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SOME REFLECTIONS ON GREEK IN A SLAVIC CONTEXT, IN BOTH ACADEMIA AND THE REAL WORLD, WITH AN OVERVIEW OF GREEK IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

Brian D. Joseph

Abstract. The study of the Greek language is argued here to be of relevance to Slavic studies and Slavic linguistics in several ways. After a brief presentation of some of the more important connections between Greek and the Slavic linguistic world, the focus is turned to one in particular that has not commanded the attention it might, namely the fact that Greek has historically been spoken and continues to be spoken in many areas in which Slavic-speakers predominate. By way of addressing that particular issue, the paper concludes with an overview of the history and status of Greek in one such region, the former Soviet Union, with comments on some differences between these varieties and the Standard language as spoken in Greece itself.

1. Introduction: Apologia and Justification

It is safe to say that the country of Greece and its primary language, Greek, have long been on both ends of influence involving the west. That is, while Greece and Greek have been a source of influence over the west, being for instance a major contributor to the foundations of western civilization, the influence has not traveled on a one-way street; rather, the west has exerted considerable influence on the country and the language too. One can cite here early contacts of Greeks with Romans, for instance during the Classical and Hellenistic eras, but in later times too, such influences are evident during the period of the Crusades, when soldiers from western European kingdoms came through Greece

and even occupied parts of it, and continuing into more modern times, including the period in and around the Greek revolution of 1821 against the Ottomans and even up to the present day. In fact, many of the intellectual and political leaders of Greece in the past two centuries have had strong ties to the west.[1] So too from a cultural standpoint, post-Classically, one can note that while some of the popular romances of the Medieval period are indigenous Greek creations, there are some that show a French influence, e.g. *Belthandros and Chrysantza*, as well as others that are direct translations of a French original, e.g. *Florios and Platziaflora* (from the French *Flore et Blanchefleur*). Moreover, western influences show up linguistically as well, especially in the form of loan words from Italian (mostly Venetian in the Medieval period), French (especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries), and English (particularly in the last half of the 20th century).

At the same time, though, both Greece and Greek have exhibited an easterly inclination as well. One need only recognize the importance of Byzantium (later Constantinople) for eastern Orthodoxy and of eastern Orthodoxy for notions of Hellenism and for what it has historically meant to be "Greek", and further consider the domination of Greece for some 400 years in the Middle Ages by the Ottoman Turks as part of the Ottoman Empire, to see that Greece, especially in post-Classical times, has not escaped a pronounced eastern influence as well. Culturally, this Greek "Orientalism" shows up, for instance, in the decidedly non-Western sound to some modern Greek folk music,[2] and linguistically in the large number of loans from Turkish (especially in the Ottoman period) and to a lesser extent Arabic (partly independently, partly through Turkish).

It is in regard to this latter set of mutual influences that a question arises with regard to how Greek and Greeks have interacted with one particular eastern source of potential influence, namely the Slavs and their languages and cultures. More specifically too, there is the question of where or how Greek studies might fit in with Slavic studies, say, within an academic setting. In this paper, some musings on this matter are offered, and one particular type of intersection of Greek studies with Slavic studies – the study of Greeks living in Slavic-dominated lands and their language – is highlighted and given some explicit attention.

2. Greek Studies vis-à-vis Slavic Studies

There are in fact many ways in which Greek and Greek studies take on a degree of relevance for Slavic studies and more generally for Eastern European studies. This is so even though Greek is not usually considered an “eastern European” language nor Greece an “eastern European” country in the sense in which such a designation is generally used today in the United States, referring to aspects of former Communist and Soviet-dominated nations.

Yet, Greek is clearly of paramount importance to understanding Medieval Slavic culture, literature, and language, given that a significant amount of the extant literature in

[1] Noteworthy of mention in this regard are Adamantios Korais, a key figure in the 19th century, with his links to France and French intellectuals, and more recently Andreas Papandreou, three-time prime minister of Greece who studied and taught in the West and even became a United States citizen (though in his case, ties to the west did not mean any sort of allegiance to the west once he became prime minister).

[2] One can note, for instance, that in Modern Greek such music can be referred to as *anatolikí* 'eastern'.

Old Church Slavonic consists of translations from the Greek Gospels, and that numerous Greek loan words are to be found in early Slavic. Moreover in its more recent instantiations, that is after about the 15th century, Greek shows important affinities with its specifically Eastern European and Slavic linguistic neighbors, sharing numerous structural features with many other languages of the Balkans, including Albanian, Romanian, and within South Slavic, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Serbian.[3]

From the standpoint of academia, this latter fact makes, for instance, a course on the structure of Modern Greek into something not just for Hellenists and linguists, but of considerable importance to anyone interested in the South Slavic languages.[4] There are numerous points of convergence – but divergence as well – for instance in the realization of verbal aspect, in the behavior of weak forms of the personal pronouns, in use of the markers for subordination, and so on, that make a consideration of Greek of great value for contrastive purposes with South Slavic languages, inasmuch as the languages are structurally so similar but at the same time not identical.

Moreover, Greek was one of the paradigm cases described by Ferguson 1959 as an instance of diglossia – the coexistence of two functionally distinct but historically related forms of a language, generally differentiated stylistically as "high" versus "low". This key sociolinguistic notion, and the related "language question" concerning usage that has plagued Greek culture and life since the early 19th century at least, have parallels in the divergences between literary and colloquial varieties of the language in various Slavic-speaking regions and the related issues pertaining to language standardization with which so much of the Slavic-speaking world has been pre-occupied for so long. The Greek situation thus makes for an important point of comparison with the somewhat similar, but not identical, sociolinguistic situations in the nations in which Slavic languages are spoken, especially in the Balkans but elsewhere (e.g. regarding Czech) as well.

Thus even though Greece and Greek have been torn, as it were, between east and west, there is much about Greek studies that make the nation and the language entirely appropriate objects of consideration in an outlet devoted to "Slavic Studies".[5] This case

[3] These structural features are well-known and include matters of phonology, morphology, syntax, and lexis, as noted briefly below in section 4 (and see Joseph 1992 for a succinct overview). Such structural connections are in addition to the "genetic" (in the technical linguistic sense of *genetic* of 'having to do with origins') relationship that Greek has with these languages all as members of the Indo-European language family.

[4] I speak from personal experience, as I taught such a class in the Winter of 2003. Among the registered students were two South Slavs whose area of specialization was South Slavic linguistics; the presence of a Romanian student of Classics and an American student working on Serbo-Croatian, along with a Greek student and an American who worked on Greek (as well as a few other students there just for the linguistic experience) made for some very lively class sessions with discussion focusing on similarities and differences, some of which helped to illuminate aspects of Greek structure.

[5] The eastern aspect of Greek is also reflected in the interesting administrative fact that for some purposes, e.g. the awarding of Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships through US Department of Education Title VI grants, Modern Greek is a language supported by area studies centers focusing on Eastern Europe (such as the Center for Eastern European Studies at The Ohio State University). Curiously, and as a bureaucratic reflection of the historical fact of pulls on Greek and Greece both from the east and from the west, as has been noted, let me mention here an interesting fact about the classification of Greek studies from my own experience: Once when I was trying to develop a grant proposal for a project on Modern Greek for the Social Sciences Research Council, I was told that they had a Western European

can be extended further in a different direction, one that has not commanded the attention it might, namely the fact that Greek has historically been spoken and continues to be spoken in many areas in which Slavic-speakers predominate both now and historically earlier as well. To the extent then that a consideration of the fate of minority languages in heavily Slavic regions is a proper enterprise for Slavic studies, as indeed it surely must be,[6] then examining the status of Greek in such areas becomes entirely appropriate. Accordingly, and by way of addressing that particular issue, attention is turned here to a brief overview of the history and status of Greek in one such region, the former Soviet Union, highlighting some of the differences between these varieties and the Standard language as spoken in Greece itself.[7]

3. Historical Background

There has been a Greek presence in parts of the former Soviet Union since at least the 7th century B.C., when Greek settlers, mostly lonians from Miletus, established colonies on the northern coast of the Black Sea, e.g. at Olbia (near the mouth of the Dnieper River) and in the Crimea, areas that are now in Ukraine. This presence has continued with virtually no breaks from that time, extending into the Caucasus, Russia, and more recently into Central Asia. Fueled at times by external events such as the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and Russian treaties and wars with the Ottomans, immigration of Greeks from the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires, especially parts of Northern Greece and Asia Minor, reached a peak in the 19th century, with major concentrations of Greeks in and around Odessa, Yalta, Mariupolis, Kherson, and Tbilisi. By the early 20th century, there were more than 650,000 Greeks in Russia, Ukraine, Armenia, Georgia, and environs, with flourishing urban communities boasting newspapers, schools, churches, and cultural institutions, and numerous rural, agriculturally-oriented villages as well.

4. Geographic Range and Interlingual Contact

Greek is spoken primarily by approximately 10,000,000 speakers in Greece, where it is the only official language, by roughly 500,000 in Cyprus, where it is one of two official languages, and by some 2,000,000 more in the "Hellenic diaspora", of which the Greeks

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program but that it did not include Greek and that they had an Eastern Europe program but that it too did not include Greek!

[6] Several scholars who started their careers as Slavists have become seriously involved in the description and analysis of minority languages in former Soviet areas; noteworthy here is the work of Lenore Grenoble on Evenki and other Siberian languages, and Johanna Nichols on Chechen and other Caucasian languages.

[7] The portion of this paper that follows was originally written ten years ago for what was to be a supplementary volume of the *Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet Literatures* dealing with language per se. However, the project never got past the planning stages, so that this was (eventually) freed up for an appearance in the present venue. Publication here in an Ohio State University Working Papers volume is especially à propos, since funding for carrying out some of the research for this piece (at the Carl Blegen Greek Collection of the University of Cincinnati library) was provided by the Center for Eastern European Studies at The Ohio State University (through a small grant in 1993), whose patronage is gratefully acknowledged here. A decade ago, there was virtually nothing available in English in the way of scholarship on these varieties of Greek, and only limited materials in other languages. That lack has begun to be rectified, and this piece is thus little more than a summary of some of the highlights of the relevant literature; see the last section for more on this body of literature.

of the former Soviet Union constitute a small part, with the greatest concentration of such speakers being in Australia, the United States, Canada, and Great Britain.

Although well-entrenched in Southeastern Europe, i.e. in the Balkan peninsula and the islands of the Aegean, since the second millennium B.C., Greek has shown throughout its history the effects of contact with other languages, both to the east and to the west, as noted above in section 1. This contact has taken the form mainly of lexical borrowings in ancient times, but, as indicated in section 2 above, intimate contact in the Middle Ages with other languages of the area, especially Albanian and the South Slavic languages, but also Turkish and Romanian, led to numerous structural convergences between Greek and these languages, including a reduced noun declension, a two-part future tense, and a widespread use of finite verbs instead of infinitives in subordinate clauses. It is Greek in this "Balkanized" form that was the basis for the language as found in the communities of the former Soviet area from the 18th century on, despite historical antecedents for earlier forms of Greek in the region.

In addition, though, and not surprisingly, borrowings from other languages of Southern Russia and Ukraine have added to the lexical stock of Greek of this region. Russian words such as *vilka* 'fork' are found in these dialects, as well as numerous technical and political terms now; several Tatar words have also been borrowed, including terms in some localities for various relatives, e.g. *agáka* 'older brother'; finally, Turkish provided a rich source of loans, including several not found in Standard Modern Greek as spoken in Greece, e.g. *humsús* 'neighbor', and *erdím* 'help'. In recent years, the younger speakers tend to use Russian loans where older speakers use Tatar loans. Noteworthy also is the use in these Greek dialects of the verbs *kan* 'I do; I make' (Standard Modern Greek *káno*) with a Russian infinitive to form a bipartite compound verb, e.g. *kan visivat* 'I embroider' (cf. Russian *vy_ivat'*). A further point of interest concerning language contact in the area is the fact that for some speakers now, interference from their Greek is evident in their Russian, as shown by difficulties many have with Russian noun gender (compare the reduction of adjectival gender noted below), and by the use of *gde* 'where?; in what place?' for *kuda* 'where?; to what place' since Greek *pu* is used for both senses of 'where'.

5. Writing and Literature

There has been a written form of the Greek language for nearly 3,500 years, the earliest being the Linear B syllabic system and the most enduring being the Greek alphabet. Dating from approximately the 8th century B.C., the Greek alphabet is the medium used for the writing of virtually all the greatest literature in Greek — from the Homeric epics (in their later manuscript form), the tragedies of the great playwrights of Classical Athens, and the philosophical and scientific writings of Plato and Aristotle, to the New Testament, the medieval *Chronicle of Morea*, the great Cretan Renaissance epic known as the *Erotokritos*, and the works of the Nobel Prize winning Modern Greek poets George Seferis and Odysseus Elytis — and for ancient inscriptions from Black Sea and Crimean colonies as well as for the newspapers and textbooks of the Greek communities of the former Soviet Union. A few modifications to the Greek alphabet were made for some sounds (in part in loan words) not easily represented but which were present in these

dialects, and Soviet scholars have used a modified form of the Cyrillic alphabet in writing about Greek of this area.

While no great literature is associated directly with these communities, many members of the Greek intelligentsia (including the founders of the Philike: Hetairia, a secret society founded in Odessa in 1814 to further the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire) had direct or indirect connections with these Greek communities; and, the well-known 20th century Greek writer Melpo Axioti, though born in Athens, hails from a family with roots in Mariupolis. It is worth noting that the Greek alphabet was used to write languages other than Greek in the Black Sea area; a gospel manuscript written in the Turkish language using Greek letters and dated 1778, for instance, has been found in the village of Chermenli (Greek: Tsurmanlík).

6. Some Structural Features of Greek of the Region

Greek of the former Soviet Union is generally described as encompassing two main dialects, the so-called Tauro-Romeic dialect found in Ukraine and the Pontic dialect found especially in the Caucasus (also in Asia Minor). The Tauro-Romeic varieties show some affinities with various dialects of Northern Greece, e.g. in syncopating unstressed high vowels and raising unstressed mid vowels, and this may well reflect the fact that the north of Greece historically has been a key source of immigration of Greek speakers into the area (though clearly there are also considerable numbers of speakers of other dialects who immigrated as well).

From a structural standpoint, focusing mainly on the presumably northern-based dialects, inasmuch as they have been the main object of study of Greek in the former Soviet Union, but with some applicability as well to Pontic, the following can be said about Greek in this region. It has essentially the same morphosyntactic categories in the verb as the standard language (three persons, two numbers (singular and plural), three moods (indicative, imperative, and subjunctive, which is now marked with the preverbal elements (as prefixes or proclitics) *na* or *as* and not through special verbal endings), two aspects (imperfective, for uncompleted or continuous action, and perfective, for completed or punctual action), two voices (active and mediopassive), and three tenses (present, past, and future). Importantly, though, the future is not a separate category distinct from the present in all dialects, especially in the Crimean region; that is, the Standard Greek marking for the future with *_a* does not occur everywhere (though it is found in Pontic). Moreover, one category not found in the Greek of the former Soviet Union is the two-part (periphrastic) prefect formation, utilizing the verb *éxo* ‘have’ as an auxiliary verb, which occurs in Standard Modern Greek and is generally regarded as an additional tense (though in some accounts it is reckoned as another aspect).

Furthermore, the morphological material used in the realization of these various categories can differ — often quite strikingly — from that found in Standard Greek today. For instance, in the Standard language, there is an *–n-* suffix that marks imperfective aspect in the present and past tense for some verbs (e.g. *líno* 'I am loosening' / *élina* 'I was loosening', vs. perfective *líso* / *élisa*); a seemingly comparable formative *-n-* occurs in Greek of the former Soviet Union only in past imperfective forms, not presents, and also in verbs in which it does not occur at all in the standard language, e.g. *pulúm* ‘we sell’ / *púlinam* ‘we were selling’ (vs. standard *pulúme* / *pulúsame*). This suffix thus

has a more specific function in these dialects than that found for the ostensibly corresponding element in the Standard language. A formative found only in these dialects is *-nesuk-*, used to form verbs from adjectives, e.g. *sapinésuk-* 'to become rotten', where the Standard language uses, with this base, the common deadjectival verb-forming suffix *-íz-*, as in the corresponding standard *sapízo* (and cf. standard *sápios* 'rotten', as the adjectival basis).

One difference in morphology that correlates with an important phonological difference comes with the verbal endings. In particular, some verbal endings are longer than those in Standard Modern Greek, e.g. 3PL mediopassive present *-undini* (vs. standard *-onde*). The phonological effect found with such endings is that the accent placement can thus be on the fourth and even fifth syllable from the end of the word, e.g. *línundini* 'they are being loosened', contrary to the usual (i.e. Standard) Greek placement of the accent no farther in from the end of the word than the third syllable. Many of the forms and endings moreover show the effects of sound changes that are characteristic of the northern dialects of Greece, thus revealing the origin of a good many of the Greek immigrants to the area in the 18th and 19th centuries. For instance, the high vowels in the ending *-undini* as opposed to standard *-onde* are the result of the vowel raising change typical of northern dialects noted above.

Noun and adjective morphology overall in the dialects of the former Soviet Union is quite comparable to that of Standard Modern Greek, with distinctions for nominative, accusative, genitive, and vocative cases, for singular and plural number, and for masculine, feminine, and neuter genders. Adjectival gender distinctions, however, are found mainly just with those modifying animate nouns that indicate a person's place in a family or in society, but not with those modifying inanimate nouns.

As far as syntax is concerned, Greek of all varieties, including the dialects in the former Soviet Union, shows fairly free word order, generally suppresses unemphatic subject pronouns, and indicates major grammatical relations through the use of different case forms of nouns and pronouns, though an invariant marker with no case distinctions heads relative clauses. Since there is no infinitive (see above), subordinate clauses are finite and show tense distinctions.

7. Vitality of the Language

Though the Greek population at the turn of the century was considerable in this region (c. 650,000), it is estimated that only about 50% spoke Greek as their first language at that time. Crimean Tatar and Russian were the major languages of the remaining ethnic Greeks. In the 1970 Soviet census, 336,869 citizens claimed Greek ethnicity, and of that total, only 132,203, or 39.2%, gave Greek as their native language. In the 1979 census, roughly the same number, 344,000, declared Greek as their ethnic status. Despite the fact that Greeks fleeing after the Civil War of 1948 established in Uzbekistan, most notably in Tashkent, a new and vibrant Greek community of over 10,000 citizens, along with schools and a newspaper, the above figures suggest that the chances for the survival of Greek in the former Soviet Union are not all that strong (see Hatzidaki 1999ab, for instance). New census information for the 21st century needs to be developed.

8. Sources

Literature on the status of Greek in the former Soviet Union is unfortunately not very plentiful. Comrie 1981 offers an overview of the entire region and so includes some brief discussion of Greek. Some early information on demographics and language use can be found in Kalfoglou 1908 and Panajiotidou 1919, with updates and more detail in Pavlidis 1953 as well as Bornträger 1993 and Henrich 1999. Hatzidaki 1999ab offer an outlook on the prospects of the survival of the dialects in Ukraine. Information of a more specifically linguistic nature on the varieties of Greek in question can be found in Blau 1874, Sokolov 1932, Semenov 1935 (specifically on Pontic), Cerniseva 1958, Beleckii 1970, Delopoulos 1983, Drettas 1997 (by far now the most authoritative source on Pontic available), and more recently in a series of important studies by Pappou-Zouravliova (e.g., 1999 (in English), and 2001; see also _uravliova & _irokov 1998). Dobrovolski & Sarafidis 1969, though propagandistic and probably hard to obtain, is an interesting booklet on the Greeks of Uzbekistan.

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