

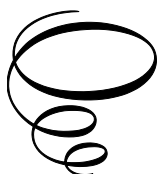
# Balkan and South Slavic Enclaves in Italy:

*Languages, Dialects  
and Identities*

Edited by

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Iliana Krapova  
and Giuseppina Turano

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## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	viii
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### PART 1: ALBANIAN IN ITALY

Italian-Balkan Linguistic Interactions in the Italian-Albanian Food Lexicon: A Short History of <i>Tumacë</i> ‘Home-made Pasta’ from the Caucasus to the Apennines .....	2
<i>Francesco ALTIMARI</i>	

Demographic and Linguistic Decline in Four Arbëresh Villages: Firmo, San Basile, San Marzano di S. Giuseppe and Spezzano Albanese .....	32
<i>Giovanni BELLUSCIO</i>	

Code-switching and Borrowing in Arbëresh Dialects .....	48
<i>Elvira GLASER</i>	

Word Formation of Late 19 <sup>th</sup> Century Arbëresh Texts from the Village of San Nicola dell’Alto .....	65
<i>Artur KARASIŃSKI</i>	

Arbëresh Syllable Pattern .....	77
<i>Irena SAWICKA</i>	

Italo-Albanian from the Text Perspective: A Case Study from S. Benedetto Ullano .....	90
<i>Lindita SEJDIU-RUGOVA and Emilia CONFORTI</i>	

### PART 2: GREEK IN ITALY

Hommage au Balkaniste Gerhard Rohlfs .....	108
<i>Petya ASENOVA</i>	

Parallels between the Greco and the Calabrian Verbal Systems.....	123
<i>Marianne KATSOYANNOU and Zlatka GUENTCHÉVA</i>	

Greek in Southern Italy: Morphosyntactic Isomorphism and a Possible	
---------------------------------------------------------------------	--

Exception.....	140
<i>Eva-Maria REMBERGER</i>	
New Initiatives on the Research and Documentation of Griko and Arbëresh in Apulia.....	158
<i>Thede KAHL</i>	
Lexical and Onomasiological Concordances among Greek Dialects of Magna Grecia, Ionian Islands, Epirus and South Albania.....	170
<i>Doris K. KYRIAZIS</i>	
“Grecità” and Orthodox Religion in Calabria: From Linguistic Identity to Transnational Religious Space .....	182
<i>Isabella SCHWADERER</i>	
The Greek Press’s Contribution to the Preservation of the Grecanic Dialect .....	202
<i>Christina VAMVOURI, Vassilis MESSIS and Fotis DIMAKIS</i>	
<b>PART 3: SLAVIC IN ITALY</b>	
Slavic-Romance Linguistic Contact Revisited: The Grammaticalization of the Indefinite Article in the Slovene Dialects of Friuli.....	210
<i>Rosanna BENACCHIO</i>	
On the Influence of Italian on the Grammar of Molise Slavic and Italo-Albanian .....	222
<i>Walter BREU</i>	
The Order and Placement of Clitics in (Old) Croatian and Molise Croatian .....	244
<i>Amir KAPETANOVIĆ</i>	
The ND Clusters in the Croatian Dialect of Acquaviva Collecroce (Na-Našu) .....	256
<i>Anna CYCHNERSKA and Irena SAWICKA</i>	

**PART 4: BALKAN LINGUISTICS AND BALKAN DIALECTOLOGY**

An Overview of Balkan Linguistics and Dialectology in the Past and Present .....	264
<i>Helmut Wilhelm SCHALLER</i>	
Types of Possessive Structures in the Balkan Languages and in Arbëresh.....	274
<i>Iliana KRAPOVA and Giuseppina TURANO</i>	
On the Etymology of Dairy Terminology.....	296
<i>Corinna LESCHBER</i>	
Areal Linguistics and Dialect Boundaries: The Case of Bulgarian Dialects.....	304
<i>Krasimira KOLEVA</i>	
Borrowing of Turkish Dialect Words in Bulgarian Dialects under Conditions of Bilingualism.....	315
<i>Lilyana DIMITROVA-TODOROVA</i>	

## INTRODUCTION

The contributions in this book originate from the conference “*Balkan*” enclaves in Italy. Languages, dialects, identities, held in Venice, Italy, from 26-28 November 2015. The conference was held on the occasion of the sixth annual meeting of the Commission for Balkan linguistics and affiliated with the International Committee of Slavists. Due to its high significance to society, the participants have set up their work so that it is not just linguistic, but also interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary. By including researchers from multiple universities, the results of work from numerous research institutions have been integrated.

In Italy and in the Balkans, work with linguistic minorities has not been included in academic discussions for a long time. Italy is in a border situation that is located not just between political and administrative, but also between various historical realities. The turbulent geopolitics in the Balkans affects Italy and indirectly affects the minorities living in northeastern (Slovenes, Croats) and southern Italy (Albanians, Greeks, Molise Slavs). To date, the necessary political dialogues with the opposite side of the Adria have not yet taken place, and, due to economic crises and the revitalization of nationalistic tendencies, the concept is very difficult to promote.

However, despite these complex relationships, in Balkan linguistics, there has been a recent shift in focus towards (areal) dialectology. The significance of such studies stems from the very nature of dialects/ varieties as representing recent or current contact situations, bi- or multilingual. To a certain extent, they approximate those situations which led to the emergence of the particular effects of a linguistic area, observed in the modern standard languages of the region. It is well-known that linguistic contact in the Balkans existed mainly at the colloquial level, with the predominant type of bilingualism being a dialect of the language A + a dialect of the language B; a less frequent type, characteristic mainly of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century “debalkanization” period, consisted of standard language A + dialect of language B. The Venice

meeting highlighted a number of issues relevant to the theory of language areas and areal linguistics, such as types of Balkan convergences, types of structure transfers, borrowing of structural patterns, stages and directions of grammaticalization, etc.

In accordance with the discussions from our conference, after an introduction about Balkan dialectology and its significance for the field of linguistics, the present book is also divided into chapters that are dedicated to the individual minorities in Italy: Albanian (Arbëresh), Greek (Grico, Grecanico) and Slavic (Molise Slavic and Slovenian).

**Albanian** (Arbëresh) is spoken in numerous provinces in South Italy and, despite the geographical fragmentation, has at least 100,000 speakers today. The Albanians' initial presence in Italy can be dated back to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. There was a massive migration during the 15<sup>th</sup> century, due to the Turkish invasion of the region. The Albanian minority living in Italy mostly uses the Tosk dialect. Since 15 December 1999, Arbëresh has been protected in Europe through Law 482, the Law Governing the Protection of Historical Linguistic Minorities.

Calabrian and Apulian **Greek** (Grico, Grecanico) is spoken by about 12,000 people in certain communities in the provinces of Reggio Calabria and Lecce. The beginnings of the Greek settlement date back to antiquity, when the first Greek migrants settled in South Italy. The Greek language in the few remaining Greek communities in South Italy dates back to Medieval Greek. Today, spoken Greek is limited to usage within families.

In Italy, **Slavic** minority languages are represented by Molise Slavic/ Molise Croatian and Slovenian. Molise Slavic is spoken in the communities of San Felice del Molise, Montemitro and Acquaviva Collecroce in the province of Campobasso, and is spoken by around 2,400 people. The ancestors of the Molise Slavs, who migrated from the Dalmatian coast in order to flee the Turkish advance, settled in what is now the region of Molise between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. There, the archaic language is spoken in a very small area and is considered to be seriously endangered. In contrast, Slovenian is spoken by around 80,000 people in the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine.

Although the papers on the Arbëresh, Griko/ Grecanico, Molise Slavic, and Slovene dialects, do not share linguistic

descriptions or language contacts, they do highlight important aspects of the linguistic situation in Southern and Central Italy. Some authors investigate the mutual influences between each of these “Balkan” varieties and the neighbouring Italian dialects in an attempt to pin down those areas of interference and variation, which operate in either direction; other papers study common tendencies which do not just pertain to local contacts, but have a wider significance for the history of linguistic and cultural contacts in Italy, between the above-mentioned varieties and the respective languages of the Balkan peninsula. Although the majority of the conference presentations relate to fields of areal linguistics, such as language contact and language variation, some papers published here deal with sociolinguistics and recent cultural issues.

The discussions at our conference brought forward useful comparisons which can contribute to a better understanding of the concrete dimensions of variation on the dialectal continuum inside and outside of the Balkans, as well as stimulate the search for finer points of contact between different types of languages/ varieties. However, the languages of recent migrants from the Balkans – such those of as Romanians, who are, by far, the largest minority group in modern Italy, or those of Albanian refugees from the 1990’s – are not taken into account in this volume. However, they would be a very worthwhile field of research in the future.

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