

**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**  
**Seeger Center for Hellenic Studies**

**Workshop**

# **Language Variation and Change: Evidence from Modern Greek Vowels**

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**Respondent: Joshua T. Katz, Classics**

If you recognize a New York accent, you can probably name its distinctive characteristics; yet, most of its melodic properties are subtle and lie under the level of consciousness of most speakers. The same is true for all accents. In this talk, I discuss how accentual variation is conveyed in speech productions and present experimental evidence from studies, which were conducted in Athens (Greece) and Nicosia (Cyprus). In fact, these studies appear to be the first to gather and compare acoustic material from urban Standard Modern Greek (SMG) and Cypriot Greek (CG) vowels in a unified manner. These two varieties differ most significantly in their consonants, but it is very difficult to perceive differences in their vowels. The subjects are young—between 18-23—Athenian and Nicosian students. In the talk, I provide evidence about the gradient effects of vowel variation and change in Greek and demonstrate that the vowels of these two varieties differ in their duration, articulatory space, and dynamic properties of their frequencies. I also argue that their variation is best understood with respect to Greek “vowel raising” and “vowel reduction” and show that phonetic variation follows systematic patterns; for instance, it applies on specific subsystems (unstressed vowels vary significantly between the two varieties whereas stressed vowels display only minor differences). The implications of these findings for studies on language variation, language change, and language pathology are also discussed.

**Charalampos Themistocleous** holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the University of Athens. His doctoral dissertation deals with the interaction between prosody and information structure in Greek. He has participated in various research programs funded by the Academy of Athens, the Leventis Foundation, and the Open University of Cyprus. He presented his work in peer-reviewed journals, book volumes, and international scientific conferences. He is also the author of the book *Experimental Methodology and Statistics in Linguistics by using R*, (forthcoming). A member of the International Phonetic Association (IPA), International Speech Communication Association (ISCA), and the Cyprus Linguistics Association (CyLing), his research interests include models of speech production, language variation and change, and phonological models of language variation.

**Friday, November 20, 2015**

**1:30 p.m.**

**Scheide Caldwell House, Room 103**

*Supported by The Christos G. and Rhoda Papaioannou Modern Greek Studies Fund*