Victor A. Friedman (Chicago, Melbourne)

THE CONSERVATIVE NATURE OF MACEDONIAN OBSCENITY: EVIDENCE FROM THE 2015 *BOMBI*

The 2015 *Bombi* (Prizma 2015) — transcripts of wiretapped conversations — provide us with an uncensored corpus of the Macedonian speech of the political elite connected with the then-ruling party VMRO-DPMNE (see Friedman 2017 for additional details). 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]", and given the technology of the time, sound files were not available to the public. In the *Bombi*, however, most of the obscenities and vulgarities are completely spelled out, e.g., *дупи*, *г'золижач*, *гомно*, *гомнојадци*, *кој ти го ебе*, *заебе*, *копиле / копиље* [sic!], *кур*, *курац*, *курчи*, *куртони*, *лиже г'зове*, *одјебе*, *пичка*, *пизда*, *пиздарија*, *попизди*, *посран*, *преебе*, *шупак*, etc., as well as abusive terms such as *будала*, *гад*, *гадура*, *говедо*, *ѓубре*, *идиот*, *куп месо*, *лигле*, *лигуш*, *мајмун*, *морон*, *морончиња*, *свиња дебела*, etc. Although the *Bombi* transcripts do not always fully spell out the e-word, the k-word, and the p-word, the uncensored sound files are available on line, and so the exact lexical and grammatical form can always be determined. The *Bombi*, therefore, offer an unprecedented window into the abusive language of a Macedonian political elite, which in turn makes it possible to document the relative conservatism of certain obscenities. In this paper, I examine the obscenities involving the verb *ебе* with 'mother' as the direct object. Of special interest are three parameters: 1) the marking of definiteness on the direct object, 2) the presence or absence of object reduplication, and 3) verbal categories (tense-aspect-mood and person). In terms of gender, 14 of the speakers using *ебе* + 'mother' are male and one, Gordana Jankuloska, is female. She was

also the most powerful woman in Gruevski's cabinet (Minister for Internal Affairs, 2006–2015).

Of the 45 occurrences of *ебе* + 'mother' (i.e., approximately once every 6 2/3 pages), the most common form of the direct object is definite *мајката* [23]. The next most common form is the Serbism or archaism *матер* [7], which is used by 4 different speakers, followed by *мамето* [5], then *мајка* [3] and *мамицата* [3], *маме* [2], and finally *мамата* [1] and (dialectal) accusative *мајку* [1]. In terms of formal tense and person, 1s present [25] is by far the most common. The next most frequent, but considerably rarer, is 1s past [6], followed by 1p present [5], then imperative [4], 3s present [2], 3p present [2], and a single 1p past [1]. Of the 34 present tenses, however, most are preceded by a modal marker: *да* [18], *ќе* [10], or *нек* [2] (standard *нека*). Of particular significance is the fact that the past tense is always synthetic aorist (1s *ебав*). Since this verb is imperfective, the consistent use of the aorist represents a rare survival of the imperfective aorist in the usage of educated, urban Macedonians, for whom the imperfective aorist is otherwise obsolete (Friedman 1993). The possessive or ethical dative associated with 'mother' is usually masculine 3s *му* [30], but occasionally 3p *им* [8], reflexive *си* [5] or 2s *ти* [1]. There is also 1 occurrence without a dative, which is an expression of annoyance or deprecation.

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 *мајка му*, which can be taken as *definitva tantum*. It appears that the collocation of *ебе* + '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 *ебе* + '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, and OV order (with its pragmatic implications) is one of the most likely triggers. Thus, it appears that just as the imperfective aorist *ебав*, etc. is an archaism, so, too, the occurrence of object reduplication in Macedonian expressions of the type *ебе* + 'mother' reflects an earlier situation. The occurrences of object reduplication with postposed dative possessives (as opposed to ethical datives tied to the verb phrase) as well as with 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.

When used with 'mother,' *ебе* is always an unprefixed imperfective. Although *ебе* does occur in its literal meaning in the corpus — in the context of

conspiracy to have rape committed — when used with 'mother' and similar objects, e.g. *племе*, the meaning is always metaphorical. In the past and future, the meaning usually involves doing something bad or something bad happening. In the imperative, interrogative and marked optative (*нек*), the meaning is dismissive. The most common occurrences, however, are expressions of anger or annoyance with *да* or a plain present. Completely absent from the *Bombi* is the use of *ебе* + 'mother' as an expression of surprise or admiration such as can be found in Balkan languages in general. Similarly, *ебе* + 'mother' in this corpus is always directed at a 3rd person, or, on rare occasion, at the speaker himself as an expression of dismay. It is never directed at the addressee. This is due to the fact that the corpus consists of telephone conversations among co-conspirators. It is also worth noting that not a single *л*-form of *ебе* occurs in association with 'mother.' The evidence from other Slavic languages, e.g. Russian, Serbian, and Bulgarian, is that the resultative past participle of *еб-*, which developed an optative meaning at the end of the Common Slavic period (cf. Friedman 2012) and is equivalent to the Macedonian *л*-form of *ебе*, was the form of choice, as it still is in Serbian and Russian (cf. Isačenko 1964). Moreover, even in Bulgarian, expressions such as *ебал съм ти майката* are common either as emphatics or expressions of annoyance or dismissiveness. The complete absence of *л*-forms of *ебе* from the *Bombi* may just be an accident of context, but it probably indicates a different development in Macedonian. Both Macedonian and Bulgarian can use the imperfective aorist, an option not available to Russian and not generally found in Serbian.

The lack of reduplication in Macedonian *ебе* + 'mother' unless it is fronted or marked with a dative possessive pronoun, plus three out of six future usages (of which one uses *матер*, which is never reduplicated) is a morphosyntactic archaism. This gives us a window into the pathways of the spread of direct object reduplication in Macedonian. While these pathways are to be expected, *ебе* + 'mother' provides modern evidence that would otherwise be lacking. Particularly interesting is the occurrence of direct object reduplication with unpossessed, indefinite *маме* (Bomba 3, Conversation 1). 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, e.g. [Geg] Albanian *Kam me ia qi atë nonë*), or else followed by a dative possessive.

In sum, just as the text of the *Bombi* tell us much about political corruption, so, too, the language in the *Bombi* tells us much about colloquial Macedonian today, and about other Balkan languages in comparison. Thus,

while Gruevski and his circle have done tremendous damage to Macedonian society, as documented in the *Bombi*, they have, albeit unintentionally, done linguists a tremendous service.

REFERENCES

Friedman 1993 — *Friedman V. A.* The Loss of the Imperfective Aorist in Macedonian: Structural Significance and Balkan Context // American Contributions to the Eleventh International Congress of Slavists / Maguire R. A., Timberlake A. (eds.). Columbus: Slavica, 1993. P. 285–302.

Friedman 2012 — *Friedman V. A.* Conjunction Calquing — A Heartland Balkanism // Balkanismen heute — Balkanisms Today — Balkanizmy segodnja / Kahl Th., Metzelin M., Schaller H. (eds.).Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2012. P. 31–37.

Friedman 2017 — *Friedman V. A.* Self/Other (Свой/Чужой) in the Macedonian 'Bombs' of 2015 // Балканский тезаурус: Взгляд на Балканы извне и изнутри. Тезисы и материалы. Москва, 18–20 апреля 2017 г. / Макарцев М. М. (отв. ред.), Седакова И. А., Цивьян Т. В. (ред.). Москва: Институт славяноведения РАН, 2017. P. 216–229. (Балканские чтения. 14.)

Isačenko 1964 — *Isačenko A. V.* Un juron russe du XVIe siècle // Lingua Viget: Commentationes Slavicae in Honorem V. Kiparsky / Vahros I., Kahla M. (eds). Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Kirjapaino, 1964. P. 68–70.

Nixon 1974 — *Nixon R. M.* The White House Transcripts. New York: Viking Press, 1974.

Prizma 2015 — Kompleten materijal od site bombi što gi objavi opozicijata (Accessed on January, 31st, 2019 at https://prizma.mk/kompleten-materijal-od-site-bombi-na-opozitsijata/).