



SUBJUNCTIVE INTERROGATIVES IN GREEK: PROSODY & MEANING

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Introduction

In Greek, we can request permission by using a Root Subjunctive Interrogative (RSI) e.g. ‘*Na paro ena tilefono?*’ without using an overt modal operator. As first noticed by Iatridou (2010), RSIs vary in their interpretation depending on their intonation. When the Nuclear Pitch Accent (NPA) falls on the verb we get a permission-asking question ‘*May I make a call?*’ whereas when it falls on the right edge we get a requirement-asking question ‘*Should I make a call?*’. This contrast falls out if we analyse RSIs as involving a covert possibility modal operator which can get a strengthened interpretation in the presence of certain focus alternatives signaled by the placement of the NPA.

Main Claim

RSIs are analysed on a par with Root Subjunctives (RSs) as involving a covert possibility modal. However, they deserve special attention because of the way *question* prosody interacts with their meaning. We show that pure *permission* meaning arises only with the default intonation of questions (NPA on the verb) whereas in the case of special focus marking the question implicates some kind of requirement because of the interaction between the meaning of the question and certain focus alternatives.

Prosody – meaning mapping in RSIs

The facts: NPA on the verb = permission RSI	CONTRASTS IN CONTEXTS	Mipos-RSIs → #permission
<ul style="list-style-type: none">We observe that a pure permission asking-question can be derived only with the NPA on the verb. This is realized with L* NPA followed by an H-L% boundary tone (Baltazani 2002, 2007, Arvaniti & Baltazani 2005). <p>(1) Na PARO ton Niko tilefono? SUBJ take.1SG the Nick phone-call ‘Can I call Nick?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">When the NPA falls on the right edge (broad focus), the question implicates that there is an expectation that something must/is to be done. <p>(2) Na paro ton Niko TILEFONO? SUBJ take.1SG the Nick phone-call ‘Should I call Nick?’/ Is it a good idea to call Nick?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Narrow focus on a constituent (i.e. <i>Nick</i>) creates an inference that there is an expectation that somebody must be called. The effect becomes stronger with overt focus movement (see Gryllia 2008). <p>(3) Na paro ton NIKO tilefono? SUBJ take.1SG the Nick phone ‘Is it Nick that I should call?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The contrast is best shown in a context of typical permission asking question as in (4): <p><i>You are somewhere for a visit, you have forgotten your mobile and you need to make a phone call.</i> Then you can kindly ask the host (4a) but not (4b):</p> <p>(4) a. Na PARO ena tilefono? SUBJ take.1SG a phone-call ‘Can I make a phone-call?’</p> <p>b. #Na paro ena TILEFONO? ‘Should I make a phone-call?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Notice that what we have is not a special intonation pattern for permission-asking questions. When we have an overt modal both prosodic patterns are acceptable: <p>(5) a. BORO na paro ena tilefono? can SUBJ take.1SG a phone-call ‘Can I make a phone-call?’</p> <p>b. Boro na paro ena TILEFONO? ‘Can I make a phone-call?’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Further evidence for the special role of intonation in RSIs comes from the fact that the question particle <i>mipos</i> is not compatible with a <i>permission</i>-asking question. Notice that <i>mipos</i> is in general perfectly compatible with a permission-asking as shown with the overt modal in (6b): <p>(6) a. #Mipos na paro ena TILEFONO? ‘Should I make a phone-call?’</p> <p>b. Mipos boro na PARO ena tilefono? ‘Can I make a phone-call?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">The infelicity of (6a) can be explained once we consider the prosodic requirements associated with <i>mipos</i>. Baltazani (2007), building on Ladd (1996), shows that the presence of a question particle like <i>mipos</i>, is associated with broad focus (NPA on right edge). As a consequence, (7) is prosodically odd, unless NPA accent is interpreted as narrow focus on the verb. <p>(7) #Mipos na PARO ena tilefono? ‘Should I make a phone-call?’</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Given that permission arises only with default prosody of questions, incompatibility with <i>mipos</i> is an artifact of the prosodic requirements of <i>mipos</i>-questions.

Meaning variation in RSIs: modality & alternatives

I. Root Subjunctives Interrogatives: Meaning ingredients

- The meaning of RSIs should be reconstructable from the meaning of Root Subjunctives (RSs) *plus* the contribution of the question operator.
 - Root Subjunctives (RSs)** e.g. ‘*Na kalesis ton Petro.*’ can express permission, advice, request, command, wish, etc. and in many (but not all) contexts are interchangeable with imperatives (Rouchota 1994, Giannakidou 2015, Oikonomou 2016, Iatridou 2017, Staraki 2017).
 - Subjunctive mood has been examined mostly in the context of embedded environments. Here, building on a unified account of embedded and root subjunctives (Oikonomou 2016), I argue that the semantic contribution of subjunctive mood is a restriction for a modal operator which can evaluate alternatives (Villalta 2008).
 - Under this view, RSs can be analysed as *mood*-Phrases which combine with a covert modal operator by virtue of the presuppositional restriction that subjunctive mood posits:
- (8) a. Na kalesis ton Niko. b. Op <sub>[moodP mood_[+SUBJ] _[TP pro kalesis ton Nick]]
SUBJ invite the Nick
~ *You can/should call Nick.*</sub>
- (9) **Presuppositional Restriction of Subjunctive Mood (building on Villalta 2008):**
Subjunctive mood requires a modal operator which can evaluate alternatives, i.e. a modal operator with a non-null ordering source (a prioritizing ordering source).
- The modal operator expresses possibility relativized to the speaker’s desires/goals/wishes (prioritizing modal operator). The meaning of the RS in (8) is that *there is a world w’ in which the speaker’s desires/goals are satisfied and the addressee invites Nick in w’.*
- (10) [[(9)]]^w = ∃w’. Speaker’s desires in w are satisfied in w’ ∧ A calls Nick in w’
- The stronger readings of RSs can be derived when the prejacent is broadly focused, producing as an alternative its negation (i.e. ¬ *addressee invites Nick*), therefore deriving the implicature via exhaustification (Chierchia et. al 2008) that ***it’s not the case that there is a world w’ in which the speaker’s desires/goals are satisfied and the addressee doesn’t invite Peter in w’.***
 - Combining RSs with the Question Operator:** Following an Alternative Semantics approach to questions Hamblin (1973), the meaning we get is the set of possible answers as shown in (12) for (11):
- (11) a. Na kaleso ton Niko? b. LF: [_{QP} Q [_{moodP} Op mood_[+SUBJ] [_{TP} T [_{VP} call Nick]]]]

- (12) [[(11)]]^w = $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \exists w'. \text{ Speaker's desires in } w \text{ are satisfied in } w' \wedge A \text{ calls Nick in } w' \\ \neg \exists w'. \text{ Speaker's desires in } w \text{ are satisfied in } w' \wedge A \text{ calls Nick in } w' \end{array} \right\}$
- The meaning of the question in (12) explains permission-seeking questions. The next question is how variation in prosody affects their interpretation.

II. Focus alternatives and variation in meaning

- i. Default prosody:** When, the NPA is on the verb (1) the alternatives are either the same as in (12) (if we take this to be *verum focus*) or it can be argued that no alternatives arise (Gutzmann et. al. 2017). The absence of proper alternatives explains the pure *permission*-question without any additional inferences.
 - ii. Broad Focus** (NPA on the right edge)
 - Under Rooth’s (1996) approach the role of focus is to evoke a contrasting set of propositions. In questions, I take the focus operator (~) to project only up to the propositional level (TP), below the question operator (Q).
- (13) a. Na kaleso ton NIKO? b. LF: [_{QP} Q ~_{[moodP} Op mood_[+SUBJ] [_{TP} T [_{VP} call Nick]_F]]]
- The focus operator has two effects: i) it gives rise to certain alternatives and ii) it presupposes that one of the alternatives on its prejacent is true (.
 - Therefore, in the case of (13) the Question-er (Q-er) already presupposes that there is some action that the Respond-er (R-er) expects/desires, in other words, he doesn’t ask for permission but choice among different alternatives. Assuming that what is F-marked is the entire VP, the alternatives created represent different possibilities.
- (14) ~_{[moodP} Op mood_[+SUBJ] [_{TP} T [_{VP} call Nick]_F]]]
- (15) [[(14)]]^{w,f} = $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \exists w'. \text{ R-er's desires in } w \text{ are satisfied in } w' \wedge \text{ Q-er calls Peter in } w' \\ \exists w'. \text{ R-er's desires in } w \text{ are satisfied in } w' \wedge \text{ Q-er writes an e-mail in } w' \\ \exists w'. \text{ R-er's desires in } w \text{ are satisfied in } w' \wedge \text{ Q-er does nothing in } w' \end{array} \right\}$
- If the answer to (13) is positive, then we exhaustify over the rest of alternatives and derive the implicature that none of the rest actions are consistent with the addressee’s priorities. If the answer is negative, it remains open which of the relevant options are consistent with the R-er’s priorities. Similar inferences arise with narrow focus as shown by the contrasts below:
- (16) Q1: Na psifiso ton ALEXI? Q2: Na PSIFISO ton Alexi?
- ‘Should I vote for Alexis?’ ‘Can I vote for Alexis?’
- a. #Ne, opjon thes psifise. a. √Ne, opjon thes psifise.
- b. #Ne, psifise ke Kiriako ama thes. b. √Ne, psifise ke Kiriako ama thes.
- Under, the same reasoning, *mipos*-RSIs which are only consistent with broad focus cannot be interpreted as pure permission because of the alternatives evoked.
 - In contrast with RSIs, where the modal operator is covert and doesn’t have scalar alternatives, permission questions with an overt possibility modal *boro* ‘*can*’ block a stronger interpretation due to the presence of the stronger scale-mate *prepi* ‘*must*’.

Conclusion & beyond

To summarize, the modal force in RSIs is always existential (possibility); the difference in the interpretation arises due to F-marking which induces further alternatives. The presence of focus alternatives creates an existential inference that at least one of the alternatives is true. In addition, under a positive answer we get to exhaustify over the relevant alternatives which captures our intuition that the responder not only provides permission but he also prohibits the questioner from certain actions, therefore the interpretation gets stronger than pure permission. Similar analysis can be pursued for the meaning for wh-questions, e.g. ‘*Pjon na kaleso?*’ which by virtue of their semantics they evoke alternatives which undergo exhaustification under the right answer.