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Applying Current Methods in Documentary Linguistics in the Documentation of Endangered Languages:
A Case Study on Fieldwork in Arvanitic

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Abstract

Arvanitic is a language of Greece also called Arberichte or Arvanitika. UNESCO has classified Arvanitic as a "severely endangered language" in Greece, which is in need of documentation as it is being used by the last generation of speakers. In the case of Arvanitic in Greece, it appears more weight has been given to the process of description at the expense of documentation proper. This paper will discuss how current methods in documentary linguistics are being applied in its documentation. It will report on a field study being carried out with the last native speakers in the community of Zarakas, Laconia, Greece.

The aim of the fieldwork being carried out is to create a reliable, representative, comprehensive and lasting record of the language in this specific community, in light of new developments in information, communication and media technology which can aid not only its documentation but also its archiving, processing, preservation as well as its accessibility. It places importance on collaboration with the local native speakers as well as ethics involving the speakers' needs and rights of privacy and ownership, while at the same time giving something back to the community.

Keywords: Documentary Linguistics, Endangered Languages, Field Methods, Arvanitic.

Introduction

According to UNESCO, Arvanitic is a language of Greece also called Arvanitika or Arberichte which has a population of 50,000 as last recorded in 2007[1]. Ethnologue has classified Arvanitic as a "severely endangered language" due to "rapid language shift" as it is not being transmitted to the next generation."[2] Arvanitic has been recorded mainly in rural Greece in approximately 300 villages and is subdivided into various local dialects one of which is South Peloponnesian which is the subject of this study.[3] It is of particular interest as it retains archaic forms of medieval Arvanitic and may be the most archaic form in Greece as well as the most endangered and in need of documentation as there are less than ten speakers in the area all over eighty years old.

Arvanitic is an Indo-European language which Ethnologue classifies as a dialect of Tosk, a language spoken in southern Albania with which it is partially intelligible but mutually unintelligible with other Tosk dialects[4]. Although it is has existed since antiquity, to date there is no record of primary or secondary data of the language before the second millennium AD. The language is characterized by a lack of an official alphabet even though it has been written in various alphabets in the past: Greek, Latin, Turkish Arabic and Cyrillic to name a few as well as invented alphabets supplemented by extra symbols where the alphabets were deficient in transcribing all the phonemes in the language. It has a literary tradition of its own (Elsie, 2005; Fortson, 2004) and has been transmitted orally from generation to generation without any formal instruction. A record of the language still spoken today could add a piece to the Indo-European puzzle (Fortson, 2004; Hamp, 1966).

There has been a lot of historical interest in what led to the Arvanitic presence in Greece but the question of when, from where and where to, how many, in which manner and for what reason the Arvanites **first** came to Greece remains to date unanswered (Biris, 1960; Elsie, 2005; Hammond, 1976; Koupitoris, 1879). It has been a source of controversy simply because of the lack of conclusive evidence. Liosis (2007) says "the question of when proto-Arvanitic came into Albanian or Greek territory and the beginning of its contact with Greek or with its dialects still has not been answered" [translation mine] (p.33). Although of great interest, all these questions are beyond the scope of the present study.

The Community

An ethnography of the community through the use of interviews as well as in situ observations is a prerequisite for field research as knowledge of the community will act as a base for the selection criteria in documentation. The present study takes place in the rural community of Zarakas which is one of the

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[1] http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap
[2] http://ethnologue.com/language/aat
[3] http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/index.php?hl=en&page=atlasmap
[4] http://www.ethnologue.com/country/gr/languages

least known areas in all of Greece due to its remoteness and inaccessibility. It must be noted that Zarakas has been chosen as a Site of Community Importance and has been designated as a Special Area of Conservation under the Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora of Natura 2000 which is a network of nature protection areas in the territory of the European Union (Bousbouras, 2007). Primary linguistic research in the area would assist in the collection of data of local ethno-biological and traditional knowledge systems.

Zarakas is situated in the Parnon mountain range in southeastern Laconia 95 km south of Sparta. It is part of the municipality of Monemvasia, bordering on the north with Arcadia (Tsakonia) on the west with Messenia (Mani) and on the south with the town of Monemvasia and further south with Voies (Vatika). With a population of about 1500 inhabitants, historically it consists of a series of villages that run along a mountain range from north to south all the way down to the port. It is an area characterized by steep cliffs leading to the sea, gorges and lack of running water and very few valleys making it an area almost impenetrable with the highest village at an altitude of 800 meters above sea level (Alexaki, 1985).

The community is based on a subsistence economy characterized by a transhumant pastoral lifestyle with migration to the lower villages to avoid the harsh weather at the higher altitudes in the winter. The main cultivation is olive trees, and in the past carob, vineyards and cereals which can be seen abandoned on the stepped terraces discerned in the area and which now serve only for grazing of livestock mainly consisting of goats, sheep and few bovine which still plays a main role in the local economy. The annual production cycles of agricultural work and stockbreeding activities compose an economic calendar which is integrated with the Christian Orthodox ritual calendar revolving around saint's feast and holy days, in which universal order in this part of the world is sustained (Hart,1992).

If little is known of the origins of the Arvanitic presence in Greece even less is known of its origins in Zarakas due to the obscurity of the historical record of the area (Dukas, 1922; Katsoris, 1972; Roumeliotes, 1996). Linguistic evidence, however, gives us some insight as to its historical significance. Alexakis (2012) gives a chronological and etymological analysis of the toponyms and surnames of Zarakas which if not comprehensive is quite extensive and is indicative of the linguistic influences in the area collected from local archives. The toponyms in the area are of Greek and Arvanitic descent however the majority of the village names are Greek some of which can be dated to ancient times providing evidence that there was Greek presence in the area before this population arrived. He concludes that the present population of Zarakas represents the migration of people from various parts of Greece including a large percentage from neighboring Crete, Mani, and Arcadia otherwise known as 'Tsakonia', as well as Northern Epirus and nearby islands, Spetses, Hydra, Portocheli, Andros among other. This is also attested by the speakers of the study who give testimony of their forefathers coming from various parts of Greece. Arvanitic was spoken throughout the community

up until the end of the 20th century. Modernization brought the end of the use of "the old language" which represents life in the past and which now remains in the realm of memory but also traces of which can be seen in the numerous Arvanitic words in the local Greek language which has also been called a dialect and worthy of documentation in its own right. Given the fact that speakers of Arvanitic were from all over Greece from Epirus all the way down to Crete and clearly of Greek ethnicity it cannot be considered a marker neither of origin nor of a distinct ethnicity. What is has been a marker of and which can be agreed with Hart (1992) is "a marker of traditional character, authenticity, village roots, and community life" (p.49).

There are not many members of the community of Zarakas left who can be called "fluent speakers" of Arvanitic according to Grinevald's (2003) typology of speakers. However, for the purposes of this study, only "fluent speakers" and "semi-speakers" were involved in its documentation and even though those classified as "terminal speakers" and "rememberers" were not included they may prove useful in future studies.

Documentation

An examination of the documentation of the Arvanitic language in Greece up to the present is necessary in order to determine what still needs to be done in light of current trends in documentary linguistics. In the preliminary stages of language documentation this involves library research, literature reviews and, where there is access, primary archival research in order to collect and assess existing records and previous studies of the language before fieldwork begins. Contemporary documentary linguistics makes a distinction between the documentation and the description of language and argues that the documentary activity constitutes a field of linguistic inquiry and research in its own right. Documentation is a product of documentary linguistics which concerns the collection of raw data in the form of audio and video recordings which lead to primary data in the form of transcription, translation, and annotation. This is then used for further study in descriptive linguistics which is the relationship between primary and structural data. As primary data are of major concern to both it is sometimes difficult to separate these fields in actual practice (Austin, 2006, 2012; Himmelmann, 2006, 2012; Lehmann, 2004). However, in the case of Arvanitic in Greece, it appears more weight has been given to the process of description at the expense of documentation proper.

The first text documented of the Tosk dialect written in Greek script is the Easter Gospel dated as early as the fourteenth century (Elsie, 1991, p.21). The first publication of Arvanitic is by Luca Matrenga, a descendant of an Arberesh family which most likely had emigrated to Sicily from the Peloponnese around 1532-1533. It is a translation of the *Dottrina Christiana* from Latin in Greek script written in Piana dei Greci, Sicily in 1592 for the Arberesh community. It is of literary significance for the fact that it also includes a poem considered the first form of poetry in the language (Elsie, 2005, pp. 14-17). Most of the

documents in the language that followed were in the 18th and 19th centuries, of religious content and written in various alphabets, mostly Greek, and many times original alphabets invented by the authors themselves (Elsie, 1991). The first formal documentation of the language is the dictionary of Theodoros Anastasios Kavalliotis of Moschopolis published in 1770, also created for pedagogical purposes, followed by others in a similar manner as well as minor works on grammar (Elsie,1991; Koupitoris, 1879).

These rare records are an invaluable source of primary data of earlier forms of the language. However, the lack of an official alphabet led to nonstandard transcription methods in various scripts (Latin, Greek, Cyrillic to name a few) supplemented by extra symbols where the alphabets were deficient in transcribing all the phonemes in the language. Therefore, they are open to interpretation as they are not supported by any raw data particularly when the last speaker of the language has gone. Consequently, the present form of the data does not lend itself to modern linguistic scientific study which the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) could better serve. For this reason, one component of the documentation of the language involves the transliteration and transcription of the various scripts used in existing documents of the language into IPA through the graphemic and phonemic conversion of the graphemes and their various glyphs with the corresponding IPA for further study. According to Himmelmann (2012), "documents in standard orthography" need no "further editing before they can be used as primary data for structural analyses" whereas "documents written in a non-standard way" become raw historical data open to speculation once there are no more native speakers around to interpret the message (p.195) . Therefore, the above mentioned primary data with no standard orthography in Arvanitic must be recorded once again into raw data and then codified for any future use.

More recent documentation of the language consists of a collection of songs by Moraitis (2002), glossaries, songs and texts by Giochalas (2002; 2006; 2011), along with some raw data in the form of sound recordings which are of great value to the record of the language. In particular, for the purposes of this study, Giochalas (2011) includes a record of the dialect of Zarakas, the community under study. However, a lack of standard transcription methods again groups these works with the primary data of the earlier documents as far as the reliability of the sample recorded is concerned.

The first contemporary scientific studies of Arvanitic, which consist of the second type of primary data of the language, begin with Haebler (1965) and Hamp (1961) and of which noteworthy is Sasse (1991). Then, within a sociolinguistic framework are those by Trudgill (1978), Trudgill & Tzavaras (1977) and Tsitsipis (1981, 1999). Liosis' doctoral thesis (2007) is a comparative sociolinguistic study of Arvanitic and Tsakonian which is of importance to the present study as it is the first scientific documentation of the Arvanitic dialect of Zarakas. However, these studies are not by far a comprehensive documentation of the language as documentation ends where the description ends.

There has been no major, in depth, contemporary documentation of the Arvanitic language in Greece within a scientific linguistics framework to date. There is scarce if any raw data in the form of audio and video recordings and if any they are inaccessible. Apart from the scientific aims of documentation a needs analysis of the community is required in order to determine the products to be given back to the community as well. In the present study this consists of a dictionary, texts and a documentary film. This is being achieved through collaboration with local, native speakers towards transcription, translation and annotation of raw data. The linguist is responsible for defining the framework within which data collection processes are to be carried out that will lead to primary data and end products. Data collection processes stand to benefit from the awareness and use of applied linguistics methods. This framework must also take into account the need to create a multi-purpose record of the language. Therefore, researchers must adopt a multidisciplinary approach which in this case involves leading a multidisciplinary team of linguists, historians, botanists, zoologists, folklorists and cinematographers towards documentation. As a result, skills in project management are needed in the planning, coordination, implementation and assessment of research activities as well as funds management. The linguist is in charge of the framework around which all the others will contribute and for the consolidation and management of the data.

Linguists doing fieldwork must first determine the sampling procedures to be used towards raw linguistic data collection which will make up the primary data of documentation. Bottom-up and top-down approaches that are complementary and supplementary must be balanced in order to ensure that a representative and comprehensive sample of the language of the particular population under study is recorded. Seifart (2008) lists three types of selection criteria towards this end: convenience sampling which is occasional and coincidental, externally motivated sampling which meets the requirements of the users of the documentation and systematic sampling of communicative events. The last method represents a top down, holistic approach to documentation based on a communicative model of language such as Hymes' (1964) "ethnography of communication". Hymes' approach claims that communication "must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be described" (p. 3). It is argued that this is a useful approach for top-down holistic language documentation as it places emphasis not only the form but also the function of language and therefore, apart from testing linguistic competence it also measures pragmatic and strategic competence needed for a broad sample. In the present study it was necessary to organize reunions amongst the speakers not only to reactivate their knowledge but at the same time to create a social setting for natural interactive language use. The linguist must determine the parameters within which communicative events will be defined. In this study, for each communicative event this entailed determining which culture specific topics, forms, functions and notions, lexis, traditional knowledge, activities, types of interaction, and stimuli would be involved. These parameters create a mosaic

which is to become the master documentation plan devised in the beginning of the project after initial ethnography and needs analysis of the community is conducted. It guides the processes of elicitation and text collection which becomes continuous work in progress. Examples of collected samples using a top-down communicative approach would be short texts such as old sayings, riddles, tongue-twisters, curses, charms, and superstitions and longer texts such as narratives, descriptions, dialogs as well as songs and poetry. However, it must be noted that staged or semi-staged communicative events may pose a problem with some speakers. In this study, the response to task and stimuli based activities was not successful which may be attributed to field dependent cognitive styles (Witkin, 1973). In this case, the linguist must create a real need for communication in order to stage as 'natural' a communicative event as possible.

On the other hand, preliminary stages of field research usually involve a bottom-up approach in data collection methods. This consists of elicitation of word lists, minimal pairs, paradigms and sentences necessary for the mapping out of the phonemic system and rudimentary rules of the language for further analysis. Amery (2009) also argues "for including commonly used speech formulas and speech acts in documentation" (p.146). Examples of these are formulaic sequences such as idioms, collocations, turns of phrase, routines, fixed phrases, and proverbs. A bottom-up approach also involves elicitation of grammaticality judgments in order to account for variability in the data which may be due to "linguistic performance" as according to Chomsky (1965) or other factors. These are based on "intuitions" of "well-formedness" of utterances and reflect the innate "linguistic competence" of speakers but which require metalinguistic abilities involving the use of metalanguage which speakers of Arvanitic usually do not have. Chelliah (2001) proposes using text based elicitation suggesting that the use of texts as a stimulus provides a shared "pragmatic context" and acts as a guide which "allows for the controlled use of native speaker intuitions" (p. 161). This method has proved useful during the recording of texts which make up the first type of primary data mentioned above into raw data towards codification. In doing so, the speakers also provided grammaticality judgments where there was variability in the data in contrast to their own "linguistic competence". Data collected through this activity could prove useful for future work in comparative dialectology. Furthermore, apart from the simple reiteration of the text for recording purposes, speakers showed creative use of language by offering alternatives to the text by summarizing, paraphrasing and retelling therefore making text-based elicitation an efficient method of collecting data of both depth and breadth.

Advances in information and multi-media technology along with access to open source software tools have allowed for the use of video and audio recordings in linguistic fieldwork to be integrated with text analysis making it the ideal medium for the documentation of endangered languages. For a top-down approach, tools such as ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) can be used for multi-tiered time-aligned annotations with audio and video files. This

includes transcription, translation and annotation which involves inter-linear glossing[1], meta-linguistic data, meta data of recordings[2] and cross-referencing (Berez, 2007). For a bottom up approach SIL Toolbox, which supports MDF[3] is useful and combined with its compatibility with ELAN makes both these products essential in a field linguist's work flow. These tools aid in the digitization, archiving, preservation and dissemination of data. However, the use of digital video and audio data does open up issues of ethics and aesthetics which could be enlightened by the field of ethno-cinematography which has a longer history of their use.

Ethics

Linguists conducting field research must adopt an ethical framework for their work that will minimize any negative effect the results of their research may have on individuals, communities and knowledge systems (Rice, 2006). Their work should be conducted with integrity, objectivity and above all the overall benefit to society, always with awareness of, respect for and compliance with local customs and therefore ensuring the potential for future research in these communities. The codes of conduct and ethical guidelines as set out by The European Commission[4] and UNESCO [5] were followed. Best practices involve conducting a needs analysis with the community and the individual participants in order to determine what the study is to give back to each individually. Participants did not expect any remuneration for their work and they did it as a moral obligation towards the community. Revitalization was not requested but copies of the material collected were requested by the participants, their families and the community. The participants and community of the present study have explicitly permitted the publication of results for academic purposes but also to be shared with the local community. However, dissemination of data to the wider public could lead to the misuse of the results which may have adverse effects to the participants and their families as well as to the community involved.

Linguists who wish to conduct ethical research in Greece with speakers of Arvanitic should be aware of both the local as well as the greater context of the language. They should be informed that speakers of Arvanitic in Greece self-identify nationally and ethnically as Greeks (Hellenes). Therefore, linguists should be aware of elements in their research which could place their Greek identity in question and which should be avoided if they do not want to alienate the very community they wish to study. Hammond (1976) says "even in these days of self-determination the Albanian-speakers in Greek lands have no sense of being anything other than Greek … they spoke of themselves as Greeks and

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[1] See https://www.eva.mpg.de/lingua/resources/glossing-rules.php.
[2] See http: //www.mpi.nl/ IMDI/ for standardized meta data formats.
[3] Multi-Dictionary Formatter. See Coward & Grimes, 2000.
[4] http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/fp7/89867/social-sciences-humanities_en.pdf
[5] See http://www.unesco.org/most/ethical.htm for more information.

had no feeling of being a minority" (p. 63). Hart (1992) explains that "like other European nations, Greece embraced, in the nineteenth century, a romantic ideology of nationhood which made linguistic homogeneity a prerequisite of national unity". Citing Tsitsipis she adds that "the Greek state has, to say the least, 'shown no tolerance for linguistic heterogeneity'" (p.48). The setting of the larger context of Arvanitika in Greece is the Balkans where borders, national identities, immigration and linguistic diversity have been sources of conflict. The linguist should be fully aware of the political conflicts related to the language without getting caught up in the politics. For all of the above reasons, this study chooses to treat the Arvanitic language as a 'local affair' and dissemination and sharing of the results will be only to the local community where the work can be appreciated as part of the community's unique history and cultural heritage apart from academic presentation and publication. By limiting dissemination of the results to these two spheres, it is hoped that the potential negative consequences to the individuals, their families and the community as a whole that the results of this study may cause is minimized therefore ensuring the participation and cooperation with this and other communities in future research endeavors.

Conclusion

The documentation of Arvanitic in Greece within a contemporary scientific linguistics framework is long overdue. It may be the last opportunity to do so as it is not being passed down to the younger generation. Research funding will play a determinative role in the feasibility and viability of future research endeavors. The fact that this study involves a very small sample of only one of the many communities where Arvanitic is spoken in Greece poses some limitations in the generalization of its future results. However, it does provide a case study for further documentation and research with native speakers of Arvanitic in other communities of Greece.

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