



ΠΥΧΚΑ ΤΗ
ΜΑΤΕΡΝΗΝΑ!

On Obscenity as a window into Balkan grammar: Evidence from the 2015 Macedonian *Bombi*

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LESoL online Symposium 2 * Mytilene, 20 February 2019

Διαδικτυακή Ημερίδα ΕΠΠΓ 2 * Μυτιλήνη, 20 Φεβρουαρίου 2019



OBSCENITY

“By ‘obscenity’ we mean verbal reference to areas of human activity or parts of the human body that are protected by certain taboos agreed upon by prevailing social custom and subject to emotional aversion or inhibition. These are in fact the sexual and excremental areas. In order to be obscene, such a reference must be made by an explicit expression that is itself subject to the same inhibitions as the thing it describes. Thus, to utter one of the numerous words, to be found in any language, which openly (noneuphemistically) describe the tabooed organs or actions is tantamount to exposing what should be hidden. Our ability to expose the forbidden by using words gives these words a kind of magical power.”

— Henderson, Jeffrey. 1975. *The Maculate Muse: Obscenity in Attic Comedy*. Oxford: Oxford (2nd ed. 1991), p. 2

Henderson was discussing Attic, specifically Aristophanic, comedy.

“The obscenity in Aristophanes is almost always integrally connected with the main themes of the plays; it is an important part of the stage action, the development of plots, and the characterization of personae,” (xiv)

“In other words, the ethos of Attic Comedy, as well as the traditions it carried on, included obscenity in all its forms as an indispensable element.” (xv)

I would argue that the same can be said for obscenity as a linguistic category in general. It is an important category of verbal action, it is important in characterization (social identification), and it is an element in any complete linguistic system.

Owing precisely to the taboos surrounding obscenity, however, it's investigation is more difficult and more marginalized than that of other linguistic categories.

Moreover, precisely because of its taboo nature, obscenity not only provides insight into cultural attitudes but can sometimes preserve structures that are otherwise obsolete.

In this presentation, I shall examine the collocation of Macedonian *ebe* 'fuck' + 'mother' as direct object as attested in an uncensored corpus of spoken Macedonian. It emerges from this corpus that the collocation preserves an older stage of grammar in Modern Macedonian, which in turn gives us insight into Balkan linguistic processes.

**CORE TABOO EXPRESSIONS TEND TO BE INHERITED,
NOT BORROWED,
(BALKAN ROMANCE *PIZDA/KIZDA* IS AN EXCEPTION)
EVEN IN SPRACHBUND SITUATIONS,
ALTHOUGH THEY OFTEN EVOLVE FROM EUPHEMISMS
FOR MACEDONIAN (E & P = PAN-SLAVIC; K = VARIATION)**

eb- < IE *yeb^h- ‘fuck, strike, touch’
(AGk οἰφω, Skt *yabh-*)

kur < IE CoSl kurǔ ‘cock (rooster)’
<?*k^[w](e)w+r ‘twist, bend, wind’

pička (< pizda) < IE *(H₁e)pi+*s(e)d- ‘around+sit’
(Alb *pidh*, Nuristani [Kalasha+5] *pəri* < **pizdikā*)

**Borrowed Terms of abuse are characteristic
of a sprachbund
but they are subject to the passage of time**

1=very rude; 2=mild; 3=old fashioned; 4=unknown

pezevenk -Mac-3,4; Blg-3(1), πεζεβεγκης (1-Cyprus),
Rmn-4; Alb/Rmi pizeveng-1, Armn-4

orospu - Alb & Mac [orospija, cf. *sorospija*] -1; Blg-3(1),
Rmi-1, 2; Rmn-4; Armn-4; Gk-3,4

(NB: Slavic *kurva* remains consistent in Slavic and
contact languages)

sikter Mac-1,2, Blg-3 (1), Rmn-1, ; Armn-1; Rmi 2, Gk
σικτιρ 1,2; Alb/Rmi 2; Judezmo 'get fucked' > 'scram'



**Vistinata za Makedonija
The Truth About Macedonia**

**popularly known as
Бомбите *Bombite* 'the bombs'**

**A corpus of spoken Macedonian
reflecting the usage of an educated political elite**

**From 2008-2015, the Macedonian government,
headed by Prime Minister and party leader of VMRO-DPMNE**
Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija-Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Narodno Edinstvo
'Internal Macedonian Recloutinary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity.'

Nikola Gruevski
[now a convicted criminal on the lam in Hungary],
illegally wire-tapped the telephones of 20,000 citizens,
including everyone in the government itself
except the Prime Minister's direct line to his first cousin,

Sašo Mijalkov, who was head of the
Administration for Security and Counter-Intelligence (UBK)
UBK = *Uprava za Bezbednost i Kontrarazuznavanje*
i.e., the secret police.

In 2015, the main opposition party,

SDSM

Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija
'Social Democratic Union of Macedonia'

led by Zoran Zaev
(now Prime Minister),

obtained many of the sound files and published selections of
conversations held by members of the
Prime Minister's government,

in a series of press releases entitled

Vistinata za Makedonija
'The Truth About Macedonia'

**but referred to in the press as the
*Bombi 'Bombs'***

**In addition to documenting
a truly breathtaking level of corruption,**

**including but not limited to:
violations of land use laws, election fraud,
interference in the judiciary, in the media, in higher education,
and in a variety of workplaces, as well as
bribery, theft, entrapment, conspiracy to commit rape,
and extra-judicial killing**

**the transcripts provide a fascinating insight into modern
colloquial Macedonian as used by a certain class of
educated elites in Skopje today.**

Between 9 February and 16 June 2015,
SDSM held a total of 38 *Bombi* press conferences
The published material contains almost
26 hours of conversation (25:43:58),
totaling close to 130,000 words (128,829)
or 296 pages of text
(Times New Roman 12 point font, standard margins),
from more than 105 adult speakers.
Of this total 17 were women and the rest men.
Most were educated in Skopje,
although a few had strong regional accents.

**Unlike the Watergate Tapes (Nixon 1974),
whose publication documented
the corruption of
U.S. president Richard M. Nixon
and were crucial in ending his presidency,
the published *Bombi* —
whose role in ending the corrupt rule of
Nikola Gruevski in Macedonia
can be compared to that of the
Watergate Tapes vis-à-vis Nixon —
did not omit obscenities.**

**Equivalent expressions
in the published versions of the
Watergate Tapes
were all labeled
“[expletive deleted]”**

**Given the technology of the time,
sound files were not available to the public.**

**In the *Bombi*, however,
all of the obscenities and vulgarities are
completely spelled out in the transcripts,
except some (but not all) occurrences
of the 3 core items (and only those 3 items)
which are occasionally transcribed as
e.., k..[r], p..[k]u
and all of them can be heard on
the sound files
available on the web:**

< <https://prizma.mk/kompleten-materijal-od-site-bombi-na-opozitsijata/> >

AMONG THE NUMEROUS OBSCENITIES IN THE *BOMBI* ARE

pička ‘cunt’, *pizda* ‘*ibid.*’, *pizdarija* ‘crap, etc.’,
popizdi ‘bitch[verb]’
u pičku materin[u]/majčinu ‘in mother’s cunt [ACC]’
kur ‘prick’, *kurac* ‘*ibid.*’, *kurči* ‘bitch[verb]’,
kurtoni ‘scumbags’,
gi boli kurot ‘their prick hurts’ = ‘they don’t give a fuck’
dupi ‘screw, fuck’,
kopile ‘bastard’
gomno ‘shit’, *gomnojadci* ‘shit-eaters’,
posran ‘covered in shit’,
g’zoližáč ‘ass-licker’, *liže g’zove* ‘ass-kiss’,
puši ‘suck[off], fellate’,
šupak ‘asshole’,

AMONG THE LESS TABOO ABUSIVE EXPRESSIONS:

budala ‘fool’, *majmun* ‘monkey’, *gjubre* ‘garbage, trash’

moron ‘moron’, *morončinja* ‘little morons’, *idiot* ‘idiot’,

gad ‘vermin’, *gadura* ‘filthy vermin’,

govedo/goveda ‘jerk/s

kup meso ‘lump of meat’

liguš ‘slimeball’, *ligle* ‘little slimeball’

svinja debela ‘fat pig’

THE ROOT ***EB-*** OCCURS BOTH PREFIXED
AND IN EXPRESSIONS NOT INVOLVING ‘MOTHER’:

koj ti/go/gi ebe ‘what the fuck do/does you/he/they care’

preebe ‘fuck over’

zaebe ‘screw up, fuck over’

odjebe ‘fuck off’

zaebanci ‘slackers’

ebago ‘fuck it’

ebati ‘fucking hell.’

***EBE* CAN OCCUR WITH ANY OBJECT
AND IN BOTH LITERAL AND FIGURATIVE MEANINGS:**

literal

kje go ebat narkomani

**‘junkies will fuck him’ (Sašo Mijalkov 3.4)
said in the context of planning to organize the rape of a
rival politician who had been entrapped and sent to
prison**

figurative

mu ebam plemeto

‘I fuck his tribe’ (Marjan Risteski [ex-mayor of Prilep] 17.8)

**THE COLLOCATION *EBE* + ‘MOTHER’
IS ALWAYS FIGUATIVE IN THE *BOMBI***

**MOREOVER, IT IS BY FAR THE MOST FRQUENT OBSCENITY,
OCCURING A TOTAL OF 45 TIMES
(= 1 IN EVERY 6 2/3 PAGES).**

**BY CONTRAST, *PIČKA/PIZDA* + ‘MOTHER’
(EXCLUDING 1 OCCURENCE THAT ALSO INCLUDES *EBE*)
OCCURS ONLY 17 TIMES**

***ebe* + ‘mother’ occurs in the speech of 15 speakers**

all of whom figure significantly in the *Bombi*

They were all major figures in or connected to the

VMRO-DPMNE government

Their speech represents a large proportion of the corpus.

14 of the 15 are men

and the 1 woman, Gordana Jankuloska,

was the most powerful woman in Gruevski’s cabinet

(Minister for Internal Affairs)

She has already been sentenced to six years in prison for

involvement in one of the 25 cases opened so far by the

Office of the Special Public Prosecutor.

OF SPECIAL INTEREST ARE THREE PARAMETERS:

**1) DEPLOYMENT VERBAL CATEGORIES
(TENSE-ASPECT-MOOD AND PERSON)**

2) THE MARKING OF DEFINITENESS ON THE DIRECT OBJECT,

3) THE PRESENCE OR ABSENCE OF OBJECT REDUPLICATION

| | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-----------------------|-----------|-----------------------------|
| 1s present | 25 | total presents | 34 | |
| 3s present | 2 | da+present | 18 | subjunctive/optative |
| 1p present | 5 | kje+present | 10 | future |
| 3p present | 2 | nek+present | 2 | optative |
| 1s past | 6 | modal presents | 30 | |
| imperative | 4 | | | |

***ebe* is imperfective**

but the past tense is always aorist (1s *ebav*, 1p *ebavme*)

**The imperfective aorist is obsolete in Modern
Macedonian**

except in some rural dialects.

The form is therefore an archaic survival.

Also noteworthy is the fact that the old perfect in *-l* (1s *sum ebal*, 3s *ebal*) never occurs in the *Bombi*. The old perfect of *ebe*+mother is often used in expressions of surprise or admiration.

This may explain its absence from the *Bombi* where *ebe*+mother is always used as an expression of annoyance, anger, disgust, threat, or dismay which in turn is consistent with the content of the conversations among the politicians in Gruevski's circle.

In Bulgarian, *ebe*+‘mother’ has most of the same functions as in Macedonian, but at least some Bulgarian usages sound peculiar to Macedonian speakers (a matter of on-going research). Particularly striking is the greater frequency of the perfect in *-l* in Bulgarian usages

THE SEMANTICS & TAM OF EBE+MAJKA IN BULGARIAN

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| THREAT | Šte ti eba majkata! | 1s future |
| VENGEFULNESS | Eba mu se majkata! | 1s present |
| DIFFICULTY | Majkata mi se eba! | 1s present |
| IGNORANCE | Eba li mu majkata? | 1s present |
| SURPRISE | Be, da mu ebeš majkata | 2s subjunctive |
| SOMETHING BEUATIFUL | Da si ebe majkata. | 3s subjunctive |
| INDIFFERENCE | Ebi mu majkata. | imperative |
| SATISFACTION | Ebah li ti majkata! | 1s aorist |
| AMAZEMENT | Ebaaah mu majkata?! | 1s aorist |
| REVENGE | Majkata mu ebah! | 1s aorist |
| DISMISSAL | Ebal sām ti majkata. | 1s perfect (M) |
| ANNOYANCE | Ebalo si e majkata. | 3s perfect (M) |
| EVERYTHING AT ONCE | Majkata si e ebalo.. | 3s perfect (N) |

< <https://www.facebook.com/Ludiq.Shapkar2/posts/само-в-българският-език-ебането-се-използва-и-за-1-закана-ще-ти-еба-мајката2- задо/1074592889302401/>>

DEFINITENESS

| | | |
|-----------------|----|---|
| <i>majkata</i> | 23 | definite |
| <i>mater</i> | 7 | accusative (Serbian or archaic) |
| <i>mameto</i> | 5 | definite (hypocoristic, dim.) |
| <i>majka</i> | 3 | indefinite, but always possessed <i>_mu</i> |
| <i>mamicata</i> | 3 | definite (diminutive) |
| <i>mame</i> | 2 | indefinite (hypocoristic, dim.) |
| <i>mamata</i> | 1 | definite (hypocoristic) |
| <i>majku</i> | 1 | accusative (dialectal) |

Of particular interest are those examples where ‘mother’ is
indefinite [1a, b, c] & [2]

(1) a. да ja ебам мајка му. (KjŠ 28.7) [36, 38]
da ja ebam majka mu
 DMS it.ACC fuck.1s.PRS mother him.DAT

b. мајка му да ja ебам. (KjŠ 28.7) [37]
majka mu da ja ebam
 mother him.DAT DMS her.ACC fuck.1s.PRS
 ‘may I/let me fuck his mother’

c. мајку му ебам. (VM 30.3) [40]
majku mu ebam
 mother him.DAT fuck.1s.PRS
 ‘I fuck his mother.’

(2) **Ееј, говедо едно, маме у пичка да**
ееј govedo edno маме u pička da
Eh cattle one.N мама in cunt DMS
го ебам. Стотче земал за
go ebam stotče zemal za
it.acc fuck.1s.PRS 100.DIM took.3s.M.L-PST for
кампања у кеш.
kampanja u keš
campaign in cash

‘Eh, what a jerk, God fucking damn him to hell. Apparently he took a hundred [thousand] in cash for [his] campaign.’
 (DPL 3.1) [2]

**(2) is especially interesting
Such a construction would not,
as far as I can tell,
occur in any other Balkan language,
where ‘mother’ either has to be definite
or determinate
cf. Geg Albanian**

Kam me ia qi atë nonë
have.1sg INF him.DATher.ACC fuck.PT that.ACC mother.INDEF
‘I will fuck that mother of his’
or else followed by a dative possessive (as in [1])

**(2) IS ALSO THE ONLY OCCURRENCE WITHOUT
AN ETHICAL/POSSESSIVE DATIVE CLITIC
THE POSSESSIVE OR ETHICAL DATIVE
ASSOCIATED WITH ‘MOTHER’
IS USUALLY MASCULINE 3S *MY* [30],
BUT OCCASIONALLY
3P *HM* [8], REFLEXIVE *CH* [5] OR 2S *TH* [1]**

While ‘mother’ is definite in 32 of the 45 usages direct-object reduplication occurs in only 16 sentences, and in 4 of these, ‘mother’ is indefinite, although in 3 of those examples the phrase is *majka my*, which can be taken as *definitiva tantum*.

It appears that the collocation of *eǎe* + ‘mother’ preserves an older stage of object reduplication. Object fronting, which is a typical topicalization strategy, is the most common trigger of object reduplication in constructions of the type *eǎe* + ‘mother’.

This is consistent with the Balkan languages where object reduplication is more restricted than it is in Modern Macedonian, e.g. Albanian and Greek,

**OV order (with its pragmatic implications)
is one of the most likely triggers.**

**Thus, it appears that just as the imperfective aorist *eḃae*,
is an archaism, so, too,
the occurrence of object reduplication
in Macedonian expressions of the type *eḃe* + ‘mother’
reflects an earlier situation.**

**The occurrences of object reduplication with postposed
dative possessives (NP; versus ethical datives tied to VP)
and in half the examples using the future marker
can be seen as indicative of the pathways
followed by the spread of object reduplication
as it became more frequent and finally regularized
in Modern Macedonian where all definite noun phrases
normally trigger object reduplication.**

CONCLUSIONS

1. **OBSCENITY IS VALUABLE FOR THE CONTRIBUTION IT CAN MAKE TO THE STUDY OF LINGUISTIC SYSTEMS, ESPECIALLY THEIR HISTORY, BUT ALSO PRAGMATICS**
2. **THE MOST TYPICAL MACEDONIAN OBSCENITY, WHICH IS *EBE*+‘MOTHER’ DISPLAYS ARCHAISMS NOT SEEN ELSEWHERE IN THE MODERN LANGUAGE**
3. **PRESERVATION OF THE IMPERFECTIVE AORIST IS ONE EXAMPLE**
4. **THE PATHWAYS OF THE SPREAD OF OBJECT REDUPLICATION CAN BE SEEN IN THE PATTERN USED IN THIS EXPRESSION IN MACEDONIAN**
5. **MACEDONIAN DISPLAYS SOME STRIKING DIFFERENCES FROM OTHER BALKAN LANGUAGES, INCLUDING THE CLOSELY RELATED BULGARIAN.**
6. **THE CORRUPT POLITICIANS WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE *BOMBI*, DESPITE THEIR CRIMES, HAVE DONE LINGUISTICS A SERVICE BY PROVIDING A VALUABLE UNCENSORED CORPUS**
7. **THE TOPIC DESERVES FURTHER MORE MULTILINGUAL RESEARCH THAN HAS BEEN DEDICATED TO IT SO FAR (CF. ALLAN 2018/2019)**

Falemnderit/Rrofshi
Հնորհակալութիւն
Naristo

Благодаря/Мерси

Тхьашъегъэпсэу

Саа олсунуз/Saa olsunuz

გმადლობთ

Ευχαριστώ

תודה רבה

Барчаллагь

Благодарам/Фала/Сполајви

تشکر ادرم

Nais tumenge/Oven saste

Muļtumesc

Räxmät/Pəxmət/رحمت

Teşekkür ederim/Çok merisi

און א שייעם דאנק!