

A Linguistic Anthropology of Praxis and Language Shift: Arvanítika (Albanian) and Greek in Contact. LUKAS D. TSITSIPIS. Oxford Studies in Language Contact. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Pp. Xii + 163 pp. \$65.00 (cloth).

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This highly nuanced study, as the Bakhtinian framework adopted by author Tsitsipis (hereafter simply T) would have it, is “polyphonic”, in two ways. First of all, the subject matter — the effects of sustained contact in Greece between Modern Greek, as a dominant language, and the Arvanítika dialect of Tosk Albanian (i.e., the southern variety of the language) that has been spoken in Greece for at least 600 years, as a subordinate language — is such that the voices of two speech communities are given due consideration. Second, T’s approach to the subject, examining the contact not from the viewpoint — so well represented in the literature and discussed here but not as a primary focus — of linguistic structure per se or of grosser aspects of language use (e.g. which language speakers employ for which purposes in the communities) but rather from a concern for issues of form, function, narrative style, ideology, conflict, hegemony, and social change, gives voice to topics not generally considered in studies of language contact.

The result is a work that probes subtle, but no less real, aspects of the interaction of two cultures, giving insight into the dynamics of a revealing case study of the very timely matter of language endangerment and language death.

T investigates Arvanítika primarily through its use in two villages in which he did extensive fieldwork: Spáta, in Attika, not far from Athens, and Kiriáki, in Viotia (ancient Boeotia), in the south central part of the Greek mainland. T describes the two locales thus (p. 8): “Kiriáki represents a more conservative community, being geographically isolated in a mountainous, rough physical terrain, whereas Spáta represents a more modernized community due to its vicinity to the capital city of Athens”. While Arvanítika was once the dominant language in these villages, speakers have been shifting towards Greek for decades, with the process accelerating after the

1950s as massive changes in Greece involving the establishment of transportation networks, monolingual education in Greek in the primary grades, agricultural mechanization, technological advances in telecommunications, and the like drastically altered the social fabric in these areas (and elsewhere). Yet, T is careful here, making it clear (p. 10) that “the focus in this treatise is not simply to locate the causes of change”; rather, he says, “it is of great importance to understand also the kind of relationship obtaining between Arvanítika communities and the matrix society brought about by the transformations in the material basis of the society”. Yet even that is not enough, as T continues: “Capitalist transformations are interrelated with other changes that give depth to the interpretation of shift and allow us to explain in interesting ways linguistic performance, linguistic ideology, and discourse at the local level”. It is this realization on T’s part that leads to the nuances and subtlety that make this a fascinating and insightful study of speakers and cultures in contact.

T sees Arvanítika speakers as being basically of two types: the “fluent speakers” and what he calls the “terminal speakers”, his designation for the low-proficiency Arvanítika speakers who represent the final stage before total shift to Greek. They are typically of the youngest generation, and Greek is their dominant language. Their competence in Arvanítika is quite limited, especially in production, but they have developed coping strategies, being “creative in the use of a particular kind of Arvanítika discourse, primarily metalinguistic in nature, that forms a kind of compromise solution to the various contradictory pressures that their precarious sociolinguistic condition generates” (p. 4). T’s label “terminal speakers” contrasts with the more usual term in the literature, “semi-speaker”, based on work of Nancy Dorian, e.g. Dorian 1981. T himself recognizes that not all who work on endangered languages are happy with his term (e.g., Mackridge 1992 calls it “chilling”). Dorian’s term is more descriptive in a synchronic way, capturing what speakers are like at present, whereas T’s term looks to the future — a bleak future admittedly — and to the fate of the speakers/language. While in general language revival (not a concern of T’s here except insofar as he shows that the survival of Arvanítika is subject to a complex of factors) is not impossible, typically efforts start too late; what is needed (cf. Keiser 2002) is an expansion of the function/domain/contexts for the use of the language (as hinted at by T when he talks about the

restricted function of Arvanítika nowadays), and it seems unlikely, given what T reports on, that any functional expansion will occur for Arvanítika.

T covers the terrain of Arvanítika-Greek contact and the concomitant shift to Greek in seven chapters: an introduction in which theoretical issues having to do with language, language shift, and language death in general are discussed; Chapter 2 on the “Politics of Change”, in which, among other things, key notions of processes of subordination and heteroglossia, drawing on Bakhtin 1981, and language ideology more generally are explored and developed; Chapter 3 on “Sociolinguistic Change”, with considerable discussion of grammatical changes in the verbal system (focusing largely on subordination strategies) and the nominal system (focusing largely on the so-called “concordial particles” that “glue” together parts of the noun phrase); Chapter 4 on “Performance and Ethnohistory”, in which T introduces the role of verbal performance, narrative performance, and narrative in language shift; Chapter 5 on the “Contextualization of Terminal-Speaker Discourse and the Production of an Across-the-Border Voice”, in which T addresses the “ways low-proficiency speakers negotiate their Arvanítika identity in a linguistic community of which they are a part and on which they depend, facing simultaneously the challenges and pressures from the wider monolingual Greek society” (p. 7) they also aspire to be part of, and in which he introduces the notion of “leaky” discourse and a “voice” that allows for the crossing of these cultural and societal borders (the “across-the-border voice”); Chapter 6 on the “Coding of Linguistic Ideology and Arvanítika Language Shift”, in which T returns to ideological themes more overtly, and introduces the notions of “congruent” and “contradictory” discourse, and shows how in a language shift situation such as that involving Arvanítika, one finds “a constant traffic among meanings and values, and an appropriation and repossession of such meanings by various interested social groups” (p. 119) — “ownership” of the language and of its symbols becomes an issue; finally, there is a Chapter 7, with concluding remarks on “Ideology and Shift [and] Language Ideology as a Discursive and Reconstructible Phenomenon”, as well as a quite comprehensive bibliography and a general index.

This book is based to a large extent on various works of T's that have appeared elsewhere, but this is no mere reprinting of previously published papers. Rather, the "recycled" material in Chapters 3 through 6 has been revised and reworked from its original published form, and a considerable amount of new material has been added to those chapters as well as to the others, including useful cross-references between the chapters that serve as links and add to the overall coherence. What emerges from this compelling mix of the old, the revised, and the new is a synthesis that goes well beyond the sum of the parts.

There is much of great interest here, but a real strength of this work is that T avoids and rejects simplistic characterizations of the contact situation and examines the whole context in which communication in Arvanítika takes place. He sees narratives, for instance, as emblematic of the context in which they occur, part of the metalinguistic negotiation that less-than-fully proficient users of Arvanítika engage in both in production but more usually in sometimes feigned comprehension of more proficient speakers. Moreover, a key observation is that "in everyday conversational discourse, terminal speakers communicate in formulas" (p. 30), so that the overall context of usage again becomes critical to understanding just what is going on with the language and its speakers, terminal or otherwise.

Even where contact alone might be thought to play a role in a particular development within Arvanítika, T is careful to look not (just) to structure but, as befits a linguistic anthropologist, to context for an explanation. For instance, the gerund, a nonfinite formation with a participle that figures in a subordination strategy, was once used in a number of subordinate clause functions, including marking simultaneity of two actions, to judge from its counterpart elsewhere in Albanian (e.g. in the standard language of Albania), yet is obsolescent in Arvanítika, becoming increasingly restricted to formulaic use. Noting (p. 43) that "the decrease in the productivity of the gerund ... , it must be stressed, is not hindered by the functionally equivalent Greek construction" (also a nonfinite participial form, rather like the English *-ing* verb form), and observing (p. 43) that older Arvanítika texts "gerunds show up more frequently in prose narratives and less so in poems", T does locate the cause of this decrease in contact with Greek, but specifically lays the blame on "a

significant shrinkage in the variation and elaboration of stylistic options” associated in large part with “the progressive discouragement of the performance of long tales told to children” (p. 43). That is, a change in the use of Arvanítika that is tied to the cultural changes surrounding increased Hellenization of the communities seems to have had an impact on an element of Arvanítika linguistic structure. Some purely structural pressure from Greek is evident though, in that the interpretation of the subject of the Arvanítika gerund, like its Greek counterpart but, significantly, unlike its Albanian equivalent, is controlled only by the subject of the main clause, not by the object; T notes this fact (p. 40) but does not exploit it to the fullest extent, failing to place it as clearly as he might have in the context of contact-related effects on the gerund.

Even in such a generally well-done book, there are a few points and statements a reader can take issue with, though mostly just on a relatively minor scale. For instance, though T says on p. 57, in his discussion of the use of the subjunctive, that this mood “is introduced with the *të* complementizer corresponding to the English subordinator *that/for to*”, it should be pointed out that *të* is not a complementizer in the usual sense of an element that sharply delimits a subordinate clause boundary (subjects of dependent clauses can occur to the left of *të*, as in T’s example(91b) *dúa aí të shkruánjë* ‘I want him to write’ (literally, “I-want he *të* writes”), and it differs from English *that* in its overall functional range (*të* does not generally occur with verbs of mental activity, for instance, whereas *that* does)) and from English *for ... to* in its grammatical properties, in that *for ... to* complements are nonfinite whereas *të* complements are fully finite (see Joseph 1983: Chapters 2, 4).

Also, T’s assertion (p. 61) that “tense has functional priority over aspectual distinctions for low-proficiency speakers”, referring to the fact that terminal speakers are not particularly proficient with imperfective past forms but do have better control of perfective (“aorist”) past forms, may be making too much of the purely structural issue of tense versus aspect. As he himself points out, frequency undoubtedly plays a role to some degree, since he notes “the retention of at least some high-frequency aorists as against the imperfects” (p. 61). My guess is that terminal speakers simply have not heard many imperfective past forms, and thus never had the opportunity to really

master them, since such forms are surely rather rare in terms of their token frequency overall (such is the case in Greek, for instance). Indeed, T points out that “one can hardly elicit imperfective forms clearly distinguished from the present form from terminal speakers” (p. 61) and refers to their tendency towards “agrammatism” (in the sense of Sasse 1990: 46-7), i.e. a general breakdown in the morphological system, accompanied oftentimes by otherwise unattested extensions of irregular formations and even outright creation of forms that “sound” like possible Arvanítika forms even if they are not actual forms (Sasse’s “phantasy morphology”).

These are all mainly minor quibbles and do not detract in any way from the overall interest of the book; in fact, they show that there is much of great interest to be found in the richly presented details of Arvanítika usage. Therefore, one further improvement one might have hoped for is that even though the book is an empiricist’s dream, being filled with hundreds of interesting example Arvanítika sentences, mostly taken from naturally occurring speech or narratives and thus of particular value as “real” data, T could have made these examples even more useful to all readers by providing more detailed glosses of each sentence; ideally, such data should be given with a word-by-word inter-linear gloss, rather than, as T does, just a translation (and not necessarily a literal one even).

As noted at the outset, this work is polyphonic in various ways. By way of concluding, and by way of utilizing the narrative device of ring-composition familiar to Greek soil (tracing back in Greece at least to Homeric epic), it is fair to mention one other way in which this work speaks with several voices: the multiplicity of audiences served by this fine study. The title of the book itself and the title of the series it appears in obviously direct the work to linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists, and the language focus clearly makes it of interest to Balkanists, Neo-Hellenists, and Albanologists, yet T’s study also speaks to dialectologists, structural linguists, and discourse analysts, within linguistics, as well as cultural anthropologists and social theorists outside the discipline. All in all, this broad appeal, coupled with the strong empirical basis, makes this a work of lasting value for a variety of fields.

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