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Pomak

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Abstract

Pomak, *pomatsko* or *na pomashki*, refers to a number of non-standardized South Slavic varieties spoken by Muslim communities in Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. Pomak is generally no longer transmitted to younger generations. Although Pomak is traditionally considered a conservative Bulgarian dialect, it exhibits some significant grammatical innovations that should mitigate this characterization. It has recently attracted attention for the typologically-rare use of ‘nominal tense’ due to an innovative development of its three-way deictic system, but also shows other innovations such as the extension of differential object marking to singular feminine proper nouns.

Keywords: Minority language; Bulgaria; Greece; Turkey

Pomak, *pomatsko* or *na pomashki*, refers to a number of non-standardized South Slavic varieties spoken by Muslim communities in Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey. A common alternate language name is Rhodopean, *na rodopski*, which is based on the name of the Rhodope Mountains where Pomaks have traditionally lived. There are no official statistics on the number of people who self-identify as Pomaks (among other identities) and who speak or understand Pomak to different degrees (Adamou and Fanciullo 2018).

Pomak has no official status and is the language of the family and the community. It is rarely used in writing, whether formally or informally. When used in writing, speakers opt for the script of the language of schooling; in Bulgaria, the Cyrillic script; in Turkey, the Latin script; and in Greece, either the Greek or the Latin scripts (Kahl 2007; Manova 2011; Adamou and Fanciullo 2018).

Following a robust trend during the twentieth century, Pomak is generally no longer transmitted to younger generations for the benefit of the standardized varieties in each country: standardized Bulgarian in Bulgaria (Kanevska-Nikolova 2012), and Turkish in Turkey (Kahl 2007) as well as in Greece where Pomaks are part of the Muslim/Turkish Minority of Thrace with access to a bilingual Greek-Turkish education protected by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne (Adamou 2010a, 2012).

From a dialectological perspective, Pomak belongs to the Eastern group of the South Slavic language branch. Pomak is traditionally considered a Bulgarian dialect and is typically described as the most conservative South Slavic variety (see among others Miletič 1912; Mirčev et al. 1962–1981; Kanevska-Nikolova 2006; Antonova-Vasileva and Mitrinov 2011). However, Adamou (2009, 2011) notes a number of significant grammatical innovations that should mitigate this characterization. Pomak is similar to other varieties spoken by Christian populations who live in the Rhodope Mountains and differs from the Slavic varieties spoken by other Muslim populations in the Balkans who live in Albania, in North Macedonia and in Kosovo (e.g., the Torbesh and Gorani) (for an overview of Muslim populations in the Balkans see Voss and Tebizova-Sack 2019).

At the phonetic level, Pomak varieties are generally characterized by the use of the vowel [ɔ] in place of the Proto-Slavonic *jers* and the nasal vowels [ɛ̃] and [ɔ̃]; the open front vowel [æ] and the use of the Proto-Slavonic vowel [y]; the palatalization of the consonants before the front vowels *e* and *i*; as well as the reduction *o* > *a/u* and *e* > *i* (see among others Kabasanov 1963; Stojčev 1965, 1970, 1983).

At the grammatical level, whereas Bulgarian and Macedonian lost the case system, Pomak varieties have preserved case to a large extent. Adamou (2009) reports the use of nominative, genitive–dative based on the dative forms, accusative based on the old genitive–accusative, and vocative case in Pomak varieties from Greece. Case is also described for the varieties spoken in Bulgaria in the early literature (see among others Popkonstantinov 1889; Stojkov 1962; Kabasanov 1963), but is nowadays practically not in use, most likely under the broader influence of standardized Bulgarian (Kanevska-Nikolova 2001, 2012). Regarding the case system, Adamou (2009) notes an innovation in a Pomak variety spoken in Greece at the level of animacy marking in case, a phenomenon that the author refers to as ‘differential object marking’ in agreement with the typological literature. Animacy marking is found in Old Church Slavonic and is present in modern Slavic languages. Where Pomak innovates is in that it extends this marking from masculine to feminine proper nouns in singular. See example (1), where the accusative case is used for the feminine proper noun ‘Meriem’ and compare with the nominative case for the same proper noun.

- (1) *huse'in-Ø* *i'ft'a* *meri'em-a*
 PN.SG.M-NOM want.AOR.3SG PN.SG.F-ACC
a'la *meri'em-Ø* *gu=* *ni=* *i'ft'a*
 but PN.SG.F-NOM ACC.3SG.M- NEG- want.AOR.3SG
 ‘Hussein liked Meriem, but Meriem didn’t like him.’ (adapted from Adamou 2009: 389)

Another feature that characterizes Pomak is the use of three deictic suffixes with a spatial-pragmatic reference, similar to Macedonian and unlike Bulgarian. The Pomak deictic suffixes partake in the formation of definite articles, demonstratives, possessive pronouns, relative pronouns, and temporal subordinators (Adamou 2011, 2013). The three Pomak deictic suffixes allow a distinction in ‘here and now’ between a referent which is close to the speaker’s sphere, marked by the *-s-* suffix as in (2a); close to the addressee’s sphere, marked by the *-t-* suffix as in (2b); and away from both, marked by the *-n-* suffix as in (2c). The kind of deictic system is termed ‘person oriented’. Personal spheres are not strictly spatial but can be determined by pragmatic and discursive criteria. Some authors offer descriptions of Pomak varieties as being ‘distance oriented’ where the speaker is the centre, in pragmatic or spatial terms (Kanevska-Nikolova 2006). Such distinctions could indicate different stages in the development of the deictic system.

[context: table close to the speaker]

- (2a) *'jela* *nah* *'matsa-sa*
 come.IMP.2SG to table.ACC.SG.F-DEF.SPKR.SG.F
 ‘Come to the table!’ (adapted from Adamou 2011: 875)

[context: table close to the interlocutor]

- (2b) *na* *'matsa-ta*
 at table.ACC.SG.F-DEF.ADDR.SG.F
 ‘At the table!’ (adapted from Adamou 2011: 875)

[context: table away from both interlocutors]

- (3c) *pri* *'matsa-na*
 next table.ACC.SG.F-DEF.DIST.SG.F

(4d) *a'ga uti'fli-l-i po u'dvode*
 when go-EVD-PL more out

'srefta-l-i 'majka =mu
 meet-EVD-PL mother.ACC.SG.F -POSS.3SG.M

'When they went a little further, they met his mother.' (adapted from Adamou 2010b: 413)

Adamou (2011) observes that the temporal reference of the main clause generally coincides with the temporal reference of the NP, but not necessarily. Based on experimental data, Adamou and Haendler (2020) further show that past temporal meaning at the level of the NP is less acceptable when there is no agreement with the clausal tense but that sentences with no such agreement are nonetheless acceptable, compared to violations in gender and number agreement. This means that, even if it is not the preferred option, Pomak comprehenders can trigger an independent past interpretation of the nominal argument with respect to the clausal tense. This independence is an important aspect of the definition of nominal tense.

Finally, Adamou (2008, 2013) reports that even though Pomak varieties in Greece have developed a morphologically overt expression of evidentiality, similar to Macedonian and Bulgarian, it is currently being replaced by the perfect paradigm. Compare examples in (5), where a speaker in his 70s uses the evidential form without the auxiliary in (5a) and a child recounts the tale using the perfect form with the auxiliary (5b).

(5a) *na'a'nif i'ma-l-o 'sfadba*
 once have-EVD-3SG.N marriage.NOM.SG.F
 'Once upon a time there was (-AUX) a marriage...'
 (adapted from Adamou 2013: 230)

(5b) *naja'nuf je i'ma-l-o ja'no ai'fe*
 once AUX(be).3SG have-PRF-N one.SG.N PN.SG
 'Once upon a time there was (+AUX) an Aishe...'
 (adapted from Adamou 2013: 230)

The variation and ongoing loss of an overt expression of evidentiality is not limited to language acquisition by the younger generation and can be traced in available materials from the area of Xanthi, Greece from the 1960s up to today (Adamou 2013 based on available materials in Theoharidis 1996; Rogo 2002; Kokkas 2004a, 2004b).

At the lexical level, Pomak speakers stand out for the use a number of lexical items that are present in Old Church Slavonic as well as Turkish borrowings for religious-cultural expressions such as greetings and thanking expressions (sometimes from Arabic) (e.g., *hofge'ldin* 'welcome'; *sa'lam a'lekum*; 'meraba' 'hallo'; *a'lah ka'bulele*; *bere'ket var'sin*; *a'lah ka'bul e'tsin*), numerals above 5, close kinship terms (e.g., *bu'bajko* 'dad' (reg. *buba*); 'ane' 'mom'; 'abla' 'elder sister'), and Turkish names and surnames (Adamou 2010). Also see Stojkov (1962) for similar observations in Bulgaria.

Finally, when looking at the effects of language contact in a diachronic perspective, Pomak varieties share many properties of the Balkan linguistic area such as presence of a 'will' future,

subjunctive, genitive–dative merger, postposed articles, and to some extent evidentiality. Additional influences from specific contact languages can also be found in grammar. For example, in Pomak spoken in Greece, *'oti* ‘because’ is a stable borrowing from Greek, while *tam* ‘just as’ is an unstable borrowing from Turkish (Adamou 2010b).

To conclude, Pomak exhibits some interesting linguistic developments both in a Slavic and in a cross-linguistic perspective. More research needs to be done on these endangered varieties and, in particular, those spoken in Greece that were not impacted by dialect levelling through contact with standardized Bulgarian as well as those spoken in Turkey where research is virtually non-existent.

Abbreviations

1SG/1PL first person singular/plural

2SG/2PL second person singular/plural

3SG/3PL third person singular/plural

ACC accusative

ADDR addressee

AOR aorist

AUX auxiliary

DAT dative

DEF definite

DIST distal

EVD evidential

F feminine

FUT future

HAB habitual

IMPF imperfect

IPFV imperfective

M masculine

N neuter

NOM nominative

PFV perfective

PL plural

PN proper noun

POSS possessive

PRF perfect

PRO pronoun

PRS present

PST past

REFL reflexive

REL relative

SG singular

SPKR speaker

Ø zero morpheme

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