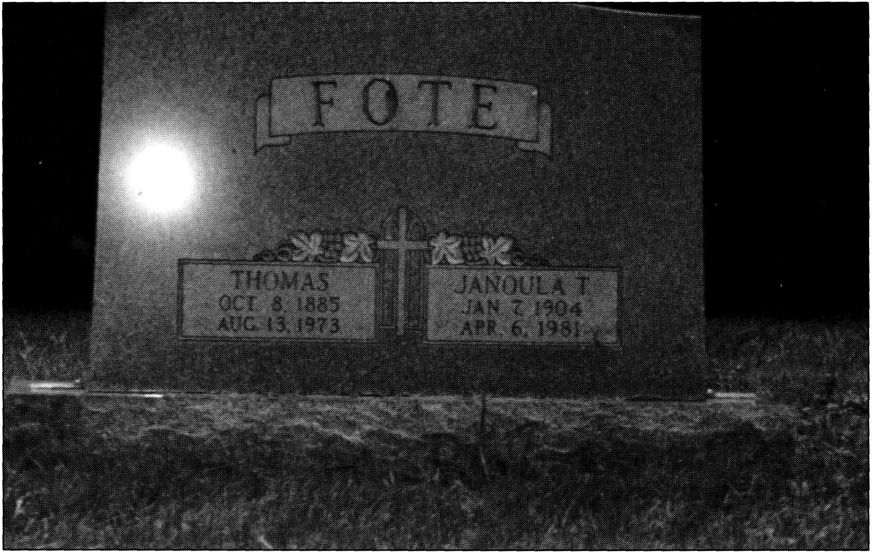


Figure 4. Monolingual English: Fote

a covert marker of ethnicity—a fairly typical first name from the rural area. Similarly, in Figure 5: Monolingual English: Lagos, only the female name (Eugenia) provides evidence of the immigrant past.



Figure 5. Monolingual English:
Lagos

Conclusion

The Greek immigrants' poor, illiterate past as well as their process of acculturation in their new country is reflected in the naming practices observed in cemeteries around the United States. The initial stage is marked by monolingual, Greek markers—often with misspelled names—while the conflict stage is characterized by the presence of the two languages (Greek and English) on the marker, evidence of the emerging dual identity of the immigrants. The tension between the two is revealed partly in the transliteration of the names—whether adhering to the original Greek or following American conventions—as well as in the abbreviations of the Greek names. Finally, in the acculturation stage, markers are monolingual (English); in some cases, it is only the first name that serves as a marker—albeit covert—of ethnicity.

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