Intensifiers/moderators of verbal multiword expressions in Modern Greek

Meka M.1, Markantonatou S.2
1 University of the Peloponnese, Greece
2 Institute for Language and Speech Processing/Athena R.C., Greece

Abstract
We present a comprehensive view of the expression of degree modification of Modern Greek (MG) verbal multiword expressions (VMWEs) with the use of lexical elements that are not part of the VMWE. Our research draws on about 550 natural examples, retrieved from the web, for 63 VMWEs denoting ANGER, SURPRISE, AGONY, FRIGHT, ANXIETY and LOVE. Three general categories of modifiers of this type were recognized: (i) lexical elements that display intensifying or attenuating/mitigating functions as a result of grammaticalization or emphatic stress, (ii) the definite and indefinite article, intensifying και ‘and’ and, (iii) lexical elements expressing levels of gradable properties. The lexical elements in the first two categories seem to apply with a much wider VMWE population than (most of) the items of the group (iii) which is the only group of degree modifiers that seems to need to be recorded in a VMWE lexicon.

Keywords: Verbal Multiword Expressions; degree modification; lexicography

1 Introduction
To the best of our knowledge, this the first attempt to provide a comprehensive view of the expression of degree modification (amplification/intensification or attenuation/mitigation) of Modern Greek (MG) verbal multiword expressions (VMWEs) with the use of lexical elements (either single word ones or multiword expressions) that are not part of the VMWE (We will also use the term “lexicalized” for the non-free parts of a VMWE, for instance, for the English VMWE “She will kick the bucket” lexicalized are the words “to kick”, “the”, “bucket”. The term has been introduced by Savary et al. (2018)). The aim is the updating of IDION, a web-based lexicographic environment for the multidimensional documentation of MG MWEs (Markantonatou et al. 2019) with information about idiosyncratic behavior as regards degree modification phenomena. 63 VMWEs denoting ANGER, SURPRISE, AGONY, FRIGHT, ANXIETY and LOVE1 were retrieved from IDION. We should point out that we do not make a distinction among the various categories of VMWE according to semantic criteria, for instance manner of contribution of the lexicalized parts of the VMWE to the overall semantics of the construct, or syntactic criteria, for instance degree of fixedness. The reason for this choice is that the classification of the modifiers according to their distribution is beyond the scope of this work that includes the identification of these words, the description of their semantic contribution as intensifiers or mitigators and the brief discussion of other discourse functions these words may fulfill. Our research draws on 544 actual usage examples featuring these VMWE that were retrieved with the Google browser. We focused on the discovery of all possible structures involving intensification/mitigation lexical elements rather than the quantitative study of the phenomenon which we leave for future research. Three general categories of lexical elements used for degree modification of Modern Greek VMWEs were recognized: (i) lexical elements that display intensifying or mitigating functions as a result of grammaticalization or emphatic stress, (ii) the definite and indefinite article, intensifying και ‘and’ and, (iii) lexical elements expressing levels of gradable properties. We observe that these lexical elements fall in two groups in terms of distributional behavior. Lexical elements of the first two categories seem to apply with a much wider VMWE population than (most of) the items of the group (iii); distribution particularities are a fact that lexicographic practice might take into account.

2 Grammaticalized lexical items
Grammaticalized expressions include the adverbs δέχω ‘a little’, κυριολεκτικά/στην κυριολέξια ‘literally’, πραγματικά, όντως ‘really’, πράγματι ‘in fact’, ειλικρινά and the prepositional phrase στ’ αλήθεια ‘frankly’.

To the best of our knowledge, there is little to nothing as regards the literature on the impressively frequent use of κυριολεκτικά/πραγματικά with MG VMWEs. Our data indicate that κυριολεκτικά has similar functions with its English translational equivalent “literally”: it marks the speaker’s commitment to what his/her utterance denotes, it indicates the dual—literal and metaphorical—meaning of an idiom and assigns the maximal intensity to a metaphorical expression that expresses exaggeration (Israel 2002; Nerlich & Domínguez 2003). Κυριολεκτικά may occupy a pre- (1) or post- (2) VMWE position but it strongly prefers the one immediately after the verb (3):

1 There is extensive literature with reference to VMWEs denoting emotions, but this subject is beyond the scope of our work. For a recent review on the topic of how emotions are expressed by VMWEs in Modern Greek (in comparison to French), see Fotopoulou & Giouli (2018).
Κυριολεκτικά τα πήρα στο κρανίο!
Kiriolektika ta pira sto kranio!
literally them took.01.SG on.the cranium
‘I literally got mad!’

Μένω άναυδος κυριολεκτικά.
Meno anavdos kiriolektika.
stay.01.SG speechless literally
‘I am literally stunned.’

Μου κόπηκαν κυριολεκτικά τα γόνατα όταν τον ξαναείδα.
Mou kopikan kiriolektika ta gonata otan ton xanai
demy.GEN cut.03.PL literally the knees.NOM when him saw.01.SG again
‘I literally went weak at the knees when I saw him again.’

Πραγματικά (4-6) has the same syntactic preferences with κυριολεκτικά and has functions similar to its English translational equivalent “really”: it ensures the truth of the meaning of the utterance (Israel 2002; Paradis 2003) and indicates emphasis (Paradis 2003) or exaggeration as regards the expression of the speaker’s emotions (Bordet 2017). Όντως, πράγματι, ειλικρινά και στ’ αλήθεια have the same functions with πραγματικά.

Πραγματικά εμέινα εμβρόντητος από την απάντηση του υπουργού Υγείας.
Praγmatika emina emvroditos apo tin apadi tis ipyri
to minister health
really stayed.01.SG stunned from the answer of the minister of Health
‘The minister’s of Health answer came as a great surprise to me.’

Βέβαια υπάρχουν φορές που χάνει την υπομονή της και τότε γίνεται πραγματικά πυρ και μανία.
Vevea iparχun fores pu xani tin ipomoni tis ke to
of course are.03.PL times that loses the patience hers and then becomes really fire and mania
‘Of course there are times when she loses patience and she really gets furious.’

Κάθε απάντηση είναι χρήσιμη γιατί είμαι σε αναμμένα κάρβουνα πραγματικά...
Kaθe apadisi ine chrismi giati ime se anamena karvuna pragmatika...
every answer is useful because am on lit coals really
‘Every answer would be useful because I am very worried really...’

Λίγο functions as a politeness marker (Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004) and as a verbal diminutivizer denoting emotion as a result of grammaticalization (Canakis 2012). However, λίγο may have an ambiguous function, namely either as an adverbial quantifier – when the emphatic stress is on λίγο or as a verbal diminutivizer – when the emphatic stress is on the verb; this is a similar though distinct function from that of the prefix ψιλο- ‘a little’ or ‘(s)lightly’ as in ψιλοδουλεύω ‘work a little’ (Canakis 2012: 178). Σαββίδου (2012), also, argues that the ψιλο- may have a mitigating descriptive meaning or mitigating pragmatic function.

Since our data are textual, it is not always easy to distinguish between the two possible functions. In our data λίγο most probably functions as a verbal diminutivizer – like the mitigating pragmatic ψιλο- – though it could be a quantifier as well (7):

(7) Και μένει λίγο σέκος η κοπελά
Ke meni liγo seko the girl.NOM
and stays a bit numb the girl
‘The girl was left speechless in a sense’

In the light of the discussion in Canakis (2012), we searched the web for VMWEs that can both accept λίγο as a modifier and appear with their verb head modified by the prefix ψιλο-. The retrieved data confirm this possibility, at least in certain contexts, and this fact indicates that for some speakers λίγο and ψιλο- function in a similar way (8-9):

(8) Όταν διάβασα ότι δεν είναι πλέον εν ζωή,
Otăn diavasa oti dein einai pleon en zoi,
when.read.01.SG that not is any more in life,
έμεινα λίγο κάγκελο...
emina liγo kagelo...
‘When I read that he has passed away, I was a bit shocked...’

(9) Ψιλοέμεινα κάγκελο και έφυγα με το Johnnie μου λίγα λεπτά αργότερα!
Psilolemina kagelo ke efya me to Johnnie mou liγa lepta argotera!
slightly-stayed.01.SG rail and left with the Johnnie my a few minutes later
‘I was a bit shocked and left with my Johnnie a few minutes later!’

3 The articles
In our data we observe that both the definite and indefinite article may have an intensifying/emphatic function which depends on whether there is an emphatic stress on them or not.

The definite article *ο*, *η*, *το* appears with VMWEs with a fixed noun phrase functioning as a subject or an object complement. It functions as an intensifier when it is emphatically stressed especially in the informal, colloquial speech (Κλαϊρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004; Apostolou-Panara 1994; Σαλτίδου 2018; Τσιακμάκης 2017). In the following example (10) from our data the emphatic stress on the article is already represented with capital letters both for the article *ΤΟ* ‘the’ and the word *ΣΟΚ* ‘shock’.

(10) Και έφτασαν τα προϊόντα και έπαιθα ΤΟ ΣΟΚ!
Ke eflassan ta proioda ke epaitha to sok!
and arrived.03.PL the的产品.NOM and suffered.01.SG the shock.ACC
‘I was so shocked when the products arrived!’

The indefinite article *ένας*, *μια*, *ένα* appears with VMWEs with a fixed noun phrase functioning as a subject or object or copula complement. With the appropriate intonation it functions as an intensifier (Τζάρτζανος 1996; Κλαϊρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004), as an emphaser (Holton et al. 2000; Mackridge 1999; Χιότη 2010) and as a moderator (Ζαμβιδού 2012). In our data the intensifying or mitigating function of the indefinite article depends on whether an emphatic stress can be assumed or not (since our data are only textual) (11):

(11) Εκείνη την ώρα με έπαιθα ένας κρός ιδρώτας.
Ekini tin ora me epaitha enas kros ihoritas.
that the hour me took.03.SG a cold sweat.NOM
‘At that very moment I broke out in a cold sweat.’

The conjunction *και* ‘and’, among others, also has the function of an intensifier/emphaser (Τζάρτζανος 1993; Canakis 1996; Κλαϊρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004; Mackridge 1999; Χιότη 2010). Canakis (1996), who is the first to systematically analyze the functions of *και* ‘and’, points out that it functions as a filler in a negative context and it means ‘after all’ [‘πως’ or ‘δε’]. In our data this is the most common context where *και* ‘and’ appears and although its absence has no effect in the utterance meaning, its use denotes emphasis (12):

(12) Είμαι ερωτευμένη. Δεν κόβω και φλέβα.
Eimi erotevmeni. Den kovo ke fleva.
‘I am in love. not cut.01.SG and vein.
‘I am in love with him but I wouldn’t die for him.’

As regards the distribution of the grammaticalized lexical items, *κυριολεκτικά* seems to apply freely. However, we have not been able to find an example of the use of the VMWE *ΜΟΥ κόβονται τα ήπατα*, Lit. to.me cut.PASS the liver.NOM, ‘I am terrified’ with *κυριολεκτικά* and this might be an indication that the particular VMWE, and probably other VMWEs that we have not studied yet, do not combine with this adverb. A much wider search of the web, probably supported by Natural Language Processing tools, as well as well-designed studies of native speaker intuitions would be necessary in order to arrive to a precise picture about the distribution of *κυριολεκτικά*. The situation seems to be the same with *πράγματι* and *λίγο*. The distribution of the emphatic stress on the articles seems to be constrained only by the syntax of the VMWE, that is whether there is an article to be stressed or not. The remaining adverbs and PPs are in less use since their functions overlap with the functions of the widely used *κυριολεκτικά*, *πράγματι*, *λίγο* and there are no indications that they are subjected to particular selection constraints by the VMWEs. This overall picture suggests that there is no need to record information about the distribution of these lexical items in the lexical entries of the VMWEs. 2

4 Degree modification

In this section we focus on lexical elements expressing levels of gradable properties, such as inherently degree adverbs, and various manner adverbs as well as adjectives, which function as intensifiers.

4.1 Πολύ/έντελως

Degree adverbs occurring with VMWEs may denote upper or lower points in a climax (maximizers *έντελως/τελείως* ‘perfectly, completely’ and approximators *σχετικά* ‘nearly’ (13)). They may also be degree modifiers of a property/situation (boosters *πολύ* ‘a lot, much’, moderators *σχετικά*, *κάποιος* ‘somewhat’ (14)) (Paradis 1997; Γαβρηλίδου 2013; Gavrilidou 2015).

(13) Μπορώ να πω ποσό ήμεινα σχεδόν μαλάκας!
Boro na po pos emina schelon malakas!
can to say.01.SG that stayed.01.SG nearly jerk
‘I could admit that I was nearly blown away!’

2 We would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for drawing our attention to this point.

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Given that Γαβριηλίδου (2013) argues that the modification of inherently intensified verbs with πολύ is redundant and considers VMWEs as inherently intensified expressions, it can be inferred that the modification of VMWEs with πολύ would be redundant. Additionally, Gavrilidou & Giannakidou (2016) point out that πολύ modifies gradable verbs/participles that do not combine with maximizers, such as εντελώς. Coming to the object of this research, although the studied VMWEs express the maximum of a property/situation, a considerable percentage of them (11 out of 63) were found to be gradable and some of them occurred with both πολύ (15) and εντελώς (16):

(15) Κάτι φώναξε εκεί πέρα, κι εγώ τα πήρα πολύ στο κρανίο!
    something shouted.03.SG over there, and I them took a lot on.the cranium
    ‘Someone shouted something over there and I got really furious!’

(16) Τα πήρα εντελώς στο κρανίο ...
    them took.01.SG completely on.the cranium
    ‘I got absolutely furious’

4.2 Adverbs of manner
In our data we found the manner adverbs χοντρά, Lit. ‘fatly’, ἁγριά ‘wildly’, γερά, δυνατά ‘strongly’, τρελά ‘madly’, κανονικά ‘normally’, σοβαρά ‘seriously’, επικίνδυνα ‘dangerously’ which, in the spirit of Γαβριηλίδου (2013), we could consider as boosters (17). We observe that these adverbs select the categories ANGER, LOVE but not SURPRISE, AGONY, FRIGHT. This could be an indication that selection restrictions hold as regards the distribution of these adverbs. Of course, the further study on these categories would lead us to safer conclusions. We suggest that such restrictions are recorded in the lexicographic description of a MG VMWE because it does not seem possible to obtain this information from some general rule of the language (Hanks, 2013: 54).

(17) Ποδοσφαιριστής δάγκωσε χοντρά τη… λαμαρίνα με σαγηνευτική αοιδό!
    football player bit fatly the sheet iron with seductive singer
    ‘A football player fell hard for a seductive singer!’

5 External modification with VMWEs
The following cases can be considered “external modifiers” (Ernst 1981). External modification by an adjective that modifies a lexicalized noun of the VMWE occurs when the adjective can be paraphrased with an adverb (in (18) the relevant adverb is “sociologically”) that takes the meaning of the whole VMWE in its scope rather than the meaning of the modified noun only (19); “internal modification” occurs if the adjective takes only the meaning of the modified noun in its scope.

(18) Don’t rock the sociological boat with your ideas. (Gehrke & McNally 2019: 782)

(19) The federal agency decided to take the project under its well-muscled wing. (Gehrke & McNally 2019: 781)

Examples (20-21) below are instances of external modification because the adjective can be paraphrased with the adverbs πολύ/πάρα πολύ ‘very much’ applying to the meaning of the whole VMWE and not to the modified part of the VMWE only:

1. The head noun of the Noun Phrase that functions as the lexicalized subject, object or copula complement of a VMWE can be modified by an intensifying adjective. In our data, the most frequent intensifier of this type is (πολύ) μεγάλος ‘(very) big’ while the maximum degree is expressed with the adjective τεράστιος ‘huge’.

(20) Έπαθα μεγάλο σοκ
    suffered.01.SG big shock
    ‘I was shocked very much.’

The adjectives μεγάλος and πολύ seem to have a wide distribution constrained by the same rules as in the general language, therefore their application will not be mentioned in the lexicographic entry of the VMWE.
2. Particular VMWEs select particular intensifying adjectives; μου ἔρχεται βαριά/χοντρή κεραμίδα, Lit. to.me comes heavy/thick roof tile, παθαίνω διπλό/τριπλό/τετραπλό/πενταπλό/... εγκυφαλικό, Lit. I suffer double/triple/four-five-tuple/... stroke, παθαίνω απίστευτο/τρελό σοκ, Lit. I suffer unbelievable/mad shock, παθαίνω τρελή κολοκύνθη, Lit. I suffer mad CRANBERRY WORD, ἔγινα σωτηριακό/πραγματικό/έργο θηρίου/θηρίου ανήμερο, Lit. I became proper/reall/wild beast/beast untamed.

(21) Και βέβαια μας ήταν χοντρή κεραμίδα...
Ke vevea mas inhe xodri keramiða...
and of course us came.03.SG thick roof tile.NOM

‘And of course, we were floored’

In this case, each VMWE selects specific intensifying adjectives; the distribution of the adjectives is clearly idiosyncratic and this is a fact that has to be recorded in the lexicographical description of a VMWE. A similar idea has been implemented in DUELMER (Grégoire, 2010) as a special device for encoding the modifiers of the lexicalized nouns in a VMWE (such as the heads of fixed object NPs) whether these modifiers are fixed as in the cases of ανήμερο θηρίο ή κεραμίδα, or less fixed such as the adjectives “sociological” and “well-muscled” in the (18) and (19) respectively.

The extent of the fixed subject or object can be used as an intensifier (Gehrke & McNally (2019) mention blow off steam < blow off a lot of steam). In MG we find the adjective ὀλίγον ‘all, whole’ (22) and numerals (23). This property should be mentioned in the entries of the VMWEs that are found in the corresponding structures.

(22) Τον Μήτσου τον είχε ανέβει όλο το αίμα στο κεφάλι.
Toon Mítso tu eixe anebhei ólo to áima sto keφáli.
the Mitsos he GEN had ascended all the blood to the head

‘Mitsos was furious.’

(23) Το επειδόθη ξεκινάει με το ύψωμα κορμί του Jon και ο θεατής περιμένει –
To epieidóthi xekináei me to ýpso ma kormi tu Jon ke o theatís periimeni –
the episode begins with the dead body the GEN Jon and the viewer waits –
εξοντας φάτε και τα 20 νύχια του – το πότε θα αναστήσει.
egosos fai ke ta 20 nýxia tu – to pothe tha anastíthi.

‘The episode begins with John’s dead body and the viewer waits – in great agony – when it will be resurrected.’

Lastly, the (very) formal/learned lexical elements ὀλίγον τι, ὀλίγον ‘a little’, ελαφρώς ‘slightly’, ὄντος ‘really’, σχετικός ‘wildly’ were found functioning as degree modifiers. For instance, in the example below, κράνα ‘cranium’ is strongly colloquial; its co-occurrence with the formal ὀλίγον may result to intensification/emphasis (Καμηλάκη 2009) or add a humorous tint to the expression (Αναστασιάδη-Συμεωνίδη & Φλάτουρας 2004) or, as in this example, function as a politeness marker moderating the probably negative impression created by the colloquial κράνα (24):

(24) Συγνώμη και εγώ που τα πήρα ὀλίγον στην κράνα, αλλά δεν είσαι ο πρώτος,
Σygnómê kai eγo pou ta píra oλígon stin kraná, allá dén eisai o prótos,
Sorry and I that them took a little on the cranium, but not be.02.SG the first
ούτε ο δέκατος...
outhe o dekatos...
neither even the tenth

‘I am also sorry that I got somewhat furious, but you are not the first, not even the tenth…’

6 Conclusion
To sum up, our data show that most of the studied VMWE co-occur with the adverbs κορμολεκτικά ‘literally’, πραγματικά ‘really’, which have multiple functions including intensification/emphasis, as well as ἔγινα ‘a little’, whose function is ambiguous – either as a quantifier or a mitigating pragmatic indicator. Also, it seems that the distribution of MG definite and indefinite article depends on the syntactic structure of the VMWEs. Therefore, it is not necessary to record the above lexical items in the lexicographical documentation of the VMWEs. On the other hand, the fact that some VMWEs choose specific intensifying adverbs (e.g. χοντρά, ‘fatly’, άγρια ‘wildly’) or adjectives (e.g. ανήμερο, ‘untamed’, βαριά, ‘heavy’) makes their lexicographic record necessary as it is indicative of idiosyncratic behavior. In addition, it would be useful to record the simultaneous modification of some VMWEs by both πολύ ‘very’ and εντελώς/τολικός ‘perfectly/completely’, because it indicates that the intensity of the emotion can not only be enhanced but also maximized despite the fact that VMWEs are inherently intensifying lexical elements. Undoubtedly, the present study could be expanded to cover more VMWEs of the same or different semantic fields in order to shed more light to the idiosyncratic way(s) in which degree
modification is expressed and enriches their lexicographic documentation. Finally, further study of the phenomenon could include classification of the modifiers according to their distribution.

7 References


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