

Vowel realization in the Rimenian variety of Kefalovryso

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Abstract

Vlach is a spoken-only language and has been recorded as endangered, lacking a unified written system (Beis & Dasulas, 2017). Studies conducted on Vlach have been mostly descriptive, with very few focusing on phonology (Dinas, 1987; Beis, 2000) or phonetics (Vrazitulis, 2023). Though the vowel system of the Vlach language is commonly reported to contain seven vowels (/i, e, a, o, u, ə, i/), the Farsherot dialect (part of which is the Rimenian variety) does not contain the central high vowel /i/ (Caragiu-Marioțeanu, 1968). The present paper investigates acoustic properties of the vowels of the Rimenian variety of Kefalovryso (Pogoni prefecture, Epirus) which, to our knowledge, has never been studied experimentally, in order to provide an acoustic description of its vowel space and to explore the status of the central vowels in this variety. We additionally compare the acoustic properties of Rimenian vowels with those of Greek, identifying areas of overlap and divergence that may bear on phonological categorization and language contact.

On the basis of linguistic profiling, the community can be characterized as Greek-dominant bilingual, with Vlach maintained as a regularly used secondary language. For the purpose of this study ten bilingual speakers of Kefalovryso (five male, five female) were recorded producing Greek and Vlach vowels in directed speech. The material consisted of carefully selected Greek and Vlach words with CV1CV2 syllabic structure, all stressed on the first syllable. The first consonant was bilabial and the second bilabial or alveolar. F1 and F2 measurements were made with Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2025) and were subsequently normalized using the Lobanov method in NORM (Thomas & Kental, 2007). Absolute and normalized vowel duration measurements were also conducted. A Linear Mixed Model in SPSS was employed to locate differences between the two vowel systems according to language and gender.

Preliminary results indicate that Rimenian vowels /o/ and /u/ are realized in a more open and front position relative to their Greek counterparts. Further comparisons among the Rimenian vowels showed that the centrals /ə/ and /i/ are acoustically close to /a/ and /e/ respectively, suggesting substantial overlap in the acoustic space. These patterns, along with additional findings, will be discussed in light of linguistic contact between Rimenian and Greek