

# MACEDONIAN AGENDA



**16 essays on the development of Macedonian culture in Australia. Includes cultural values, language, religion, arts, identity, women's issues, the elderly, immigration, politics, the "child refugees", human rights and more**

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*Front cover: February 2, 1960, Bitola Railway Station, Macedonia:  
Mr Aleksandar Kolupacev is farewelled by his village, Gjavato, as he  
sets out for a new life in Port Kembla, Australia.*

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# Some Observations On The Speech Of Bilingual Macedonian-Australians

Betty K Stewart

*An earlier version of this paper was presented at the inaugural Australian Macedonian National Conference held at the University of Melbourne in 1989*

Every language is in a constant process of change and adaptation in order to continue to be useful for speakers to express themselves. It is the aim of this paper firstly, to make some observations on the Macedonian language as spoken by the children of Macedonian immigrants in the Australian context and secondly, to consider the extent to which the Macedonian language is maintained in Australia.

It has been observed as inevitable that when two languages share the same environment, they will influence each other. These languages are said to be in contact as they are alternatively used by the same speaker (Weinreich). Such a situation of languages in contact can only arise where there is a pool of bilingual speakers who have some mastery of both languages. A bilingual speaker is a person who is able to generate meaningful utterances in two languages on a continuum of proficiency in each of the languages: from a perfect mastery of both languages, to a native speaker like competence in one language and a limited ability in the other.

Where two languages are in contact there is influence exerted by one language on the other. The result of that influence is the "transference" of some elements of one of the languages into the other. Transferred elements may be found solely in the language of one speaker or may have wide currency in the whole bilingual community, when the transfer is said to be stable.

In Australia, for Macedonian-Australian bilinguals Macedonian exists alongside Australian English, the language of government, commerce, media and education. While it is true that Macedonian has not impacted on Australian English generally, the English speech of Macedonian bilinguals is affected as a result of having Macedonian as their mother tongue. Amongst themselves, Macedonian-Australian bilinguals may use some Macedonian words mixed in with their English

speech. In the workplace or schoolyard where there are larger numbers of Macedonian speakers, non-Macedonian speakers may learn some Macedonian words from their Macedonian speaking colleagues and use those words which are usually, it seems, of a colourful variety. The present discussion focuses on the elements transferred from English into the Macedonian speech of the Macedonian-Australian bilingual.

Reasons for such transference are varied. They range from the inability of the bilingual to express his thoughts and feelings adequately in Macedonian, to social pressure to be "Australian" rather than an "ethnic". It may be that the bilingual does not know or has forgotten the appropriate Macedonian word as a result of lack of reinforcement of Macedonian. Further factors which are relevant to the arising of transference include formal schooling, degree of bilingualism and other aspects of a sociocultural nature.

The lexicon or vocabulary of a language is the least conservative and most flexible part of the language, so it is in the vocabulary that changes are most quick to take place. By contrast, the grammar of a language can be said to be impervious to change in the language contact situation. My comments will be restricted to the observable changes in the vocabulary of the Macedonian-Australian bilingual.

The comments in this paper are based on observations of Macedonian bilinguals in the Illawarra region of NSW. The immigrants who came to the Illawarra are, for the purposes of this discussion, a homogenous group with similar sociocultural experience. To explain the variety in linguistic behaviour, it is necessary to look at the linguistic factors as well as extralinguistic factors such as the sociocultural features of the bilingual speakers and the bilingual community. The migrants came to the Illawarra principally from the Bitola and Ohrid areas of Macedonia and the majority arrived in Australia in the period 1960-1975. These migrants are said to be the first generation bilinguals. Their children, the second generation bilinguals, were either born in Australia or arrived as small children (that is, prior to the age by which language and phonation habits are formed, estimated to be 9 years of age).

The places of employment of a large number of the first generation bilinguals principally include the BHP steel manufacturing plant, light manufacturing and associated transport industries or the clothing manufacturing industries, where they do unskilled work. The first generation bilinguals had little opportunity for formal education in Macedonian and generally no opportunity for education in English. This situation is changing as an increasing number of those first generation bilinguals who were in their teens or twenties on arrival are beginning

to occupy skilled and semi-skilled positions and have become self employed in their own small businesses.

In the Illawarra region there are two Macedonian churches; a number of soccer teams; a large number of folk dancing, pensioner, business and professional, youth and women's groups; the Macedonian Welfare Centre; and a community theatre group called the Blagoja Neskovski Macedonian Theatre. The Macedonian Welfare Centre, which has since 1984 provided a wide range of welfare services and has served as a meeting place and drop-in centre for various groups, is situated in Port Kembla. Community functions are run by the various cultural associations and are well attended and quite popular with the youth. These events together with family functions such as traditional style weddings, christenings, name days and village feast days are manifestations of the Macedonian community's identity in the Illawarra.

While it appears that few studies have considered the Macedonian language as an immigrant language in contact with English, many studies have been done on other immigrant languages in contact situations (such as Haugen on Norwegian in America, Bettoni on Italian in North Queensland and Clyne on German in Victoria) and from the results of these studies certain hypotheses can be made on the way in which it is likely that the Macedonian language will develop in Australia under the influence of Australian English.

It must be noted that there are some difficulties in preparing such a study of Macedonian. Obvious difficulties are the problems in establishing accurately the Macedonian spoken by the first generation bilinguals at the date of arrival (whether a dialect or the standard). This must be compared to Macedonian spoken by native monolinguals in Macedonia at the present time (to see how Macedonian has developed over time) in order to then contrast the Macedonian spoken in the Illawarra today (under the influence of the Australian environment). As the standard Macedonian language has changed a great deal over the last 30 years, including transference from English, the identification of transference in the speech of the bilinguals must be compared with the speakers' competency in Macedonian and not the standard language.

The second generation Macedonian bilinguals generally learn Macedonian informally in the home domain from their family. Generally the language is only ever learned as a spoken language. By way of contrast, the bilinguals learn English formally at school both as a spoken and a written language.

The possible sources of replenishing Macedonian for the bilingual come from the ethnic radio programs, the Macedonian press, and

theoretically Macedonian programs on SBS Television. For some bilinguals there will also be Macedonian language classes, whether run by the community ("ethnic schools") or the Department of Education in Saturday morning schools. There may in addition be correspondence with relatives overseas and, perhaps, meeting newly arrived Macedonian speakers.

A brief study conducted by the Macedonian Welfare Centre in Port Kembla indicates that the second generation bilinguals do not generally listen to 2EA (SBS Radio), they do not watch programs on TV (this is mostly because there are virtually no Macedonian language programs on SBS TV), and their Macedonian is not sufficiently developed to allow them to read the press.

Accordingly, Macedonian is under certain pressures from Australian English in the Australian setting in which the two languages co-exist. Transference can be observed in the speech of all bilinguals, both first and second generation. It appears that the speakers see the English transfers in their Macedonian speech negatively (so that they are embarrassed about their speech) or as humorous (so that transfers are used to share a joke with another bilingual or to self parody). The same negative attitude does not seem to arise in relation to the English borrowings in the standard Macedonian language. That is seen rather as that language's mechanism for adapting to the modern word. For example, the standard Macedonian word for "computer" is "kompjuter".

Credit should be given to bilinguals for their creativity in adapting a language in which they have had no formal instruction (that is Macedonian), by means of transferring elements from another language they regularly use (that is of course English), to allow some degree of every day use in an environment which requires innovation.

The sociocultural setting in which transference between two languages in contact takes place requires attention because it is the sociocultural setting which determines the frequency and type of transfers which take place. The factors which affect the individual bilingual are:

1. The bilingual speaker's ability to express himself verbally in general and his ability to keep the two languages apart.
2. Relative proficiency in each of the two languages.
3. The manner of learning each of the two languages.
4. Attitude to the languages spoken.

The factors which affect bilingual groups are:

5. The size of the bilingual group and its sociocultural homogeneity or differentiation.
6. The number of bilinguals with given characteristics or speech

behaviour (whether there is a large number of persons who have a native proficiency in the language or not).

7. The relative prestige of each language and whether it is an immigrant or indigenous language.

8. Attitudes towards the culture of each of the language communities.

9. Attitudes to bilingualism itself.

10. Tolerance to the transference or mixing of languages and views as to "correct speech" or pure language.

The speech of the Macedonian-Australian bilinguals is a variety of Macedonian characterized by changes in the vocabulary under the effect of transference from English. Australian Macedonian is definitely a variety of Macedonian and there can be no suggestion made that Australian Macedonian is a new language or a pidgin such that the constituent languages have now been lost.

The Macedonian language has been brought by migrants to a new sociocultural context. Leaving behind the village life, the migrants arrived in the Illawarra to find the factory, new place names, the unions, the Australian welfare system, the health system, local shopping and new consumer items. Thus it would be inappropriate for the language to be merely maintained as it was when the migrants arrived in Australia. This would not allow them to speak about their new environment. Rather the language is stretched and developed to fit the new environment.

What follows is a list of examples of transference compiled from the speech of the first and second generation bilinguals. By drawing attention to these words, it is not intended to mark the words as examples of incorrect speech, rather, the examples show the creativity of the bilingual. Some words may be familiar to Macedonian speakers outside the Illawarra, but others will not as transfers have taken place in the specific sociocultural context of the Macedonian community in the Illawarra. The list is compiled according to the degree and manner of integration of the transfer into the Macedonian sound system (pronunciation) and grammar. The terminology used to describe the examples is that established by Clyne.

### *Transfers with phonic integration*

These are words that are borrowed directly from Australian English but adapted according to the sound system of Macedonian, that is to say they are pronounced with a Macedonian accent.

Some examples:

Words relating to work:

Ofis - office  
Kemis - chemist  
Kokavec - coke ovens  
Stilvork - steelworks  
Lidigen - leading hand  
Shifti - shifts: compare dajshif, najshif, aftenun  
Rosta - rostered day off  
Overtaj - overtime  
Lajdzhuti - light duty  
Kompo - compo, abbreviation for workers' compensation  
Bandali - bundles (units of work at Bonds clothing factory)  
Ofa - offer (of redundancy)

**Words relating to other domains:**

Flor - floor  
Friza - fridge  
Shtofa - stove  
Olza - hose  
Kichin - kitchen  
Karpet - carpet  
Jard - yard  
Kabets - cupboard  
Shopin - shopping  
Bas - bus  
Bich - beach  
Trak - truck  
Brajzmer - groomsman  
Brajzmerki - bridesmaid  
Inshurants - insurance  
Strit - street  
Trajla - (box) trailer  
Voljunit - wall unit  
Sosich - sausage  
Fruta - fruit  
Pinats - peanuts  
Letes - lettuce

(Note: "j" is pronounced as "y" as in you, the "r" is pronounced as a rolled "r")

### *Transfers with morphological integration*

These are words which are borrowed from English but adapted in Macedonian by applying more than just the rules of the sound system; the transfers are adapted to the grammatical rules of Macedonian. For example suffixes such as the diminutive or pejorative are added:

bucharnitsa - butcher shop

drinkarot - the man who delivered drinks to the home - compare with mlekarot and lebarot (milk and bread delivers respectively).

bositsa - female "boss"

karche/ karcheto - little car/ the little car

blajmam - I blame - (eg, nemoj da me blajmash mene; literally, do not blame me)

shutiram - I shoot - (eg, si ja shutiral grlfrenkata; literally, he shot his girlfriend)

### *Semantic transference*

This is transference which involves giving Macedonian words additional meanings where the "equivalent" English words have those additional meanings but the original Macedonian words do not.

Some examples:

hit/ udrish in:

Odi pravo duri da go udrish Wentworth Street i setne svrti destro - literally, go straight until you hit Wentworth Street and then turn right; and die/ umrish in:

Ke umrish ko ke... literally: you'll die when (be very shocked/ surprised); and make/ napravam as in:

Ke go napravam krevetot... literally: I will make the bed.

### *Multiple transfers*

These are words which are transferred into Macedonian without any adaptation whatsoever. Common switches or multiple transfers which occur in conversation are interjections such as "you know", "alright", etc. However it may be that when the speaker cannot remember the word in Macedonian a switch will often occur.

### *Type and number of transfers*

The frequency of transferred words and the type of integration of

transferred words used depend on the speakers bilingual command, on the person to whom the bilingual is speaking and the context in which the conversation is taking place.

Where two persons, each aware that the other is bilingual, commence a conversation, one may use certain markers to indicate that some transference from English is about to take place. This is in order to establish whether the person to whom he is speaking understands Australian Macedonian or not. For example: Igram, kako sho velat tuka, soccer (literally: I play, as they say here, soccer). Obviously, where the bilingual is aware that the person to whom he is speaking knows no English at all, the bilingual will attempt to keep his speech free from any transfers.

Language use is person specific. While it may be generally viewed as a weakness in language skills to allow transfers of elements from English into Macedonian, this transference may not be viewed negatively where it does not interfere with communication. The speaker will try to control transference, for example, where he is speaking with monolinguals. His ability to do so will of course be restricted by his language competency.

Evidence that transference can be controlled is gained from the fact that Australian Macedonian is used between bilinguals to, for example, keep secrets from persons who are not familiar with both languages. Also it is common to hear in the conversation of young Macedonians in English some Macedonian phrase which will establish their common background. For example, zhimi majka (a common expression that literally means "I swear on my mother's health").

Perhaps the most important factor involved in the frequency of transfers is the concept of language economy or the principle of least effort. Where there are a number of choices for saying something, eliminating or not using words with which the speaker is less confident leads to a reduction in the items, whether English or Macedonian, to choose from. Thus a speaker may make maximum use of the words familiar to him and thereby can avoid making mistakes in getting his message across, eg, popravam karo'i, literally, I fix cars. An alternative, "sum mekanichar" (I am a mechanic) requires knowledge of or use of the word "mekanichar". Also, "rabotam vo banka" (literally, I work in a bank), avoids knowledge of the standard literary Macedonian word for the person's job description. "Ke imam shaoa" (I will have a shower) avoids the need to use "se tushiram" or similar.

When we look at the words which are transferred from English into the Macedonian of the bilinguals, it has been observed that nouns are most frequently borrowed, for example, flet, kar, etc; next in order of

frequency of borrowing are verbs, for example, "ne tajsta ubo" (it doesn't taste good), "me blajmat mene" (they blame me); then adjectives, "nashite luge se differen" (our people are different), and so on.

English does not assign genders to its nouns whereas Macedonian does. Thus when an English noun is transferred into Macedonian and is to be integrated grammatically, a problem is created as to the gender to be assigned to that noun. Here, it is interesting to compare the way a first generation bilingual and a second generation bilingual assign the gender. One of the factors behind the assignment of the gender could be the rules in Macedonian about assigning a gender. The transfer "party" serves as an example to show the contrast. A first generation speaker of Macedonian assigned "partite" (plural neuter for a single "party") whereas one of the second generation bilinguals said "partijata" (feminine). In the first case the article was attached as though the noun were plural presumably because it ends in the "i" sound. In the second case it was given the feminine gender article perhaps because the more important information was that "party" is not a plural noun.

### **Language Maintenance, New Language Learning or Language Shift**

The overall pattern observed in immigrant languages is an erosion of the language. This occurs even in the family context suggesting extinction of the immigrant language by the third or fourth generation. That is to say that the grandchildren or great grandchildren of the immigrants who arrived in Australia will probably not know any Macedonian.

In order to survive, a language must have a context or domain of use, for example, the home, family, church, or work. English is the only language in Australia which has functions outside the home and outside community functions and organizations. If Macedonian is no longer necessary as the language in the home then any attempts to maintain Macedonian may prove to be futile. If it is important that children use Macedonian at home, their language skill must become more sophisticated in terms of vocabulary so that the child can discuss matters at home which relate to work or education and their spare time interests. It would also be helpful if their skills included the reading and writing of the language.

A 1984-85 study (Kalantzis) conducted by the Multicultural Studies Centre of the University of Wollongong for the Department of Immigration looked at the attitude of first and second generation bilinguals to language maintenance. The first generation bilinguals expressed the

view that Macedonian should be maintained because it is a language which is internationally under threat and maintenance of the language allows maintenance of the religion and social cohesion in the Macedonian community.

The attitude of the children (second generation bilinguals) seemed to be dependent on their peers. Those children who attended school or work where there was a large group of Macedonians thought it important that Macedonian be maintained, but indicated that they would not study Macedonian if it were offered in High School. Rather they felt it more important to learn a language such as French, German or Italian (languages given an amount of prestige by virtue of the fact that at the time of the study they were taught generally in secondary schools). Those speakers who attended a school where there were very few Macedonians felt it more important to be Australian rather than Macedonian and did not think maintenance of Macedonian was important. A reasonably high number of speakers indicated that they saw knowledge of Macedonian as a factor in getting a job. This can be explained by the very high youth unemployment rate in the Illawarra and the high profile of welfare and interpreting "industries" in the area. The study found that 99 per cent of the second generation interviewed for the study spoke Macedonian.

There are said to be certain values which are seen as central to the existence and identity of an ethnic group. At this time it is not unreasonable to assert that the Macedonian language is of central importance to the Macedonian identity of the Macedonian community in the Illawarra. The language has an importance for the individual as well as its sociological importance as a medium for communication in the community. The value to the speaker of maintaining the language must be related to the way in which the speaker sees himself: whether as an Australian or a Macedonian or a combination of both. According to Haugen, in *The Norwegian Language in America*, the likelihood of maintenance of a language is related to the status and intimacy of the language; its relevance to friendships, family, shared values and common cultural experiences.

At the present time, Macedonian is spoken in the home by a large number of families in the Illawarra area. The church may be seen as a protector of the language as services are carried on in Macedonian. Macedonian is used widely in local broadcasting and the Macedonian press, and for community continuity and interaction.

A large number of Macedonian youth are involved in dance groups and sports groups where the other members are also from the community and where there is also a role for parents. However a survey by the

Macedonian Welfare Centre in Port Kembla indicates that most Macedonian youth go to church only occasionally, that is for public holidays (praznitsi), and that the youth rarely listened to 2EA and virtually never read the Macedonian press.

As long as the Macedonian language has a communicative function, for example serving the communicative needs of recently arrived migrants and the elderly, obviously it will be maintained; children need to understand and speak Macedonian where parents and grandparents do not speak English. Macedonian may quickly be lost with the passing of the elderly and the assimilation of the recently arrived if that is the only need for the language.

However, if the language has a symbolic importance for future Macedonian-Australians, then an effort will be made to maintain the language for that reason. Then, even if the language does not survive the third or fourth generation bilinguals, perhaps that symbolic importance will have the effect that the language is revived in the future by Macedonian-Australians interested in their background. At that stage the question is no longer one of language maintenance but rather one of new language learning. This situation has been described as "third generation return" amongst Italian English bilinguals. It has been observed that the third and fourth generation bilinguals want to learn the language of their forbears but must learn the standard language formally rather than their forebears' dialect because the language is no longer spoken in the home.

The policy of the government towards the maintenance of languages should not be forgotten as it is an important factor in the maintenance of Macedonian. For economic reasons, the current government policy towards ethnic languages seems to value the south east Asian languages above maintenance of community languages, such as Macedonian, brought to Australia by immigrant workers. This in fact was the recommendation of the National Language Policy. The government cannot be relied on to ensure the maintenance of Macedonian.

The findings of the Kalantzis study indicated that those students who study Macedonian at school, in addition to speaking it at home, have a confidence and an ability in both the English and Macedonian languages unknown to those who learn Macedonian only at home.

Studying Macedonian in a formal manner helps the speakers to realize which are the stabilized English transfers inherited from their families: it expands the vocabulary (otherwise the home learnt Macedonian is stunted at the time of entering school and restricted to words relating to the family context); it gives children the benefit of the continual corrective

influence of the standard Macedonian spoken around them. Formal schooling in the language will offer the speakers a standard model of their mother tongue. Obvious problems are insufficient numbers of qualified teachers, and that for young children an extra effort is required because the language is taught out of school hours. Thus there is an importance for the language to be maintained at the tertiary level in order that teachers can become properly qualified to teach a standard model of the Macedonian mother tongue.

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