

Foreign Words in the Macedonian Language

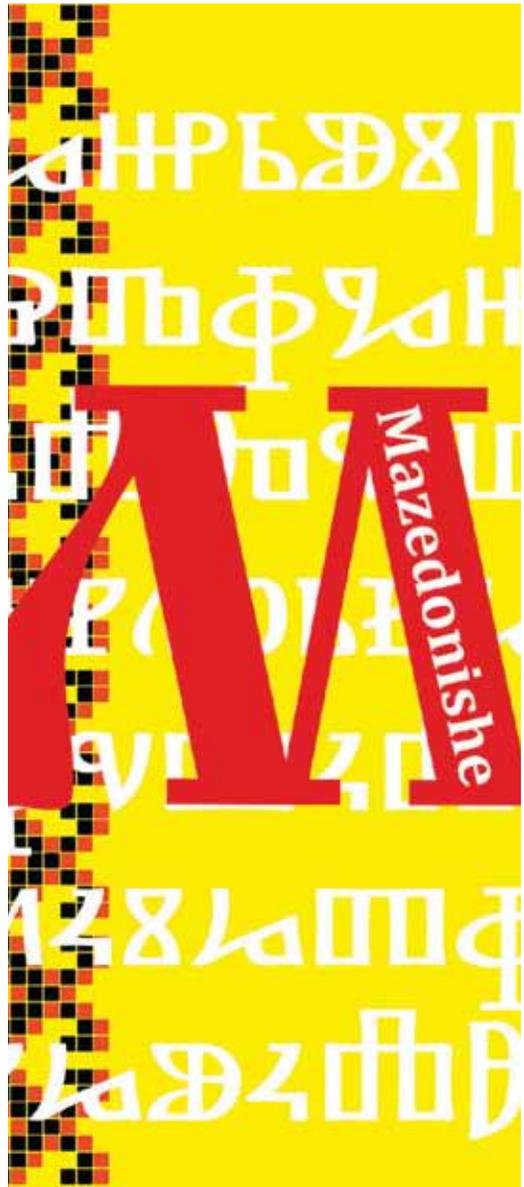
Macedonian belongs to the south Slavic family of languages. Bulgarian and Serbian are its closest linguistic relatives. But thanks to its central position in the Balkans, Macedonian territory has always been an intersection of peoples, ethnic groups, and influences, all of which affected the corpus of the language. Thus, it is estimated that Macedonian has over 65 000 words. Educated people are estimated to use some 4 000 to 5 000 words while writers use some 20 000 to 30 000.

Some words, such as *ajvar*, are so typical of Macedonia, that they are considered to be part of the national identity. They are used in the cultural branding, for touristic promotion etc. Macedonians were so angry with Slovenians who, being first in the European Union, rushed to register the famous red pepper p \hat{a} te as a typical Slovenian product. But it seems that Macedonians are not aware of the fact that *ajvar* is a Turkish word and that the dish is a tradition from the Ottoman times.

The language is a living being. It is a matter which is changing together with society and its living conditions. It is open to influences from other cultures and languages, just as the people who speak it. People are creating the language and they bear the responsibility for enriching or impoverishing it.

LEXICAL SNOBBISM

Some think that the use of foreign words



in the language is a recent fashion. They call it lexical snobism, when instead of an existing word one uses a foreign one, slang, jargon or dialectical variant. Leisure radio and TV programmes, talk shows, and live streaming are most often criticized for this. But they are not the only ones responsible for modern-day linguistic borrowing: small businesses and traders use English words or Latin script instead of the official Cyrillic alphabet for altogether different, pragmatic reasons.

While the new words which are imported into the language without trying to find, construct, or use a more appropriate Slavic word cause concern among linguists, they are more keen to retain the archaisms, which are certainly dying fast as the reality and the reasons for their everyday use no longer exist. They are considered to have a high cultural and stylistic value, keep track of the social and cultural history of the people. They are the symbol of the complexity of the national identity and speak about the continuity, roots and traditions.

GREEK ROOTS

The presence of the Greek words is one of the oldest influences in the Macedonian language. It is due to the fact that Cyrillic alphabet was invented by the Byzantine missionaries Sts Cyril and Methodius, who, together with their disciples, translated the Bible and all the Church literature needed for the religious life of the converted Slavic pagans. Thus the whole religious and spiritual life was highly affected by words of Greek origin like *liturgija* (liturgy), *igumen* (abbot), *kaluger* (monk), *parastos*, *panahida* (prayers for the dead) etc. But the linguists say that the biggest influence of the Greek language lies in the transformation of Macedonian into an analytical language (with the introduction of articles), which makes it unlike most other Slavic languages which are synthetic. The linguists however have counted more than 1000 Greek words in the Macedonian language. Some like *kirija* (rent), *zesko* (hot), *zito* (wheat)

have been in use for more than 15 centuries.

OTTOMAN TRACES

One of the largest groups of foreign words comes from the Turkish language because Macedonia was under the Ottoman rule for more than 500 years. Linguistic analysis found that there are more than 3000 words of Turkish origin. But the influence is bilateral. More than 300 words of Slavic origin infiltrated into the modern Turkish language.

Some words are so deeply ingrained in everyday life that no language reform can eliminate them: *patlijan* (tomato), *filjan* (cup), *papuci* (slippers). Some other words survive only in the archaic layer, but are still part of the language: *ciflik* (feudal property), *vizier* (minister), *kadiya* (judge). Such archaisms are mostly present in the oral culture, in the proverbs, sayings, poems etc.

SERBIAN INFLUENCES

Another great influence on Macedonian is the Serbian language, which is due to the linguistic and geographic proximity, but also to the official status of the language. Serbian is present in Macedonian on two levels. First of all, northern Macedonian dialects, including the biggest and most influential Skopje, Tetovo and Kumanovo ones, are close to Serbian. This makes many Serbian words normal elements of Skopje or Kumanovo regional dialects. Secondly, the official use, the influence of the media and shared socio-political realities during the 80 years of living in the same state have led to a strong presence of the Serbian language. However, Serbian words, especially in the official and high cultural practice, are regarded as erroneous usage and uncultivated intrusions. As linguistic distinctiveness is so important for the national identity, there is a tendency to insist on the use of Macedonian words instead of Serbian or Bulgarian borrowings or dialectisms.

The creators of the first Slavic alphabet - Glagolica are St. Cyril and St. Methodius, who had missionary activities in many Slavic countries. The Cyrillic alphabet was composed on the Macedonian soil by the students of St. Cyril and St. Methodius - St. Clement and St. Naum of Ohrid, which was then part of the Kingdom of Bulgaria. They transformed and simplified then new and varied Glagolitic alphabet that in honor of St. Cyril was named Cyrillic.

OTHER INFLUENCES

Apart from the languages of the closest nations or the overall domination of English, there are words and language traces of other languages as well.

One may be surprised to hear that *kapar* (partial advance payment) or *trampa* (exchange) come from the Italian language. Or that *palto* (suit) and *tantela* (lace) are not archaisms but borrowings from French. People from Bitola are so proud of their dialectical term for girl, *cupe*, but many would be surprised to

hear that this is an Albanian word, just as the word *rovja* (thunder), which is so dear to poets.

While some foreign words came into Macedonian directly from their original languages, others entered through mediation. Thus, there are some Persian and Arabic words which came with the Turkish influence. Few people know that *kibrit* (matches) is from Arabic while *gerdan* (necklace), *boston* (common word for watermelon and melon) and *cesma* (tap) are Persian.

Many German words came with the use of various machines and technologies. Originally German terms are used for car parts, tools, names of machines and mechanisms. They have been altered and somewhat adapted to Macedonian, but still sound quite distant and incongruent with the rest of the language – *gurtna* (break pad), *sajbna* (washer), *strafciger* (screw driver), *stangla* (rod), *motorcangla* (pliers).

For almost fifteen years there has been a Law on the Macedonian Language, which discourages the use of foreign words and supports the use of original Macedonian expressions or ones which are close to the Macedonian language heritage and which better express the national spirit and way of life. But it seems that the demands of the real life are stronger than the musings of the language connoisseurs and law-makers.

