

Svetlana Berikashvili. *Morphological Aspects of Pontic Greek Spoken in Georgia*. München: LINGCOM, 2017, 163 pp. ISBN 978-3-86288-852-8.

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Over the last decades, documenting dialects and generally non-standard languages has witnessed an increasing interest, especially when these linguistic systems face the threat of extinction. The publication of the book *Morphological Aspects of Pontic Greek Spoken in Georgia* is very timely, because it provides a rather detailed account of the morphology of a variety of the Pontic group, the idiosyncratic features of which have been relatively unknown.

Taking into consideration the main existing proposals for both Greek and Pontic morphology, Berikashvili provides a thorough presentation of her material, and at the same time raises a lot of questions regarding the influence that the variety has received from the languages that has entered in contact with, mainly Turkish and Russian, and to a lesser extent Georgian and Standard Modern Greek. Although she does not offer any sound theoretical analyses of the data, she encourages the debate on several issues on Pontic morphology, particularly on those regarding inflection, and shows that there are “several avenues” for further developments in the study of contact morphology, if dialects are accounted for as a testing bed for validating theoretical proposals.

All scholars may not agree with some of the possible explanations put forward by the author, such as for instance, the division in inflectional classes of nouns (pp. 36–47), or the realization of the perfective stem in verbal forms (pp. 63–65). However, a solid description of a variety of items is provided and the author opens doors to further investigation and possible theoretical analysis.

The book consists of four chapters, preceded by the acknowledgments, a list of abbreviations, and a particularly useful introduction containing important information about methodological issues, the research that led to the production of the work, the main features of the Pontic variety under examination, and an overview of the history of Pontic Greeks in Georgia. Samples of the data with glossed extracts of narratives of speakers are listed in an appendix, followed by the citation of the data resources and the bibliographical references. The book ends with three types of indices, the subject index, the author index and an index consisting of geographical names, toponyms and names of languages and dialects.

The introduction is divided into three parts. In the first section, Berikashvili clearly sets out her goals and offers details about the corpus that is used, its

collection, annotation and transcription. In the second part, the settlement of Pontic Greeks in Georgia during the various stages of their migration is offered, accompanied by information about the Pontic villages that have been established in this country. Finally, the third part discusses some general, but substantial issues concerning, more specifically, the currently used name in Georgia, Romeika, the debatable status of Pontic being a language or a dialect, its conservative character with respect to features appearing in other Modern Greek dialects (see, for example, the ancient suppletive forms in page 68). This section ends with hints about some contact-induced changes and a list with the most important works written on Pontic Greek in general, while emphasis is put on the fact that this book is the first attempt to describe a Pontic variety on the basis of corpus data.

In my opinion, the last section of the introduction would have been more complete if it included part of the Conclusions Chapter (Chapter 4), which refers to the general properties of the dialect. Many of the issues reported in this chapter, such as for instance, the division of Pontic Greek in subgroups, or a number of features which classify Romeika to the Chaldiot branch (pp. 104–107) would better match the third section of the introduction, where the reader becomes acquainted with the basics of the general properties of Pontic.

In the chapter following the introduction (Chapter 1), the phonetic system of the variety is clearly presented, and the most important phonological phenomena regarding Pontic in general are mentioned. Certain innovations of Romeika are particularly interesting, for instance, the realization of some consonants due to an influence from Georgian.

The next two chapters constitute the core of the book, dealing with nominal and verbal morphology respectively, although Chapter 3 is much longer (53 pages) compared to Chapter 2 which counts only 20 pages.

Nominal morphology is presented in Chapter 2 and important questions regarding inflection are dealt with, such as gender assignment and metaplastism, case syncretism, and the division into inflectional classes. The chapter offers a comprehensible and meticulous description of the inflection of nouns, while the various forms of the article and the general issue of gender are also approached. Nevertheless, a number of points require special attention and are subject to some criticism, the most important of which are resumed as follows: first, although the chapter is on nominal morphology, both the description and the discussion are limited to inflection, while derivation or even nominal compounding are completely missing, with the exception of a simple reference to the diminutive suffixes and the collective *-and/-ant* ones. I consider this to be the most serious gap of the entire description. Second, a distinction

in inflectional classes is proposed on the basis of stem allomorphy, following Ralli's approach for Standard Modern Greek (cf. Ralli, A. 2000. *A feature-based Analysis of Greek Nominal Inflection*. *Glossologia* 11–12, 201–228), but also on the basis of the animacy hierarchy. Thus, nouns are distributed in eight inflectional classes (ICs), but IC₁ (masculine nouns in -os), IC₂ (masculine nouns in -is, -as, -es) and IC₃ (feminine nouns in -a, -i, -e and -u) are further divided into two subclasses each, depending on the semantic nature of the nouns they include. For this division, the feature +/-human plays an important role, since there is a different inflection in the plural of +human and -human nouns. However, while humanness seems to be a sufficient criterion for the distinction, Berikashvili also adds the pleonastic +/-animate feature, probably driven by the tendency in international literature to adopt this feature instead of the +/-human one. Third, the reader has difficulties in discerning the notion of differential subject marking (DSM) which is mentioned in pages 32–35, but is not sufficiently explained. A more detailed account of this matter would have been useful, especially that there are putative cases of DSM in Romeika which seem to be different from what is mentioned to be the case for other varieties of Pontic.

Chapter 3 offers a detailed description of verbal conjugation. Again, attention is brought to inflectional types, while the productively used verbal derivational suffixes (-ev-, -iz-, -az-, -on-) are only mentioned in order to show some inflectional peculiarities, especially with respect to the formation of the imperfect and the aorist tenses. Curiously, the term 'inflectional class' is not used in this chapter and the term 'conjugation' is preferred. Verbs are considered to be distributed in two categories (conjugations), according to the place of stress on the first person singular of the present tense, following the distinction of traditional Modern Greek grammars (e.g. Triandaphyllidis, M. 1938. *Modern Greek Grammar*, Athens). Among the various matters that are treated in this chapter, prominent positions are occupied by the variation observed in stem allomorphy, the variety of endings in the imperfect and the aorist tenses, both active and passive, and the imperative forms. As far as the personal forms are concerned, the importance of the second person in present tense is pointed out in Romeika, which shows alternative forms due to the application of phonological laws or to the influence of Standard Modern Greek. Moreover, the place and form of the augment -e-, another crucial issue, is discussed in detail, and several examples are offered which could be used as evidence for future analyses regarding the augment in Greek. The chapter ends with a very useful summary of various conjugation types and tables illustrate them for a better comprehension. In spite of some minor errors (for instance, the analysis of the string -ps- as the perfective marker of verbs with stems ending in labial and

labiodental consonants, e.g. *é-θre-ps-a* ‘I fed’ instead of the correct one *é-θrep-s-a* < *θréf-o* ‘to feed’, p. 63) in purely descriptive terms, I consider this chapter as the most elaborated one, which could be utilized as a significant reference manual for future studies on dialectal morphology.

Chapter 4 is supposed to summarize the findings of nominal and verbal morphology of Romeika, but strangely, it opens the discussion on borrowing, a very important factor triggering change in language-contact situations. Several notions of borrowing are tackled, such as the integration strategies in adopting foreign items, lexical versus structural borrowing, variation in the assignment of grammatical gender and inflectional classes depending on the donor language or on pure phonological factors, selective borrowing, etc. Unfortunately, all these issues are superficially mentioned and no in depth explanation is offered which could add to the book a substantial value. From the little that is said, a more detailed account of borrowing, of mainly nouns but also verbs, could have constituted an important section of this work. Indeed, it is missing, and in spite of the fact that Berikashvili has work of her own on this particular domain, admitting that “... the Pontic variety spoken by the Pontic-speaking community in Georgia is a good case study to investigate contact-induced changes...” (p. 118).

To sum up, Berikashvili’s book is a detailed examination of an important dialect of Modern Greek, the variety of Pontic spoken in Georgia, displaying phenomena that other Modern Greek dialects seem to ignore. It addresses issues that may be of wider interest to researchers and the description is laid out in a clear format, while tables and the wealth of examples drawn from a wide corpus make it easy to follow the developing arguments.

In my opinion, the book will be a fairly accessible read for many scholars dealing with dialectology, morphology, Greek, and contact linguistics. For the next editions, certain edits can be suggested which would increase the continuity of the reading experience. I would mention typos and syntax errors with respect to English, a restructuring of Chapter 4, as suggested in previous paragraphs, and a clearer presentation of certain issues, e.g. borrowing, which are considered to be important for the Romeika morphology.

This work deals with a very specific subject and for this reason, it may be seen as a highly specialist work, designed primarily for experts in dialectology. However, even non-specialist readers will find its broad linguistic conception particularly rewarding.