Linguistic Choices and their Pragmatic Function: A Sociolinguistic Study on Late Byzantine History Writing

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Even though 'Style switching', 'Levels of style', 'Mimesis' and 'Intertextuality' are familiar concepts to modern Byzantine philologists, and have been explored as a sign of a Byzantine author’s education (or lack of it), their pragmatic function haven’t drawn enough attention from modern scholars. Furthermore, the target-audience and the active role, that it played in shaping texts, have been ignored or at the very least underestimated.

On the basis of some examples from late Byzantine historiographic works, this paper shows and analyzes possible causal links between linguistic choices (i.e. vocabulary, intertextuality, allusions, style) made by Byzantine historians and the socio-cultural contexts (i.e. schooling systems, cultural trends, political and religious debates etc.) in which they and their target audience(s) lived.

More concretely, I will try to address the following questions:

1. Does the choice of vocabulary, level of style, etc. imply a pragmatic function?
2. Is it possible to analyze the communicative effectiveness of a historical text (i.e. its effect on the target audience)?
3. Is it possible to find causal links between an author’s linguistic choices and his educational path / communicative purpose / target audience?
4. Can we consider the way in which a historical text has been written as evidence, as the result of its social, political, historical context? And if so, how should we do this?

Keywords: Late Byzantine History Writing, Language and Identity.