

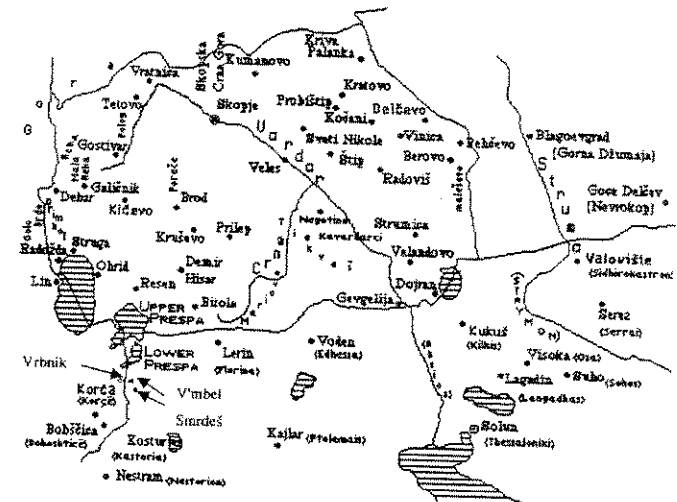
Pronominal Variation in the Macedonian Dialect of Vrbnik, Albania

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1.0. Description of the Village of Vrbnik

The village of Vrbnik is located in an isolated valley in the Korča region of southern Albania (see *Figure 1*). The nearest town is Bilišta, located seven kilometers to the west through high hills along an undeveloped dirt road.¹

Figure 1:
The Republic of Macedonia and Adjacent Territory
(Based on Friedman 2001 and Šklifov 1973).



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 the westernmost village in Aegean Macedonia.² Vrbnik historically maintained close cultural ties with the Aegean villages of Smrdeš and V'mbel.

In the summer of 2000 there were in Vrbnik 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.³

The village considers itself a pure Macedonian village and it has been recognized as such in publications on the Macedonians of Albania (see, for example, Budimovski 1983:96).⁴ There are, however, some Christian Albanians who have married into the village.⁵ The dominant language used in the village is Macedonian, though all residents are bilingual and speak standard Albanian with those who do not know Macedonian.

The public buildings in the village include a town hall in the village center, two small stores, a church and two small chapels, which recently have been restored for religious services, a hall for weddings and other large public gatherings, and a school.

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.⁶ 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 for more than 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 Macedonian Television (MTV) broadcasting from Skopje. Some households also receive publications from Skopje.

Most speakers, despite this recent influx of Macedonian media, speak in the Vrbnik dialect. Older speakers, in particular, are acutely aware of those features in

the standard language which are different from the dialect. While conducting field research, we noted that the older speakers would correct the younger speakers when they exhibited features of the standard, as opposed to Vrbnik, norm. The inhabitants of the village view their dialect as a Kostur dialect, spoken in the farthest west village in the Kostur region. They are extremely proud of this, and identify more as Aegean Macedonians from Kostur, than as Macedonians, *per se*. Because Vrbnik is surrounded by hills with no road arteries leading out to bigger towns, the isolation from the Kostur region during the Hoxha era was felt acutely. Not only was there an electrified fence that ran along the border in the hills just beyond the village, but there was also no access to Macedonian radio and television. This left Vrbnik even more isolated from the villages of V'mbel and Smrdeš, villages with whom they intermarried, traded and with whom they had shared village Saint's days. People in the village referred to themselves as *edno selce vo dupka* 'a little village in a hole.' This isolation did, however, help preserve local dialect features.

Our initial study of this dialect was based on data collected from twenty years of letters sent by two families in Vrbnik to their Canadian relatives. This data base was augmented by field research. In this study, which serves as the beginning of a longer monograph, we will present a synchronic description of innovation in the pronominal system.⁷

2. Pronominal System

The pronominal system of the Vrbnik dialect shares many of the features of the Kostur dialects — see Šklifov 1973, Vidoeski 1981, Hill 1991 and Drvožanov 1993 for more details — but there are two significant innovations in the Vrbnik system, which will be the main topic of discussion here.

2.1. Subject Pronouns

The subject personal pronouns show some vacillation in form as can be seen in the following table. Forms given first are more frequently used:

jas/jaska/aska 'I'	nia/nie 'we'
ti 'you'	via/vie plural 'you'
taja/taa 'she'	tia/tie 'they'
toj 'he'	
toa 'it'	

Preliminary study suggests that in the first-person singular, variation between *jas* and *jaska* is pragmatically motivated. Hill (1991), describing the dialect of Gorno Kalenik, suggests that the form *jaska* carries a nuance of emphasis or contrast. We note a similar function of this pronoun in Vrbnik. (All examples are either from letters written from Vrbnik, field research or the Kallfa history.⁸)

- (1) Imate rodnini vo Canada aku sakate da mu zbornite? Na radioto k'e vi go slušne glaso i da gi pozdravite so edna pesna. I *jaska* gi zedov doma vo mojata kuqa i ve pozdravi so edna pesna. (LT)
 'If you have relatives in Canada, would like to talk with them? They will hear your voice on the radio and you can greet them with a song. I, too, took them home to my house and sent you greeting with a song.'
- (2) I *jaska* ... 20 godini rabota vo Bilišta đărvodelec no sega ot ku dojde demokracijata sme bez rabota. (LT)
 'Even I ... worked for twenty years in Bilishta as a woodworker but now since democracy has come, we are out of work.'

In the plural forms, Šklifov (1993) notes both *nia/nie* and *via/vie* as occurring throughout Kostur. It is not clear if the vacillation is due to interdialect contact or more recent contact with the standard language.

2.2. Object Pronouns

Variation and innovation is seen especially in the direct object and dative forms of the pronouns and the forms of the possessive pronouns. Here we see a tendency toward greater analyticity and loss of the synthetic forms, particularly in the third person. In the table below, we have left blank forms that do not occur due to apparent merger with the direct forms.⁹ In the third-person direct object clitics the vocalic forms *o* and *i* were more common in allegro speech. The feminine third-person clitic *e* was used fairly consistently. As will be seen in the commentary which follows, even the long forms of the direct object are subject to loss and replacement.

mene	me	mene	mi
tebe	te	tebe	ti
nego	go/o		mu
nea	e/a/ja/mu		mu
nas	ne		ni (ne rekoe)
vas	ve		vi
niv	gi/i	nimi	im/mu
	Direct		Indirect

The clitic pronouns are used more consistently than the long forms. While the pronoun is typically reduplicated, the reduplication is not as consistent as in the standard language. Perhaps due to Albanian influence the reduplicated pronoun is becoming more facultative than grammaticalized. Note the lack of reduplication in the following examples :

- (3) Vo Albania i živi i umreni se razbudia za da bare svoite bliski vo Amerika.
 'In Albania both the living and the dead have risen up to find their nearest kin in America.' (LT)
- (4) Vi čestitame i prazniko na Kračun i novata godina.
 'We wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.' (LT)

Elsewhere (Schallert and Kramer 1994) we have discussed possible causes for the vacillation in the form of the feminine clitic pronouns and the merger of the third-person pronouns. In part the vacillation is due to the greater phonological instability of the feminine forms, which are either purely vocalic or begin with a palatal glide, whereas the masculine forms typically have initial consonantal phonemes (*m-*, *g-*) which may have contributed for the preference for these forms to be generalized.

The loss of distinctive dative-case forms and the merger of these into the masculine singular form is common in many dialects. There are several possible causes for this development: language contact, simplification, and pragmatics and discourse structure (see Schallert and Kramer 1994 for a more detailed discussion). Gender markedness may also account for the generalization of the masculine clitic since masculine is less marked semantically, although morphologically more “pronounced” or “prominent.”

While speakers would accept some synthetic forms, for example, *mi davaš mene*, the tendency in the dative is to use the preposition *na* and the accusative pronouns: *mu davam na nego*, *mu davaš na nea*. Speakers were quite hesitant to select the long-form pronouns and in some instances, they used the nominative, reflecting general loss of subject/object distinctions: *go pulja toj* ‘I see him,’ *e pulja taja* ‘I see her,’ *i pulja tie* ‘I see him’ (FIdN). It is clear from our fieldwork that the pronominal system is undergoing a major restructuring and that further research will be necessary.

2.3. Possessive Pronouns

The forms of the possessive pronouns show similar trends — in particular, we see in the third-person singular and plural a generalization of the third-person plural possessive pronoun. While not patterning exactly like the spread of *mu* in the dative, the use of the third-person form *temen* is similar in its loss of marking for gender and number. In the table below we give forms of the possessive pronouns:

moj, moja, moe, moi naš, naša, naše/našo naši
 tvoj, tvoja, tvoe, tvoi vaš, vaša, vaše/vašo, vaši
 temen, temna, temno, temni (FIdN)

Šklifov (1993) notes the variation *naše/našo*, *vaše/vašo* (80). In our data sample, forms in *-e* predominate, but there are isolated examples of *-o*, for example:

- (5) Denes kogato go zedov *vašoto* pismo so golema rados go otvori.
 ‘Today when I received your letter I opened it with great happiness.’ (LT)
- (6) Nauči bratušedke vo Kanada pri vas dojdoe eden maž so žena ot seloto *našo*.
 ‘Know, cousin, that a man with his wife from our village have come to you in Canada.’ (LT)

The use of *temen* in the third-person plural has been documented by Vidoeski (1965:59-60) and Šklifov (1973). Neither author, however, has commented on the use of this possessive pronoun with singular referent. Note, however, the following examples:

- (7) taja e *temna* nevesta, toj e *temno* momče
 ‘she is *his* wife, he is *her* man.’ (FIdN)
- (8) Prodolži da predava do 1948 godina a *temnoto* okinuvanje od učiteluvanjeto dojde so prekinuvanje na svičkite odnosi so S.F.R. Jugoslavija od strana na Albanskata vlada.
 (KH)
 ‘[She] continued to teach up until 1948, but *her* departure from teaching coincided with the severing by the Albanian government of all relations with the S.F.R. Yugoslavia.’
- (9) Ova makedonska naselba ... ima osobeni vrednosti za Kostursko-egejskomakedonskata naselba, *temnata* istoria, kultura i tradicii ... (KH)
 ‘This Macedonian district ... has particular value for the Kostur-Aegean Macedonian district, *its* history, culture and traditions ...’

In one interview, an informant tried to speak more formally and in inquiring about someone's girlfriend in Canada first asked about *nejna prijateljka* 'her friend,' then corrected herself and substituted *nivna prijateljka*, literally, 'their friend.' This example provides further evidence that in the third person there is no longer distinctive marking for gender and number. The third-person possessive marker *temen* has spread across the gender and number distinction. We argue here that one possible motivation for this change is by analogy with the use of *mu* in its possessive function. Here *mu*, also unmarked in the dialect for gender and number, has a similar possessive function: *majka mu na Nada* 'Nada's mother,' *majka mu na Jovan* 'Jovan's mother,' *majka mu na decata* 'the children's mother.' This possessive function of the dative third-person pronoun served, perhaps, as the catalyst for the spread of a single third-person possessive pronoun.

Across Macedonian linguistic territory there is a great deal of vacillation in pronoun use and competition between different subsystems. In Skopje, for example, the subject pronouns *on, ona* 'he, she' occur alongside *toj, ta*.

Cross-linguistically it is apparent that pronominal systems are volatile and subject to borrowing and innovation. The Vrbnik data fits into a general pattern across Macedonian dialect territory, whereby there is a tendency to merge subject and object forms, and to simplify gender and number.

Notes

1. Subsequent to our visit, the road was paved and one of the inhabitants of the village bought a small van to provide transportation to Bilišta.
2. Aegean Macedonia is a term generally used to refer to the Macedonia territory awarded to Greece after the Balkan wars of 1912-13. Those interested in a detailed analysis of Kostur dialects should refer to Šklifov 1977 and Vidoeski 1999. Schallert, this volume, discusses phonological details of the Vrbnik dialect.
3. Many of the people with whom we spoke while in the village have since sold their livestock and moved to other countries.
4. Budimovski (1983:77) notes 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 for residents of Vrbnik, which we consider high.

Balkanistica 18 (2005)

5. In Vrbnik, there is strong evidence of religious based identity. Hence, "pure Macedonian" refers to the fact that it is an Orthodox Christian village. The term "Turk" refers to a Muslim. In one letter, for example, the author refers to her sister's fiancé ... *esti našo ne turčin*. 'He is not a Turk, he is ours.' In fact, he was a monolingual Albanian Christian.

6. We are indebted to Kristo Kallfa for sharing his written memoirs of the village.

7. We are particularly indebted to Virginia Stoymenoff for sharing her written correspondence with us, and to all those people in Vrbnik who generously helped us during our stay in the village.

8. Most of the letters were written in Macedonian using Albanian orthography. Note, however, in the first example the variation in the representation of Macedonian *k* as either *k'* or *q*. All examples taken from letters (designated "LT") will be cited with original orthography, punctuation and capitalization. Field notes (designated "FldN"), the Kallfa history (designated "KH") and letters written in Cyrillic have been transcribed using standard transcription.

9. The absence of these forms will need to be verified by further research.

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Balkanistica 18 (2005)

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