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The Importance of Slovene for Understanding Balkanisms

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Abstract. We argue here that Slovene is linguistically and geographically peripheral vis-à-vis the Balkans, but nonetheless it has considerable relevance for Balkan linguistics and for understanding the massive contact-induced convergence embodied in the Balkan sprachbund. We present three ways in which Slovene helps to shed light on a key sprachbund feature, namely the loss of the infinitive. We first examine the distribution of the infinitive within South Slavic, and determine that peripheral Slovene, with a robust infinitive, aids in confirming a generalization about the geography of infinitive-loss: the more centrally Balkan a language is, the greater the degree of infinitive-loss it shows. Second, we follow Mihevc Gabrovec (1973) and compare an innovative use of the infinitive in 18th–19th century Slovene with a parallel innovative usage found in 12th–14th century Greek, and conclude that the comparison has only typological validity but shows that still-vital infinitives can be put to novel uses; Slovene thus helps to illuminate the strength of the infinitive in Medieval Greek. Finally, we discuss the case of the infinitive in Dolenjska Romani, a quasi-Balkan Romani dialect that differs from other Balkan Romani dialects in having an infinitive; this infinitive, however, can be attributed to contact with Slovene, with its robust infinitive, so that Slovene helps to elucidate the dialectology of Balkan Romani precisely with regard to the infinitive.

When we think of the honorand, what comes immediately to mind is the Yiddish word *menshlikhkayt*. In addition to Marc Greenberg's considerable and impressive scholarly achievements, what also stands out in our minds is that he has done them all while also being a successful husband and father as well as one of the nicest and most decent human beings in our field and in academia in general, territory not always known for a plethora of decent folks. To our mind, he is a real *mensh*, a man among men, something we say with the greatest of admiration.

1. Introduction

Greenberg (2011) makes an important contribution to the principled type of historical areal linguistics distinguishing Slovene from the Balkan linguistic league that we (Friedman and Joseph, To appear 2019) advocate for Balkan

linguistics in general.¹ In that article, Marc demonstrated that an apparent similarity between Prekmurje Slovene and the Balkan languages is of quite different origins in the two regions. This in turn argues against the kind of synchronic surface typological comparisons that do not serve to advance our understanding of sprachbunds.² In honor of Marc's many and important contributions to scholarship, especially to Slovene and the position of Slovene in linguistic studies in general, here we build on Greenberg (2011) in a more general way, discussing how Slovene helps to define the Balkans, of which it is and is not a part.

As just indicated, Slovenia occupies a curious position with regard to the Balkans. Unlike most of former Yugoslavia, it was never a part of the Ottoman Empire, and yet a 1922 supplementary volume to the 1911 *Encyclopedia Britannica* labeled as "Balkan Italy" Slovene-majority territory that was ceded to Italy under the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920 (Cvijić and Chataigneau 1922: 370), but which has been part of Slovenia since 1945. In general, being part of Yugoslavia for most of the 20th century meant that Slovenia was part of the geopolitical Balkans. At the same time, it was (and to some extent still is) betwixt and between the northern boundary of the beginning of what we can call the ideological Balkans. For some, the former Austro-Hungarian Empire is as "Balkan" as the former Ottoman Empire, with which it competed for territory in Europe for centuries. Other definitions choose rivers such as the Kupa and Drava, which separate Slovenia and Hungary from Croatia. Still others choose the Sava, which flows to the south of the center of Zagreb, and yet others the Una, which forms part of the border between Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.³ It was in this spirit that Slovenia's prankster philosopher, Slavoj Žižek, described the Ljubljanica River, which runs through the center of Ljubljana, as the dividing line between the Balkans and *Mitteleuropa*.⁴ Nonetheless, owing to political and linguistic association with the other South Slavic peoples, some of whom were part of Trubetzkoy's (1923, 1930) original definition of the

¹ We can also note here Schallert and Greenberg (2007) and Greenberg (2003), both of which demonstrate the importance of areal phenomena in historical linguistics.

² We follow here the convention advocated in Friedman and Joseph (to appear 2019) and treat "sprachbund(s)" as an assimilated loanword in English, like *pretzel(s)*, which is neither capitalized, written in italics, nor pluralized in the German fashion.

³ This issue is discussed in considerable detail, and with an eye to the ways in which various ideologies impinge on the delineation of a boundary, in Friedman and Joseph (To appear, 2019: Chap. 1), drawing largely on Friedman's own extensive experience with the Balkans.

⁴ Žižek's pronouncement is viewable at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwDrHqNZ9lo> (last accessed 20 June 2018). The term *Mitteleuropa* had problematic Nazi usages, but seems to have avoided the contamination associated with *Reich*.

- (2) počnuvam da trčam (Macedonian)
 begin.1Sg da run.1Sg
 ‘I begin to run’ (literally: “I-begin that I-run”)

Slovene, by contrast, uses an infinitive in this construction, and others as well, as in (3):

- (3) začnjam teči
 begin.1Sg run.INF
 ‘I begin to run’

The ways in which Slovene illuminates the feature of infinitive replacement in the Balkans are threefold. First, it allows us to test geographic limits of the Balkan sprachbund through a generalization about geography and language that can be seen in the distribution of the loss of the infinitive in the Balkans. Second, Slovene offers a useful typological perspective on one seemingly puzzling detail about the loss of the infinitive in Greek. Finally, the way in which Slovene has interacted with a Romani dialect helps to resolve an anomaly in the dialectological distribution of an infinitive across Romani.

2. The Geography of the Loss of the Infinitive in the Balkans

As noted above, Slovene is not in the linguistic Balkans, i.e., the Balkan sprachbund. This does not mean that it is not valuable, however, in judging aspects of that sprachbund. In particular, again as noted above, Slovene is part of the South Slavic subgroup of Slavic, and thus it can be contrasted with other South Slavic languages that are unquestionably or, at least partially, Balkan.

With regard to the specific Balkan feature concerning the infinitive, Slovene demonstrates and is consistent with the view that there is a definite geographic generalization to be made here: the more embedded a language is in the Balkans, i.e., the more a language is geographically south and central in the Balkans, the more infinitive-loss it shows.⁶ For instance, the dialects of Greek that are outside of the Balkans, such as the Romeyka Greek of eastern Turkey, reported on recently in Sitaridou (2014), or the Greek of southern Italy found still in Apulia and Calabria, discussed most recently in Baldissera (2013, 2015), still maintain a productive use of an infinitive, even if it is somewhat limited when compared with Ancient Greek; this retention of the infinitive in certain contexts in non-Balkan Greek contrasts with its total loss in Balkan Greek. The same holds for a comparison within East South Slavic between, on the one hand, the completely infinitive-less and more centrally Balkan Macedonian,

⁶ This generalization is discussed briefly in Joseph (1983: 251).

especially the western dialects, and, on the other, Bulgarian (and to a lesser extent southeastern Macedonian), where some remnants of infinitival usage are still discernible. As for Slovene in particular, it contrasts with the rest of West South Slavic, being completely “infinitival”, whereas the Bosnian-Croatian-Montenegrin-Serbian complex shows in general variation between infinitival and finite complementation, controlled by various social and lexical factors. There is differentiation within West South Slavic, with the dialects of Croatia generally being more infinitival than those of Serbia, and the southeastern Torlak dialects having completely lost the infinitive like Macedonian (Belić 1905), but the position of Slovene is clear, and sets a telling and distinct northern boundary on the distribution of infinitive-loss within the Balkans.

The factual basis for this geo-linguistic generalization can be summarized by the material in Table 1 on the following page, in which the dialects and languages that show infinitives to some degree are contrasted in revealing ways with related dialects and languages that generally lack infinitives, and in each case, the infinitival ([+infinitival]) dialect or language is geographically closer to the center of the Balkans than its contrasting partner in the pairing.⁷

3. A Typological Perspective on Infinitival Resurgence in Greek

Despite the fact that between Ancient Greek and Modern Greek the infinitive completely disappeared from the language, a loss that can be traced progressively for the most part from century to century, with the infinitive essentially disappearing by the 16th century, there is an interesting functional resurgence of the infinitive evident in Medieval Greek that runs counter to the general downward trend with the infinitive. That is, starting around the 12th century and extending into the 14th or 15th century, a new use of the infinitive arose whereby the infinitive, nominalized by the definite article (giving an instance of the so-called “articular infinitive”), occurs in clause-initial position with arguments such as a subject and/or an object, in a “stage-setting” function, giving the circumstances, often temporal in nature, under which the action of the main clause occurs. An example of this usage, sometimes referred to as a “Temporal Infinitive”, “Absolute Infinitive” or “Circumstantial Infinitive” is given in (4), from the 13th century *Chronicle of Morea*:

⁷ The abbreviations in the Table are as follows: Armn = Aromanian; BCSM = Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian-Montenegrin; Blg = Bulgarian; Rmn = Romanian; Mac = Macedonian; MRmn = Meglenoromanian. This table, along with more discussion of the infinitive, comes from Friedman and Joseph (To appear, 2019: Chap. 7).

Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Infinitival vs. Non-Infinitival Usage in Languages Represented in the Balkans

[+infinitival]	[-infinitival]
Romeyka Greek (eastern Turkey)	Balkan Greek
Southern Italy Greek	Balkan Greek
Arbëresh Tosk Albanian	mainland Tosk Albanian
Geg Albanian	most of Tosk
West South Slavic (BCSM, Slovene)	East South Slavic (Mac/Blg)
Slovene	BCSM
Croatian	Serbian
Non-Torlak (N/W) Serbian	Torlak (Southeast) Serbian
Bulgarian	Macedonian
Maleshevo-Pirin, Lower Vardar Mac	the rest of Eastern & all of western Mac
Western European Romance	Eastern (non-Italo-)Romance
Istro-Romanian	Balkan Romance (Armñ, MRmñ, Rmñ)
Romanian	Aromanian/Meglenoromanian
Northern Romanian (Maramureş, Crişana)	Southern Romanian
East Rumelian & Anatolian Turkish	Western Rumelian Turkish
Modern Indo-Aryan (e.g., Hindi)	Romani
some non-Balkan Romani	Balkan Romani

- (4) κ' ἐγὼ τὸ ἀκούσει το εὐτύς
 k' egō to akousei to eutus
 and I.NOM the.NTR hear.INF it.ACC at.once

ἐθλίβηκα
 ethlibēka

be-aggrieved.1Sg

'And on hearing it, I was at once aggrieved'

(literally: "and I the to.hear it at.once was.aggrieved")

(Morea 6066)

Slovene is relevant here because of a development within the language in its early modern stage. As Mihevc-Gabrovec 1973 has documented,⁸ a temporal, and thus somewhat circumstantial, use of the infinitive arose in Slovene in the 18th and 19th centuries and occurs in the works of such authors as *Matevž Ravnikar*, *Franc Metelko*, and *France Prešeren*; see (5) for an example from Mihevc-Gabrovec (opt. cit.: 223).

- (5) hlapec to slišati poklekne in Boga hvali
 servant it hear.INF kneels and God praises
 'The servant, on hearing it, kneels and praises God'
 (literally: "servant it to.hear kneels ...") (Ravnikar ZSP I 40/711)

Mihevc-Gabrovec states that this usage is unique among Slavic languages and seems to represent an innovation within Slovene of the relevant period. She argues, moreover, that despite the parallels with the Greek temporal/circumstantial infinitive, e.g., in terms of the sorts of verbs (typically perception verbs of hearing or seeing) that participate in the construction, the Slovene usage is not directly connected in any historical way with the Greek.⁹

Nonetheless, Slovene is relevant for understanding the Greek construction and what the occurrence of this innovative construction in Greek means for the loss of the infinitive in that language. That is to say, it is not relevant as a contact-related or genealogically related phenomenon with regard to the Greek, but it is relevant as a typological parallel. In particular, it shows that the emergence of a construction of this sort is indeed something that languages can do with infinitives that are still a living part of the language. The Slovene development demonstrates that given the presence of an infinitive in a language, a functional shift with that infinitive in the direction of a temporal/circumstantial construction is a possible innovation that languages can

⁸ We thank the honorand, Marc himself, for helping us—not realizing the purpose for our asking him—to secure a copy of the Mihevc-Gabrovec article, so that we could check some details. We are especially pleased that in a sense, therefore, he contributed to his own *festschrift*. Moreover, Marc provides an interesting insight on the Slovene construction (from e-mail correspondence on 22 January 2018), namely that it may suggest that the infinitive, which could be used to translate German and Latin participles, "was felt to be available for extra duty". That succinct phrasing encapsulates the argument given here for the Greek construction, for it seems reasonable to suppose that the Greek redeployment of the infinitive would be possible only if the infinitive was still a living part of the grammar of Greek.

⁹ English offers another typological parallel to this usage, also with perception verbs, in sentences such as *To hear her talk, you would think she was an expert on nuclear weapons*, or *To see him swagger like that, you would think his team had just won the World Cup*. As with the Greek parallel, this usage most likely has no genealogical connection with the Slovene construction.

engage in. As far as Greek is concerned, as argued by Joseph 1983, the infinitive still had some vitality in the medieval language of the 12th–14th centuries, in that it remained as an optional complement type with a number of verbs, e.g., ἴμπορώ ([imboró]) ‘can’ and ἀρχίζω ([arxízo]) ‘begin’; thus, it was available to be put to use in such a temporal/circumstantial construction. The Slovene temporal infinitive thus offers a parallel of a typological nature to the Greek development, and thereby makes the emergence within Greek of a new function for the infinitive less anomalous within the overall downward trending of infinitival use in the language; it shows that as long as an infinitive has some vitality, some place in the grammar, the deployment of the infinitive in such an innovative use is quite possible.

4. Slovene as the South of *Mittleuropa*: A Romani Infinitival Perspective

Like Macedonian and Balkan Greek, the Romani dialects of the Balkans, as well as most Romani dialects outside the Balkans, have no infinitive whatsoever (which, in relation to the ancestral Indic language, means replacement of an infinitive with finite clauses), and the current subordinating constructions undoubtedly took their definitive shape during the period of contact between Early Romani and Medieval Greek (Matras 2002: 181). For the most part, Romani has been quite consistent in its preservation of this Balkan feature even in those dialects that have been spoken outside the Balkans for six or more centuries. However, there are some Romani dialects that have developed new infinitival constructions in the form of invariant 3sg, or, less frequently, 2sg, forms in subordinate clauses with co-referentiality, not agreeing in person with the subject of the main verb (Boretzky 1996, Elšík and Matras 2006: 40, 125–9). These dialects, for the most part, belong to the Central dialect group, i.e., those dialects that are restricted to what we can call the core of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and this includes the Prekmurje Romani dialect of Slovenia. There is one infinitive-possessing dialect, however, that is particularly problematic for the now most widely accepted quadripartite dialectal division of Romani into Northern, Central, Vlax, and Balkan (cf. Matras 2002, 2010, namely the “dialect with seven names” (Cech and Heinschink 2001), among which Dolenjska Romani (referring to a part of Slovenia, Dolenjsko, where the dialect is spoken, although some speakers are now in Italy) is the broadly accepted name (Cech 2006).¹⁰ For our purposes here, the importance of this dialect resides in the fact that while some of its basic features connect it with the Central group, other features are clearly Balkan, and more specifically Arli

¹⁰ Other names used by and for these speakers include Rom Sloveni, Gopti, Rom Hravati, Lički Šijači, Sinti Istriani, and, in Niš, Čajrlije (Cech and Heinschink 2001).

(Cech and Heinschink 2001), pointing to its presumed Balkan origin.¹¹ The infinitival construction is one of the key features that this Romani dialect of Slovenia shares with Central Romani. It is thus arguably the case that Slovene not only helps to define the Balkan sprachbund by its own un-Balkanness, but has also contributed to the “de-Balkanization” of formerly Balkan dialects, and has done so precisely in the domain of the infinitive.¹²

5. Conclusion

Slovene is indeed linguistically and geographically peripheral vis-à-vis the Balkans, but its relevance for Balkan linguistics and for the key linguistic development in the Balkans, namely the massive contact-induced convergence embodied in the Balkan sprachbund, is also clear. The considerations offered here show that aspects of Slovene grammar and Slovene language contact are relevant outside of the language itself in that they shed some light on the loss of the infinitive within the Balkans as well as its re-creation outside the Balkans; in this way, as a tribute to the honorand, we trust that we have accomplished even a tiny fraction of what Marc Greenberg has done in bringing the historical phonology of Slovene, as seen especially in Greenberg (2000), into the broader realm of the study of Slavic diachrony, and of language change in general.

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¹¹ The Arli Romani dialects are spoken in throughout the southern Balkans (the name is Erli in Bulgaria and eastern Macedonia). The name comes from Turkish *yerli* ‘local, settled’.

¹² We can also note here the effect of East Rumelian Turkish on some Balkan Romani dialects in eastern Bulgaria that conjugate Turkish verbs as in Turkish (Friedman 2013). In a few of these dialects, Turkish conjugation has been borrowed to the extent that the Turkish infinitive is used after Romani *te* (the equivalent of Albanian *të*, Balkan Romance *să/si/s'*, Balkan Slavic *da* and Modern Greek *na*) in infinitival clauses (Friedman 2009). The infinitive, however, is limited to Turkish verbs and has not affected native verbs, unlike Central and Dolenjska Romani, where the invariant forms after *te* are native.

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