# What is meant by "Modern Greek dialect"? Some thoughts on terminology and glossonymy, with a glance at Tsakonian

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ABSTRACT: Η ετικέτα που χρησιμοποιείται για την ονομασία μιας γλώσσας ή μιας διαλέκτου, δηλαδή η γλωσσωνυμία, μπορεί να δημιουργήσει προβλήματα ως προς την ερμηνεία της. Εξετάζεται εδώ η γενική φράση που βρίσκεται στα αγγλικά για να περιγράψει κανείς μια ελληνική διάλεκτο, δηλαδή «Modern Greek dialect» και υποστηρίζεται ότι το καθένα μέρος της φράσης μπορεί να προβληματίσει. Δηλαδή, δεν είναι απολύτως σαφές τι σημαίνει «Modern», τι σημαίνει «Greek», και τί σημαίνει «dialect». Επίσης, εξετάζεται το όνομα συγκεκριμένων γλωσσικών ποικιλιών που συσχετίζονται με τα ελληνικά, ιδιαίτερα «τα Τσακωνικά» και «τα αρχαία Μακεδονικά». Όλη η συζήτηση για τα ονόματα εμπλουτίζεται από το μοντέλο οικογενειακού δέντρου για τις σχέσεις μεταξύ διαφορετικών γλωσσών και διαλέκτων.

**Keywords:** glossonym, dialect, chronological stage, Tsakonian, Ancient Macedonian Aromanian, Romanian, Albanian, tree model

## 1. Preliminaries

The phrase "Modern Greek dialect", or alternatively "modern Greek dialect", has, on one reading, a fairly intuitive interpretation, referring to a certain kind of contemporary variety of the Greek language. Nonetheless, this perhaps common-sense definition is actually not as straightforward as it might seem, and in fact, each piece of the noun phrase "modern/Modern Greek dialect" presents some problematic aspects with regard to interpretation. Moreover, just as each part can be problematized, so too must the total phrase as well be subjected to an exercise in "deconstruction". It turns out that there actually is much to be learned from a careful consideration of this seemingly straightforward phrase that is used so often in Greek linguistics.[1]

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[1] As becomes clear in this discussion, Greek presents some particular issues of interpretation, but a similar problematization of a phrase referring to a dialect of any language is certainly possible and likely to be a similarly useful exercise. See Joseph 1999 for a brief consideration of a somewhat similar situation in Albanian.

The discussion herein can be viewed as sounding a call for some terminological clarity, and for the conceptual clarity that can accompany judicious use of terms and definitions.

In what follows, I examine this designation, "Modern/modern Greek dialect", and ultimately draw some parallels with another problematic use of the term "Greek dialect", ending with some general thoughts about naming and labels for languages and dialects, what we might more neutrally call "speech forms". That is, I offer here an exercise in understanding glossonymy, how we name the objects of our linguistic investigations. In this regard, then, this contribution is in the tradition of such works as Adamou 2008 and the related work, Tsitsipis 2008.

## 2. A first pass through a parse of "modern/Modern Greek dialect"

As an initial step in this glossonymic consideration, I first give some thoughts in turn on each element in the complex designation "modern/Modern Greek dialect".

### 2.1 Problematizing *modern*/*Modern*

Setting aside for the moment the matter of capitalization (i.e. *m-* versus *M-*), one issue that arises immediately with the phrase under consideration here is the use of the adjective *M/modern* itself. On one level this pertains to whether the adjective is an inherent part of the language label, with *Modern Greek* being a label like *Old English* and even more importantly whether it is even needed; in other words, what is the unmarked value of the label "Greek"? That is, we can ask whether it is like *English* or *French*, for which the unmodified interpretation refers to the modern form of the language, so that chronological specification is needed for older stages of the language, viz. *Middle English*, *Old French*, and the like, or instead has a different unmarked value. In particular, it seems that Greek differs from language labels — glossonyms — like *English* and *French*, in that unmodified *Greek* generally refers to the ancient form of the language, not to the modern form, so that the adjective "Modern" is needed to focus on the modern form of the language.

Besides the actual words involved in the phrase under consideration, there is an orthographic issue, namely whether the initial adjective is capitalized or not, i.e. whether we talk

about a *Modern Greek dialect* as opposed to a *modern Greek dialect*. In principle — and this is a bracketing issue as well for the parsing of this noun phrase — there could be a difference in interpretation between these two phrases. On the one hand, there could be a variety associated with the contemporary stage of the language, i.e. with Modern Greek, describable as a string which could be parsed as [[Modern Greek] [dialect]] for which upper-case *Modern* (thus *Modern Greek dialect*) might be preferable; on the other hand, there could be a modern form of a dialect from any earlier point in the history of Greek, describable as a string which could be parsed as [[modern] [Greek dialect]] for which lower-case *modern* (thus *modern Greek dialect*) might be preferable.  These may well be theoretical distinctions that in practice are not all that useful, but I note that in a certain sense, this latter string, *modern Greek dialect*, especially if "Greek" is taken in its default way to refer to Ancient Greek, as noted above, could be used for *katharevousa* (puristic Greek), as it is a modern form of a variety that on many levels approximates the ancient Attic-Ionic dialect; the same can perhaps be said for Tsakonian, as discussed in section 3.

A further matter with the use of *modern/Modern*, although it perhaps does not need much discussion, is the question of where we draw the line temporally for *modern/Modern*, what we designate as the point at which we recognize the modern form of the language. As is well known, there are no clean breaks in linguistic "stages", in the periodization that historical linguists assign to the languages they investigate.  It is not the case that the point of transition from, e.g. Old English to Middle English, or Middle English to Modern English, is signaled in some overt way, by some particular linguistic event, an innovation of some sort.  However, it is not necessarily even a purely linguistic issue, as external events might provide for a basis for scholars at least to talk about a turning point; a relevant example is the case of the Norman French invasion of England in 1066 and its signaling the end of the Old English period and movement into Middle English.  But even with that external event, no one would say that in the year 1066 one could notice a shift from Old English to Middle English.

In the case of Greek, there is general agreement that the language is "fairly" modern by about the 12th century AD, based for instance on the fact that the poems of Theodoros Prodromos from a structural point of view (leaving aside the temporally restricted lexical material, words that have not survived into present-day Greek) have a distinctly modern feel to them, even if there are some elements of grammar that are quite different from present-day Standard Modern Greek.  For instance, the early Medieval Greek future tense was formed differently from the

present-day standard, with the primary future formation being a periphrasis of conjugated forms of θέλω 'want' serving as an auxiliary verb, and an infinitive as the complement to θέλω, e.g. θέλω γράψειν 'I will write';[2] the perfect tense system as it is in the modern language, consisting of conjugated forms of έχω 'have' as an auxiliary with a remnant of the earlier infinitive, had not developed; the system of weak pronoun placement differed from that in the modern language (see Pappas 2004); and so on. But, largely for those structural reasons, Prodromos is not considered to be "really" modern either, and we can look to perhaps the 16th century for the turning point into a "truly" modern form of Greek, at least as far as dialects are concerned.

  Even so, we need to bear in mind that most of the speech forms we talk about as "Modern Greek dialects" represent divergences from a common form of the language that we can locate temporally to about the 10th century or so.

## 2.2 Problematizing *dialect*

Second, the concept of 'dialects' and the very term 'dialect' itself are problematic. The difficulties with distinguishing between "dialect" and "language" are well known and need not be rehearsed here. But it can be said that the standard sorts of putatively purely linguistic criteria for differentiating dialect from language include the following, though note that they are not without some cause for doubt as to their applicability:

  • historical derivation, whether closely or only distantly related, though it is important to recognize that related lines of descent can, of course, diverge significantly

  • mutual intelligibility, or lack thereof, but an issue here is how to judge intelligibility, and in any case how to rule out the involvement of other, nonlinguistic, factors, such as good will on the part of one or the other party in a conversation. Moreover, even though insisting on mutuality might be one way of constraining the use of this criterion, in cases of one-way intelligibility (as between Danish and Swedish), the same speech

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[2] On the range of future formations in Medieval Greek, see Joseph & Pappas (2002), Markopoulos (2009), and Holton et al. (2019).

form can be judged a language by one set of speakers (e.g. Swedes with respect to

Swedish) and a dialect by another set (e.g. Danes, with respect to the same Swedish)

This tells us something important, namely that purely linguistic criteria for deciding this issue may not be valid, or at least are very hard to apply in an even manner. And, of course, factors of a social, political, or attitudinal nature, or the like, must be taken into consideration as well, and traditionally they have been in discussions of what constitutes a "dialect".

It could be argued that in general we operate with an intuitive notion of what is meant by "dialect" and our operative sense is rooted in some notion of "degree of difference", with a heavy bias in favor of phonological differences and in favor of regionally/geographically based differences. Both of these biases are inherited from the dialectological traditions of 19th century western scholarship.

I do not dispute their importance and their utility, but I would put forward the idea that a language can be thought of as a collection of thousands and thousands of "features", that is to say words, morphemes, sounds, constructions, meanings, and so on, and we tend to talk about "dialects" without any clear measure of how many of these features need to be different in order to have a distinct "dialect".

Moreover, we do not even have a clear basis for quantifying differences across whole varieties. In situations where two speech forms differ in that one has, say, [i] where the other has [e] (as between northern and southern varieties in Greece, e.g. northern πιρμένου vs. southern περιμένω 'I wait') or one has, say, [c] where the other has [tʃ] (as between Athenian and Cretan varieties, e.g. Athenian και ([cε]) vs. Cretan [tʃε] 'and'), it is possible to measure the degree of difference in such individual forms via a metric known as the *Levenshtein distance* (LD). Also known as "string edit distance", LD measures the number of "edits" (insertions, deletions, substitutions) needed to make forms in two varieties of a language identical to one another, with a value of 1 being assigned to each edit needed.[3] However, as useful as such a quantification is with regard to specific forms (like 'and'), it is not clear what to do with differences that are regular and are realized across the whole of the lexicon, as is the case with 'and' and 'wait' in

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[3] Thus, in 'and', there would be an LD between Athenian and Cretan of 1 (via the substitution of [c] by [tʃ], if [tʃ] is treated as a single segment) or 2 (via the substitution of [c] by [t] and the addition of [ʃ], if [tʃ] is treated as a cluster). In 'I wait', there would be an LD of 3 (substitution of southern ε by northern ι, deletion of southern ι (alternatively, substitution of southern ι by northern Ø), and substitution of southern o by northern < ου > [u]).

Greek. In particular, should the ɛ/ɩ substitution count as one difference for each form in which it is realized so that there would actually be a myriad of ɛ/ɩ differences, one for each token of the sound difference, i.e., one for each word or morpheme with the feature in question? Or, should we abstract away from the many individual ɛ/ɩ substitutions and count that generalization as a single point of difference between the dialects?

As linguists, of course, we tend to abstract over a range of tokens and focus on type-based differences, thus recognizing that there is a generalization to be made about, for instance, the unstressed [i] of northern Greek that is consistently matched by an [ɛ] in southern Greek, or the Athenian [c] before a front vowel that is consistently matched by a [tʃ] in Cretan. But it is fair to wonder if speakers themselves have the same sense; since sounds do not occur in isolation but rather only occur as part of morphemes and words, speakers' experience with differences in sounds will necessarily be with sounds as realized in particular morphemes and words, and the generalization of the linguist may not be one that naïve speakers themselves can make.

And, we indeed find reports in the literature where speakers focus on particular words that are pronounced differently from region to region, and even when speakers do abstract away to types, the judgments are not reliable. I once was interviewing a speaker of Cree, an Algonquian language spoken in western Canada, and a question came up about dialect differences. My consultant was a speaker of a dialect with a [y] as the reflex of a Proto-Algonquian sound that ended up as [l] in another dialect; as it happens, there are only about a dozen morphemes where this *y : l* difference is manifested, as the proto-language sound had a limited distribution, but interestingly her reaction to the *l*-dialect speakers was roughly "I can't understand those *l*-speakers --- they have *l*'s all over the place". What a linguist might characterize as a small though real difference was highly salient for her and got in the way of inter-dialectal communication.

Moreover, even if we could quantify all the differences successfully and meaningfully, we would be faced with the problem of determining how many differences are enough to constitute a dialect boundary? If, say, 100 differences are not enough, would 101 be enough, or 102, or 103, and so on?

I do not have an answer to the various questions raised here but mention them as purely theoretical issues to consider. That is, there is no real answer here. As with the problematizing of

the use of the term "modern", we can say that it is important every now and then to examine the bases of our practices, just so we are aware of what we are doing.

## 2.3 Problematizing *Greek*

The discussion so far has focused on issues that any dialectological characterization needs to deal with, namely temporal issues (the "modern" part of our noun phrase of interest, "modern Greek dialects") and boundary issues (the "dialect" part). But, there is a third issue that comes out of a consideration of the third part, namely, what is "Greek" in this context. In particular, we can ask whether it means that the speech variety in question:

- derives from ancient Greek

- is spoken on Greek soil, whether within the territorial bounds of the modern Greek nation-state or within those of some territory recognized in the past as part of a Greek state

- originated in a region that can be now, or at some time in the past was, considered to be Greek soil

- is spoken by speakers who identify as being "Greek", whether in terms of ethnicity or nationality.

- or is something else altogether.

I would venture to say that this particular problematization is highly fraught, and it may not be a problem that is restricted to Greek. That is, any language label — any glossonym — involves a degree of abstraction along the same lines as those just given. That is, one can just as legitimately ask what English is, what French is, and so on; these are all valid questions to raise.

## 2.4 Summing up

To some extent, all of the considerations discussed in the preceding sections converge to pose problems of scientific terminology, hence the reference to "glossonymy" in the title and throughout. In the end, we have to talk about these speech forms, and the labels we use, whether informed by the sorts of musings offered here or not, must be viewed as rooted in scientific decisions. At the same time, too, however, they can be taken as powerful emblems with consequences that extend outside of the scientific sphere.

### 3. A case in point in the Greek sphere

By way of offering an extended example where these issues come together and raise some thorny scientific problems, I turn to the situation with Tsakonian and its relation to (the rest of) Greek. As far as how glossonymy enters the picture here, I focus just on issues that pertain to matters of English usage with the labels in question since bringing the practice of scholars writing in other languages to bear here would constitute an extended study of its own and would only complicate the already complex landscape developed herein. It can be noted that similar sorts of deconstructions could be devised, possibly, for other quite divergent outlying varieties of Greek, such as Pontic or Cappadocian or even Grico/Grecanico, though the historical derivation is perhaps clearer in the case of Tsakonian than these other outliers in the Hellenic world.

The issue is this: Tsakonian is the term I use here for what is generally seen as a modern form of an ancient Doric Greek dialect, specifically Laconian Greek, that is still spoken in the eastern "thumb" of the Peloponnesos in Greece. This origin makes Tsakonian somewhat unusual among modern outcomes of ancient Greek, since for the most part, the dialect diversity of ancient Greek was eliminated in the Hellenistic period as the Greek Koine arose, based mainly on the Attic-Ionic dialect (and especially Ionic). Thus most of the modern varieties of ancient Greek spoken in Greece today, e.g. Peloponnesian Greek (which we may take as the basis for the modern standard language of Athens, though there is some debate there), Northern Greek, Cretan, Southeastern Greek (e.g. that spoken on Rhodes), etc., derive ultimately from the Hellenistic Koine. This relationship can be schematized as follows (oversimplifying somewhat, to be sure), where for the moment I call the whole group "Greek" (with the quotation marks being there intentionally) and try to show the place of Tsakonian vis-à-vis the rest of Greek

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                           "GREEK"


     AEOLIC   ...  DORIC    ...        ATTIC-IONIC



       Ø        TSAKONIAN              KOINE



                                        "X"


          CRETAN  PELOPONNESIAN  SOUTHEASTERN   NORTHERN
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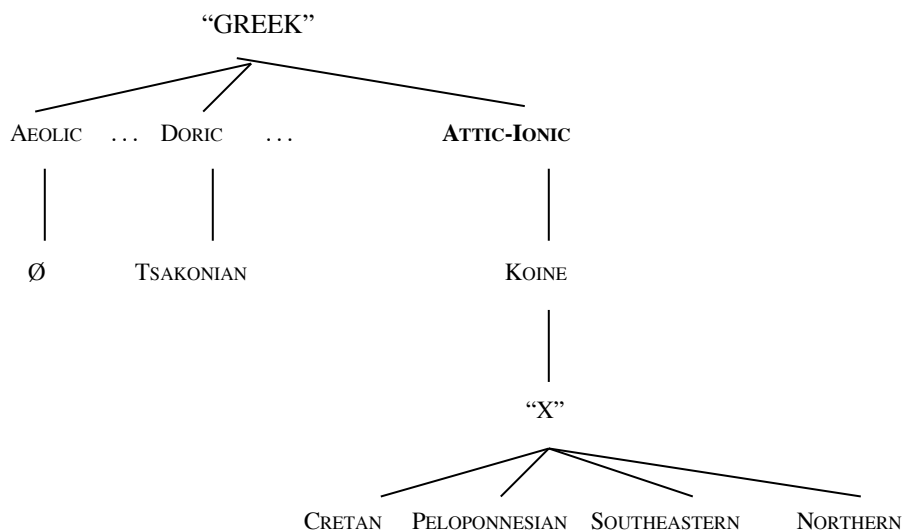
Figure 1: The Place of Tsakonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 1

This sort of relationship is fairly straightforward and one sees it time and time again in any family tree modeling of language relationship, with branchings at higher nodes and at lower nodes giving an indication of the distance genetically[4] between speech communities (languages, dialects, whatever) represented as labels on the various nodes. So what is problematic about it? The problems arise when one considers the issue of how to label the nodes, and in particular, when one considers the scientific implications of the terms by which these speech forms represented by the nodes are named.

What the tree in Figure 1 shows is that Tsakonian is not particularly closely related to the current Northern dialects, to Cretan, or for that matter to the Standard language (based on Peloponnesian), at least not more closely related than say, Cretan is to the northern varieties. It is a sibling to the whole complex that gave rise to Cretan, Northern varieties, and so on, but it is not a sibling to any one of those particular speech forms.

But do we call it *Tsakonian Greek*, or just *Tsakonian*? What are the other speech forms mentioned in the tree ? If they are Northern Greek, Peloponnesian Greek, Southeastern Greek, etc., then can Tsakonian be Tsakonian Greek? If the others are "Modern Greek dialects" (or "dialects of Modern Greek"), what is Tsakonian? Is it a Modern Greek dialect? In a certain sense, yes it is, in that it is a modern form of some ancient Greek dialect, but not in the same

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[4] The term *genetic* here derives from the Greek γενετικός, which means "pertaining to origins" (i.e. to γένεσις 'origin'). Some linguists now prefer the term *genealogical*, given the biological (and, in some contexts, even racist) implications that *genetic* can summon up.

sense as Peloponnesian, Cretan, etc., since it stems from a different source. Thus if we treat Peloponnesian, Cretan, etc. as dialects of "Modern Greek", so that the node above them is so labelled, then Tsakonian is left out in the cold, as if it is a different language.

This might actually be the right result, since Tsakonian is sufficiently different in many respects from Peloponnesian, from Cretan, from the varieties of the north, etc., since it did not share in their relatively recent common development, and thus has phonology unlike them (e.g. aspirated stops), a verbal system unlike them (e.g. a periphrastic present tense and arguably (see Joseph 2001) a negative verb as opposed to simply a negative morpheme that attaches to a verb), lexical archaisms that had been replaced in other varieties (e.g. a continuation of ancient ὁράω for 'see'), and so on, and the form of Tsakonian in the early 20th century, before various sorts of assimilatory pressures with Standard Greek altered Tsakonian in various ways, was really quite unintelligible to other speakers of Greek.

The situation gets more complicated yet, though maybe with a similar sort of outcome pointed to, when the modern Standard language is taken into consideration. The current language of Athens, used by millions there and easily the de facto standard for speakers of Greek around the country, with regional varieties (Peloponnesian, Cretan, etc.) being recognized as such, is often taken as the point of reference against which the regional varieties are to be judged (this is of course true in general with many standard languages and regional varieties, not just in Greece and not just in the Balkans). Thus if the standard language (sometimes referred to as "Common Modern Greek") is what most linguists think of or mean when they use the label "Greek" or "Modern Greek", then Tsakonian surely should not be "Greek", since its relation to the standard (at least historically) is quite different from the relation of Cretan or northern varieties to the standard. Treating it as a separate language, but still as one that is closely related to the modern speech forms that derive from the Hellenistic Koine, might thus be further justified.

Taking such a step would raise the question, of course, of what to call the branches and what to call the source node, especially if one were to insist on "Greek" as the name for that source, i.e. topmost, node. If we tried a different name for the starting point in ancient times, e.g. "Hellenic", and tried to reserve "Greek" just for the immediate ancestor of the modern cluster of dialects we have been talking about that excludes Tsakonian, that would fly in the face of centuries of usage whereby Greek was used for the ancient forms too. In fact, with the term

"Greek", as noted in §2.1, the default, at least as far as English is concerned, is for that to refer to the ancient language, so that in general we specifically have to say "Modern Greek"
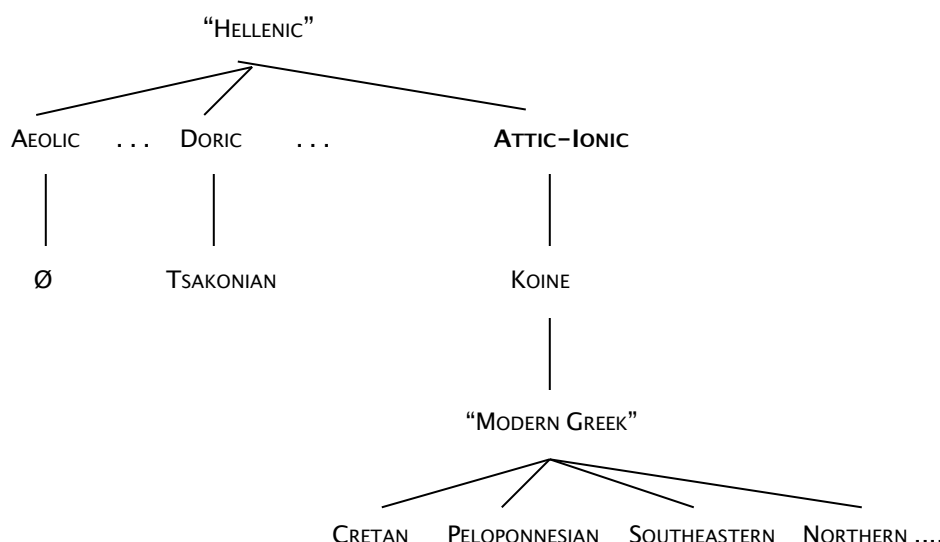


Figure 2: The Place of Tsakonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 2

Part of the problem therefore is that there is a tradition and history associated with particular names; I note here the astute observation made by my good friend, the late Lukas Tsitsipis, in what may well have been his last published work, Tsitsipis 2008, regarding the use of particular designations for speakers of Arvanitika in Greece:

> What about the names of languages? Names are not just recognition labels … [they] should be viewed as rich metonymic depositories of socio-cultural histories, that is, their use evokes a whole series of images and events concerning human groups. … A name is an index of some sort. It is part of a socio-semiotic process such that every instance of its use can construct and reconstruct features of a non-stable identity.
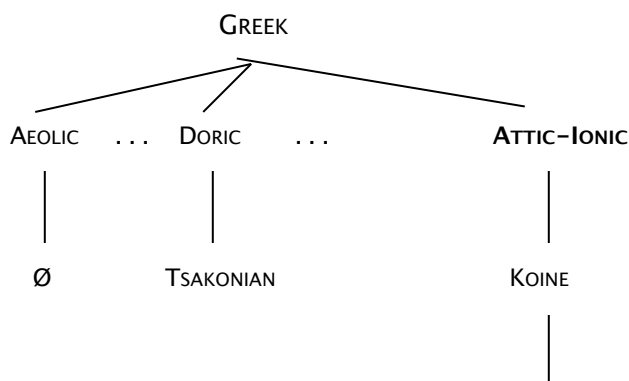
> Arvanitika speakers may call themselves just *Arvanites*, an appellation evoking very different memories and values from the ones triggered by the use of the term *Arvanites* by members of the majority society: either through the use of denigrating intonation or through lexicalized discrimination such as

*skatoarvanites* 'shit-Arvanites', or through occasional referential extension by calling other groups they want to discriminate against 'like-Arvanite'.

And, I would say, extending Tsitsipis's insight, that there is this same sort of "baggage" attached to the use of labels in scientific contexts.

Thus, in a sense, *any* naming decision is going to be difficult for some reason, whether we are talking about scientific labels that linguists and anthropologists use or about less technically driven naming. In this way too, dealing with naming issues surrounding a language like Greek with a long history and tradition of scholarship is qualitatively different from the situation with a little-studied language of a small tribal group where there may not be the same sort of "baggage" associated with particular labels (though there may well be other problems, such as exonyms that are radically different from the self-designations, as a perusal of lesser-known languages listed in *Ethnologue* (https://www.ethnologue.com/) shows again and again).

One possibility for a naming decision would be to do what is seen increasingly for the language of the state of Israel, i.e. using the language's autonym, "Ivrit", instead of the historically charged "Hebrew" (which invites an immediate connection to be made to the Biblical language), as Eric Hamp did through the use of "Makedonski" for the modern Slavic language Macedonian that is the national language of the contemporary Republic of North Macedonia (see, e.g., Hamp 1989). For Greek that would mean using "elinika" for the modern standard language and the varieties most akin to it (those in the north, that in Crete, etc.) so that Tsakonian could stand with that label alone, though "Tsakonian Greek" would now become feasible, as it is, after all, a modern instantiation of an Ancient Greek variety). That of course would not help Greeks, since they use '*elinika*' as a matter of course, but the focus here is on English-language practices.
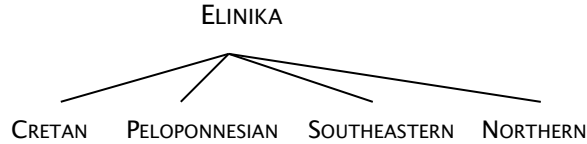
GREEK

AEOLIC ... DORIC ... ATTIC–IONIC

Ø TSAKONIAN KOINE

ELINIKA

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         ELINIKA
    ┌──────┬────┴────┬──────────┐
  CRETAN  PELOPONNESIAN  SOUTHEASTERN  NORTHERN
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Figure 3:  The Place of Tsakonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 3

## 4.  A parallel from a different era but still concerning Greek

A similarly thorny issue that involves Greek and the notion of "Greek dialect" is one that has had massive political ramifications.  I mention it here, since it seems to offer an interesting parallel to the issue with Tsakonian, and that is the case of Ancient Macedonian and its relation to "Greek" (or some would say, "the rest of Greek").[5]

I start from the following interpretation of certain facts about Ancient Macedonian and about what we conventionally call "Greek":  Ancient Macedonian has voiced plain stops where "Greek" has voiceless aspirates, as in ἀβροῦτες · ὀφρύες (i.e., *abroûtes* = *ophrúes*) 'eyebrows', where the β : φ correspondence, standing for [b] : [ph], reflects the outcome of a Proto-Indo-European voiced aspirated stop *bh.  This correspondence is quite systematic throughout the limited corpus we have an Ancient Macedonian.  Moreover, there is one form, ἄλιζα (i.e., *áliza*) for a kind of tree ('white poplar') that has a [z] apparently reflecting an intervocalic *s (shown by various cognates, e.g. Old High German *elira*, Spanish *alisa* (a presumed borrowing from a Gothic *alisa), Russian *ol'xa*), a sound and context where "Greek" originally had an *h* and ultimately a zero.

I take these facts (and I realize that this is not a consideration of the whole of the known Ancient Macedonian lexicon and the parallel forms in Greek) to suggest that what we call "Greek" underwent an innovation, that of loss of *s /V__V and devoicing of the PIE voiced aspirates that Ancient Macedonian did not undergo, and in fact instead voiced the intervocalic *s and deaspirated the voiced aspirates, while maintaining their voicing. This nonsharing of certain innovations means that whatever the relationship between Ancient Macedonian and Greek, it cannot be that Macedonian is an immediate sibling to other forms that we typically call "Ancient Greek dialects" such as Attic-Ionic, Aeolic, Doric, etc. That is, in schematic terms, the relationship *cannot* be:

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[5] See Joseph (To appear) for a review of relevant literature and facts, and a discussion of the political and ideological dimensions to this issue.

INDO–EUROPEAN

ITALIC . . . ARMENIAN . . . **GREEK**

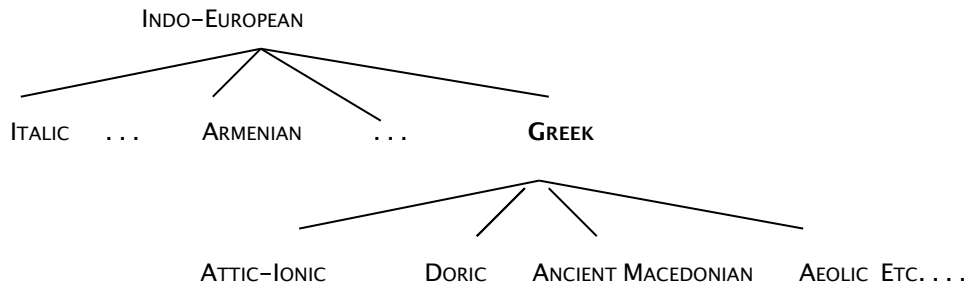ATTIC–IONIC DORIC ANCIENT MACEDONIAN AEOLIC ETC. . . .

Figure 4: The Place of Ancient Macedonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 1

where Ancient Macedonian is a sibling to any of the speech forms conventionally referred to and viewed as "ancient Greek dialects".

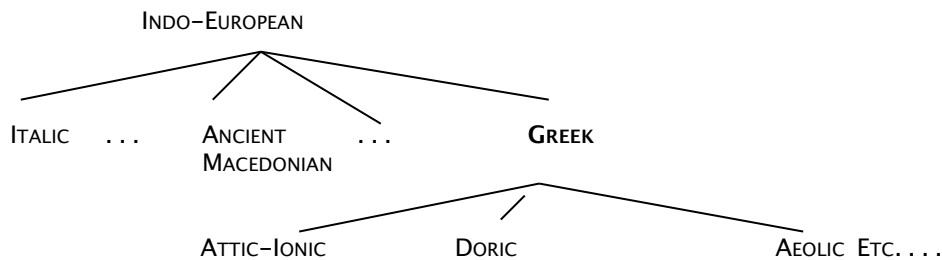Rather, the relationship must be either the following:

INDO–EUROPEAN

ITALIC . . . ANCIENT . . . **GREEK**
MACEDONIAN

ATTIC–IONIC DORIC AEOLIC ETC. . . .

Figure 5: The Place of Ancient Macedonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 2

or the following:

INDO–EUROPEAN

ITALIC . . . ARMENIAN . . . **HELLENIC**

ANCIENT MACEDONIAN GREEK

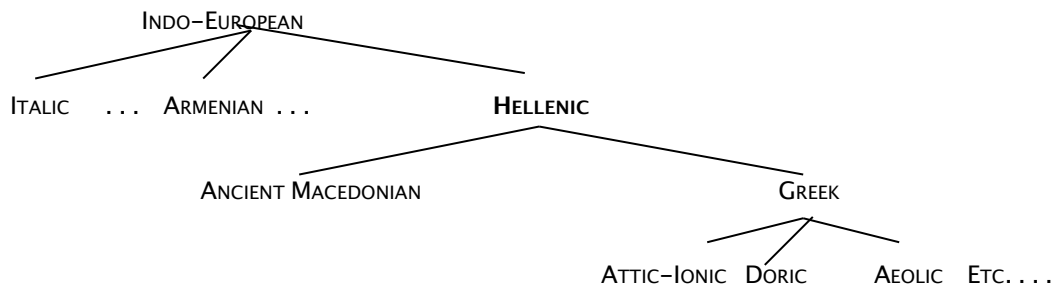ATTIC–IONIC DORIC AEOLIC ETC. . . .

Figure 6: The Place of Ancient Macedonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 3

In the first of these, Ancient Macedonian would be within a branch of Indo-European that is separate from the one containing Greek and thus no more closely related to Greek than any other branch of the family (ignoring for the moment some possible deep connections, e.g. with Armenian that have been much discussed in the literature or with Albanian, as recently proposed in Hyllested and Joseph 2022). In the second of these, Ancient Macedonian would be a sibling to the complex of "Ancient Greek dialects".

Importantly, in both of these, the notion of "Greek dialect" is such that Ancient Macedonian is not an "Ancient *Greek* dialect", but at best could be a sibling to the totality of the Ancient Greek dialects or it could be an "Ancient *Hellenic* dialect", but the only way it could be an "Ancient Greek dialect" is if one fiddles around with terminology and uses "Greek" for the node subsuming Ancient Macedonian and Attic-Ionic + Doric + Aeolic etc. – but then presumably a different name would be needed for the cluster of Attic-Ionic + Doric, etc., maybe "Greek proper" or even "Hellenic" there (since it is not used for the higher node), or some such designation:
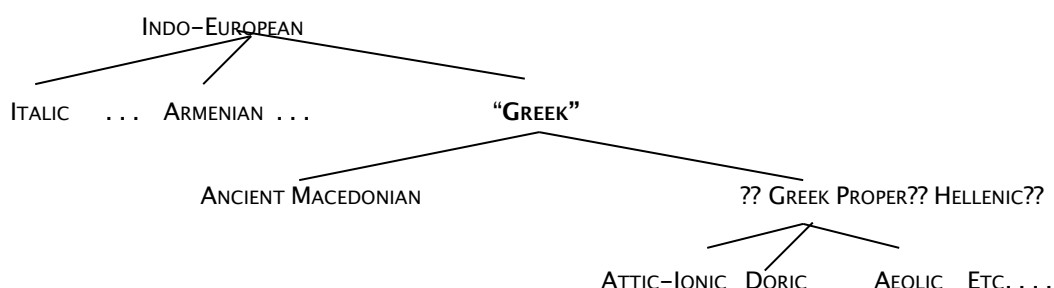


Figure 7: The Place of Ancient Macedonian, with Relevant Labels, Take 4

I confess that I am not sure what a suitable labelling solution is here. To some extent, we may not be able, with Greek, to have a neutral naming system that will allow for all the relationships of the various clusters of relevant speech forms, both ancient and modern, to be indicated properly and in a non-confusing and/or ideologically non-charged manner.

And there are similar problems for other languages. Just in the immediate sphere of the Balkans, one has to be mindful of using "Romanian" to refer to the main language of Romania, since that invites the inference that Aromanian, as spoken in Greece for instance, is perhaps a dialect of that language, when in fact it is rather different and may have a slightly different line of historical descent so that talking about Daco-Romanian and Aromanian might be preferable. But here too there is historical and traditional baggage that might get in the way.[6]

The bottom line is that we can continue to talk about "Modern Greek dialects" and subsume under it such interesting speech forms as Tsakonian, but we have to be mindful of the implications of our usage.

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[6] See Joseph (1999) for some thoughts on related issues involving Albanian and Arvanitika, the now-endangered dialect of Albanian spoken in enclaves in Greece for hundreds of years.

## 5. Conclusion

It may not be unreasonable to suggest that the scholarly — and official — insistence on a great degree of unity for "Greek" (Greek as "one" language – see Joseph 2009 for some consideration of this question) may get in the way of giving Greek/Hellenic/whatever a more prominent place in the field of linguistic theory than it has. Impressionistically speaking, my sense is that there is just as much structural diversity in the Hellenic-/Greek-speaking world as there is in the Romance or Germanic or Slavic world, but these latter branches of Indo-European have been well integrated into mainstream linguistic theorizing in ways that Greek has not; while it cannot be proven, I do wonder if the notion that there are many Romance languages, many Germanic languages, many Slavic languages but, in the relevant literature at least, only one Greek language may play a role in relegating the diversity within Greek to this lesser prominence in the field at large.

      Whatever all these musings might mean, and however much they might represent a call to action, I am realistic enough to know that any changes in nomenclature and in the recognition of distinct Hellenic languages may not happen anytime soon and any suggestion for change will obviously take some time to be accepted, if even acceptable at all. Nonetheless, it is my hope that sounding these views here might make all practitioners aware of the issues connected with something as seemingly straightforward as what we call the object of our scholarly interest. That is, the occasional airing of these issues in a forum dedicated to the study of Modern Greek dialects is, I trust, a basis for important introspection into the practices that underlie our science.[7]

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[7] There are other nomenclature-related issues within Greek, especially the three-way distinction that is made among ιδίωμα (roughly, 'local variety'), διάλεκτος ('dialect'), and γλώσσα ('language'), a distinction that does not fully have clear one-word parallels in English. But I leave that particular issue for another time and another venue.

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