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**BETWEEN DIALECT AND STANDARD: TOWARDS A
MORPHOLOGY OF THE VERBAL SYSTEM OF THE
MACEDONIAN DIALECT OF VRBNIK, ALBANIA¹**

The village of Vrbnik is located in an isolated valley in the Korça region of southern Albania. The nearest town, Bilišta, is located seven kilometres to the west through high hills along an undeveloped dirt road. Just beyond the hills to the east of the village is the Greek border. The proximity of the border is a defining characteristic of the village, whose inhabitants consider themselves one of the westernmost Aegean villages. Vrbnik historically maintained close cultural ties with the Aegean villages of Smrdeš and V'mbel.

In Vrbnik there are approximately eighty households with a population of about three hundred residents. The population of the village is both diminishing and aging as the younger generation leaves the village for better jobs in cities or abroad.

The village considers itself a pure Macedonian village and it has been recognized as such in publications on the Macedonians of Albania (v. for example, Budimovski 1983:96)². There are, however, some Christian Albanians who have married into the village. The dominant language used in the village is Macedonian, though all residents are bi-lingual and speak Albanian with those who do not know Macedonian.

¹ Транскрипцијата на дијалектните текстови е од авторот на текстот (ред.)

² Budimovski notes (1983:77) that the survey by the British vice-consul G.C. Blunt in 1897 included population figures for Macedonians in a number of villages, but that he neglected to mention the village of Vrbnik where several hundred Macedonians were known to have resided. Popovski (1981:246) cites the figure 600 residents for Vrbnik which we consider high.

The village school offers instruction in Macedonian through the fourth grade. Beyond this grade, the students continue schooling in Albanian in Bilišta. According to one village resident, from the end of the Balkan Wars to 1924, instruction in the village school was in Greek, and from 1924 to 1944 in Albanian. Since 1945 with the recognition of the Macedonian minority in Albania, instruction has been given in this school in Macedonian (Macedonian instruction in this village school is also mentioned in Popovski 1981:248). The first teachers at the school were sent from the Republic of Macedonia. After 1948 instruction has been provided by local village teachers.³ Although the teachers have been from this area, instruction is given in standard Macedonian. Students also receive instruction in Albanian to help them make the transition to the Albanian school in Bilišta.

The influence of the standard language on the local dialect comes not only from this schooling, but also, during the last ten years, from television and other media. Prior to 1990, access to Macedonian media was restricted. Now, however, there are a number of satellite dishes in the village and everyone watches television broadcasts from MTV -Macedonian Television broadcasting from Skopje. Some households also receive the journal *Macedonia*, published in Skopje.

According to Vidoeski's classification, Vrbnik is on the edge of the Kostur dialect area. A number of isoglosses define this area. Here I will mention only those features relating to the verbal system. In this preliminary study⁴, we note that the verbal system in Vrbnik is marked for the following categories: tense, aspect, voice, and mood. There is a non-past, and three pasts: aorist, imperfect, *ima*-perfect, and *imaše* pluperfect. Verbs form a verbal noun, verbal adjective, and verbal adverb. The category of *status*, that is, the grammaticalized expression of speaker's view (see Aronson and Friedman for discussion) encoded in the standard language in the opposition between the verbal I-forms on the one hand and the simplex pasts and *ima/imaše* perfects on the other, is marginal in this dialect since the I-forms have effectively disappeared. Further field study may reveal a resurgence in the use of the I-forms due to pressure from the standard language. Here I will only comment briefly on the few verbal I-forms to occur in the corpus

under study here. The lack of the verbal I-form also means a lack of an opposition between expectative and hypothetical conditions and the lack of verbal meanings associated with the I-past, mainly admirative, dubitative, and non-witnessed. In this paper I will discuss mainly features of the non-past. Discussion of the past tense forms remains for future study.

There are two aspects: perfective and imperfective. In Vrbnik we see the expected formation of imperfective verbs with the suffix *-va/-vi* *zborva*, *zborvi* and the loss of the e-class of verbs for those which have a stem ending in a consonant: *moži* but *umre*. Perfective verbs are either prefixed or have the suffix *-n-* (of course these verbs in the non-past belong to the i-stem class, e.g. *ke o paniš imoniko* 'you'll drop the watermelon'). Perfective verbs do not occur in the non-past except subordinated to a set of modal words, including at least *ke*, *da*, *neka*, and *ako*.

I will begin discussion with forms of the non-past. As expected from dialect descriptions of this region, Vrbnik maintains three stem-classes: *-a*, *-e*, *-i*. In the non-past there is not, then, a complete merger of the *e* and *i* classes, as in some other Aegean dialects, but the *e*-class is restricted for the most part, to verbs with a vowel prior to the stem vowel. Other verbs which in the standard language belong to the *e*-class have merged with the *i*-class, e.g. *dojde*→*dojdi*, *pomože*→*pomoži*:

1. *Ke dojdish da gi zemiš.*

You will come to take them.

2. *Pri nas i 5 pari da imaš ne možiš da najdeš ništo da kupiš.*

Here where we live even if you have 5 cents you can't find anything to buy.

3. *Možiš da ni pomožiš za da dojme?*

Can you help us to come?

but:

4. *Ti znaeš šo so mene živat i starite (svekor i svekārva)*

you know, the old people (my mother and father-in-law) live with us.

5. *Nema so šo da se obueš vo nozite vo dožd*

There is nothing for you to put on your feet in rainy weather.

³ We are indebted to Kristo Kallfa for sharing his written memoirs of the village with us.

⁴ This study is based on a mixed corpus. Most of the data is taken from ten years personal correspondence between relatives in Vrbnik with a relative in Canada. Data is also taken from an account of the village's history written by a person from the village. Finally, data was also collected during a field research.

The verb **najde** vacillates between stem classes, most likely due to dialect mixing, compare example 2 above given again here,

6. Pri nas i 5 pari da imaš nemozhiš da **najdeš** ništo da kupiš

and:

7. Ovo pismo da ve **najdi** svičkite dobro.

May this letter find all of you well.

Below are given the non-past endings for the three stem classes:

The endings for verbs in the a-class are:

| | | | |
|-----------|-----|----------|---------|
| jas/jaska | -am | nie/nija | -me |
| ti | -š | vie/vija | -te |
| taja | -# | tie/tija | -e, -at |
| toj | | | |
| toa | | | |

The endings for verbs in the i-class are:

| | |
|----|---------|
| -a | -me |
| -š | -te |
| -# | -e, -at |

The endings for verbs in the e-class are:

| | |
|---------|---------|
| -a, -am | -me |
| -š | -te |
| -# | -e, -at |

Peter Hill, writing on the Lerin dialect of Gorno Kalenik, notes the spread of the first singular desinence -m to verbs of other stem classes, and the third plural ending -at to verbs in the mixed i/e class. He attributes the spread to inter-dialect and dialect-standard contact. We see similar results of similar phenomena in the Vrbnik data, as seen in the data given here. This variation is most likely due to dialect mixing; tape transcripts and the letters suggest that typical for the dialect is a first singular ending -a for i- and e-

stems, and a third plural ending -e, findings consistent with Šklifov and others. In the examples that follows I will illustrate the variation between forms. Examples of variation in the first singular showing expected alternation between -am and -a include:

8. ...**sakam** da e oblečime so bel fustan
[for her wedding] I want us to dress her in a white dress.

9. Paketo ne **znam** mi go imaš isprateno eli ne.
I don't know whether or not you have sent the package.

In contrast with:

10. **Ke spijsa**; jas **ke peja**.
I will sleep, and you will sleep; I will sing, and you will sing.

Alternation in the ending -at in the third plural is seen in the following examples.

11. decata rastat i **sakat**
the children are growing up and wanting [things].

Compare this example with the more typical Kostur -e ending:

12. te **pozdravuve** i te **celuve** ot daleku
[the children] greet you and kiss you from far away.

13. i decata ti neka **piše** pismo
Let your children write letters, too.

The fact that these endings are in free variation can be seen if we compare similar examples written by the same person:

14. Mažite **ode** so kozi po 1-2 dena
The men go with the goats for one or two days.

15. Decata **odat** na školje vo selo duri na četvărto odelenie.
The children go to school in the village up to the fourth grade.

It may be that the third-plural of the e-stems were particularly susceptible to shift to -at, to avoid homonymy between the third singular, and third plural.

The forms of the present of the verb to be 'sum' show variation as well. According to Šklifov, in the Gornokostursko, Korešćata subgroup we should expect the following system:

| | |
|---------|----------|
| se | sme, sne |
| si | ste |
| e, esti | se |

Based on the written texts and field tapes, the Vrbnik present forms of the verb **sum** are:

| | |
|---------|---------|
| se/sum | sme/sne |
| si | ste |
| e, esti | se |

Šklifov does not remark on the variation in the first person singular, third person singular, and first plural. In the first person singular and plural variation may be due to dialect mixing, perhaps now intensified by increased contact with standard Macedonian. The letters may be due to dialect mixing. Here are some examples showing variation in the first person in similar contexts:

16. Jaska denes **su**m utre ne **su**m i sakam da ne me zaboravite dur koga **su**m živ.

Today I am alive, tomorrow I'm not and I want you not to forget me while I live.

17. Jas **se** 30 godini
I am thirty years old

18. Jas **se** bes rabota ...
I am without work.....

19. nie tuka **sme** svičkite dobri.
that all of us here are well.

But in a different letter:

20. nie tuka **sne** svički dobri

In the third person singular the forms **e** and **esti** at first appear to be in free variation, as the following examples demonstrate:

21. Tate **esti** 55 godini

My father is 55 years old.

Taja **esti** ќerka moja

She is my daughter.

22. Aleksandar **e** 6 godini i maloto momiče **e** 1 godina

Alexander is six years old and the little girl is one year.

Roland Schmieger, writing on the Aegean dialect of Nestram, notes similar variation in the third singular. He concludes that there is no semantic difference between the orthotonic and clitic forms, only a syntactic one. The syntactic distinction is seen in the Vrbnik data as well. Only the long form can be used in clause initial position. In the letters none of the authors mark clauses with commas, nor do they always break sentences, but on the tapes, clausal break is clear. Thus, we can see that the form **esti** can stand in initial position:

23. Denes šo ti piša pismoto tãrgnae edna druga žena so sve dete **esti** čupa na Aco.

Today while I am writing to you another woman left with all her children she is Aco's daughter.

In the next example the first **esti** could be replaced by **e**, but not the second one:

24. si e godime sestrami deteto **esti** indžinier ...**esti** našo ne turčin

we are marrying my sister the young man is an engineer he is ours not a Turk.

One slight difference in usage appears to be the preference for clitic **e** in marked modal constructions, and fixed expressions such as **kakva da e**, **šo da e** e.g. conditionals and optatives:

25. da vi e vurnato.

May it be returned to you.

26. da ti **e** živ [mažo]

May [your husband] be alive.

27. Aku opitata šo možime da rabotame nie možime **šo da e**

If you ask what we can do for work, we can do anything.

28. [tia] rabotat zemjodelje rabota **kakva da e neka e mana kolku da e** tia ne se plašat.

[they] work as farmers whatever work there is Let it be as hard as possible, they're not afraid.

29. **aku e** kăsmet možime da dojdime

If it is fate we can come.

While we see the use of the clitic form **e** in the majority of these examples, there is variation here as well, e.g.:

30. aku sakaš i aku **esti** eftino da mi pratiš tro kafe

If you want, and if it is inexpensive, send me a little coffee.

The difference is, perhaps, tied to degrees of expectation and hypotheticalness, but that remains at present an open question.

I will now turn briefly to the past tense forms. In Vrbnik there has been a restructuring of the verbal system since the l-forms have been lost for the most. The category of status opposition between the verbal l-forms and the simplex past and ima/imaše perfects is irrelevant in this dialect since the l-forms have effectively disappeared. The lack of the verbal l-form also means a lack of an opposition between expectative and hypothetical conditions and the lack of verbal meanings associated with the l-past, mainly admiring, dubitative, and non-witnessed. Although the verbal l-forms and *sum* perfect are not in regular use, a study of their residual use may lead to a conclusion that they exist with status function, in particular carrying a meaning of non-confirmative. Note, for example, that Šklifov remarks on the loss of the verbal l-forms, but notes that they are encountered, albeit rarely, in folk texts. Nonetheless, his dialect excerpt from Dumbeni contains an l-form used as a reported, non-witnessed:

Ot staro vreme nija se kazvame bulgari. Sa' mu ot il'ada devetstotini i četirdese i edna godina fatie da ni vele partizanite, šo **sne bile** nija makedonci.

Since olden times we have called ourselves Bulgars. But in 1941 they began to tell us partisans, that we were Macedonians.

In Vrbnik, the ima perfect and pluperfect are more fully grammaticalized than in the standard language since here there is not a restriction on ima plus the verb *to be*, e.g. As Friedman notes, in the far southwest we get forms such as ima bidenó.

Both in standard Macedonian and in the Vrbnik dialect, there is one synthetic modal form, namely the imperative and analytic modal forms⁵. Analytic forms involve the interaction of a series of modal words, particles and conjunctions, which interact with the verbal forms. These modal words which can co-occur with the perfective non-past make up the set of modal words. In the standard language there is a rich set of interacting particles: *ako*, *da*, *dokolku*, *duri da/ne*, *dodeka da/ne*, *neka*, *li*, and the hypothetical *bi* used with the verbal l-form. In Vrbnik, with the loss of the verbal l-forms, and less variation in modal expressions of conditionality, we see a smaller set of modal words which interact with the verbal system, namely: *da* which occurs in both dependent and independent modal constructions, *ako* which occurs in subordinate clauses of condition, *neka* used in third person concessives, and *ke* a marker of expectation and futurity.

The goal of this paper has been to provide a preliminary sketch of some of the morphologic, syntactic, and semantic features of the verbal system of the Kostur dialect spoken in the Albanian village Vrbnik. This paper is part of an on-going study of this dialect. Future studies will provide further details on the grammar, lexicon and folklore of this village. Vrbnik remains a significant dialect because, due to its years of isolation, the dialect is still used as the primary source of communication and has, therefore, preserved many features of Kostur dialects.

⁵ See Kramer 1986 for a detailed study of analytic modal forms in standard Macedonian.

Sources:

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