

Constructing the Albanian migrant on the Greek virtual space

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Since their arrival to Greece 30 years ago, Albanian migrants have been met with “intense xenophobic discourse” (Archakis 2020, 7) and have been engraved in the Greek consciousness as “cunning”, “primitive”, “untrustworthy”, “dangerous” and “criminal” (Lazaridis & Wickens 1999, 648). The current discourses in Greece argue for the successful integration of Albanians and the outdated view of Albanians as a marginalized group. Within the framework of computer mediated communication (Androutsopoulos 2006) my talk explores the linguistic and cultural construction of the Albanian migrant in Greek internet memes. I show that the stigmatizing and marginalizing discourses are still well present but are often times harder to detect because they take the form of microaggressions rather than overt hate speech.

The data in support of the above argument come from 98 internet memes which have been collected from various websites and social media platforms using *Alvanos* ‘Albanian’ and *Alvania* ‘Albania’ (in their Greek or Greeklish orthographies) as search keywords. For inclusion in the analysis ‘Albanian’ or ‘Albania’ had to be present in the meme itself or the accompanying caption/hashtag to ensure the meme specifically targeted Albanians and not other ethnic groups residing in Greece. The analysis examined the construction of Albanians via the text content and image(s), and the type of Greek attributed to Albanians (via non-standard orthography that marks them as non-native Greek speakers).

The findings show that while few memes address what it means to be Albanian, and particularly an Albanian in Greece, the majority of the memes reiterate and thus perpetuate the stigma around Albanians. This is achieved by constructing the migrants as criminal, aggressive and uncivilized, and juxtaposing them linguistically and culturally to Greeks who are constructed as their polar opposites (i.e., law abiding, calm, civilized). In terms of the language attributed to Albanians, this includes words such as *macheroso* ‘I (will) stab (you)’ that relate to the stereotypes about Albanians, and non-standard pronunciations of Greek such as *korio* for Standard Modern Greek *chorio* ‘village’. These non-standard pronunciations, evidenced via orthography, and their associations with Albanians contribute to the indirect comparisons with Greeks who then emerge as standard, normative, and the opposite of what Albanians are.

I argue that memes are be useful sources of data that can reveal the ideologies surrounding minority ethnic groups and the speech that seems to characterize them. Memes can also be the vehicle through which these ideologies become known and available for reproduction by members of the majority group that do not have first-hand experience with those ideologies. I propose that the non-standard language attributed to Albanians can be termed a Mock Language which works to elevate Greekness by denigrating Albanianness. The supposed humorous intention of the memes and the anonymity the internet affords to meme creators licenses hurtful content which has social, economic, psychological consequences for vulnerable groups like migrants. Evidence for the latter is the central theme of trauma in the narratives of second-generation Albanian migrants in Ndoci et al. (2021).

References

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Rexhina Ndoci bio

Rexhina Ndoci is a PhD Candidate at the Department of Linguistics of The Ohio State University. Prior to joining OSU, she completed her BA in English and Greek Languages and Literatures at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. Her research is situated in the field of sociolinguistics with a particular focus on language and its relationship to ethnic identity. Her dissertation focuses on the linguistic construction of Albanianness in Greece and the social perception of Albanian-accented Greek. At OSU she teaches undergraduate linguistics and sociolinguistics courses. Rexhina is also a Research Assistant at the Laboratory for Greek Dialectology at OSU where, under the supervision of the lab director Dr. Brian D. Joseph, she is involved in a project examining the Greek of South Albania and the linguistic practices of Greek-Albanian bilinguals of the same area. More recently she joined, as a Research Assistant, two projects led by Dr. Petros Karatsareas at the University of Westminster. One examines the role of language in the trajectories of Albanian onward migrants who first migrated to Greece and then London. The other looks at the sensory and linguistic constructions of authenticity in the Greek and Italian foodscapes of post-Brexit and COVID-19 London.