

**LETTERS FROM YORDANKA FILARETOVA
TO MARIA BURMOVA: LINGUISTIC VARIATION
BETWEEN 1865 – 1888¹**

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Letters from Yordanka Filaretova, a native of Sofia, to Maria Burmova are analysed for linguistic variants before the official codification of Bulgarian orthography in 1899. Filaretova's mobility, specifically her long-term residence in Istanbul, suggests loose (i.e. more dispersed rather than dense) social networks that correlate with innovations in linguistic norms and the diffusion of linguistic change. The paper thus contributes to the study of the linguistic history of norms listed below, that is, the value of language variants by speakers who were not centrally involved in debates about what language variants should eventually be chosen for the Bulgarian literary language.

Key words: historical sociolinguistics, linguistic variants, social network theory, orthography, language standardization

This paper is part of a larger study using social network theory to analyze the use of linguistic variants in the 19th century Bulgarian language before and after 1878, specifically in the correspondence of educated speakers who are natives of Sofia, and before official codification of the orthography in 1899. The basic premise is that language change is actuated from a situation of variation, i.e. speakers either maintain certain established, more conservative variants or adopt newer, innovative ones. Several studies on language variation and change in English have established a correlation of dense social networks with maintenance of

¹ This paper is part of a larger project on the sociolinguistic history of the western dialect of Sofia during the 19th century before and after Sofia became the new capital in 1879. My archival research was generously supported by the Advanced Academia Fellowships Programme of the Centre for Advanced Studies in Sofia. I would also like to thank Nadezhda Aleksandrova for alerting me to the correspondence between Filaretova and Burmova in the National History Archives.

local norms and resistance to change, while loose social networks correlate with innovation in language norms and the spread of language change (Conde-Silvestre 2012). Thus vernacular language as evidenced in personal correspondence are analyzed to discover which variants were in use and which variants were preferred over time in order to provide a window into the historical processes at work during the 19th century in terms of the eventual standardization of the Bulgarian literary language. As Hernandez-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre point out:

The preservation of letters written by the same individual over different periods of his/her lifetime [...] adds an interesting dimension to historical linguistic research based on correspondence. In addition to the attested validity in detecting the provenance [...] and direction of long-term changes, [...], they are also useful to analyse the linguistic behaviour of individual speakers over more or less prolonged periods of time — ideally a complete life span — and thus to trace how a change in progress diffuses longitudinally in real time along a group of homogeneous speakers (Hernandez-Campoy & Conde-Silvestre 2015: 18).

In discussing the Late Middle to Early Modern English spelling change of <p> to <th> in the Paston letters (1422-1509), the authors argue that the adoption of the innovative <th> spelling by speakers in the later years of their life can be explained by their geographical and social mobility that exposed them to other variants. This association of mobility with the adoption of innovative change is confirmed by Bergs' 2005 monograph study of linguistic features in the Paston letters. This correlation of increased mobility with innovative change is articulated explicitly by Tieken-Boon van Ostade:

Whether upward or downward, geographical or social, any type of mobility would, as already indicated, have brought people into contact with different norms of speech, with the potential for their own language to change in response. [...] At the same time, many more people were probably not mobile: such people probably belonged to closed networks, and their language would therefore have been conservative compared to those people who did move about a lot (Tieken-Boon van Ostade 2006: 251).

The focus in this paper then will be on this factor of mobility which correlates with loose social networks, given the fact that Yordanka Filaretova traveled extensively and lived in different locations, as well as the fact that her social connections were also typical of loose networks. Her family lived in Sofia, but her brother, Dimitar Hadzhikotsev, studied in Russia and travelled considerably as a merchant and political actor. Filaretova's husband, Sava Filaretov, was from Zheravna in the eastern

(Balkan) dialect area and his higher education took place in Russia. Filaretova lived as part of the Bulgarian community in Tsarigrad (Istanbul) and Halki, and while there she became friends with Maria (Marionka Ivanova Parvova-Zolotovich) Burmova (1835 – 1916). Burmova was the niece of the wealthy Tsarigrad merchant Georgi Zolotovitch, who adopted her and brought her to Tsarigrad and then Halki in the 1850s, and also the wife (1861) of Todor Burmov, a journalist/editor, who later became the first prime minister of the principality of Bulgaria in 1879 (Radkova 2009). Filaretova also belonged to the Russian diplomatic community in Tsarigrad. Moreover, Filaretova's philanthropic work throughout her life resulted in numerous connections with other social actors beyond Sofia.

Yordanka Filaretova was born in 1843 to a wealthy merchant family in Sofia and at age 15 was one of the first students in the Sofia Girls School when it opened in November 1858, headed by Sava Filaretov. In October 1860 she married Filaretov, who in March of the following year was forced to leave Sofia for political reasons. He returned to Russia, became a Russian citizen and was subsequently named consul of the Russian diplomatic mission in Tsarigrad. Filaretova gave birth to their son in August 1861 and was reunited only briefly with Sava when he returned to Sofia in November 1861 on his way to Istanbul, leaving Filaretova and their son in Sofia. With the assistance of Nayden Gerov, a close friend of her husband's, Filaretova moved with her son, mother and nephew to Istanbul to join her husband in May 1862. Sava died of tuberculosis in November 1863, but Filaretova remained in Istanbul/Halki until 1867 when she returned to Bulgaria first settling in Plovdiv, and then returning to Sofia in 1869. In November 1869 she founded Женско благотворително дружество „Майка“ (Women's Charitable Society) and devoted her life to philanthropic work. She was active in the work of the Sofia Revolutionary Committee founded by Levski in 1870 and served as a nurse during the Serbo-Bulgarian War of 1885-1886. Due to disapproval of the Stambolov government she left Bulgaria for Tsarigrad in 1890 and then Russia in 1893 (visiting Marin Drinov in Kharkiv before settling in Saint Petersburg) and returned to Bulgaria probably around 1896. She died in Sofia in 1915 (Tsekov 2009).

10 letters (out of a total of 33 collected) from Yordanka Filaretova to Maria Burmova (National Library of Cyril and Methodius F16 AE644) are analyzed in terms of salient linguistic variants during the period 1865-1888. These 10 letters were selected as representative not only in terms of time but also place (Halki, Plovdiv, Sofia and Tsarigrad). The linguistic variants selected for analysis are given in Table 1 together with the 19th

century schools they are associated with (Georgieva et al. 1989: 177-182). It should be noted that what is being analyzed are the orthographic representations of these variants and that orthographic variation is quite typical for this period of time for many educated Bulgarians and professional writers.

Table 1. Linguistic Variants and Schools

	Tarnovo	Plovdiv	Koprivshitsa	Drinov
1st p. sg. pres.	-ж/ѣж	-ж/ѣж	-а/я	-ж/ѣж ²
1st p. acc. pro.	ма	мя	ма	ме
Reflexive pro.	са	ся	са	се
1 st p. sg. cop.	сѣмь ³	сѣмь ⁴	–	сѣмь ⁵

While several individual verb stems exhibit little (**знаѣж** – 7 vs. **зная** – 1; **благодарѣж** – 4 vs. **благодаря** – 1) or no variation (**надеѣж сѣж**⁶, **желаѣж**, **просѣж**, **сѣбѣща**) in first person singular present tense ending for the first and second conjugations, those that do vary show a gradual shift over time such that the **-а/я** endings are more numerous by the 1880s. The trajectory of this shift is not steady, however, as there is variation even within individual letters and not simply over time. Thus in the first sentence of the body of the 1865 letter from Halki we find **Най перво вы сѣж моля да мѣж извините** [...], and in the last half of the same letter **Молѣж Вы сѣж ако Вы нѣѣж мѣжно да попита Г=нѣж Бурмовѣж** [...]. In the 1868 letter from Plovdiv we find almost the same wording in the initial sentence of this letter **Най пѣрво Ви сѣж молѣж сестра ще да ма извините** and 5 of the 6 tokens of **мол-** in this letter have the ending in **-ж**. The single token of **мола Ви сѣж** occurs in the last paragraph, but follows two tokens of **молѣж** in the same paragraph. In 1884 there is one token of **са помола** and in 1888 one token of **моля Ви** (without the reflexive particle) and no tokens with **-ж**. The singletoken of **благодаря** (vs. 4 **благодарѣж**)

² It is interesting to note that in a letter from Drinov to Filaretova, dated 02.27.1893 (F249 AE9 L1-2-2a) Drinov uses **-а/я** for the first person singular of the following verbs: **благодаря**, **помоля**, **отговора**, **пиша**, **напиша**, **кажа**, and *jus* only in roots: **пѣтъ**, **пѣтуванѣе**, **кѣща**, **кѣмѣж**. This usage deviates from Drinov's own 1870 principles and probably anticipates the 1899 orthographic reform.

³ Momchilov 1868: 60.

⁴ Gruev 1858: 41.

⁵ There are four examples of **сѣмѣж** in Drinov 1869: VI (**Кѣм читатели-тѣж**).

⁶ The reflexive particle variants **сѣж** ~ **са** will be discussed below with variants of the first person pronoun.

occurs in the last letter of 1888. Thus the directionality of the shift seems to clearly favor **-а/я** over time. Table 2 presents the 1st p. sg. pr. endings of all first and second conjugation verbs in both numbers and percentage.

Table 2. 1st p. sg. endings I & II conjugations

	-Ѣ/ѢѢ	-а/я	-мь	Total
1865 Halki	9 (69.5%)	4 (31.5%)	0	13
1.1867 Plovdiv	1 (20%)	3 (60%)	1 (20%) ⁷	5
2.1867 Plovdiv	7 (54%)	6 (46%)	0 (0%)	13
1868 Plovdiv 18 (67%)	8 (29%)	1 (4%) ⁸	27	
1869 Sofia	10 (71%)	4 (29%)	0 (0%)	14
1871 Sofia	5 (83%)	1 (17%)	0 (0%)	6
1876 Sofia	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	10
1884 Tsarigrad	4 (37%)	6 (54%)	1 (9%) ⁹	11
3.1888 Tsarigrad	1 (25%)	3 (75%)	0 (0%)	4
8.1888 Sofia	4 (50%)	4 (50%)	0 (0%)	8

While overall the *jus* endings **-Ѣ/ѢѢ** maintain a strong presence throughout the entire timespan, I would argue that it is significant that the numbers of **-а/я** endings do become more numerous once Filaretova resettles in Bulgaria in 1867. The *jus* endings then increase in the 1868 letter and it is not until 1884 that the **а/я** endings have a resurgence. Thus, the letters from January and February of 1867 each have 2 tokens of **пишѢ** to 1 token of **пиша**, but in 1868 and 1869 there are only **пишѢ** tokens (3 tokens in 1868 and 1 token in 1869, respectively), and then not until 1888 does the second single token of **пиша** appear. What is interesting is that in the 1868 letter there is 1 token of each – **видѢ**, **вида**, and **повидя**, but then 1 token of **видѢ** in 1884. Even more striking is the fact that the 1868 letter also has one token of each – **могѢ**, **мога**, and **можемь**. What this variation suggests (if we compare the 1865 letter from Halki where there are only two tokens of non-*jus* endings: **моля** and **отговора**) is that moving back to Bulgaria exposed Filaretova to more variation than what might have been exhibited or even tolerated by the Bulgarian colony in Tsarigrad/Halki and that this exposure is being reflected in the variants in her letters at least temporarily. Also suggestive is the noticeable drop in the overall frequency of *jus*-endings in the three post-1879 letters

⁷ говоримь

⁸ можемь

⁹ можемь

which could tentatively be interpreted as reflecting the influence of the influx into the new capital of Sofia by eastern speakers and their pronunciation. When the patterning of the other variants is examined below, this interpretation seems less tenuous.

The accusative forms of the 1st person singular accusative pronoun are presented in Table 3 and the reflexive accusative pronoun in Table 4. Table 4 with the first person singular accusative pronoun shows a very unambiguous pattern: once Filaretova moves to Bulgaria in 1867 the **мж**-form faces competition with **ма**, and by 1868 going forward **ма** is the only form used. What is somewhat puzzling, however, is the fact the variant **мя** (preferred by the Plovdiv School) does not appear at all.

Table 3. First person singular accusative pronoun

	мж	ма	мя	ме	Total
1865 Halki	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2
1.1867 Plovdiv	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
2.1867 Plovdiv	2 (66.6%)	2 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3
1868 Plovdiv	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
1869 Sofia	0 (0%)	2 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2
1871 Sofia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
1876 Sofia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
1884 Tsarigrad	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3
3.1888 Tsarigrad	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
8.1888 Sofia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1

The pattern with the reflexive accusative pronoun (Table 4) is less clear than that of the first person accusative above, but at the same time it is relatively consistent. Again in 1867 the *jus*-form **цж** begins to compete with **ца**, but it is not until 1869 (versus 1868 for the first person) that **ца** becomes the dominant form. It is also in 1869, however, that the variant **ця** (Plovdiv School) makes its first appearance and then dominates in 1876 and 1888. In 1884 only **ца** appears but in the letter from 8.1888 **цж** makes a reappearance. A complicating factor here is that in fact **цж** is not the prescribed form for the reflexive pronoun (in fact the original form is with the front nasal, i.e. **цѧ**) but rather the form of the third person plural copula, and Filaretova does use **цж** consistently for the copula throughout the time period of these letters. The use of **цж** for the reflexive pronoun is probably by analogy to the 1st person **мж**.

Table 4. Reflexive accusative pronoun

	сж	са	ся	ся	Total
1865 Halki	8 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8
1.1867 Plovdiv	3 (75%)	1 (25%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4
2.1867 Plovdiv	15 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15
1868 Plovdiv	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
1869 Sofia	3 (9.5%)	25 (86%)	1 (3.5%)	0 (0%)	29
1871 Sofia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
1876 Sofia	0 (0%)	2 (40%)	3 (60%)	0 (0%)	5
1884 Tsarigrad	0 (0%)	13 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	13
3.1888 Tsarigrad	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1
8.1888 Sofia	1 (11.1%)	2 (22.2%)	6 (66.6%)	0 (0%)	9

The pattern of variation for the first person singular present copula (Table 5) is similar to that of the 1st person accusative pronoun. Once Filaretova has moved back to Bulgaria, the **сѣмѣ**-variant appears and by 1869 it has taken over entirely. The **сжмѣ**-variant seems to be a more conservative variant. It can be found in Bogorov's 1844 grammar which was probably the grammar used in the Sofia Girls School –Valchev (2008: 226) points out that both Sava Filaretov and his predecessor Zahariy Kursha had copies of Bogorov's grammar. By way of comparison Neofit Rilski (1835) has **самѣ**, Momchilov (1868) has **сѣмѣ**, Gruev (1858) and Gerov in their letters to Filaretov and Filaretova both use **сѣмѣ**, and Sava Filaretov uses **сѣмѣ** in his letters to Gerov at this time. The only other 19th-century Bulgarian grammar I have found so far that has the form **сжмѣ** is Radulov's 1873 one (printed in Belgrade where Radulov taught), however, this does not account for Filaretova's use of it in 1865. In the letters from Filaretova to Gerov that I have examined thus far, there is only one, dated Sep. 14, 1865, and written in Halki, that has **несжмѣ получила** (in 2 earlier letters written in Tsarigrad in 1862 and 1864, Filaretova uses **сѣмѣ**). Thus one is tempted to posit that the use of the more conservative form **сжмѣ** in 1865 might be due to the influence of the Bulgarian intelligentsia in the Halki community. If so, then this would then be an example of social mobility as a factor in variation. Filaretova started moving in more educated circles when she arrived in Tsarigrad/Halki and became sensitive to the social indexical value of which spelling was more acceptable. Thus the use of the form **сжмѣ** could be explained as a hypercorrection by a young woman who suddenly finds herself in a more highly educated and formal milieu. Unfortunately letters from Burmova to

Filaretova were not available, although an undated letter from Burmova to her uncle Georgi Zolotovich has one token of the first person singular copula in which both vowels are corrected: **сѣ/ѡмѣ/ѣ**. Although it is unambiguous which vowels were the corrected ones, it appears that the final form is **сѣмѣ** corrected from **сѡмѣ** based on the fact that the ascenders of the **ѣ** and **ѡ** are larger than other tokens in these letters which suggests that they are the result of the correction rather than the original vowels. Burmova had a much more extensive education than Filaretova, so perhaps she was more comfortable using the innovative form even in a more conservative speech community.

Table 5. 1st person singular copula

	сѡмѣ	сѣмѣ	сѣмѣ	Total
1865 Halki	4 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1
1.1867 Plovdiv	2 (66.6%)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0%)	3
2.1867 Plovdiv	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1
1868 Plovdiv	2 (50%)	2 (50%)	0 (0%)	4
1869 Sofia	0 (0%)	3 (100%)	0 (0%)	3
1871 Sofia	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0
1876 Sofia	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1
1884 Tsarigrad	0 (0%)	6 (100%)	0 (0%)	6
3.1888 Tsarigrad	0 (0%)	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1
8.1888 Sofia	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0

So it would seem that time and place coincide to a certain extent in generalizing a pattern whereby the more archaic spelling with *jus* is used in earlier letters and variants in **-а** and **-я** gain traction once Filaretova is back in Bulgaria, although this pattern is clearer in the first person singular accusative pronoun and first person singular copula, somewhat less so in the reflexive accusative pronoun while the *jus* spelling persists in first person singular verb endings. No doubt the writing of *jus* reflects what Filaretova was taught in school and possibly reinforced in the Bulgarian community in Tsarigrad/Halki (perhaps indicative of a socio-indexical function to mark literacy). Whether this patterning will be supported by variants in the other 23 letters to Burmova remains to be seen. Moreover, whether this pattern is also present in letters to other correspondents, such as Nayden Gerov, Dimitar Hadzhikotsev, Filaretova's brother, and Hristo Stoyanov, another Sofia native who was a former student of Filaretov's and a family friend, is yet to be determined. Based on Filaretova's first two

letters written in Sofia to Nayden Gerov in 1862, a striking number of 1st person verb forms exhibit *mekane*¹⁰, i.e. the analogical use of **-мъ** (and **-ме**) instead of **-ж/ѣж** or **-а/я**, such as **молимъ**, **отговоримъ**, **благодаримъ**, **жалимъ**, **пригответимъ**, and no examples of *jus* in the verb endings. It is significant that Filaretova's first use of *jus* in verb endings occurs after her move to Tsarigrad/Halki: for example, in her letter written to Gerov in Tsarigrad in February 1864 there are both **вида** and **видж** in the same sentence. In the March 1865 letter to Gerov written in Halki there are both **знаемъ** and **незнаж** also in the same sentence. The fact that the 1868 letter from Plovdiv has more conservative variants overall than the earlier two 1867 letters still needs to be accounted for, as well as the fact that the 1868 letter contains several variants of the same form, for example, **могж/мога/можемъ**, **видж/вида/повидя**, **(по)молж/мола**, **кажж/кажа**, **сжмъ/сьмъ**. A next step would be to take a closer look at other letters from this early period in Plovdiv to see whether this co-occurrence of different variants in a single letter is typical or not. What could be indicative of Filaretova's uncertainty as to which variant is the appropriate one now that she is being exposed to more innovative forms. Another critical time period is pre- and post-1879 when the influx of high-prestige eastern dialect speakers in Sofia occurred. One has to recall that Yordanka Filaretova's formal education was actually fairly short and presumably ended with her marriage in 1860, while Sava Filaretov's direct influence on her language use ended with his death in 1863. So her writing must have evolved over time as she engaged in letter writing to various people. Future direction for this project will be to compare the variants in Filaretova's letters to different correspondents such as Nayden Gerov and her brother Dimitar Hadzhikotsev, and Hristo Stoyanov, a family friend, teacher, and former student of Filaretov's. The questions that need answers are whether the pattern is consistent with those in the Burmova letters or not and in which case the concept of linguistic accommodation (Giles 2016) whereby Filaretova's variants are adjusted according to the language of her correspondents will be relevant. A fairly recent direction in sociohistorical linguistics (Havinga 2021) focuses precisely on this kind of intra-individual variation in letters.

¹⁰ Technically the term *mekane* refers only to the use of the ending **-ме** in the 1st person plural of verbs in the first and second conjugations by analogy to the third-conjugation ending, but the analogical mechanism is the same in the first person singular.

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