

*(Im)mobility, climate, and language: Towards a geoanthropology of the Balkans*

Brian Joseph

The ways in which humans interact with the physical environment of the geography within which they live, i.e. their geoanthropology, have ramifications for their language. The peoples of the Balkans offer various case studies showing such geoanthropological effects, focusing on movement, or lack thereof, across different environments, for different reasons, and with different results. Thus, by way of illustrating the range of these geoanthropological interactions with language, I survey here some of these cases, drawing in part on Friedman & Joseph 2023. In particular, I discuss the linguistic correlates of a nomadic versus a sedentary lifestyle for Roma populations in the Balkans, as well as the effects of the “transhumance” of both the Balkan Romance speakers of Aromanian in the central Balkans (especially Albania, Greece, and the Republic of North Macedonia) and the Sarakatsani speakers of Greek who live in northern Greece, Bulgaria (where they are known as Karakačani), and the Republic of North Macedonia (where they are known as Sarakačani), by which whole villages relocate at different altitudes for summer and for winter.

I then draw parallels with similar situations in other parts of the world, looking in particular at the linguistic consequences of nomadic versus settled Bedouin Arabic lifestyles in the Middle East (as discussed in Cadora 1992) and the so-called “vertical” bilingualism in the Caucasus (Nichols 2015), by which people in higher altitude villages know the languages of those lower down the mountain, but those in the lowlands do not bother to learn highland languages.

Based on these case studies, I argue first that the observed effects have largely to do with differential patterns of contact with speakers of other languages brought on by the differential interaction these groups have through their shared geography. Ultimately, therefore, I claim further that there is no specific geoanthropological effect as a *primary* mechanism of language change, but rather that any such effects are secondary, deriving from well-known and well-understood mechanisms of contact-induced change (as outlined in Weinreich 1968, Thomason & Kaufman 1988, Winford 2003, and Matras 2009, among other sources).

In this way, the linguistic effects of geoanthropology are rather like what has been argued for other aspects of the historical development of languages, especially grammaticalisation (Campbell 2001) and exaptation (Joseph 2016), i.e. they are real, yes, but are derivative and thus arguably epiphenomenal, in that they reduce to already well-established patterns of linguistic change.

*References*

- Cadota, Frederic. 1992. *Bedouin, Village and Urban Arabic*. Leiden: Brill.
- Campbell, Lyle. 2001. What's wrong with grammaticalization? *Language Sciences* 23: 113-161.
- Friedman, Victor A. & Brian D. Joseph. 2023. *The Balkan languages*. Cambridge University Press.
- Joseph, Brian D. 2016. Being exacting about exapting: An exaptation omnibus. *Exaptation and Language Change*, ed. by Muriel Norde & Freek van Velde, 37-55. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Matras, Yaron. 2009. *Language contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nichols, Johanna. 2015. Types of spread zones: Open and closed, horizontal and vertical. *Language Structure and Environment. Social, cultural, and natural factors*, ed. by Randy La Polla & Rik De Busser, 261-286. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Thomason, Sarah G. & Terrence Kaufman. 1988. *Language contact, creolization, and genetic linguistics*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weinreich, Uriel. 1968. *Languages in contact: Findings and problems*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Winford, Donald. 2003. *An introduction to contact linguistics*. Oxford: Blackwell