

Dialect borrowing versus internal developments in epic Greek: Reconsidering the dative plural in -εσσι

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The high degree of linguistic variation in epic Greek is clearly related to its being the traditional language of epic poetry, composed in a rigid meter. This variation is commonly thought to be the result of linguistic contact between poets (and audiences) speaking different dialects of Greek, notably Ionic and Aeolic.

While the 'base dialect' of epic Greek is clearly Ionic, Homer's non-Ionic features are usually assumed to have been adopted from an Aeolian poetic tradition. Discussions usually focus on the question whether there was an extended period of contact between Ionian and Aeolian traditions (the Diffusion Theory, e.g. Horrocks 1997), or whether the Ionic coloring of the epics resulted from a switch of default poetic dialect among singers (the Phase Theory, e.g. West 1988).

My leading question is a different one: can the linguistic variety of epic Greek be explained by internal developments of their traditional language, to the effect that many (if not most) apparent Aeolisms are in fact creations of the *Kunstsprache*?

In the present paper, I reconsider the consonant stem dative plural in -εσσι, a morphological innovation occurring in various forms of Greek (cf. García Ramón 1990, Cassio 2006; 2017a), but most widespread in Aeolic dialects and therefore usually considered an Aeolism (most recently Cassio 2017a; 2017b). I present arguments for viewing -εσσι itself as analogically created within the epic tradition, independent of its existence in any vernacular. Taking Wackernagel's explanation of the ending (1903) as a starting point (i.e. -εϛ -εσσι in analogy with the *o*-stem endings -οι -οισι), I will show concrete examples of situations in which the innovation -εσσι imposed itself. I will also draw some general conclusions regarding the mechanisms behind the creation of 'artificial' forms in epic Greek (on which in general see Witte 1972, Hackstein 2010).

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