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Teaching Greek grammar in 11th-century Constantinople: Michael Psellus on the Greek ‘dialects’

Abstract: In this paper, I aim at sketching the place of the Ancient Greek literary dialects within grammar in the 11th-century Byzantine curriculum, for which a didactic grammatical poem, composed by the polymath Michael Psellus (ca. 1018–ca. 1080), is a unique and understudied source (viz. *Poemata*, 6). I do so by offering, together with a first English translation of the relevant verses, a close analysis of part of the poem and its sources. This enables us to assess how Psellus pictured the relationship of the κοινή (*koinè*) with the four other canonical dialects. I likewise argue that, although Psellus does not offer a definition of the word διάλεκτος (*dialektos*), his poem nevertheless allows us to reconstruct his conception of it to a certain extent. This contribution also seeks to contextualize Psellus’ views against the backdrop of the Hellenistic and Byzantine tradition of Greek dialect studies.

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Introduction

In the present paper, I focus on the position of the Greek ‘dialects’ in the Byzantine educational curriculum and, more specifically, in 11th-century Constantinople, on which the Byzantine philosopher Michael Psellus offers us a unique window. However, before plunging into Psellus and his didactic poem on grammar, I will offer a thumbnail sketch of Hellenistic and Byzantine ‘dialectological’ learning, so as to contextualize his views. First, I will provide a few notes on the variegated Greek concept of ‘dialect’, to the understanding of

The present paper largely draws on the talk I held at the 25th *Studienkreis ‘Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft’* (SGdS; June 5–6, 2014, University of Leiden, the Netherlands), at which the theme “Language and Learning. The history of linguistics in the context of education” took center stage.

which, among others, Anna Morpurgo Davies has contributed much (see also the work by Hainsworth, Cassio, Consani, and Lambert).¹ *Dialektos* (διάλεκτος) as a linguistic term has as its core meaning ‘way of speaking’ and has been variously defined in the Greek world; I will limit myself here to three important and ‘dialectologically’ relevant parameters.²

1. The diatopic parameter: *dialektos* as regionally restricted speech. This is not the most prominent parameter, certainly not in later Byzantine times (which contrasts with modern applications of the term).

2. The ethnic-tribal parameter: *dialektos* as speech characteristic of a Greek tribe. These Greek tribes were limited in number; there were only four (Aeolic, Attic, Doric, Ionic) and they all had their own speech variety. Later on, the *koinè* (ἡ κοινή, short for ἡ κοινή διάλεκτος) came to be added as a fifth, a modification which was often left unmotivated. The dialect situation was thus forced into an ethnic-mythological framework that was already at hand, as can be seen in the genealogy of the children of Deucalion in Figure 1.

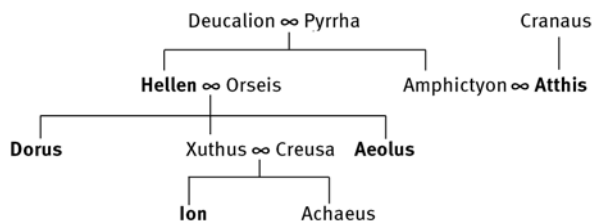


Figure 1: Schematic presentation of the genealogy of Deucalion's children

The relationship of the *koinè* toward the dialects has been variously interpreted by grammarians and scholiasts and can be summarized as follows:

1 See A. MORPURGO DAVIES, The Greek notion of dialect. *Verbum* 10 (1987) 7–28. See also A. C. CASSIO, Il ‘carattere’ dei dialetti greci e l’opposizione Ioni-Dori. Testimonianze antiche e teorie di età romantica (su Arist. Quint. 2. 13, Iambl. v. *Pyth.* 241 sgg., *sch. in Dion. Thr.* p. 117, 18 sgg. Hilgard). *Aion* 6 (1984) 113–136; C. CONSANI, Διάλεκτος. Contributo alla storia del concetto di “dialetto”. *Testi linguistici*, 18. Pisa 1991; J. B. HAINSWORTH, Greek views of Greek dialectology. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 65 (1967) 62–76; F. LAMBERT, Les noms des langues chez les Grecs. *Histoire Épistémologie Langage* 31/2 (2009) 15–27; R. VAN ROOY, ‘What is a “dialect”?’ Some new perspectives on the history of the term διάλεκτος and its interpretations in ancient Greece and Byzantium. *Glotta* 92 (2016) 244–279.

2 See VAN ROOY, *ibid.*, for a more elaborate discussion of the criteria in question.

1. ‘The four other dialects derive from the *koinè*’.³
2. ‘The *koinè* is the ‘mother’ of the four other dialects and it was formed by the mixing of these dialects’.⁴ However, it remains problematic what the ‘mother’ image exactly represents within this context.⁵
3. ‘The *koinè* is a dialect, because it has its own form, caused by its composite character’.
4. ‘The *koinè* has similarities with the other dialects and therefore it is a dialect’.⁶
5. Very often, the *koinè* was simply added as a fifth dialect, without further explanations.

3 See V. BUBENÍK, Variety of speech in Greek linguistics. The dialects and the *koinè*, in S. Auroux / E. F. K. Koerner / H.-J. Niederehe / K. Versteegh (eds.), *History of the Language Sciences. An international handbook on the evolution of the study of language from the beginnings to the present. Handbücher zur Sprach- und Kommunikationswissenschaft*, 18/1. Berlin/New York 2000, here 441. – “Διάλεκτοι δέ εἰσι πέντε, Ἰάς· Ἀθίς· Δωρίς· Αἰολίς, καὶ Κοινή· ἡ γὰρ πέμπτη, ἴδιον οὐκ ἔχουσα χαρακτήρα, κοινὴ ὠνομάσθη, διότι ἐκ ταύτης ἄρχονται πᾶσαι.” (*Grammaticus Meermannianus* in G. H. SCHÄFER, *Gregorii Corinthii et aliorum grammaticorum libri De dialectis linguae Graecae. Quibus additur nunc primum editus Manuelis Moschopuli libellus De vocum passionibus*. Lipsiae [Leipzig] 1811, here 642.)

4 “Τινές φασιν ὅτι οὐκ ὀφείλει κοινὴ καλεῖσθαι, ἀλλὰ μικτή, εἴ περ ἡ κοινὴ ἀπὸ τεσσάρων συνέστηκεν· οὐ γὰρ τὴν διὰ τεσσάρων φαρμάκων ἔμπλαστρον κοινὴν καλοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ μικτήν. Καὶ καλῶς ἔλεγον ταῦτα πρὸς τοὺς λέγοντας τὴν κοινὴν συνίστασθαι ἐκ τῶν τεσσάρων, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις, ὅτι μήτηρ ἡ κοινὴ· εἰ γὰρ τις εἶποι ὅτι δωριστί, φασὲν ὅτι τὸ κοινὸν αὐτοῦ, ἢ αἰολιστί ὁμοίως, ἢ ἰαστί, ἢ ἀτικιστί· [...]” (*Scholia Londinensia*, 469, 2–9. Unless mentioned otherwise, all references are to the editions used by the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* at <http://www.tlg.u-ci.edu/>.)

5 It seems appealing to interpret this in a genealogical-historical way (which indeed occurs in secondary literature), but I do not think that this interpretation captures the author’s intentions. Rather, he seems to indicate that the *koinè* is – in an a-historical way – the variety that hierarchically ‘roofs’ the other dialects, since it contains elements of each group of dialects. It ‘embraces’, as it were, each of the other ‘dialects’, as is befitting for a ‘mother’.

6 For the two views in 3. and 4.: “Οἱ μὴ βουλόμενοι τὴν κοινὴν καταριθμεῖν διάλεκτον ταῖς προειρημέναις τέταρσιν, αἰτιῶνται τρόπον τοιῶδε· οὐδὲν γὰρ φασὶν ἔχειν ἴδιον, ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ τετραφάρμακος καλεῖται, οὐδὲν ἴδιον ἔχουσα· οὕτω καὶ ἡ κοινὴ διάλεκτος, ἐκ τεσσάρων συναρμοσθεῖσα, οὐκ ὀφείλει συγκαταριθμεῖσθαι ταῖς αὐταῖς. Τῶν δὲ τὴν κοινὴν εἰσηγησαμένων οἱ μὲν λέγουσι, ὅτι πάσαις συμβέβηται ταῖς διαλέκτοις ταῖς ὁμοφώνοις· οἷον φίλος, νῦξ, καὶ τὰ ὅμοια· οἱ δ’ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἔχουσα τύπον, ἀλλ’ ἐκ διαφόρων λέξεων συνηρμοσμένη τε καὶ συνηθροισμένη.” (*Grammaticus Leidensis* in SCHÄFER, *Gregorii ...*, as footnote 3 above, 640–641). This passage is also repeated by the *Scholia Londinensia* (p. 469). Cf. also the treatise *Περὶ διαλέκτων ἐκ τῶν Ἰωάννου γραμματικοῦ τεχνικῶν*, in A. Manutius (ed.), *Θησαυρός*. Κέρας ἀμαλθείας καὶ κήποι Ἀδώνιδος. Venice 1496, here 235’–236’, which also has these same wordings.

3. The parameter of particularity. Many grammarians and scholiasts have a very general definition of *dialektos*, i.e. *idiōma glōssēs/glōttēs* (ιδίωμα γλώσσης/γλώττης), ‘property of tongue’.⁷ In this case, the dialects are approached from a literary-exegetical perspective, since the dialectal particularities and variations are mainly described in order to understand the speech of canonical literary authors. This is also reflected in the usage of assigning individual dialects to prototypical authors; e.g., Herodotus was, among others, seen as exemplary of Ionic authors, although his ‘mother dialect’ probably was Doric, since he came from the Doric territory of Halicarnassus. However, the literary genre in which he composed his historiographical work imposed the Ionic dialect. Here, the diatopic and ethnic parameters seem to have been pushed into the background; one could say that the propagators of this ‘dialect’ concept have a diaphasic focus in their ‘dialectological’ study, in that dialects are seen as typical of certain authors (and their genres).

Some scholiasts also introduced subdivisions within each dialect individually; e.g., Doric allegedly consisted of the varieties spoken by the Argives, the Laconians, the Syracusans, the Messenians, and the Corinthians, according to an early Byzantine scholiast.⁸ There was no uniform terminological system to denote this conceptual and hierarchic division. Psellus will be adopting the most widespread one, as we will see later on.

A brief account of Psellus’ life and work

After some concise notes on Psellus’ life and oeuvre, I will take a look at the relevant ‘dialectological’ passages of the poem, which have been neglected up till now.

Michael Psellus⁹ was born ca. 1018 at Constantinople as Constantine (Psellus). As from 1043, he was the secretary of the emperor. Soon he reaped fame by his didactic qualities and he was accorded the title of ‘consul of the philosophers’ (“ὕπατος τῶν φιλοσόφων”). Ten years later, however, he fled from the capital, as suspicion arose regarding his faith; the Church authorities did not

⁷ For this, see VAN ROOY, Perspectives (as footnote 1 above) 259–261.

⁸ See *Scholia Marciana*, 303.

⁹ It is unknown whether Psellus (Ψελλός) was his real family name or a surname given to him because he lisped. This section largely draws on A. KAZHDAN, Psellos, Michael. *ODB* 1754–55 and A. BERGER, Psellos. Brill’s New Pauly. Leiden/Boston 2006 [Brill Online, last accessed on April 11, 2014; <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/psellos-e1012310>].

approve of his rationalist ideas on astronomical issues. Renaming himself ‘Michael’, he spent a short time in a monastery. Eventually, he returned to the court, where he became the advisor of several Byzantine emperors, a position he would hold until his death ca. 1080.

Psellus was one of the most important scholars in the cultural renaissance of 11th-century Byzantium. His wide knowledge is exemplified in his rich oeuvre. The greater part of his work is written in a highly archaic, though not always classical, Atticizing literary Greek. In other, mostly minor, writings, he adopts a more familiar language. His *magnum opus* is the *Chronographia* (*Χρονογραφία*), an account of contemporary Byzantine history.

The main goal of Psellus’ literary activities was to compose didactic compendia of contemporary knowledge, both in prose and in verse form. He was a specialist of ancient philosophy. As many of his contemporaries, he wrote exegetical and theological writings. He was also active as a jurist and a philologist. Various speeches, occasional poems, and about 500 personal letters constitute the remaining part of his oeuvre.

Psellus’ *Poemata*, 6

Introduction

Psellus intended the sixth poem of his volume of verse to be a didactic compendium of Greek grammar. He dedicated it to Michael VII Ducas by order of his father, emperor Constantine X, who ruled from 1059 until 1067.¹⁰ So we can conclude that the poem was probably written in the sixties of the 11th century, when Michael Ducas was a teenager. It offers a unique, albeit barred, window on the position of the Greek ‘dialects’ in the 11th-century Byzantine grammar curriculum.

At the beginning of the poem, Psellus refers to grammar as the ‘basis of sciences’.¹¹ This also emerges from the place of the poem in the collection; preceded by verses exclusively dealing with theological subjects, grammar is the first secular topic to be discussed in Psellus’ *Didactica maiora*.¹² Emperor Con-

¹⁰ See C.M. BRAND / A. CUTLER, Constantine X Doukas. *ODB* 504 – 505.

¹¹ This was the canonical view in his times. See R.H. ROBINS, The Byzantine grammarians. Their place in history. *Trends in Linguistics, Studies and Monographs*, 70. Berlin / New York 1993, here 126.

¹² It is followed by compendia of rhetoric, law, medicine, and a vast range of other topics, most of which have not yet been studied in depth. L.G. WESTERINK (ed.), *Michaelis Pselli Poemata*.

stantine X also appears to have seen grammar as a necessary steppingstone to the other sciences, as is clear from the title attributed to the secular poems in the manuscripts:¹³

Τοῦ αὐτοῦ Ψελλοῦ Σύνοψις διὰ στίχων σαφῶν καὶ πολιτικῶν περὶ πασῶν τῶν ἐπιστημῶν γενομένη πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβέστατον βασιλέα κύριον Μιχαὴλ τὸν Δούκαν ἐκ προστάξεως τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ βασιλέως, ὥστε διὰ τῆς εὐκολίας καὶ ἡδύτητος ἐνεχθῆναι τοῦτον εἰς τὴν μάθησιν τῶν ἐπιστημῶν.

Synopsis of the same Psellus in clear and ‘political’ verses concerning all the sciences, for the most pious emperor, lord Michael Ducas, by order of his father and emperor, so that he is introduced in the learning of sciences with ease and delight.

The title also hints at the didactic aim of the poem with the words “σαφής” (‘clear’), “εὐκολία” (‘ease’), and “ἡδύτης” (‘delight’).¹⁴

The poem consists of 490 verses and is written in the ‘political’ verse; the scheme is the following:

υ - υ υ υ - υ υ || υ - υ - υ - υ
- υ υ υ υ υ υ - || - υ υ - υ - υ

Although the origin of the meter is unknown, it clearly is a Byzantine creation, typically used in vernacular poetry, but also in *Hochsprachliche Literatur*.¹⁵ Thus, Psellus addressed young students who were to be immersed in the study of grammar for the first time in a relatively simple form of the *Hochsprache*. The poem falls into two major parts:

Stuttgart/Leipzig 1992, here V, refers to the first nine poems of the collection as the *Didactica maiora*, followed by six poems constituting the *Didactica minora*; see also W. HÖRANDNER, The Byzantine didactic poem – a neglected literary genre? A survey with special reference to the eleventh century, In F. Bernard/K. Demoen, Poetry and its contexts in eleventh-century Byzantium. Farnham/Burlington 2012, 55–67, here 57. HÖRANDNER, *ibid.* 57–62, esp. 58, offers a general discussion of Psellus’ didactic poetry, which also has remarks on the peculiar textual transmission of these poems; see also F. BERNARD, The beats of the pen. Social contexts of reading and writing poetry in eleventh-century Constantinople. Ghent 2010, here 75 (in general) and 60–61 (on our poem).

13 See BERNARD, *ibid.* 75 and HÖRANDNER, Didactic poem (as footnote 12 above) 58.

14 According to HÖRANDNER, Didactic poem (as footnote 12 above) 58, “ἡδύτης refers to the verse form in general”, while “εὐκολία” refers “to the political verse in particular”.

15 Most notably during the Palaeologus Renaissance and during the *Turkokratia* after 1453; see H. HUNGER, Die hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner. *Handbuch der Altertumswissenschaft*, 12/5. München 1978, here 95.

- part 1 (verses 1–269) is mainly a summary of Dionysius Thrax' grammar and the canonical scholia that went with it in the Byzantine grammatical tradition.¹⁶ Since Thrax' *Ars grammatica* does not discuss the dialects, the early Byzantine scholia will be of main interest for the study of Psellus' 'dialectological' sources.
- part 2 (verses 270–490) comprises a partially alphabetic listing of rare and infrequent words (v. 270: "σπάνια ὀνόματα").¹⁷

The poem as a whole has not yet been properly studied. The figure below presents the structure of the first part with the relevant passages in bold. I will focus on the passages in which the Greek dialects and the concept of *dialektos* take center stage. The following section contains these passages, along with my English translation.

Structure of the 1st part	verses
1 general introduction	1–2
2 'dialectology'	3–25
3 metrics	26–30
4 declension	31–32
5 nominal accentuation	33–38
6 mood (+ aspect)	39–44
7 voice	45–51
8 participle	52–58
9 verbal accentuation	59–64
10 tense/aspect	65–91
11 metrics (2)/prosody	92–100
12 phonetics and phonetic variations in morphology	101–165
13 glosses (rare words)	166–174
precursor of 2nd part	
14 prosody (2)	175–176
15 figures of speech	177–180
16 'histories' and 'subdialects'	181–188
17 analogy	189–193
18 text interpretation	194–208
19 metrics (3)	209
20 tense/aspect (2) and number	210–256
21 phonetics (2)	257–269

¹⁶ See WESTERINK, Michaelis Pselli Poemata (as footnote 12 above) 80f., where the source apparatus refers to the relevant passages.

¹⁷ See HÖRANDNER, Didactic poem (as footnote 12 above) 60.

Text and translation of the relevant passages of Psellus' *Poemata*, 6¹⁸

- Μελέτω σοι γραμματικῆς καὶ τῆς ὀρθογραφίας·
 πρῶτος αὕτη θεμέλιος καὶ βάσις μαθημάτων.
 Οὐκ ἔστι δὲ μονότροπος οὐδὲ κοινὴ καὶ μία,
 ἀλλ' ἔχει γλώσσας καὶ φωνὰς καὶ πέντε διαλέκτους,
 5 Αἰολικὴν, Ἴωνικὴν, Ἀτθίδα καὶ Δωρίδα
 καὶ τὴν συνήθη καὶ κοινὴν καὶ κατημαξευμένην·
 ἐκάστη δὲ διάλεκτος ἔχει φωνὰς ἰδίας,
 ἢ δὲ κοινὴ, κἂν πέφυκεν ἄθροισμα τῶν τεσσάρων,
 ἀλλ' ἔστι καὶ μονότροπος, ἄλλη παρὰ τὰς ἄλλας.
 10 Ἄλλ' ὡς ἐν παραδείγματι δεικτέον σοι τὰς πέντε.
 τὸ μὲν γὰρ 'Πέρσης Πέρσεω' τυγχάνει τῆς Ἰάδος
 (ἦν εἶπον γὰρ Ἴωνικὴν καλῶ σοι νῦν Ἰάδα,
 Ἰὰς γὰρ ἀπὸ Ἴωνος· διώνυμος ἢ κλήσις).
 ὡς δὲ τὸ 'Δημοσθένεος' γενικῶς τῆς Ἰάδος
 15 καὶ τὸ 'Περσέων' γενικῶς, ὡς δὲ καὶ τὸ 'νυμφέων'·
 εἰ δὲ τις μεταλλάξειε καὶ λέξειε 'νυμφάων',
 Αἰολικὴν διάλεκτον εἶπεν, οὐ τὴν Ἰάδα.
 εἰ δὲ τις εἴποι 'θάλατταν' ἢ 'τεῦτλον', Ἀττικίζει.
 εἰ δὲ τις ὀνομάσειε τὰς Μούσας 'Μώσας' πάλιν,
 20 ὑποδωρίσας εἶρηκε Δωρίδι διαλέκτῳ.
 ἢ δ' Αἰολίς διάλεκτος τῷ ῥῶ βῆτα προσνέμει,
 'βράκος' τὸ ῥάκος λέγουσα, 'βρυτῆρα' τὸν ῥυτῆρα.
 εἰ δὲ τις εἴποι 'θάλασσαν' καὶ 'ράκος' καὶ 'ρυτῆρα',
 κοινὴν εἶπε διάλεκτον ἦτοι συνηθεστάτην.
 25 ταύτην μοι μόνην δίωκε, τῶν δ' ἄλλων καταφρόνει.
 [...]
 74 Καὶ τοῦτο δέ μοι γίνωσκε καὶ μή σε λανθανέτω·
 75 χρόνοι πολλοὶ λελοίπασιν ἔν τισι τῶν ῥημάτων
 καὶ πρόσωπα πληθυντικὰ τῆς κοινῆς διαλέκτου,
 ἀλλ' ἀντανεπληρώθησαν ἐξ ἄλλων διαλέκτων.
 [...]
 181 Τὸ τρίτον τῆς γραμματικῆς τοῦτο τυγχάνει μέρος,

18 In translating these passages, I have transcribed the terms which Psellus uses when discussing conceptual distinctions. When Psellus deals with examples of grammatical, flectional, and phonetic/phonological features that are characteristic of one dialect group, these examples will be rendered in the Greek alphabet.

ιστοριῶν ἀπόδοσις καὶ γλωσσῶν πολυτρόπων.
 ἐκάστη γὰρ διάλεκτος παμπόλλους ἔχει γλώσσας.
 ἢ γὰρ Δωρὶς διάλεκτος ἔχει τοιάσδε γλώσσας,
 185 Ἀργείων Κορινθίων τε καὶ τῶν Συρακουσίων·
 ἢ δ' Αἰολίς τῶν Βοιωτῶν, πρὸς δὲ καὶ τῶν Λεσβίων.
 ὀφείλει δ' ὁ γραμματικὸς εἶδέναι καὶ τὰς γλώσσας·
 ἴαδος γὰρ τὸ 'πίσυρες', ἀλλὰ Συρακουσίων.

Let grammar and orthography be your concern;
 that is the first foundation-stone and basis of sciences.
 It is, however, not of one kind nor is it common and the same,
 but it comprises *glōssai* and *phōnai* and five *dialektoi*,
 5 Aeolic, Ionic, Attic and Doric
 and the usual, common and hackneyed [*dialektos*];
 and each *dialektos* has its own sounds. And the common [*dialektos*],
 even though it is an aggregate of the four, it is nevertheless
 also of one kind, different in comparison with the others.
 10 But the five have to be shown to you by way of example. For
 the inflection 'Πέρσης Πέρσεω' happens to be from the Ionic speech
 (for the speech they called *Iōnikè*, I shall now call it for you *Ias*,
 for *Ias* derives from *Iōn*; the appellation consists of two names).
 As the form 'Δημοσθένεος' is the way in which the genitive is conveyed
 in Ionic
 15 as well as the form 'Περσέων', thus is also the form 'νυμφέων';
 but if one altered it and said 'νυμφάων',
 he spoke the Aeolic *dialektos*, not the Ionic.
 But if one says 'θάλαττα' or 'τεῦτλον', he speaks Attic.
 But if one names in turn the Muses 'Μῶσαι',
 20 he speaks in the Doric fashion and talks in the Doric *dialektos*.
 And the Aeolic *dialektos* adds a beta to the rho,
 saying the word 'ράκος' as 'βράκος', the word 'ῥυτήρ' as 'βρυτήρ'.
 But if one says 'θάλασσα', 'ράκος' and 'ῥυτήρ',
 he spoke the common or the most customary *dialektos*.
 25 Follow this one alone indeed, and look down upon the others.
 [...]
 74 But know this indeed and may it not escape you:
 75 many tenses are lacking in some of the verbs
 and also plural persons of the common *dialektos*,
 but they are filled up by other *dialektoi*.
 [...]

- 181 This happens to be the third part of grammar,
the explanation of ‘histories’ and various *glōssai*.
For each *dialektos* comprises numerous *glōssai*.
For the Doric *dialektos* comprises the following *glōssai*, that
of the Argives, that of the Corinthians and that of the Syracusans;
185 and the Aeolic [*dialektos*] that of the Boeotians, but also that of the
Lesbians. The grammarian is obliged to know also the *glōssai*,
for ‘πίσυρες’ [derives] from Ionic, but [also] from the Syracusans.

Commentary and discussion

Verses 1–25

Upon stating the importance of grammar as the basis of other sciences (in vv. 1–2), Psellus proceeds by immediately stressing the manifoldness of this art. This is rather stunning, since one of his main sources, Dionysius Thrax’ grammar, does not discuss the different ‘dialects’ at all. What is more, none of the commentaries on Thrax discuss the ‘dialects’ as a first topic. The initial importance Psellus seems to attach to this manifoldness is countered, however, by his prescription in verse 25. There, he incites his readers to disdain the ‘dialects’ other than the *koinè*.

Psellus argues that grammar is concerned with different *glōssai* (Attic *glōttai*; γλώσσαι/γλώτται), *phōnai* (φωναί), and five *dialektoi* (“ἀλλ’ ἔχει γλώσσας καὶ φωνὰς καὶ πέντε διαλέκτους”, v. 4); he clearly presumes that there exists a distinction between these three terms. The hierarchical conceptual relationship between *dialektos* and *glōssa* (that is, a *dialektos* comprises several *glōssai*) will be made explicit later on.¹⁹ *Phōnè* probably refers to a specific aspect of the Greek language: viz. its physical sound.²⁰ If we can attribute this interpretation to *phōnè*, it may be argued that the plurality of this aspect, alluded to in v. 4, is realized in the phonetic divergences between the five Greek dialects; as noted these were often explained in terms of phonic operations (see v. 7: “ἐκάστη δὲ διάλεκτος ἔχει φωνὰς ἰδίας”).

Psellus makes use of the traditional nomenclature for the five dialects (“Αἰολικὴν, Ἰωνικὴν, Ἀτθίδα καὶ Δωρίδα/[...] κοινὴν [...], vv. 5–6). In verses 11–

¹⁹ See *Scholia Marciana* 303, and WESTERINK, *Poemata* (as footnote 12) 81; and *Scholia Londinensia* 469.

²⁰ See *Scholia Londinensia* 469 and LAMBERT, *Noms* (as footnote 1 above) 22.

13, he offers an etymological explanation of the term ἴας; he refers to the tribal ancestor Ἴών, the grandson of Ἕλλην. The key term ἔθνος, ‘tribe’, is, however, absent in Psellus’ verses on the ‘dialects’, just as the view that a *dialektos* exhibits linguistic features particular to a certain region.

The reference to the *koinè* is markedly longer than the naming of the four other dialects (see v. 6: “καὶ τὴν συνήθη καὶ κοινήν καὶ κατημαξευμένην”). The usage of this linguistic variety in everyday speech and common parlance is emphasized by the use of the adjectives συνήθης (‘usual’; ‘customary’) and κοινή (‘common’). In this capacity, the *koinè* is also “the level of language appropriate to didactic texts”, to put it with the words of Hörandner.²¹ Psellus goes on by curiously adding “κατημαξευμένην”, the participle perfect of the verb καταμαξεύω (which literally means: ‘to wear down with wheels’). At first sight, this statement seems utterly pejorative; the participle is often used to designate prostitutes, women of easy virtue, and all that is hackneyed and banal.²² This appears to be incompatible with his radical prescription in favor of the *koinè* variety in verse 25 (“ταύτην μοι μόνην δίωκε, τῶν δ’ ἄλλων καταφρόνει”).²³ The so-called *Grammaticus Meermannianus* has a similar prescriptive statement, which reads: “ληπτέον δὲ ταύτην μὲν ὡς (πρὸς) κανόνα, τὰς δὲ λοιπὰς πρὸς ἰδιότητα [the *koinè* must be taken as rule, the others as particularity]”.²⁴ Initially, these two adjectives, κοινός and κατημαξευμένος, seem to have constituted a more or less pleonastic collocation in which the latter had a rather negative connotation. Later on, however, this collocation became fixed to such an extent that, by Psellus’ time, the difference in connotation seems to have been lost.²⁵ This is testified to by the entry “Κατημαξευμένα” in the 12th-century *Etymologicum magnum*,²⁶ since “Κοινά” is offered there as a gloss for “Κατημαξευμένα”.²⁷ If this is to be assumed, v. 6 and v. 25 are by no means contradictory.

21 HÖRANDNER, Didactic poems (as footnote 12 above) 60.

22 H.G. LIDDELL / R. SCOTT / H.S. JONES, A Greek-English Lexicon. Oxford 1940, s.v. καταμαξεύω.

23 HÖRANDNER, Didactic poems (as footnote 12 above) 60.

24 See SCHÄFER, Gregorii ... (as footnote 3 above) 642; see also CONSANI, Διάλεκτος (as footnote 1 above) 67.

25 It is first attested in Dionysius of Halicarnassus (ca. 60 BC – end of the first century BC), *De antiquis oratoribus*, 4.

26 *Etymologicum magnum* 497.

27 Searching the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*, I encountered 12 instances of the collocation of κοινός with κατημαξευμένος, always in this order. Pseudo-Psellus also uses this collocation in *Poemata*, 54, 132–3: “Ἀπλῶ μὲν λόγῳ καὶ κοινῶ καὶ κατημαξευμένῳ / ὄργανον τὸ ψαλτήριον δεκάχορδον σημαίνει, / [...]” Here, the original negative connotation does not seem to have been

The conception that the *koinè* is an ‘aggregate’ (“ἄθροισμα”, v. 8) of the four other dialects seems to have been a widespread one. Psellus did not, however, take this element from the scholia on Thrax, in which this theory is refuted:

Τὴν δὲ κοινήν ἀπὸ τῶν τεσσάρων λέγουσι πεποιθῆσθαι, κακῶς· καὶ γὰρ Ὅμηρος <τοῖς> τέτταροι χρῆται, καὶ οὐ παρὰ τοῦτο κοινή ἐστὶν αὐτοῦ ἢ διάλεκτος· τὸ τε γὰρ ἔρος καὶ ἄμμες Αἰολικόν· ἔστι δὲ καὶ τὸ ἐσσεῖται καὶ τὸ εἶ Δωρικόν· ἐπὶ τὸ πλεῖστον δὲ Αἰολικῷ χρῆται τύπῳ. (*Scholia Londinensia*, p. 463, 25–26)

And they say that the *koinè* is made of the four [*dialektoi*], [and they do this] wrongly; for Homer also uses the four [*dialektoi*], and this does not necessarily imply that his *dialekτος* is *koinè*; for ἔρος and ἄμμες are Aeolic; and both ἐσσεῖται and εἶ are Doric; he mostly uses the Aeolic type.

Psellus rather relied on the ‘dialectological’ treatises he knew; for example, the so-called *Grammaticus Leidensis* uses the term “συνηθροισμένη” to characterize the *koinè* as an aggregate of different speech forms.²⁸ Vv. 74–77 on the supplementation of *koinè* verbal paradigms with forms from other ‘dialects’ exemplify this aggregate hypothesis.²⁹ Consequently, Psellus is a member of group 3. of the introduction, which granted the *koinè* a peculiar character of its own. Psellus emphasizes this by the two adjectives μονότροπος (‘of one kind’) and ἄλλος (‘other’) (see v. 9: “ἄλλ’ ἔστι καὶ μονότροπος, ἄλλη παρὰ τὰς ἄλλας”).³⁰ In doing so, Psellus is aiming to legitimate the *koinè* as an independent dialect. He even mentions separate ‘dialectal’ forms of the *koinè*, which is not common in the extant Byzantine ‘dialectological’ tradition (see vv. 23–24: “εἰ δὲ τις εἶποι ‘θάλασσαν’ καὶ ‘ράκος’ καὶ ‘ῥυτῆρα’, / κοινήν εἶπε διάλεκτον ἦτοι συνηθροιστάτην”).

Next, Psellus offers an eclectic overview of the phonetic and morphological peculiarities of the five dialects, all of which are traditionally offered in the

preserved either. See HÖRANDNER, Didactic poem (as footnote 12 above) 59, who contends that Psellus regularly uses the participle κατημαξευμένος to refer to the *koinè*.

28 See SCHÄFER, Gregorii ... (as footnote 3 above) 640–641.

29 He appears to base this view of his on the *Canones isagogici de flexione verborum* by the grammarian Theodosius of Alexandria (*floruit* ca. AD 400), upon which he further elaborates in verses 210–56. See p. 70, 20–71, 2: “Ἐνικά. Τετυμμένους εἶην· ὅτε μὲν καθαρὰν ἔχει τὴν ἐσχάτην ὁ παθητικὸς παρακείμενος, τῷ κοινῷ κανόνι τὸ εὐκτικὸν ποιεῖ, κέκλημαι κεκλήμην, δέδημαι δεδήμην· ὅτε δὲ ἐτέρῳ συμφώνῳ πρὸ τοῦ μ παραλήγοιτο, τότε διὰ τὸ ἀσυστατεῖν τὸ εὐκτικὸν τε αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑποτακτικὸν διὰ μετοχῆς ἀναπληροῖ, τετυμμένους εἶην–εἶης–εἶη. Δυϊκά. Τετυμμένῳ εἶητον–εἶήτην. Πληθ. Τετυμμένοι εἶημεν–εἶητε–εἶησαν.”

30 In v. 3, Psellus had also used the former term to describe the manifold nature of Greek grammar. A query in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database shows that he is unique in applying this term to the *koinè*.

scholia on Dionysius Thrax and in other treatises. The *De dialectis* by pseudo-Theodosius of Alexandria (*floruit* ca. AD 400) and the London scholia on Thrax are his most important sources. The way in which he introduces this topic (*viz.* by means of the phrase “ὡς ἐν παραδείγματι”, v. 10) seems to indicate that a passive knowledge of the Greek dialects suffices for someone who is just starting the study of Greek grammar (whom the poem is addressing).³¹ In offering a brief treatment of the different dialects at the outset of his grammatical compendium, Psellus achieves two goals: (1) he has made his readers aware of the existence of the five traditional dialects and (2) he has contrasted the normative preponderance of the *koinè* with the ‘inferiority’ of the other dialects. The imperative “καταφρόνει” (‘despise’; ‘look down upon’) is remarkably strong and this verb does not feature in other ‘dialectological’ contexts. The importance of the *koinè* is not really surprising, as it is the speech variety that is closest to vernacular Greek (which descends from the *koinè*). Moreover, it is the idiom in which the Septuagint and the New Testament are composed, which were influential texts throughout the Byzantine era, whereas the other dialects almost exclusively figure in pagan texts (some of which – it must be granted – were nevertheless very popular and widely read in the Byzantine era). Nevertheless, Psellus’ own literary production exhibits many Atticist features, which seems to indicate that high literary aspirations were a valid excuse to ignore the prescription in favor of the *koinè*.

Verses 181–188

In verses 181–188, Psellus treats Dionysius Thrax’ ‘third part of grammar’. However, it does not constitute a ‘third section’ in Psellus’ poem; the strict adoption of the numeration of Thrax’ grammar testifies to its canonical position in Byzantine grammatical thought and education.³² Psellus dedicates the following verses to the explanation of the term γλῶσσα, which he interprets as a ‘subvariety’ of a canonical ‘dialect’ (see v. 182: “ἐκάστη γὰρ διάλεκτος παμπόλους ἔχει γλῶσσας”). In agreement with his didactic goal (*viz.* getting his pupils and readers acquainted with dialectal diversity), Psellus does not offer a systematic account of the existing *glōssai*. He confines himself to the naming of three Doric and two Aeolic ‘subvarieties’ (vv. 183–185). He concludes this section

³¹ What is more, a passive knowledge of the other Greek *dialektoi* seems to have sufficed for most members of the Byzantine literate society, the majority of which wrote in (variants of) the *koinè* (or in ‘demotic’ Greek).

³² See ROBINS, *Grammarians* (as footnote 11 above).

with the remark that a grammarian has to know these different *glōssai*, probably because these are relevant to literary exegesis (see v. 186: “ὀφείλει δ’ ὁ γραμματικὸς εἰδέναι καὶ τὰς γλώσσας”).

One passage seems to indicate that Psellus did not have a perfect knowledge of the ‘dialects’ and their ‘subvarieties’ himself, as he seems to have made a mistake when ascribing the Aeolic form “πίσυρες” (v. 187) to the Ionic *dialektos*, in which τέσσαρες is expected.³³ His attribution of that same form to the Syracusan *glōssa* (a Doric ‘subvariety’), which he has taken from the London scholia (p. 470), is likewise wrong. For the Syracusan *glōssa* does not have πίσυρες but the Doric form τέτορες, as expected.³⁴

Conclusions and contextualization

Psellus does not offer a definition of the term *dialektos*, although he must have known the most important ones. We can only try to approach his precise conception of the term. He seems to be obfuscating the diatopic parameter as well as the links of the Ancient Greek ‘dialects’ with ethnic-mythological entities. The absence of the diatopic criterion may have the following reason; it is not inconceivable that, for Psellus, the dialects were no longer prominently connected with a specific geographic location. Rather, as they were part of the literary canon and closely linked up with specific authors, they were seen as static entities having a fixed place within that literary canon.

Psellus does, however, explicitly subdivide the ‘dialects’ into several *glōssai*, a *glōssa* being a ‘subvariety of a *dialektos*’; he has taken this terminological-conceptual distinction from the scholia on Dionysius Thrax’ grammar. This conceptual hierarchy was widespread in Byzantine ‘dialectological’ thought and it even influenced early modern discussions of the Ancient Greek dialects to a considerable extent (e.g., Claudius Salmasius [1588–1653] relies on this idea in his *De Hellenistica commentarius* of 1643, printed in Leiden by Elzevir). Psellus adheres to the fivefold classification into Attic, Doric, Aeolic, Ionic, and *koinè*, and – in his role of ‘guardian of language’ – he propagates the *koinè* as the linguistic norm. He even orders to despise the others. He considers the *koinè* an ‘aggregate’ of the four other dialects, which nevertheless has its own character and properties.

³³ See LIDDELL/SCOTT/JONES, *Lexicon* (as footnote 22 above) *sub voce* τέσσαρες.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, *sub voce* τέσσαρες. The Sicilian writer Epicharmus (fifth century BC) testifies to this fact. See *Fragmenta Epicharmi* (KAIBEL) 149.

Apart from offering ‘dialectal’ examples typical of the *koinè* (θάλασσα, ῥάκος, ῥυτήρ), which is uncommon in the Ancient Greek and Byzantine ‘dialectological’ tradition, Psellus also seems to be idiosyncratic in two other respects. On the one hand, he discusses Greek dialectal diversification as a first topic in his exposé, albeit as a kind of precaution for grammar students rather than because of the importance of the issue. On the other hand, he limits his demonstration of the differences between the dialects to a very small number of examples. This is because of his didactic aims, viz. offering a first introduction to grammar and emphasizing the central importance of the *koinè* as the most common medium of (upper-class) speech and writing (which does, however, contrast with his own Atticizing language in his most aspiring literary texts). We may conclude that not originality, but didactic perspicuity was Psellus’ main aim in discussing grammar and the place of the dialects in it.³⁵

35 See HÖRANDNER, Didactic poems (as footnote 12 above) 59.

