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## Intensifiers/moderators of verbal multiword expressions in Modern Greek

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### 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 LOVE<sup>1</sup> 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 VMWEs 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 *λίγο* ‘a little’, *κυριολεκτικά/στην κυριολεξία* ‘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 & Dominguez 2003). *Κυριολεκτικά* may occupy a pre- (1) or post- (2) VMWE position but it strongly prefers the one immediately after the verb (3):

<sup>1</sup> 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).

(1) Κυριολεκτικά τα πήρα στο κρανίο!  
 Kiriolektika ta pira sto kranio!  
 literally them took.01.SG on.the cranium  
 ‘I literally got mad!’

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

(3) Μου κόπηκαν κυριολεκτικά τα γόνατα όταν τον ξαναείδα.  
 Mou kopikan kiriolektika ta gonata otan ton xanaída.  
 my.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* and *στ’ αλήθεια* have the same functions with *πραγματικά*.

(4) Πραγματικά έμεινα εμβρόντητος από την απάντηση του υπουργού Υγείας.  
 Pragmatika emina emvroditos apo tin apadisi tu ipurygu Iyias.  
 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.’

(5) Βέβαια υπάρχουν φορές που χάνει την υπομονή της και τότε γίνεται πραγματικά πυρ και μανία.  
 Vevia iparxun fores pu xani tin ipomoni tis ke tote ginete pragmatika pir ke mania.  
 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.’

(6) Κάθε απάντηση είναι χρήσιμη γιατί είμαι σε αναμμένα κάρβουνα πραγματικά...  
 Kaθe apadisi ine xrisimi 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 κοπελιά  
 Ke meni liyo sekos i kopelia  
 and stays a bit numb the girl.NOM  
 ‘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, έμεινα λίγο κάγκελο...  
 Otan diavasa oti den ine pleon en zoi, emina liyo kagelo...  
 when read.01.SG that not is any more in life, stayed.01.SG a bit rail  
 ‘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!  
 Psiloemina kagelo ke efiga me to Johnnie mu liya 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 (Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004; Apostolou-Panara 1994; Σαλιτίδου 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 έπαθα ΤΟ ΣΟΚ!  
 Ke eftasan ta proioda ke epatha to sok!  
 and arrived.03.PL the products.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 1946; Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004), as an emphaticizer (Holton et al. 2000; Mackridge 1999; Χιώτη 2010) and as a moderator (Σαββίδου 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 έπιασε ένας κρύος ιδρώτας.  
 Ekini tin ora me epiase enas krios idrotas.  
 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/emphaticizer (Τζάρτζανος 1953; Canakis 1996; Κλαίρης & Μπαμπινιώτης 2004; Mackridge 1999; Χιώτη 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’ [‘πια’ or ‘δα’]. 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.  
 Ime erotevmeni. Den kovo ke fleva.  
 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 *πραγματικά* 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*, *πραγματικά*, *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.<sup>2</sup>

## 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/εντελώς

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

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

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

- (14) Εγώ ίσως και να ήμουν κάπως τσιμπημένη μαζί του, μα αυτός δεν ήθελε να το δει.  
 Ego isos ke na imoun kapos tsibimeni mazi tu, ma aftos den ithele na to di.  
 I maybe and was somewhat pinched with him, but he didn't want to it see  
 'I was probably a bit soft on him, but he did not want to see it.'

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, Gavriilidou & 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!  
 Kati fonaxe eki pera, ki ego ta pira poli sto kranio!  
 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 ...  
 Ta pira edelos sto kranio...  
 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', *άγρια* '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!  
 Podosferistis dagose chodra ti... lamarina me sayineftiki aiδο!  
 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  
 Epaθα megalο sok  
 suffered.01.SG big shock  
 'I was shocked very much.'

The adjectives *μεγάλος* and *πολύς* 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 έρχεται βαριά/χοντρή κεραμίδα*, Lit. to.me comes heavy/thick roof tile, *παθαίνω διπλό/τριπλό/τετραπλό/πενταπλό/... εγκεφαλικό*, Lit. I suffer double/triple/four-/five-tuple/... stroke, *παθαίνω απίστευτο/τρελό σοκ*, Lit. I suffer unbelievable/mad shock, *παθαίνω τρελή κολούμπρα*, Lit. I suffer mad CRANBERRY WORD, *έγινα σωστό/πραγματικό/άγριο θηρίο/θηρίο ανήμερο*, Lit. I became proper/real/wild beast/beast untamed.

(21) Και βέβαια μας ήρθε χοντρή κεραμίδα...  
Ke vevea mas irthe xodri keramida...  
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 DUELME (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 and *χοντρή/βαριά 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 *όλος* '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) Του Μήτσου του είχε ανέβει όλο το αίμα στο κεφάλι.  
Tu Mitsu tu ixe anevi olo to ema sto kefali.  
the Mitsos he.GEN had ascended all the blood to.the head  
'Mitsos was furious.'

(23) Το επεισόδιο ξεκινάει με το άγυχο κορμί του Jon και ο θεατής περιμένει –  
To episodio xekinai me to apsiχο kormi tu Jon ke o theatis perimeni –  
the episode begins with the dead body the.GEN Jon and the viewer waits –  
έχοντας φάει και τα 20 νύχια του – το πότε θα αναστηθεί.  
exodas fai ke ta 20 nixia tu – to pote tha anastithi.  
having eaten and the 20 nails his – the when will resurrect.03.SG.MIDDLE  
'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 *ολίγον τι*, *ολίγον* 'a little', *ελαφρώς* 'slightly', *όντως* 'really', *αγρίως* 'wildly' were found functioning as degree modifiers. For instance, in the example below, *κράνα* 'cranium' is strongly colloquial; its co-occurrence with the formal *ολίγον* may result to intensification/emphasis (Καμηλάκη 2009) or add a humorous tint to the expression (Αναστασιάδη-Συμεωνίδη & Φλιάτουρας 2004) or, as in this example, function as a politeness marker moderating the probably negative impression created by the colloquial *κράνα* (24):

(24) Συγγνώμη και εγώ που τα πήρα ολίγον στην κράνα, αλλά δεν είσαι ο πρώτος,  
Siynomi ke ego pu ta pira oliyon stin krana, ala den ise o protos  
sorry and I that them took a little on.the cranium, but not be.02.SG the first  
ούτε καν ο δέκατος...  
ute kan o dekaτος...  
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 *κυριολεκτικά* 'literally', *πραγματικά* 'really', which have multiple functions including intensification/emphasis, as well as *λίγο* '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/τελείως* '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.

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