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**Edited by  
Brian D. Joseph  
and  
Arnold M. Zwicky**

**The Ohio State University  
Department of Linguistics**

**204 Cunz Hall  
1841 Millikin Road  
Columbus, Ohio 43210-1229  
U. S. A.**

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A Greek-Bulgarian Mischsprache in the Rhodope?\*

Brian D. Joseph  
The Ohio State University

In an excursus in his Neugriechischen Studien II (1894: 90-92), Gustav Meyer discusses what he refers to as "Ein bulgarisch-griechischer Mischdialekt im Rhodopegebirge". The dialect in question was located in the Rhodope, in the area of Cépina, and was spoken by Pomaks, i.e. Moslem ethnic Bulgarians. This dialect had been described first by the Greek scholar Skordelis twenty years earlier,<sup>1</sup> who suggested that it was a form of Greek.<sup>2</sup> Meyer was rather of the opinion that it was a Bulgarian dialect, and it is clear that this is undoubtedly the proper view to take. Importantly, though, to judge from the title he gave to his excursus, it seems that Meyer felt that there was a further designation that was appropriate for this dialect; in particular, he seems to have believed that it could be classified as a "Mischdialekt", a "mixed dialect".

It is not my intention here to present new facts concerning this dialect, or even to delve at all deeply into the facts of the dialect as Meyer presents them. Indeed, Meyer's presentation is based on that of Skordelis, and Skordelis provided nothing more than a relatively brief word-list. There may indeed be more recent accounts available of this dialect (or ones just like it), but they need not be of any concern here.

Instead, I plan to consider carefully the nature of Meyer's claim that this is a "Mischdialekt", and in particular to examine just what this means in the light of the recent reopening of the question of "Mischsprachen"---"mixed languages"---by Sarah Thomason in several recent papers of hers<sup>3</sup> and by Thomason and Terrence Kaufman in their forthcoming book Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics<sup>4</sup>.

I take as my starting point for this discussion (as do Thomason and Kaufman (p. 1)) a passage from Schuchardt (1884: 5) that, by opposing his own views to those of Max Müller, clearly lays out the controversy in the 19th century concerning "mixed languages", i.e. languages whose genetic origins are such that they are the offspring of more than one "parent" language, instead of showing the more familiar single parent origin:

Mit mehr Recht als MAX MÜLLER gesagt hat: "Es gibt keine Mischsprache", werden wir sagen können: "Es gibt keine völlig ungemischte Sprache".

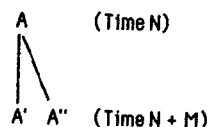
Müller's actual statement on the subject, as taken from his Lectures on the Science of Language (Müller 1878<sup>2</sup>), is worth citing, though, for it brings out an important distinction in the controversy and points to the need for some clarification. It runs as follows: 'We [have] had to lay down two axioms ... the first declares grammar to be the most essential element, and therefore the ground of classification in all languages ... the second denies the possibility of a mixed language' (p. 82). It is this second axiom that Schuchardt has apparently picked up on in the passage cited above. Müller goes on, however, to say that 'there is hardly a language which in one sense may not be called a mixed language. No nation or tribe was ever so completely isolated as not to admit the

importation of a certain number of foreign words.' Thus, what Müller is claiming in denying the existence of "mixed languages" is that there are no languages with "mixed grammar". He does, though, seem to be allowing for language mixture in a trivial sense, i.e. that which arises through lexical borrowing. However, there is a certain vagueness in talking about grammar in this context: for example, would borrowed morphology or borrowed syntactic patterns constitute "mixed grammar"? To a certain extent, then, what is at issue is the definition of "language mixture". It is to this particular facet of the question that Thomason and Kaufman make a contribution, by providing a clear characterization of "mixed language", thereby making it a technical term.

Their technical characterization of "mixed language" has to be understood in terms of the significance of the controversy regarding language mixture, summed up so neatly in the above quotation from Schuchardt. The importance of the possible existence of such a language type stemmed from the state of linguistic research in the 19th century. This period was witness to truly spectacular achievements in historical linguistics, and these advancements were made possible largely through the development of the methodology now known as the Comparative Method. Mixed languages, if they existed, posed a threat to the findings of historical linguists and to the methodology they used because mixed languages, by their very nature, run counter to the basic assumptions that allow the comparative method to work.

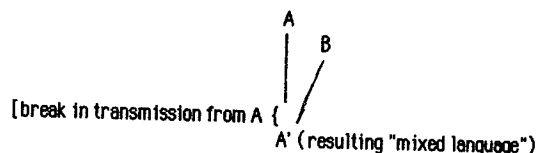
In particular, successful application of the comparative method depends on an assumption of direct lineal descent on the part of two or more languages from some common source, as indicated in (1), where N is some arbitrary point in time taken as the starting point for the investigation, N + M is some arbitrary point in time later than N, and A' and A'' are changed forms of A, and thus are offspring of A:

(1) Direct Lineal Descent



If, on the other hand, the descent through time from the language stage A to later forms of A involves a significant influence from another language in a particular set of social circumstances, there can be a break in the direct lineal transmission of A to subsequent sets of speakers; if such an "imperfect transmission" of A occurs--to use the descriptive label of Thomason and Kaufman--as in (2), then the resulting language in a sense has two parents, i.e. is a mixed language:

(2)



In such a case, if a mixed language results, then, Thomason and Kaufman argue, "the label 'genetic

relationship' does not properly apply" (p. 15)--A' is not the direct lineal descendant of A but rather is "agenetic" as far as linguistic family relationships are concerned. Accordingly, in such a situation, the Comparative Method could not draw on or be applied to the outcome of these developments.

Normally in language contact, the extent of the influence of one language over another is neither so great nor so drastic nor so intense over a relatively short period of time, e.g. causing language shift within one generation, that it leads to a true break in transmission. It is also not the case that the necessary social factors are generally present that are conducive to such a break--e.g. the failure of the shifting group to be fully "integrated into the group which provided it with a new language" (Thomason & Kaufman, p. 15). However, the conditions necessary for such drastic breaks in direct lineal transmission of a language have demonstrably occurred in the past, thereby creating truly "mixed languages", languages that have arisen by a peculiar set of social circumstances possible (but not necessary) when two (or more) speech communities come into contact with one another.

Examples of such mixed languages include pidgins and creoles--Tok Pisin, the emerging creolized national language of New Guinea is one such case--but also certain nonpidgin/noncreole<sup>5</sup> languages such as Ma'a,<sup>6</sup> an African language with a Cushitic lexical base but Bantu grammatical structure, or Michif,<sup>7</sup> the language spoken by many residents of the Turtle Mountain Chippewa reservation in North Dakota that generally has French nouns and adjectives--together with their structural patterns--but Plains Cree verbs and verbal syntax. Thus it seems that mixed languages do exist; they are perhaps not to be found to the extent that Schuchardt believed, but neither are they the impossibility that Müller believed them to be. What makes them rare is the fact that the social circumstances that can lead to these truly mixed languages do not frequently arise in language contact situations.

With this background concerning mixed languages, and armed now with a definition that allows the notion "mixed language" to be treated as a technical term, the Rhodope dialect reported on by Meyer can be examined. The facts that Meyer gives for this dialect are a list of 23 verbs built up of a Greek stem--specifically the aoristic (i.e. perfective aspect) stem--with a productive Bulgarian derivational suffix, *-ova-*; the forms in question include those in (3):

- (3) *argosovam* 'I work' (cf. Greek *ἐργάζομαι* [erǵázome], aorist stem *ἐργασ-* [erǵas-])
- arnisovam* 'I deny' (cf. Greek *ἀρνῶμαι* [arnṓme], aorist stem *ἀρνησ-* [arnis-])
- diakonisovam* 'I serve' (cf. Greek *διακονῶ* [ðjakonó], aorist stem *διακονησ-* [ðjakonis-])
- zalisovam* 'I am dizzy' (cf. Greek *ζαλίζομαι* [zalízome], aorist stem *ζαλισ-* [zalis-])
- prokopsovam* 'I succeed' (cf. Greek *προκόπτω* [prokópto], aorist stem *προκοπῶ-* [prokopis-])
- xarisovam* 'I give' (cf. Greek *χαρίζω* [xarízo], aorist stem *χαρισ-* [xaris-])
- xonepsovam* 'I digest' (cf. Greek *χώνευω* [xonévo], aorist stem *χώνεψ-* [xoneps-]).

Meyer also lists several nouns as well that are from Greek, as in (4):

- (4) gunia 'corner' (cf. Greek γωνία [gonia])  
 drum 'road' (cf. Greek δρόμος [dromos])  
 zuna 'belt' (cf. Greek ζώνη [zoni])  
 kromit 'onion' (cf. Greek κρομμύδι [kromidi]).

It turns out, as Meyer observes, that the nouns of Greek origin in this dialect are ones that are also found elsewhere in Bulgarian; that is to say, their existence in this speech community need not be directly due to Greek influence but instead--if this is a Bulgarian dialect, as Meyer suggests--they could simply be in this dialect as the result of direct lineal descent from the source of Bulgarian dialects.

This last observation is important in the context in which this discussion began, namely in the context of a concern for the existence of "mixed language forms", for it suggests that this Rhodope speech community is not truly a "Mischdialekt", e.g. Greek with Bulgarian grammar, but rather is a dialect of Bulgarian. Furthermore, the evidence presented in (3) is consistent with this view, for these facts show only the effects of a very common occurrence when loan words enter a language--the words are adapted to the borrowing language's morphological patterns. In this case, Greek aoristic verb stems were made over in the borrowing language, Bulgarian, with productive Bulgarian derivational verbal morphology, i.e. the suffix *-ova-*. Since the source of this suffix is Bulgarian, it would presuppose--or perhaps demonstrate--that the dialect in question is a Bulgarian dialect, one that happens to have an overlay of some Greek lexical input,<sup>9</sup> and not a "mixed dialect".

Morphological reshaping of loans is such a common development in instances of language contact that it probably does not need exemplification, but in (5) some examples are given that are especially relevant to the matter at hand of Greek verbal forms being borrowed into the Čepina dialect of Bulgarian and morphologically remade. In these examples in (5), Turkish simple past tense verbal stems have been borrowed into Greek and remade with a native Greek verbal derivational suffix, *-ίζω*:

- (5) γλεντ-ίζω [ɣlɛndizɔ] 'I celebrate' (cf. Turkish *gülen-mek* (INFINITIVE), simple past stem *güledi-*)  
 καβουρντ-ίζω [kavurdizɔ] 'I roast' (cf. Turkish *kavur-mak* (INFINITIVE), simple past stem *kavurdi-*)  
 μπαιλντ-ίζω [baɪlɛndizɔ] 'I faint' (cf. Turkish *bayıl-mak* (INFINITIVE), simple past stem *bayıldı-*)  
 μπογιαντ-ίζω [boɣadizɔ] 'I paint' (cf. Turkish *boya-mak* (INFINITIVE), simple past stem *boyadı-*)  
 νταβραντ-ίζω [dɛvrɛndizɔ] 'I strengthen' (cf. Turkish *davran-mak* (INFINITIVE), simple past stem *davrandı-*)  
 νταγιαντ-ίζω [dɛɣɛndizɔ] 'I bear' (cf. Turkish *dayan-mak* (INFINITIVE), simple past stem *dayandı-*).

While it is not entirely clear why past stems, in the case of the Turkish loans, or aoristic stems--one of whose functions is in the formation of completive aspect past tenses--in the case of Greek loans, should have been the basis for the borrowings and reshaping noted here,<sup>10</sup> other such instances are apparently to be found all over the Balkans.<sup>11</sup> At the very least, though, the examples in (5) show that what happened in the Čepina dialect of Bulgarian is not at all unusual.

This Rhodope dialect that Meyer labelled as a "Mischdialekt", then, probably is not mixed, at least not in the now technical sense of "mixed language" developed by Thomason and Kaufman, nor even in Müller's vague sense of showing "mixed grammar". It is a "mixed dialect" only in the most trivial sense, i.e. only in that there are some nonnative, i.e. non-Bulgarian and specifically Greek--elements in the dialect, most evidently in the form of the stems of a class of verbs. Thus it is mixed just in the one way in which Müller himself sanctioned the notion of language mixture, i.e. via lexical borrowings. It is not, however, a speech form that has arisen under the special conditions that seem necessary to bring on a wholesale shift by a speech community from one language to another in a short period of time with a consequent break in the normal lineal transmission of a language through generations and peer groups. While it is not entirely clear exactly what Meyer had in mind when he referred to this dialect as a "Mischdialekt"--he does not elaborate on this designation at all in his brief discussion--and he may simply have meant that it is mixed in the trivial sense and not in any more significant sense, the discussion here can be taken as a step in the direction of clarifying our understanding of the nature of this dialect.

Given then that this Čepina dialect shows the effects of language contact, it is of course interesting and important to speculate on the nature of the Greek-Bulgarian contact in Čepina that led to the intimate borrowings evident in (3) (and possibly (4)), whereby Greek words were borrowed and incorporated in Bulgarian, replacing already-existing Bulgarian words. It is the case, however, that intimate borrowing represents the characteristic type of contact situation found throughout the Balkans, so that on this count also, the Čepina situation is not at all unusual.

Although this Rhodope dialect has not proven to be a mixed dialect in any interesting sense, the fact that true noncreole mixed languages do exist, as shown by Michif and Ma'a, means that the possibility must always be taken seriously that a given language contact situation under investigation might be such as to produce a mixed language. Moreover, given the relative rarity of mixed languages, it is essential to investigate (within reason) every reported instance of mixed language forms in order to see if more can be uncovered. This investigation of the limited data from Meyer can be taken in that vein. In the case at hand, the investigation did not lead to the uncovering of another mixed language, but it did lead to a clarification of Meyer's report on this Bulgarian dialect. Furthermore, it is not inconceivable that somewhere in the Balkan peninsula, now that it is clear what to look for and how to look for it, evidence of a truly mixed language might turn up.

# Notes

\*This paper was originally presented as part of a panel entitled "Bulgaria and its Balkan Linguistic Neighbors" at the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, in New Orleans, November 22, 1986. I thank members of the panel and audience there, especially Ronnie Alexander, Victor Friedman, Eric Hamp, Ken Naylor, and Johanna Nichols

for useful and insightful comments, though I have not necessarily followed up on all their observations and suggestions in this version.

1. Meyer cites the work as Skordelis 1874, though the copy that I have of the piece (a xerox only, without the title page of the journal, however) indicates instead a date of 1875.

2. The context of Skordelis' observations on Greek in the Rhodope is relevant to understanding his suggestion. Skordelis was responding to doubts raised by other European scholars about the ethnic origins of the modern Greeks (in particular whether they were "true" descendants of the ancient Greeks or instead were perhaps Slavs or even of some other origin). He presented this Greek vocabulary to demonstrate that this part of the Rhodope had been at some point in the past primarily a Greek-speaking, and thus Greek, area. See Joseph 1985 and references therein for some discussion of other instances of Greek scholarship responding to similar claims.

3. For example, Thomason 1980, 1983, 1984.

4. I owe a great debt of thanks to the authors for providing me with a prepublication copy of their manuscript and for permission to quote from that version.

5. These languages are not to be considered creoles because they do not show any significant degree of morphological and morphosyntactic simplification in comparison with their source languages, whereas true creoles generally do.

6. See Thomason 1983 for detailed discussion of Ma'a with extensive bibliography.

7. The major sources on Michif are Crawford 1976, Evans 1982, Rhodes 1977, and Weaver 1982; see also the discussion in Thomason 1984 and Thomason & Kaufman (Chapter 9).

8. The initial *a-* here, as opposed to the *ε-* in the Greek form cited here, probably reflects a Greek dialectal development in the dialect that provided the input to the Bulgarian dialect in question.

9. This evidence would also, of course, argue against Skordelis' identification of this dialect as a form of Greek.

10. It may be, for example, that the aoristic and past tense forms are of greater frequency than nonaoristic or nonpast forms, or that they are the unmarked members of verbal paradigms. I know from personal experience that I mastered the Greek aoristic past tense long before I ventured into the realm of the imperfective past forms. Still, if frequency or markedness were responsible, one might expect that the generalization of one stem as opposed to another might be lexically governed, varying with the semantics of the borrowed word itself. Thus some further explanation for this Balkan (or actually pan-Balkan--see footnote 11) parallel may still be needed.

11. It is worth noting that already in the last century Miklosich had observed that aorist stems were the basis for verbal loans in the Balkans. I am indebted to Eric Hamp for bringing this fact to my attention.

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