MOLISE SLAVIC

ABSTRACT

Molise Slavic (alternatively Molise Croatian) is a Slavic minority language in the Italian Region of Molise. On the spot it is simply called *naš jezik* 'our language', adverbially *na-našu* 'in our way'. The ancestors of today's Molise Slavs emigrated from the valley of the river Neretva in the Dalmatian Hinterland in the 16th century as refugees due to the Ottoman expansion on the Balkans. The nearest Slavic standard language is Croatian (BCMS), but long-lasting bilingualism in Italy has had very strong effects on the lexical, phonological and grammatical structure of this micro-language, turning it into an *Abstandssprache* with characteristics of its own. The overall umbrella language for Molise Slavic is Standard Italian. Molise Slavic is only very rarely used in writing. This article will give an overview of the historical and sociolinguistic setting, the geographical and dialectal situation, the role of matter (MAT) borrowings in the lexicon and the radical changes in grammar by means of pattern (PAT) borrowings and functional shifts.

INTRODUCTION

Molise Slavic (MSL) is still spoken in three neighboring rural municipalities, forming a linguistic island (enclave) in the hilly part of Lower Molise about 35 km from the Adriatic Sea, at 400-500 meters above sea level. The ancestors of today's Molise Slavs left their original homes in the Herzegovina with the help of the Venetian fleet about 500 years ago. Apart from very scarce historical documents, their micro-language is the main testimony of these data. MSL clearly belongs to the Serbo-Croatian dialect continuum with the Štokavian-Ikavian group as its historical basis; cp. Proto-Slavic **čьto* > MSL *što* 'what' (unlike Kajkavian *kaj*, Čakavian *ča*) and **dъvě* > MSL *dvi* 'two.F' (unlike Ekavian *dve* and Jekavian *dvije,* which we also find in the BCMS standards). As for relative chronology, MSL shows all BCMS developments having occurred prior to the 16th century, e.g. the development of the *Jer*-vowels (ъ, ь > a/Ø) as in **dьnь* > *dān* 'day'. On the other hand, it does not have such later characteristics of BCMS like the emergence of the ending *-ā* in the genitive plural of nouns, spreading from the 17th century onwards. From this follows that the emigration took place in the 16th century. See the classical work of Rešetar (1911) and Ivić (1958: 248–269) for more details.

The denominations of the three MSL villages, *Kruč* (officially *Acquaviva Collecroce*), *Mundimitar* (*Montemitro*) and *Filič* (*San Felice del Molise*), are of Italian origin, which means that they existed already before the arrival of the Slavs. Due to preceding earthquakes and epidemics, they seem to have been populated in the beginning almost exclusively by Slavic monolinguals, but with local Molise varieties and – from the 1860ies onwards – Standard Italian gradually creeping in into their language. So already at the time of Rešetar (1911) the population of the Slavic enclave was almost completely bilingual with very few monolingual Italians.

In the 1950ies this situation changed drastically, and nowadays knowledge and usage of the minority language is mostly restricted to the older generations. At the most, a percentage of about 30% of active speakers could be assumed and of 60% having at least some passive knowledge. These data refer to the overall number of about 1700 residents (reduced to a half with respect to 1950). As for language usage, the individual villages behave differently, with the highest percentage of speakers in the smallest and most conservative village of Montemitro (MM, 400 inhabitants), a medium number in the traditional "capital" Acquaviva (AC, 650), and a very low one, restricted to a few elderly people, in San Felice (SF, likewise 650 inhabitants).

Slavic schooling in these villages has been rare and unsuccessful, in spite of several attempts, for the most in Standard Croatian. In the last decades continuous private efforts have been made to develop MSL into a language of literature, resulting in quite a lot of poems, short stories and even some romances. Nevertheless only very few Molise Slavs are able to read and write their mother tongue, which deliberately is not used officially, as all native speakers are bilingual.

For the sociolinguistic situation and statistics see Marra (2007), Bada (2009), Breu (2019a: 180–186), Šimičić et al. (2019); for historical and modern writing in MSL see Breu (2017a; 2018). Regarding orthography, a Croatian-based mostly phonological alphabet has been adopted by the few intellectuals using MSL occasionally in writing, with some additional letter combinations and diacritics to symbolize sounds absent in BCMS; see Breu and Piccoli (2000) and Piccoli and Sammartino (2000).

Part of MSL phonology and grammar still shows more or less clear Slavic characteristics unknown to its Romance contact varieties. On the other hand, quite a lot of contact-induced changes have occurred, bringing this micro-language structurally nearer to the Romance language type.

In spite of the local vicinity of the three municipalities, dialectal differentiation in vocabulary (both inherited and borrowed) and grammar is not negligible. If not otherwise indicated, the examples in this article are from the dialect of Acquaviva Collecroce. For the sake of simplicity, Romance sources will mostly be given in standard Italian orthography, although borrowings, actually, often derive from local varieties.

THE MOLISE-SLAVIC LEXICON AND THE ROLE OF LEXICAL BORROWINGS

From among a series of oral corpora of several Slavic micro-languages in total language contact, MSL turned out to be by far the most accessible for lexical borrowings (Adamou et al. 2016). While Colloquial Upper Sorbian, Greek Balkan Slavic (Nashta) and Burgenland Croatian had an average of at most 5% of loanwords, MSL had more than 20%. These include not only nouns (with an average of 45% of all nouns in the corpus) and verbs, but also frequent functional words like conjunctions, e.g. *e* 'and' (← It *e*), *ke* (MM) ~ *ka* 'that' (← It *che*), *ma* 'but' (← It *ma*), *tramjend* 'while' ← Molisan *tramìendə,* and pragmatic markers like *alora* 'then, well' (← It *allora*), *bè* 'well' (← It *be'*). Adjectives and adverbs have been borrowed more rarely, but still more often than prepositions like *fra* 'between' (← It *fra*). In addition, phrasal words have been

calqued, e. g. *si ga pokj* || Ital. *se ne andare* (*andarsene*) 'leave', literally 'to go of it' and *ko-je-je* || Molisan *chi-è-è* 'whoever', literally 'who is is'.

While this is true for all three dialects, there are also clear differences in the vocabulary, often in combination with foreign influence or with the same phonological word having a different meaning. See, for example, purely Slavic oppositions like *krela* (AC) 'wing' ≠ *lete* (MM), *zvaterit* (SF) 'close' ≠ *zatvorit* (AC, MM) and contact-induced differences like *usta* (AC, genuine Slavic) 'mouth' ≠ *guandže* (MM ← It *guancia* 'cheek'), *čič* 'chickpea' (AC ← It *cece*) ≠ *grah* (MM, SF, Slavic) 'pea', *njiva* (AC, Slavic) 'field' ≠ *largo* (MM ← It *largo* 'square, space') ≠ *pajiz* (SF ← It *paese* 'village, country'), *bak* 'bull' (AC) ≠ 'tomato' (MM); for more examples see the dictionaries of Breu and Piccoli (2000) and Piccoli and Sammartino (2000). In some cases MSL borrowings change the gender of their Romance sources, due to the integration into existing paradigms, e.g. It *carità* F 'alms' → *karita* NOM.SG.M, *karitala* GEN.SG.M (AC) ≠ *karita* F (MM, indeclinable).

In many cases of polysemy in the Italian model varieties, MSL presents an analogical meaning extension of an inherited word (= adaptation of the semantic structure; Breu 2003a, Breu in print: 390); for example, *grad* 'village' acquired the additional meaning 'country' due to the Italian polysemy of *paese* 'village, country'. Sometimes other semantic shifts are involved, as in *kaša*, originally 'porridge', whose meaning shifted to 'mud' and thus got linked with Italian *terra* 'mud, earth, country, globe' and consequently acquired its whole range of meanings, including *Kaša* 'Earth, globe'.

MSL numerals form a highly mixed system, with only the genuine-Slavic numerals 1–10 + 100 surviving. Romance numbers 1–4 are obligatory when combined with morphologically unintegrated borrowings, but excluded for genuine-Slavic nouns and integrated borrowings alike. Between 5 and 10 and for 100 they are optional both with inherited and borrowed nouns. This leads to combinations like *dva godišta* M (inherited) 'two years', *dvi ure* F 'two hours' (borrowed, morphologically integrated) vs. *duj an* 'two years' (unintegrated), *pet godišti* ~ *čing godišti* GEN.PL 'five years', but only *čing an* 'five years' and so on. Just like Russian and BCMS, MSL has a →paucal, used with the numerals 2-4 and *opa-dva* 'both', e. g. *na dobri sin* NOM.SG 'a good son', *dobre sinovlja* NOM.PL 'good sons', but *dva dobre sina* NOM.PC 'two good sons', *pet dobrihi sinovlji* GEN.PL 'five good sons' (Breu 2015).

PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY OF MOLISE SLAVIC

As for MSL phonology, in principle, all pre-emigration vowels and consonants have been preserved, including the syllabic *r̥* (with variants like [ər] for some speakers). The loss of the opposition between pre-palatal and post-alveolar fricatives by means of **tj > ć > č* and **dj > đ > dž* (rarely *j*) could go back to a similar merger in the original home, e.g. *kozlič* 'kid' (Cr *kozlić*), *žedža* 'thirst' (Cr *žeđ*); see Ivić (1958: 256–257).

New phonemes have entered the MSL phonological system together with lexical borrowings. Such borrowed phonemes are *hj* /ç/ as in *hjen* 'hay', *gh* /ɣ/ as in *brighanat,* *è* [ɛ] as in *kafè* 'coffee', *ò* [ɔ] as in *dòp-ka* 'though'. Although the palatal voiceless stop *kj* [c] appears in derivations from the genuine Slavic root **jt* as in *pokj*

'to go', *dokj* 'to come' (Cr *poći, doći*), too, it has become much more frequent by means of local Italian borrowings like *kjac* 'place' or *kjikjarijat* 'speak, talk' (Breu 2011: 385–389).

The traditional tone and quantity system has also been kept, but with considerable changes regarding its phonetic realization and its context rules, especially with respect to the possibility of word-final stress as a result of the loss of word final-short vowels, dependent on a scale of vowel strength, with short *-i* being weakest. As a consequence, there is a pitch contrast in monosyllabics, e.g. [nóːs] < [nósi] 'carry!' IMP.2SG (rising tone) in opposition to ['noːs] 'nose' NOM.SG.

A very important phonological rule is akan'e of unstressed mid-high short vowels *e, o > a* in the two dialects of Acquaviva and San Felice, probably due to local contact influence, but not in Montemitro, e.g. *na mala* (AC, SF) ≠ *no malo* (MM) 'a little (bit)', *grozja* 'grape' (AC), *grozdja* (SF) ≠ *grozdje* (MM). Another peculiarity is the strong tendency to devoice word-final short vowels, especially in Acquaviva and San Felice, e.g. *ženą* 'woman' NOM.SG, *ženų* ACC.SG, but *žene* GEN.SG with a normal, voiced *-e < -ē* (Breu 1999).

A phonetic adaptation to Italian phonotactics could be seen in the reduction of consonant clusters, e.g. *pčela > čela* 'bee', and the devoicing of *v > f* after voiceless *s*, e.g. *svit* [sf] 'world', contrasting with [zv] in borrowings like *zvenit ← It svenire* [zv]. In Italian a cluster [sv] is not allowed. Moreover, there is a strong tendency to replace *lj* [ʎ] by [j], like in southern varieties of Italian, e.g. *ljud ∼ jud* 'man'.

CONTACT-INDUCED GRAMMATICAL CHANGE IN MOLISE SLAVIC

In MSL the forms and functions of morphological categories have been changed to a large extent under the influence of language contact with Italian and its local varieties. Existing grammemes have adapted to their Italian counterparts und new ones have developed. This is true for both the nominal and the verbal system. In morphosyntax, analytical forms have been introduced on Italian models. As for syntax, word order, especially of clitics and of modifiers, has adapted to Italian, but other domains like negation have also been affected.

THE NOMINAL SYSTEM

The Slavic case system has been preserved in spite of its absence in Italian, with two exceptions. First of all, like in many other Slavic languages, the vocative has disappeared, at least the inherited one. There is, however, a neo-vocative in proper names, formed on the Italian model of cancelling the last syllable or at least a word-final consonant of the nominative, e.g. *Terè'* 'Theresa!' VOC.SG : *Terèza* NOM.SG, *Nikò'* 'Nicola!' VOC.SG : *Nikòla* NOM.SG., *Džuva'* 'John!' VOC.SG : *Džuvan* NOM.SG. The second exception is the traditional locative, lost as a case for expressing a local state in opposition to the expression of the goal of a movement by means of the accusative. So, just like in Italian *sono al paese* 'I am in the village', *vado al paese* 'I am going to the village', there is no difference in case between *jesa u grad* and *grem u grad*: the noun is in both cases in the accusative. In feminines, there is dialectal differentiation. While in

San Felice it is again the accusative *jesa/grem **u crikvu*** 'I am in the church / go to the church' to express both functions, in Montemitro it is the dative (*u crikv*), and in Acquaviva, where the dative ending has systematically been replaced by the accusative one, the form in question (*u crikvu*) could be of either case. However, irrespective of the form the individual dialects use, both functions coincide. The dative singular has been preserved, but again we have dialectal differentiation in the feminines, where San Felice has the traditional ending *-i*, lost in MM for phonological reasons, while Acquaviva shows the just mentioned merger with the accusative: *ženi* (SF), *žen* (MM), *ženu* (AC) 'woman.DAT.SG'.

Due to the model of Italian analytical "cases", the genitive is optionally expanded by means of the preposition *do* 'of, from', e.g. *žene ~ do žene* 'woman. GEN.SG.F'. In a similar way the expansion of the instrumental by means of the preposition *s* 'with' has become obligatory not only in its sociative, but also in its function as indicator of the means of action, e. g. *s nožam* INS.SG.M 'together with / by means of the knife', whereas the agentive function is expressed by the (obligatory) preposition *do* + GEN, e.g. *biša rečana **do jene žene*** 'it was said by a woman' vs *sa ga štoknija **s jenme nožam*** 'I cut it with a knife' (Breu 1996: 26–27, Marra 1999: 155–157). The only function of the pure instrumental is a local one, to wit as an indicator of the trajectory of movement as in *putam* INS.SG.M 'on/along the road', *škalami* INS.PL 'up/down the stairs'.

As for gender, MSL has completely lost its neuter in nouns, and the expression of animacy has become optional. The absence of these genders in Italian is the main reason for these reductions. While it is true that central Italian dialects do have neuter nouns, expressed by means of different definite articles and by doubling the initial consonant, it is also true that MSL could not follow this model, as it lacks both means of expression. The old neuter normally merges in all three MSL dialects with the masculine gender, but in Acquaviva, probably due to its akan'e as a necessary condition, there are some exceptions, e. g. **ovo nebo* 'this sky' N > *ovi nebo*.M (MM) ≠ *ova neba*.F (AC). Pronouns, the indefinite article and impersonal verbs in the *l*-perfect have kept their neuter gender. Even in adjectives it is preserved as a gender for substantivization. Here, just like in (local) Italian, it is expressed by means of an ending of its own, e. g. *ono dobro*.NOM.SG.N 'the good (thing)' *je dola* PRF.3SG.N (MM *je dolo*) 'has come'; see Breu (2003b; 2013: 105–111).

Another loss is the class of feminine nouns of the former *i*-declension, ending in a consonant in the NOM.SG. Here, unlike the unconditioned passage of the neuter to the masculine gender (or rarely the feminine as a sporadic effect of akan'e), a general differentiation has occurred in all three dialects, with these nouns having completely adapted to the gender of their Italian counterpart. This means that if the noun in question corresponds to an Italian masculine, it has passed to the masculine paradigm, with its NOM.SG unchanged. If, however, its Italian counterpart is feminine it has formed a new NOM.SG with the ending *-a* and passed over to the feminine *a*-declension. These shifts have occurred without any exception, e.g. **krv*.F 'blood' > *krv*.M = It *sangue*.M, **peč*.F 'oven' > *peč*.M = It *forno*.M, but **noč*.F 'night' > *noča*.F = It *notte*.F, **stvar*.F 'thing' > *stvara*.F = It *cosa*.F (Breu 2013: 99–103).

Traditionally, MSL like all other Slavic languages did not have an article system, and it still lacks a definite article. But it has developed an indefinite one, by copying the Italian polysemy of *uno*, expressing both, the number 'one' and the indefinite article. Therefore *jena* 'one', short form *na*, now has exactly the same article functions as its Italian counterpart. Given this situation, supported in addition by the fact that in Italian the definite article is obligatory in generic usage, MSL indirectly has even acquired a "definite zero-article". So, whenever the indefinite article is missing, the noun is understood as definite, e.g. *jena žena* 'a woman' vs. *Ø žena* 'the woman' (Breu 2012).

In MSL the traditional synthetic comparison of adjectives and adverbs has become analytical, again by copying the Italian model and with the same suppletive exceptions as in Italian, e.g. *stari – veča stari – največa stari* 'old – older – oldest' with *veča* as the comparative particle, corresponding to It *più* 'more', but suppletive *dobri – bolji* 'good – better', corresponding to It *buono – migliore*. The formation of the superlative with its own particle *največa* 'most' is special, as the Italian way of forming it by means of a definite article obviously could not be copied (Breu 2009).

THE VERBAL SYSTEM

The MSL categories of the verb, tense, aspect, mood and voice, all show characteristic changes, most of them due to language contact. In the domain of tense a contact-induced additional de-obligative future developed, with the help of the auxiliary *jimat* 'have, must', in opposition to the traditional future with the auxiliary *tit* 'will, want', which has turned into a future of probability, e. g. *mam po* 'I will (necessarily) go' vs. *ču po* 'I will (probably) go'. Based on the Italian model of temporal concord, both constructions have developed counterparts in the past, using the imperfect of the auxiliaries, e.g. *mahu po* 'I would then (necessarily) go, *čahu po* 'I would then (probably) go'. A case of conservation by language contact is the past perfect, which in MSL is very frequent, unlike in most other Slavic languages. It is formed in a rather idiosyncratic way by means of the pluperfect-particle *bi* added to the perfect, mostly even infixed into its auxiliary, e.g. *je bi nosija* 'had taken', *s-bi-ma nosil* 'we have taken'.

The imperfect has developed a modal function in addition to its past-tense meaning, corresponding to the same counterfactual mood the imperfect expresses in colloquial Italian. So, *greda-hu*.IMPF.1SG may mean both 'I went' and 'I would have gone', just like its Italian counterpart *andavo*.

As for verbal aspect, two traditional oppositions exist in MSL, the typically Slavic derivational opposition of perfectivity (IPFV : PFV) and the morphosyntactic opposition of the imperfect with the perfect, which also replaced the aorist, e.g. *čina-hu*.IMPF.1SG 'I made, was making' : *sa čija*.PRF.1SG.M. 'I made, have made'. This preservation of the imperfect in spite of the loss of the aorist is typically Romance, whereas in all Slavic languages outside the Romance contact areas having lost the synthetic forms, it was always the imperfect to be lost first. This means that here a Slavic diachronic constant has been replaced by a Romance one. The derivational opposition is productive only for aspectual pairs expressed by a suffix, for example *kupit* PFV :

kupivat IPFV 'buy', *platit* PV : *plačat* IPFV 'pay'. Formations with a prefix, e.g. *sijat*.IPFV : *posijat*.PFV 'sow', *krest*.IPFV : *ukrest*.PFV 'steal' continue to exist, but there is a tendency to reduce them to bi-aspectual simplex verbs, e.g. *pisat* IPFV/PFV 'write'. Unlike most other Slavic languages, MSL is very strict in integrating telic verbs as aspectual pairs by means of suffixation, e.g. It *partire* → *partit*.PFV / *parčivat*.IPFV 'leave', It *salvare* → *salvat*.PFV / *salvivat*.IPFV 'save' (Breu 2017b: 66). Contrary to BCMS, in MSL the derivational and the morphosyntactic aspect opposition combine freely, for example with special forms for the perfective imperfect like *dojahu*.PFV.IMPF.1SG 'come' (Breu 2014; 2017b: 47–50).

New aspectual oppositions are formed periphrastically. One of them is a progressive, as in *sa riviva* 's/he is arriving', using the adverb *sa* 'now', in calquing a local construction of this type containing Molisan *mo* 'now'. Nowadays, however, most speakers take it for the equivalent of the Italian progressive of the type *sta arrivando.* The second one is an imminentive of the type *stoji za partit* 's/he is about to depart', corresponding exactly to It *sta per partire,* literally 'stands for departing' (Breu 2017b: 58).

As for voice, among other things, a venitive event passive has been formed with the help of the auxiliary *dokj*.PFV : *grem*.IPFV 'come' + PST.PTCP, corresponding to a similar construction in Italian, e.g. *dojaša*.PFV.IMPF.3SG *pokrena*.PST.PTCP.SG.F 'she used to be covered' = It *veniva coperto.* Unlike Italian, where this construction in the imperfect also expresses the progressive meaning 'was being covered', there is an asymmetric differentiation in MSL, due to its derivational aspect opposition. Here the perfective imperfect is restricted to habituality, while the imperfective imperfect *gredaša*.PFV.IMPF.3SG *pokrena*.PST.PTCP.SG.F has both functions. As in Italian, the venitive passive – unlike the reflexive (event) passive – allows for an agent, namely by means of *do* + GEN, replacing the traditional instrumental. The traditional passive, formed by means of the auxiliary *bit* 'be' + PST.PTCP, expresses both an event passive and a state passive, with typical interactions with the categories of tense and aspect, again like in Italian (Breu and Makarova, in print).

There are also changes consisting in purely formal adaptations to the contact varieties, for example in the case of the optionality of the infinitive ending, based on the model of an alternation of the infinitive in the Molisan dialect, e.g. *kupi ~ kupit* 'buy', *re ~ reč* 'say', *po ~ pokj* 'go' (Breu 1998: 342–343).

Syntax

A typical result of Italian influence in syntax is the postposition of non-decorative modifiers, e.g. *na brižni čeljada* 'a poor (pitiable) person' vs *na čeljada brižni* 'a poor (impoverished) person'. Stressed pronouns are doubled by unstressed clitic pronouns, e.g. *ne morahu **mu** hi da **njemu*** 'they could not give them to him' (with *mu* doubling *njemu* 'him'). Doubling of nouns is also rather frequent, even if they are not in topic position, as in *je **hi** sprega **solda*** 'he wasted the money', with *hi* 'them' doubling *solda* ACC.PL.

Clitics as a whole have adapted to the Italian verb-centered position to the detriment of the traditional Wackernagel rule (second position in the sentence). As a

consequence, clitics may appear in the beginning of a sentence, as in *Ga vidim saki dan* 'I see him every day' with a sentence-initial *ga* 'him', impossible in Standard Croatian. Negative pronouns initiating a sentence are normally used without double negation, just like in Italian, e.g. *nikor je doša* 'nobody has come', instead of the traditional double negation, used if these pronouns follow the verb, as in *nije doša nikor* lit. "it has come nobody" (Breu in print: 416–425).

Relative clauses are initiated by means of the borrowed relative particle *ke ~ ka* ← It *che,* as in *ljud **ka** stoji za rivat* 'the man **who** is about to arrive'. It is homonymous with the complementiser in object phrases, e.g. *Je reka **ka** čaša do(kj)* 'He said **that** he would (probably) come' (Breu, 2019b). Calqued local relative clauses of the type *stojahu di su fratrice* 'I stayed where the nuns were', *je di je bar* 's/he is where the bar is', with *di* 'where', tend to omit the verb *bit* 'be', thus calquing the southern-Italian usage of 'where' as a preposition governing the nominative: *stojahu di fratrice* 'I stayed at the nuns', *je di bar* 's/he is in the bar' (Rohlfs 1969: 199, 223, 259, Breu 1996: 36–37).

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