

Izvorni naučni rad
UDK:811.163.2'276.1

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**ON SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF MINORITIES
(CONCERNING THE BULGARIAN LANGUAGE)**

In this paper, we present the peculiarities of minorities and their languages. We provide general information on the state of research and include international professional literature. We show what specific features characterize the Bulgarian over-heating in different regions of Europe. Today, the Bulgarian language has been increasingly explored outside the country, for example in Ukraine, Moldova, Greece and Serbia. Bulgarian-speaking people live there. We continue to show which sociolinguistic aspects affect different groups in Bulgaria. We document the situation of linguistic minorities, which are very numerous in Bulgaria. We conclude that minority languages are intensively researched and that there is a need to study them, both within and outside national borders.

Keywords: minority languages, sociolinguistics, Bulgaria, Bulgarian minority

Introduction

In the last few years, we have started work in a totally unexplored field of sociolinguistics which we call sociolinguistics of minorities. Although we have been working in the field of Bulgarian sociolinguistics of minorities, i. e. sociolinguistics concerning Bulgarian dialects used by diverse minority groups in Bulgaria and on the territories with compact Bulgarian population abroad, our experience could be easily applied to other languages, too.

So far, several articles exploring different aspects of the issue have been published or presented at conferences. In the first of them (Iliev, 2019), the basic postulates of the Bulgarian sociolinguistics of minorities are discussed and the case of the trilingual Romani minority from the village of Voivodovo, Haskovo region, in Southeastern Bulgaria (speaking Turkish, Romani, and Bulgarian on a dialect level) is researched.

The second article (Iliev, 2020) reviews a similar case concerning the bilingual inhabitants of the upper quarter of Chakalarovo, Kardzhali region (Southeastern Bulgaria) who speak both Bulgarian and Turkish dialects. The third paper (Iliev, 2022) examines the use of the Rhodopean Bulgarian dialect by the Agupti (or ‘Egyptian’ Gypsies), settled in Madan, Smolyan region (again in Southeastern Bulgaria). The latest article published recently (Iliev, Kazakova, 2025) pays attention to the Bulgarian dialect spoken by the Albanian minority in Mandritsa, Ivailovgrad region (Southeastern Bulgaria).

Besides, in the first of the cited articles attention was paid to some fragmentary attempts for describing such linguistic phenomena: by Kyuchukov (Kyuchukov, 1994) – for the use of Turkish dialects by Gypsies in Bulgaria; by Hudson (Hudson, 1995: 274–275) – for the use of English by Afro-Americans in the USA; by Nikolova (Nikolova, 2004: 5–6) – for the use of Bulgarian in the Ottoman empire by Turks, Tatars, the Gagauz people, Circassians and Greeks. Also, some unexplained by the authors examples for the use of Bulgarian dialects by non-Bulgarian minority groups were shown: by Primovski (Primovski, 1955: 219) – regarding the above-mentioned Agupti or ‘Egyptian’ Gypsies in Madan, who before speaking Turkish used to speak an ‘authentic (Bulgarian) old Rhodopean dialect’; by Ognyanova (1985: 87) – concerning the use of the Bulgarian Shop (Sofia region) dialect by Gypsies or Romani people; by Barbolova (1999: 5–6) – for the Bulgarian dialect of the Gagauz people in the village of Kubei or Chervenoarmeiskoe in Ukrainian Bessarabia; by Kocheva (2005: 54) – for the use of the Thessaloniki region Bulgarian dialect by the Greeks in Nessebar on the Black sea coast; by Marinov (2008) – on the bilingualism of the Romanian speaking population from the village of Bregovo, Vidin region. Moreover, we could add, a new-found extract from L. Panov’s book (2016: 36–37), where the Shop dialect of one of his main characters – a Gypsy, is demonstrated again. However, many other examples could be shown here.

An object of research for the Bulgarian sociolinguistics of minorities are the minority groups speaking Bulgarian on the territories of Bulgaria, Ukraine (Kahl, Nechiti, 2016), Moldova (Henzelmann, 2025), Romania, Serbia, Northern Macedonia (Simyan, Drăgan, 2025), Albania, Greece (cf. Henzelmann, 2017: 39ff.), and Turkey. Bilingualism and multilingualism are

typical for all of them. The particular minorities under research, as stated by Iliev (cf. Iliev, 2019) are: the Gypsies (the Romani people), the Romanians, the Aromanians (more, cf. Kahl, 2008), the Greeks, the Albanians, the Russians, the Armenians, the Tatars, the Gagauz people, the Turks, the Czechs, the Slovaks, the Jews and others. A vast field for research on the matter could be found in Turkey, where a great number of forcibly relocated Muslim Bulgarians from Macedonia, Northern Bulgaria and the Rhodope region live together not only with Turks, Gypsies, Albanians, Tatars, Armenians, Vlachs, Greeks, Bosnians, but also with many Caucasian peoples.

Minority groups in Bulgaria

a) The Romani people

This group includes numerous subgroups, some of which are trilingual (speaking Bulgarian, Romani and Turkish languages), others – bilingual (speaking Romani and Bulgarian, Turkish and Bulgarian, etc.), and some – monolingual (speaking only Bulgarian – known as ‘Asparukh’s Gypsies’, ‘Asparukh’s Bulgarians’ or ‘Gray pigeons’, who are the Bulgarian equivalent of the Romanian-speaking Gypsies) (Romite, 2008). It is a curious fact that as the ‘Asparukh’s Gypsies’ consider themselves to be direct descendants of the Turkic Proto-Bulgarians, in the same way, the Vlach or Romanian-speaking Gypsies believe that they derive from the ancient Dacians. As a source of information regarding the Romani dialects in Bulgaria we will show only the work of Iglja and Draganova (2006).

The Romani minority, being most numerous and widely dispersed throughout Bulgaria, offers best possibilities for research regarding the Bulgarian dialects used by its members. An abundance of dialectal material probably could be found in the Romani quarters of Sofia, Pernik, Yambol, Stara Zagora, among the Bulgarian-speaking Tsutsumani Gypsies in Northwestern Bulgaria and so on.

b) Romanians and Aromanians

The Romanian dialect of the Vlachs from the Vidin region was studied by Budish, Asenova and Simeonov (Budish, 2001; Asenova, Simeonov, 1978). However, there are Vlachs in Nikopol and other places along the Danube River (Mladenov, 1995: 7; Balkanski, 1999). Another Romanian dialect speak the Kopanari (wash-tub makers), the Lingurari (spoon-makers), and Mechkadari (bear-breeders) Gypsies who live all over Bulgaria (Mladenov, 1995; Doncheva, 2005). We have dialectal recordings from the village of Yagoda, Kazanlak region; from Tchernokonevo, Dimitrovrad region, and from Korten, Nova Zagora region (in the first two villages, most of the Kopanari

Gypsies, besides Romanian and Bulgarian, can speak Greek too, as they have worked and lived in Greece for 15–20 years, and the children and grandchildren of many of them still live there). Furthermore, there are Aromanian settlements in the Western Rhodopes, whose language was studied by Popesku and Balkanski (Popesku, Balkanski, 1995).

c) Greeks

The situation here is just as much diverse, as with the Gypsies. Apart from the Sarakatsani people in the Sliven and Karlovo regions, as well in Western Bulgaria (Batakov, 2004), some information about their language could be found in P. Asenova's (1976) works. In Bulgaria and Ukraine, up to present days, there are representatives of the minorities that still speak Greek dialects: the Kariots (who call themselves 'Romei') in the Yambol region (see Daskalova-Zheliaskova, 1985) and in the Harmanli region (Rusev, Madzharov, 1987); the Ortaköy Greeks in Ivailovgrad and the neighboring village of Belopolyane (Primovski, 1973); the Pontic Greeks in Pomorie, Nessebar and other places (Kocheva 2005; Poromanska 2014); the Greeks in the Odessa region of Ukraine. N. Derzhavin (Derzhavin, 1915: 322) notes for the village of Malak Boyalak, Odessa region, whose inhabitants immigrated from Malak Boyalak, Elhovo region, in Bulgaria, that there was a mixed Greek-Bulgarian population, who called themselves Greek-Bulgarians and spoke both Greek and Bulgarian. In the past, Greek towns were also Varna, Asenovgrad, and Plovdiv, as well as the villages around them (in Kuklen, Plovdiv region, still live people who speak a Greek dialect). A large Greek community, according to Nikolova (2004: 70), existed in Tarnovo, too, during the Ottoman rule. Nikolova writes that for Petar Bogdan who visited the town in 1640 was not very clear of which ethnic origin were the local people there who used to speak both Greek and Bulgarian.

d) Albanians

This was another widespread ethnic group on the Eastern Balkans in the past (Gyuzelev, 2004), whose successors still live in the Bulgarian village of Mandritsa, Ivailovgrad region, and in Kardzhali. Their dialect had been studied by Sokolova (1983). A part of the population of Chiprovtsi region (Northwestern Bulgaria), especially in Kipilovets (Gyuzelev, 2004: 41; Ilieva, 2012: 4–5) consists of Albanian settlers, who used to speak excellent Bulgarian (on a dialect level) even during the 17th century. In Arbanassi, Tarnovo region, which was thoroughly an Albanian village (Gyuzelev, 2004: 50), many years ago, women used to speak 'a peculiar mixture of Modern Greek and Bulgarian' (Nikolova, 2004: 151). Apparently, like the Gagauz people in Var-

na, the Albanians in Mandritsa also tended to accept the Greek language and culture (there were Greeks in the village once). The Bulgarian refugees from Greece come to the village later – after 1919 (Petrov, 2015:17).

The situation is the same in the village of Zhovtnevoe (Karakurt), Bolgrad region (Ukrainian Bessarabia), where Albanian settlers from Northeastern Bulgaria have been living. There, Bulgarians, Gagauzians, and Albanians live together and Albanian, Bulgarian, Turkish and Russian are spoken (ABGSSSR, 1958: 13–14; Budina, 1993; Dermentli, 2011; Kahl, Nechiti, 2016: 15–16). A. Voinikova (2008: 80–81) points out that, in Zhovtnevoe, Bulgarians, Albanians and Gagauzians speak Bulgarian (of course, dialectal). This information was personally confirmed by a taxi driver from Bolgrad, who was born and raised in the above-mentioned village. Last but not least, as well as elsewhere, mixed marriages play a significant role for the presence of bilingualism and trilingualism.

e) Russians

The Russian Old Believers, called Lipovans, still inhabit, as an ethnic minority, the Kazashko village in Varna region and Tataritsa, a quarter of Aidemir village, Silistra region of Bulgaria (Uzenova, 2009).

f) Armenians

Armenian refugees moved to Bulgaria as a compact group after the Armenian genocide in Turkey in 1915–1916, and Haskovo, where there are Armenians nowadays, too (Karahanyan, 1980), became a starting point for their displacement around Bulgaria. The major Armenian city in Bulgaria at present day is Plovdiv, but many Armenian groups live also in Ruse, Sliven, Burgas, etc. Many of the representatives of this minority are trilingual and besides Bulgarian and Armenian they speak Turkish (at least the older generation). However, the number of those Armenians who speak only Bulgarian is gradually increasing since they have forgotten their mother's tongue. Regardless of the opinion of Videnov (2006: 69), that Armenians face no problems in speaking standard Bulgarian, some expressions used by the older Armenian generation in the town of Kardzhali, for instance, clearly indicate that their parents, alongside with Turkish have used Bulgarian only at dialectal level (when they used to communicate with the Bulgarian refugees from Aegian Thrace who also moved to Kardzhali (at first, there was no compact Bulgarian population in the town without counting the administration, post officers, and the military): Н'амъ с ко̀го дъ приказвам армѣнски 'there is no one to speak Armenian with'; Тòй, Стѣфан, си дòйде 'he, Stefan, returned'; Ейс'ана шъ гу пуглѣннеме 'we will take a look at it in a while'; Дòйде ведн'џ

Нийяз̀то... ‘(the) Niiazi came once...’; В̀чик знайш, чи шь д̀йдът ‘now you know they are coming’, and so on.

g) Tatars

This particular minority group, which have been assimilated by the Turks and the Gagauz people and has a limited presence in the Dobrudzha region, has not been studied by us yet. They could be an object of research by other colleagues. The Tatars in Bulgaria and their language have been researched by Emil Boev (2016).

h) The Gagauz people

One can learn more about them again by Emil Boev (1995). Many of them emigrated from Bulgaria to Bessarabia (Ukraine and Moldova – in the latter, there is an autonomous Gagauzian republic), but some Gagauzian groups still live in Northern Bulgaria (there used to be a separate Gagauzian quarter in Varna). In Bessarabia, the Gagauz people live together with the Bulgarians in Kubei (Chervenoarmeyskoe), Zhovtnevoe, Kurchi, Tabaki, Stari Troyan, Komrat, Kirsovo (ABGSSSR, 1958: 13–14). These people speak Bulgarian dialects, too, which is enabled by the mixed marriages (including with Moldovans), as N. Nedelchev (1998: 7–8) observes. Some new insights by the German scholar Martin Henzelmann (2022) could be added to the newest research on the Gagauz people, multilingualism, and language contact in Moldova. Todor Balkanski (2005: 15) writes, concerning the Gagauz people who live in Caucasus and in Kazakhstan, that besides Turkish they know Bulgarian, too.

i) Turks

As Videnov correctly notices (Videnov, 2006: 69), many of the Turks in Bulgaria live in compact groups, separately from Bulgarians, and don’t speak Bulgarian well. This is a well-known fact, especially to people like us, who have been living and working in Kardzhali for years. Yet, the situation at the border areas between the Muslim Bulgarians and the Turks in the Eastern Rhodopes is different. It has been stated (Boev, 1976: 201) that a process of interfusion between the Bulgarian and the Turkish population as well as between the Bulgarian and Turkish languages is in progress. St. Kabasanov (1963: 8–10) noticed many years ago that in the village of Tihomir, Krumovgrad region, most men were bilingual and used equally well Turkish and Bulgarian, furthermore there were many mixed marriages among the population of the neighbouring Strizhba, where even women and children used to speak Turkish. Unlike Strizhba, in Tihomir we have not seen Muslim Bulgarian spe-

aking Turkish, but the majority of the extremely conservative inhabitants of Strizhba really use Turkish, as well as a Bulgarian a-dialect.

Emil Boev (1976: 201–202) mentions Byal izvor, Ribni dol, Dve topoli, Rusalsko, Gabrovo, Buk, Bezvodno, Slivka, Diamandovo (already a quarter of Byal izvor) as mixed villages. According to him (Ibid: 222–223), it is not a coincidence that the Turks in some villages around Kardzhali call the Turks in other villages by the name of pamàk ‘Muslim Bulgarian’ (which designation reflects the typical Rhodopean Bulgarian acavism).

There are other villages in the Eastern Rhodopes where the Turkish population speaks a Bulgarian dialect, as the above-mentioned Chakalarovo, Kirkovo region. The village consists of two quarters – Upper and Lower. People living in the Lower quarter speak Bulgarian dialect (along with the literary Bulgarian), and in the the Upper quarter the older generation speaks dialectal Turkish and dialectal Bulgarian (the younger generation there knows literary Bulgarian too). B. Tihova (1963: 20–22) had described the phenomenon in the in the sixties of the nineteenth century, however the situation is the same today, although the youngest barely use Turkish despite understanding it. While in some of the above-mentioned villages a process of Turkification has taken place, in Chakalarovo, apparently the opposite process of Bulgarization of the Turkish population has occurred (while the elderly consider themselves to be Turkish, the young consider themselves to be Bulgarians and have Bulgarian names). Tihova (1963: 38–41) asserts that the nearby villages of Fotinovo, Krilatitsa and Shoptsi are also former Bulgarian settlements. She states that the people from Kosturino and Barzeyà speak Turkish and Bulgarian dialects and consider themselves Turks, but the neighbouring Bulgarian population disagrees on that matter. Nowadays Kosturino and Barzeyà are entirely Turkish.

In such cases the mixed population often uses a religious designation or claims to be of a mixed origin – like the Greek-Bulgarians near Odessa, and the Bulgarians in Romania who call themselves Serbian-Bulgarians (see Mladenov, 1993: 25). In other cases the population does not care of their nationality (a good example are the Bulgarian Pomaks in Greece or some Romani groups in Bulgaria).

j) Czechs

Unfortunately, the Czechs, who used to live in the Voivodovo village, Vratsa region, left Bulgaria a long time ago. Information on them could be seen in Budilova and Jacoubek (Budilova, Jacoubek, 2014).

k) Slovaks

In some villages of Northern Bulgaria – Gorna Mitropolia, Podem, Brashlyanitsa, Pleven region, there were Slovaks until recently (Ivanchev, 1978). Almost none of them was left. During a visit of ours in Podem, we were told that only one elderly Slovak woman still lived there.

l) Jews and others.

Here, we not comment on them, for we have not studied them yet.

**Available audio recordings of the Bulgarian
dialect speech of minorities.**

A significant part of our work, alongside with the research of the Bulgarian dialects spoken by the minorities, is providing audio recording with samples of these dialects. For this purpose, we have uploaded videos with exemplary materials. So far one can hear the following samples:

The Agupti from Madan, Smolyan region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6K0jxxhBEk>;

The Albanians and the Gagauz people from Zhovtnevoe, Bolgrad region (Ukraine): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jl4pNQYgaac>;

The ‘Asparukh’s Bulgarians’ from Radievo, Dimitrovgrad region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iXCrBf8dADg>;

The Gagauz people from Kirsovo, Taraklia region (Moldova): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ix6Kkh18PI&feature=youtu.be>;

The Gagauz people from Star Troyan, Ukrainian Bessarabia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HecYXgjIM6w&feature=youtu.be>;

The Gagauz people from Kirsovo and Star Troyan, Ukrainian Bessarabia: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rGGcfsWrNs&feature=youtu.be>;

The Romanians from Star Beshenov, Banat (Romania): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3A5tvfU148c&t=12s>;

The Turks from Chakalarovo, Kardzhali region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05tE8NvHQsM>;

The Romani people from Voivodovo, Haskovo region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIkBFNvbJBs>;

The Romani from Malomirovo, Elhovo region: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LwXpnhYHE4>.

More samples are to find on the Austrian VLACH project (<https://www.oew.ac.at/vlach/>), others are yet to come.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that minority languages in Bulgaria will continue to be studied in the future, and in various aspects. This concerns their sociolinguistic reality, but also language contact and educational opportunities. In the future, it will also be necessary to examine how issues of language contact with the dominant languages of the surrounding area affect minority languages, such as the historical importance of French in Bulgaria (Henzelmann, 2019) and the associated question of how much this has influenced minority languages. Another example is the significance of Ukrainian or Russian in Ukraine, both of which have influenced the local languages of the Bulgarians, Gagauz, and Albanians (Kahl, Nechiti, 2016) to varying degrees, but what we do not yet know is what secondary changes and interactions this has motivated in the languages of the minorities. It is also unknown how they affect linguistic and cultural semiotics of these groups (for more details, see Simyan, Drăgan, 2025). All in all, we note that the research on the Bulgarian dialects spoken by minorities in Bulgaria shows that this phenomenon must not be neglected by linguists for several reasons.

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**О СОЦИОЛИНГВИСТИЧКИМ АСПЕКТИМА МАЊИНА
(НА ПРИМЈЕРУ БУГАРСКОГА ЈЕЗИКА)**

У овом раду приказујемо особености мањина и њихових језика. Пружамо опште информације о стању истраживања и укључујемо међународну стручну литературу. Показујемо које специфичности карактеришу бугарско „прегријавање“ у различитим регионима Европе. Бугарски језик се у последње време све више истражује ван земље, на пример у Украјини, Молдавији, Грчкој и Србији. Тамо живе људи који говоре бугарски. Настављамо да показујемо који социолингвистички аспекти утичу на различите групе у Бугарској. Документујемо ситуацију језичких мањина, које су веома бројне у Бугарској. Закључујемо да се мањински језици интензивно истражују и да постоји потреба за њиховим бављењем, како унутар тако и ван националних граница.

Кључне речи: *мањински језици, социолингвистика, Бугарска, бугарска мањина*