

THE ROLE OF MACEDONIAN LANGUAGE IN THE PRESERVATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN TORONTO

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Toronto, as the largest centre of Macedonians outside of Macedonia offers a unique environment for studying ethnic identity, language shift, language maintenance, and language contact among Macedonians. Not only is the community made up of people who arrived during different historic eras, from different countries, countries with varied policies towards Macedonian in particular and minority language rights in general, the current climate in Canada is one rife with language policy and language planning problems of its own. The dynamic of French-English relations and the official bilingual policy has led to the creation of heritage language programs and an official governmental policy of multi-culturalism which purports to advance the language and culture of many diverse ethnic groups in Canada. While studies on diverse ethnic communities in North America focus on similar problems, e.g. the loss of cultural identity, the redefinition of ethnic identity as the language and culture of the host country become dominant, or the alienation of generations caused by different cultural and linguistic expectations, the study of Macedonian offers some particularly interesting socio-linguistic problems. Mace-

donians have arrived in Toronto in three more or less discrete waves—the first wave arrived during the first decades of the twentieth century, the second arrived in the inter-war period, and in the aftermath of the Greek Civil War, and finally, the third wave began in the early sixties and has continued to the present. Each wave of immigrants to Canada brought a notion of ethnicity which reflected both their place of origin and the political climate of the period. Thus, for example, many of the early Macedonian immigrant clubs and institutions i.e. church, social clubs, etc. were either Bulgarian identified, or village identified. Up to the nineteen sixties Macedonian language instruction in Toronto was primarily in the Bulgarian Exarchate churches, such as Svety Kiril i Metodij, using Bulgarian primers supplied by the MPO (Macedonian Political Organization) of Indiana. Unlike the first two waves of immigrants who arrived having had no schooling in Macedonian, particularly since they emigrated before codification of the literary language, and from northern Greece, the last wave of immigrants has come predominantly from Vardar Macedonia (now the Republic of Macedonia), bringing better educated people from more urban backgrounds. As a result of the different backgrounds of the immigrants, language contact involves not only Macedonian in contact with English, but also Macedonian dialects in contact with and conflict with the literary norms. Danesi, writing about Italian-Canadian communities, uses the term Italian Koine to refer to the lingua franca, or in his terms ethnolect, of the community, an idiom which gradually blends dialectal forms with the standard language while incorporating and assimilating certain English words, e.g. *caro* 'car', *roomo* 'room', etc. It is probable that the situation will be found to be similar for Macedonian.

In this paper I will give a general overview of the language situation in Toronto¹. The topics I will touch on here concern intergenerational attitudes towards the use, importance, and retention of Macedonian. As we shall discover, particularly in examining the use of Macedonian by speakers from Aegean Macedonia, the minority language policies of Greece which lead on the one hand to language death and assimilation in the home country, breed a strong desire for language retention in the diaspora, while the open multi-cultural policies of Canada, while encouraging retention of some aspects of the home culture, seem to lead, in the second-generation immigrants, that is the first generation born children of Macedonian immigrants, to a weakening of foreign language use. The discussion will be based largely on a series of interviews conducted in Toronto with approximately two dozen speakers from both Vardar and Aegean Macedonia, speakers ranging in age from approximately twenty to sixty. The current study does not include speakers from Pirin Macedonia solely because their numbers are fewer and I have, as yet, no informants. and the different history of Macedonian in Bulgaria requires a separate study.²

Since the partition of Macedonia following the Balkan wars of 1912-13, the Macedonian language has developed asymmetrically in the countries in which it is spoken. While in Vardar Macedonia the language was codified and began functioning as an official language, in Bulgaria and Greece the official governmental policies have been, almost without exception, policies which explicitly seek the linguistic and cultural assimilation of the Macedonian minorities. After codification in 1944, Macedonian achieved official status in Yugoslavia. This event has far-

1 See Kramer (1993) for a more detailed discussion.

2 See Kramer (forthcoming) in Goebel et al., *Handbuch of Kontaktlinguistik*, Mouton DeGruyter.

reaching impact on the development of Macedonian even in the diaspora and on the attitudes towards Macedonian by various speakers. As Hassanpour (1993) has written concerning Kurdish—a language which has no homeland but is subject to the different language policies in Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Syria and the former USSR—changes in the status of a language imply first and foremost the allocation or reallocation of its functions. A language which acquires, for example, official status, will inevitably be used for purposes of government which includes regular use in administration, justice, military, official documents, state publishing, broadcasting, and, usually, formal education. Decisions on the status of a language are usually of an extra-linguistic nature, they regulate the language needs of a monolingual state or the position of a language or languages in bi- or multi-lingual circumstances (Cobarrubias 1983, Hassanpour 1988). "Status Planning, as opposed to corpus planning which is deliberate change in the structure of language (grammar, vocabulary, morphology, phonology, etc.), especially when minority languages are present, is primarily a political issue involving both the state and the entire population of a country." One additional effect of such policies, particularly in a case such as Macedonian in which the language develops asymmetrically, is that speakers from those areas where the full development of the language is prohibited, look upon the standardized language as a step-parent, a forced relation which they had no part in nurturing since, by virtue of its official status within the Yugoslav federation, Macedonian has undergone significant changes due not only to the influence of Serbo-Croatian, but also due to its use in the full range of activities in the Macedonian Republic. In Toronto, the identification of the literary language with Yugoslavia has led to various resentments by the earlier immigrants, some of whom, as stated earlier, under the auspices of the MPO were taught Bulgarian in their church schools up to the

nineteen sixties. Many speakers from Aegean Macedonia were illiterate in Macedonian and many continue to use Macedonian solely as a spoken language.

When we look at the types of official attitudes a nation government may have towards minority languages we can see how different countries of origin help shape the attitude of different speakers towards the standard language and how this affects language use in diaspora. Cobarrubias (1983: 71) has proposed the following taxonomy of policies towards minority languages (see also Hassanpour 1993: 140):

1. attempts to kill a language
2. letting a language die
3. unsupported co-existence
4. partial support of specific language functions
5. adoption as an official language.

In Yugoslavia policy 5 was adopted, in Greece, policy 1, and in Canada, policy 4, official governmental recognition of Macedonian as a heritage language, has led to the translation of certain government pamphlets, ads, access to media.

Future analyses of language use will have to deal specifically with at least three areas: 1. code switching English/ Macedonian, and the phonological and morphological adaptation of loan words, 2. consistent use of either literary language or dialect and 3. cultural and linguistic identification of various immigrant groups by country of origin and age. Here I will just discuss attitudes towards the use of Macedonian, the standard language and problems of language maintenance. Before turning to specific attitudes expressed concerning Macedonian, it must be stated that in the interviews, speakers tried to speak with me consistently in Macedonian, more specifically in literary Macedonian. My position in the community is such that I am strongly identified with the literary language.

When I interviewed people from Aegean Macedonia in Toronto, I noticed that for them Macedonian identity is tied very closely with the Macedonian language and, although they often do not know the standard literary language, they would like their children to speak and read Macedonian. Remarks made by these speakers give strong testimony to the difficulties of learning Macedonian in Greece.³ The first quote is from an interview with a man from Brevina who told me:

Дома ние секогаш го зборувавме македонскиот јазик. Но секогаш што се вели кај нас и стисот, начи, сидот има уши. ...во црквата мораш да зборуваш грчки, во школото мораш да зборуваш грчки, на улица, треба да се поздравиш со брат ти на грчки, оти ако не се поздравиш на грчки со брат ти, ако слуши некој дојаш, начи, до казни, то парична казна а исто и до затвор и многу пати на пример во школото ако не зборуваш грчки, предацата ќе те извади надвор пред другите деца и сите треба да те пукнат и да ти речат дека ти ја страмиш Грција... Јас коа се родив, мајка ми беше на реката, переше... Јас тогаш бев две недели гулем, начи, мало бебенце, и плачев а мајка ми викаше од каде што переше да не плачам, оти ќе дојди, ќе ме нахрани во тоа место се наде, начи, полицванот, во тоа место, и одма на мајка ми из рече зошто ти тој јазик го употребуваш тој забран ти јазик. Мајка ми му рече дека секој дете што се родува треба прв да си знае својот мајчин јазик, а после

³ All quotes are transcribed as given. I have not corrected or changed to literary standard. I am grateful to all the Macedonians in Toronto who helped me with this project. In particular to Tanas Jovanovski for his invaluable assistance.

има време за другите јазици. И затоа мајка ми беше осудена на затвор и беше околу шест недели во затвор...

At home we always spoke Macedonian. But always, as we say, walls have ears. In the Church you have to speak Greek, in school you have to speak Greek, on the street you have to greet your own brother in Greek because if someone comes and hears you, it means a fine or prison. And many times for example in school if you don't speak Greek the teacher would take you outside in front of the other children and everybody had to spit at you and tell you that you were shaming Greece. Once after I was born my mother was at the river doing laundry, I was two weeks old, and I cried, so my mother called to me, she told me not to cry, that she would come and feed me. There was a police station near there and immediately someone came up to my mother and asked her why she was speaking that forbidden language. My mother said that a baby needs to learn its mother tongue first, and then there is time for other languages. Because of that my mother was sentenced to six weeks in jail.

Often language identity is tied to ethnic identity.⁴ In a number of families in Toronto loyalties are divided. This conflict over language use and ethnic identity is evident in the following:

Татко ми зборуваше македонски, баба ми зборуваше македонски, тие луѓе не знаеја никако друг јазик освен македонски. Со ние не можиме

⁴ For a discussion of language use and ethnic identity among urban Muslims in Macedonia, see Fraenkel (1993).

ништо друго да бидиме освен македонци, не можиме да бидиме Грците, а сега јас имам роднини таму, и тие се има од некои погрчени да речиме, борба водиме секоаш ка ќе се најдиме со нив. Први брачеди, сие, тие велат дека тие се Грци, јас велам, дека сум Македонец(ц) дека не сум Грк. Голема борба вистина измеѓу нас, први брачеди, сие. Татко му и татко ми се браќа... нивни деца се Грци а уствари јас сум Македонец. Како можи тоа да биди.

My father spoke Macedonian, my grandmother spoke Macedonian. These people didn't know any other language except Macedonian. So we can't be anything other than Macedonians. We can't be Greeks, but now I have relatives there and they have become somewhat Hellenized, let's say. We fight whenever we are together. We are first cousins. They say they are Greek, I say I'm a Macedonian. It's really a big battle between us. We're first cousins. My father and his father are brothers. Their children are Greeks, but in fact I'm Macedonian. How can this be?

Although parents of children growing up in Canada would like their children to speak Macedonian it is difficult for this first generation to pass on their language to their children. This situation is, of course, not unusual and the linguistic pressure to assimilate to the official language is felt by all ethnic groups. A father from Vardar Macedonia summed up the difficulty as follows:

Моите деца ги носам на школу, овде да учат македонски меѓутоа и малку тешкотии со нив додека све разбираат македонски, кога јас сум зборувал на македонски, тие разбираат меѓутоа

одговараат на англиски. Македонскиот јазик е важен за нив зато што потеклото нивно е македонско и то ако знаат македонски веќе англиски сигурно дека знаат, таа се два јазици и многу полесно се научи трет.

I take my children to Macedonian school but it's a little hard; they understand when I speak to them in Macedonian, but they always answer in English. The Macedonian language is important for them since they are of Macedonian background, and if they know English and Macedonian, two languages, then surely, a third will come more easily to them.

Among some younger speakers, it seems that Macedonian identity is more closely allied with a certain cultural iconography rather than with language use, per se. When I spoke with Macedonians of university age, those who were either born or raised in Canada, they identified strongly as Macedonians, but felt more closely tied to the cultural manifestations of their ethnic background and less with the language per se. One example of this cultural identity can be seen in events surrounding the statue of Alexander the Great, presented to the city of Toronto by the Hellenic Pan-Macedonian Association, which has, over the past several years been the focus of public protest. There have been several violent demonstrations in which more than two thousand Macedonians participated. In 1991 there was a confrontation between Greeks and Macedonians when the Macedonians tried to place a wreath at the statue. As one community leader told me, "The statue is on public land and everyone should have the right to honour the statue." A spokesperson for the Greek community was quoted in the press as stating, "If they want to come as Canadians or Americans to lay a wreath that's fine. But they cannot come as Macedonians because they are Greek." A student

at the university of Toronto gave an impassioned talk in Macedonian class after a bitter exchange of letters between Macedonian and Greek students in the university newspaper, stating that historical facts are irrelevant in talking about Alexander, it is enough that Macedonians identify with Alexander to make him a key symbol of the community.

The conflict with the Greek community helps to strengthen Macedonian cultural identity. The history of the Balkans was cited frequently to me in remarks from younger Macedonians. The following remarks are representative:

The first generation to come at the turn of the century was the first generation allowed a formal education. The Greeks laugh at the people in our community. They say, "We've got doctors, lawyers—what have you got?" But we're just starting. The reason we are shepherders or whatever is because of you people. They would get to a certain level and then you wouldn't let them go any further.

Macedonians have a tighter knit family unit. They've never had a homeland since the time of Alexander—they have had no state, no nation to identify with, yet the race still exists. That is quite an accomplishment. It's unique to say that I'm a Macedonian given that realistically there's not been a nation state since the time of Alexander. In this country, the only thing is that you cannot and should not deny what my forefathers were. Essentially what the Greeks did, by not identifying them as a distinct ethnic group, they're saying that my past didn't exist.

The second most important Macedonian symbol is Cyril and Methodius. Again historical questions do not play the most significant role. What is important is that young Macedonians identify with them as cultural icons. When the idea was raised in class that Cyril and Methodius might not have been Macedonian, but Greek, one student who was born and raised in Bitola until she was thirteen, avowed that we know they were Slavic Macedonians by their last name, Miladinov, they were the brothers Miladinovci. I do not mean to suggest that this response is typical, but rather, that it points to the students' overall impressionistic view of Macedonian history.

The third symbol is Goce Delčev and the Ilinden uprising. The picnic celebrated annually on Ilinden was first organized in 1959 and each year thousands of Macedonians from various churches and village communities participate. The last two years the picnic has been held at the Macedonian national park and the event continues to be a unifying one for the community.

While the Macedonian language has been an important, if not one of the most important, facets of Macedonianess amongst older informants, my students at the University of Toronto seem to know nothing about the history of the Macedonian language nor about the battles fought for the codification and recognition of the standard language. They are unfamiliar with the names Misirkov, Krčovski, Pejčinovik, Blaže Koneski. Those young Macedonians whom I have interviewed, although they have a very strong Macedonian identity, do not consider the language per se as an important element of that identity in Canada. As one young man, active in church and politics said to me:

If I have something to express and I feel it's important, I'd rather express it in a language that I can get across what I'm saying than struggle with

the language to prove a point that I can speak or understand.

While this paper cites the difficulties encountered in the maintenance of the Macedonian language, the community itself is an active one. Macedonian studies have developed quite impressively in Canada. One must first mention the work of historian Andrew Rossos, of the University of Toronto. Dr. Lilian Petroff of the Multicultural Historical Society has produced two monographs and numerous articles on the Macedonian immigrant community, with special emphasis on the first-wave immigrants, and the history of Macedonian women in Canada. To date only one article on the Macedonian language has appeared in *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, a paper written in 1959 by Michael Kay on English Loan words in Macedonian. I hope my own work will fill this gap. There have been several anthropological studies on the Toronto community and several more are in the research stage. Here we may cite the book *Men in White Aprons*, by Harry Herman, the study of the Želevo village association by Foto Tomev, and the work entitled *Whose are You? Ethnic Identity among Toronto Macedonians*, by Peter Vasiliades. Dr. Blaga Petroska of Skopje has written a study on the Macedonian family in Canada. The Macedonian Historical Society has established a library and organizes lectures on various aspects of Macedonian history. The Macedonian language is taught in the church and is also taught as a Heritage Language in several school districts. For the past four years the Macedonian community under the sponsorship of Canadian Macedonian Place has funded a Macedonian language course in the Department of Slavic Languages of the University of Toronto. The Macedonian Students' Association of the University of Toronto has been very active in supporting the course and in supporting Macedonian issues at the University. Finally, I should mention Jane Hacking, who defended a disserta-

tion in October 1993 on Russian and Macedonian linguistics. This is the first Canadian thesis on the Macedonian language.

Although the Macedonian language is threatened in Canada by pressures on younger speakers to use English, the Macedonian presence and Macedonian identity are thriving in Toronto. Perhaps events in the Republic of Macedonia will strengthen younger Macedonians' ties to the standard language. Although different generations place different value on the use and maintenance of the Macedonian language in their community, my work to date reflects a shared commitment to and awareness and appreciation of Macedonian culture. I hope that language can remain a part of that identity.

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