Oscan and Greek in Italy: Contact Phenomena and Domain

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Oscan and Greek: Contact Phenomena and Domain

- Previous work has examined Greek/Oscan contact only on a small scale (1 inscription, 1 site, 1 genre), often without the benefit of more modern perspectives on sociolinguistics

- This paper takes a new approach by considering Greek/Oscan contact across all of the "South Oscan" written texts.

- The distribution of contact phenomena suggests that suggests that **written** use of borrowing, code-switching, etc, was conditioned by **domain** or **genre** and not geographic location

- This is likely to reflect widespread **societal bilingualism** in the spoken language

Languages of Central and Southern Italy
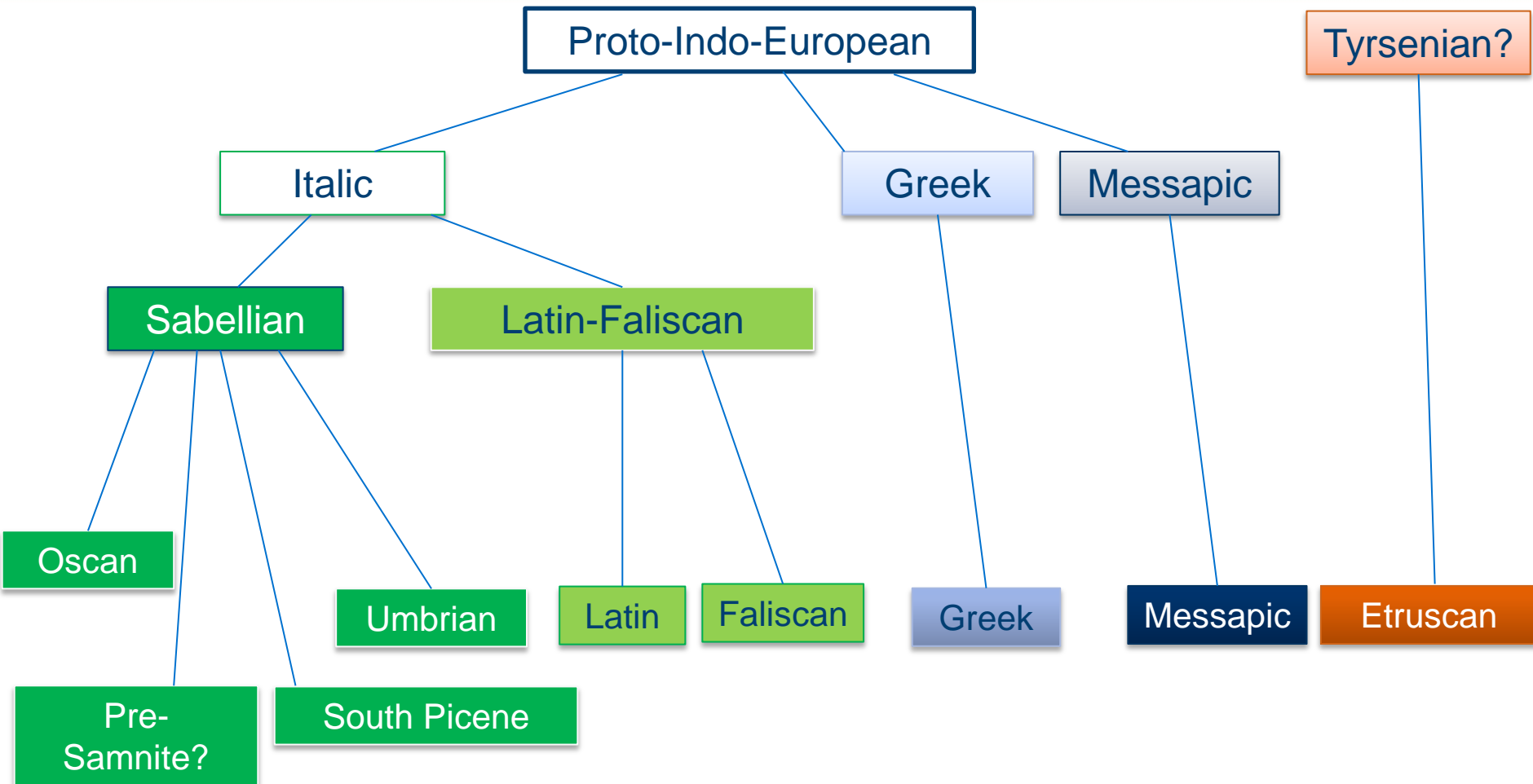
Languages of Italy

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South Oscan

- Around 130 Oscan texts, mostly written in the Greek alphabet
- Texts mainly date from the 4th to the 1st century BC

South Oscan

- 50 Dedications

- 3 Legal texts (2 Oscan; 1 "Pre-Samnite")

- 5 Official texts (e.g. by magistrates who commissioned a building/wall)

- 8 Curse tablets (*defixiones*)

- 3 Funerary epigraphy (2 certain, 1 doubtful)

- 25 Tile stamps and makers' marks

- c. 100 Coins (around 30 separate coin legends)

- 8 Graffiti and dipinti

Greek/Oscan contact phenomena

- Out of around 130 South Oscan texts, around 35 inscriptions (more if coins are included) show evidence of contact (borrowing, code-switching, morphological changes, Greek-influence spelling, Greek-influenced syntax, etc)

- Several of the texts with the most evidence of contact with Greek have been found since 2000

- Twentieth-century scholarship regularly down-played the importance of contact
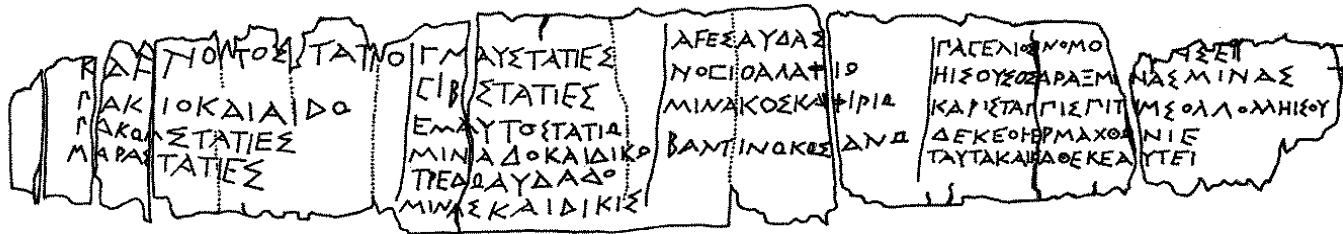
Greek/Oscan contact phenomena

Lazzeroni (1972) concluded that some 'Oscans' wrote Greek but no 'Greeks' wrote in Oscan. Did not allow for widespread bilingualism; used a model of cultural contact that is no longer accepted.

Prosdocimi (1976) concluded that the "grecismi" in Oscan were a matter of "parole" and not "langue"; he also did not deal with South Oscan texts.


Paestum

Metaponto

Greek/Oscan contact phenomena

Lejeune's work (e.g. Lejeune 1990) played down contact with Greek at sites such as Rossano di Vaglio, emphasising local tradition and creativity.

Since then, most work on Oscan bilingualism has dealt with individual texts rather than wider patterns (though see also Poccetti 2010 for some new insights).

Rossano di Vaglio

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Language choice: Oscan or Greek?
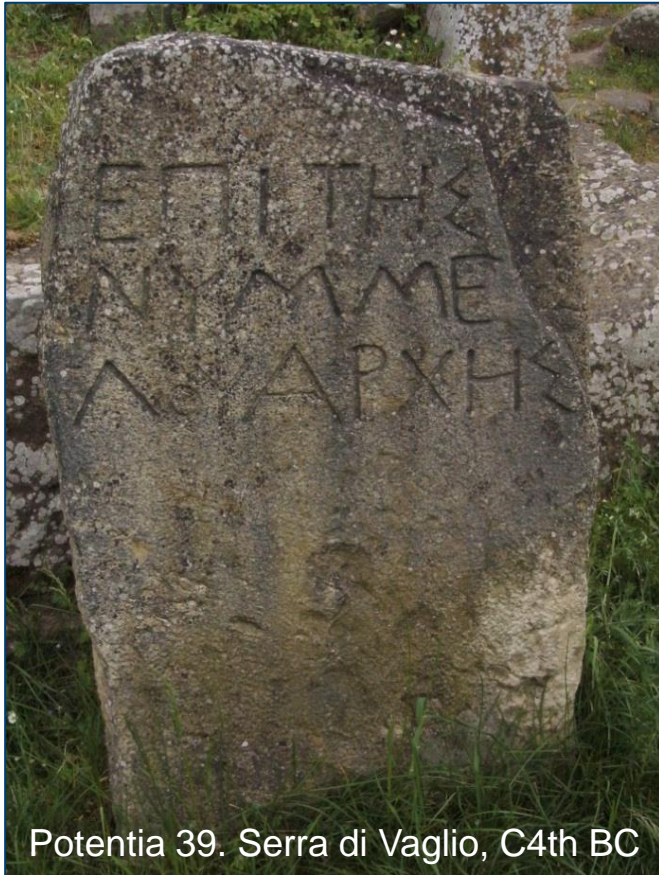
Potentia 39. Serra di Vaglio, C4th BC

Numistro 1/Lu 4. Muro Lucano, 300-275 BC.

επι τησ νυμμελου αρχησ
"In the magistracy of Nummelos"

μαισ αρριεσ σουϝεν μεδδικεν
"Mais Arries in his magistracy"

Borrowing

[-?-]αματομ

[-?-]υξ κhομοι

[-?-]μψδοι μεfι

[-?-] *vacat*

Potentia 21/Lu 29 (photo: Crawford).
Rossano di Vaglio, third century BC?

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Code-switching
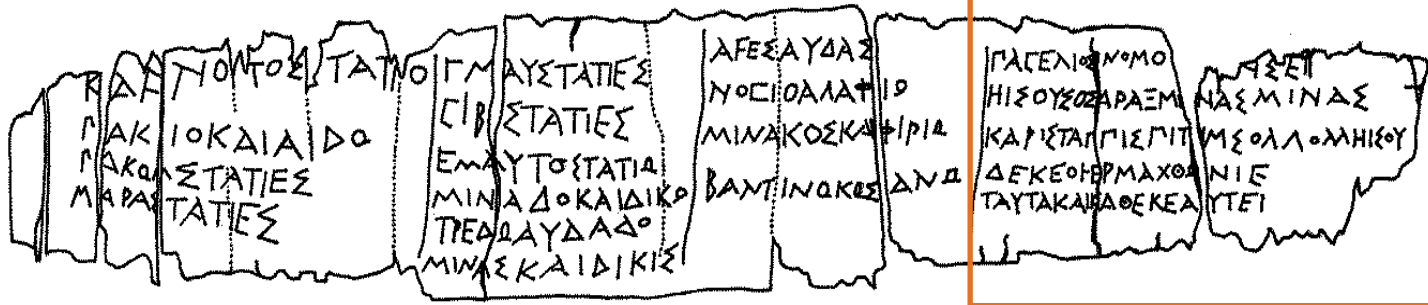
"And whoever (is acting on behalf) of all of them, Hermes of the Underworld, receive these (names) and keep them here."

π(?) αϝελιοσ νο(ϝισ) μο[-5-]νσ ετ
κησ ουσοσ αρα μ[ι]νασ μινασ
καρισ ταπ(?) πισπιτ ι(νι)μ σολλομ ησου
δεκεο ηερμα χθωνιε
ταυτα και καθεκε αυτει

Reuse

σακαρακιδι-

μαι πακτιη-

ισ εροuκτη(ι)σ

πακτιη(ι)σ

"In the priesthood of Paktis Erouktis son of Paktis"

επι ιερ(εως)

"In the priesthood"

Crimisa 1/Lu 23 (Image: Crawford). Crimisa, 300-200 BC.

Mapping contact phenomena in South Oscan

Map 4 Map of Table 24

|	
○	0 features
●	1–2 features
■	3–4 features
✦	10 features

Coast vs inland

(Non-Greek) inland sites

(Greek) coastal sites

Language contact and domain

- Contact phenomena cluster around curse tablets, coins and artists/craftsmen, and to a lesser extent dedications
- Largely absent from laws and funerary texts
- Corpus is **small**, so generalisations should be tentative – but these patterns make sense historically

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	One language			Two (or more) languages	
Community	Closed	Open, high ELV	Open, low ELV	Even ELV	Uneven ELV
Types of bilingual texts	No bi-version. No texts displaying bilingual phenomena.	No bi-version. Few texts displaying bilingual phenomena, perhaps including lexical borrowing.	No bi-version. Texts displaying bilingual phenomena involving lexical borrowing, perhaps tag-switching.	Bi-version may be common. Texts displaying bilingual phenomena involving code-switching, borrowing, interference. Bi-directional influence.	Fewer bi-version texts. Texts displaying bilingual phenomena involving code-switching, borrowing, interference. Linguistic features of the higher vitality group are mostly found in the lower.
Genres/Domains	One language used in all domains.	One language used in all domains.	One primary language used in all domains. **Borrowing may be limited to certain domains.**	**Languages may be specialised to different domains.**	**Languages may be specialised to different domains.** Higher vitality language may be used in majority of domains, or show signs of taking over domains of lower vitality language.

Conclusions

- Genre-based differences conditioning which written texts show the most evidence of Greek (and Latin) influence/borrowing

- "Epigraphic habit" provides a flexible framework of norms, which varies with location, time, genre. Writers exercise personal choice within that framework

- Written evidence of language contact probably reflects a (historically plausible) societal bilingualism
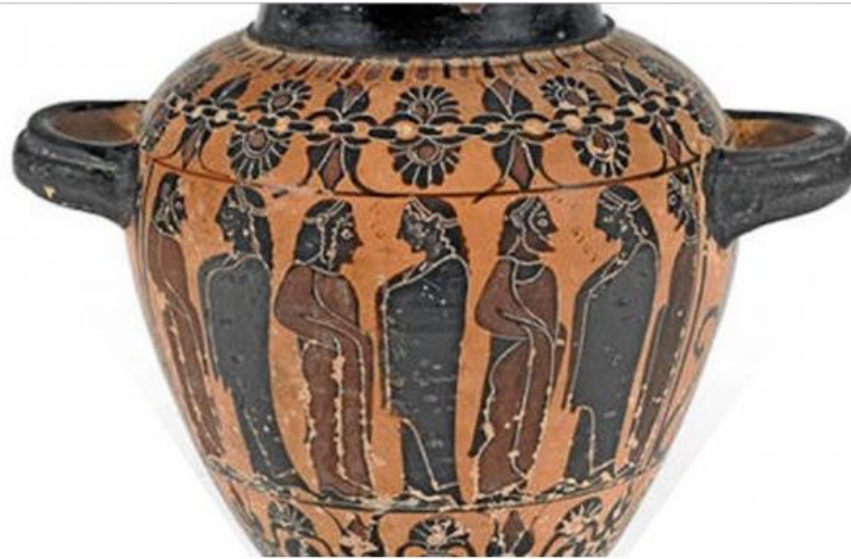
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