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THE BALKAN INFINITIVE LOSS—SOME
METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS*

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The complete or partial loss of the infinitive is a well-known phenomenon that has occurred to different degrees throughout the Balkan languages. There is much about the infinitive-loss phenomenon that is well-documented, and the basic facts, as reported in a standard Balkan handbook such as Sandfeld (1930: 173) seem fairly clear: Greek is generally described as a language with no productive remnants of its former infinitive (but see the discussion below); Bulgarian utilizes an infinitive only with a handful of verbs, most notably the modal verb for 'be able', and in some future formations; Albanian has a periphrastic form with the value of an infinitive which is dialectally restricted and seems to be of secondary origin; Romanian has an infinitive but it is used more in the literary language than in the colloquial language, and even then only in restricted contexts; a similar situation is to be found in Serbo-Croatian, and so on, for other Balkan speech communities.¹

Despite the documentation available in the handbooks (e.g., Sandfeld (1930), Schaller (1975)) and works on the loss of the infinitive in the individual languages (e.g., Hesseling (1892) and Burguière (1960) for Greek, Demiraj (1970) for Albanian, etc.), there are still several aspects of the Balkan infinitive-loss which merit further study, such as the way in which the infinitive-loss spread through each of the languages and from language to language, the ultimate causes of the infinitive-loss in each language and in the Balkans as a whole, the dialect distribution of the use of the infinitive in those languages that still have it, etc. Thus a full and complete account of the Balkan infinitive-loss is still a desideratum.² In this paper, some of the methodological problems facing such a study are discussed, with special reference to Greek. Unfortunately, a solution to these problems is not as readily forthcoming as is the statement of the problems themselves; still, it is important to recognize what the problem areas actually are.

Perhaps the most basic problem is that of defining exactly what an "infinitive" is. Related to this is the question which too few linguists have paid any attention to, namely what the parameters are which determine whether a verb is FINITE or NONFINITE. The definition of finiteness in general is beyond the scope of this paper, but the comments made here on the definition of an infinitive, i.e., a particular

class of nonfinite verbs, will have some bearing on this larger issue.

Most traditional, Indo-European-based definitions of "infinitive" center on the absence of person and number markings, thus distinguishing an infinitive from other nonfinite forms such as participles, which typically have markings for number. However, there are two problems with such an approach.

First, there is the problem posed by Portuguese, which is said to have "personal" (i.e., inflected) infinitives, which are functionally equivalent to uninflected infinitives (for the most part):

- (1) a. Ao sairmos de casa, nos encontramos Carlos
 on leave/INF + 1PL from home we met/1PL
 'On (our) leaving the house, we met Carlos'
 b. Ao sair de casa, nos encontramos Carlos
 leave/INF
 'On (our) leaving the house, we met Carlos'.

Although these "personal infinitives" are the result of an historical reanalysis of inflected Latin imperfect subjunctives as being infinitive + personal endings, they are identified with uninflected infinitives by traditional grammarians and by naive native speakers of Portuguese, and so might really be "infinitives" in some sense of the term despite their markings for person and number.

Second, there are languages in which one finds verbal categories that appear to be "infinitive-like", in that they correspond in translation and usage to Indo-European infinitives, but for which agreement markers such as those for person and number are not relevant in the verbal system at all. Korean is such a language; its gerundive form in *-ki* parallels Indo-European infinitives in at least some uses, e.g., as complement to adjectival verbs as in (2):

- (2) a. Mary-nin po-ki-e yepuda
 TOPIC see-GRDV-DAT be-pretty
 'Mary is pretty to look at'
 b. Ku cheyk-un ilk-ki oriopta
 This book/TOPIC read/SRDV be-hard
 'This book is hard to read'

However, Korean gerundives are no different from other Korean verb forms in having no person and number markings. For Korean, such a characterization of "infinitives" would have to rely on tense markings, since tense is a category that is relevant for the Korean verbal system.

These problems suggest that to some extent, it may be necessary to define "infinitive" in each language in its own terms, though cross-linguistic similarities and parallels in and among the criteria so used may well emerge. This means that there may be no set of objective universally-valid criteria by which "infinitive" may be defined, and rather that the parameters of finiteness and consequently of "infinitiveness" must be determined on a language-by-language basis.

For Greek, especially in earlier stages of the language, an approach of this sort based on morphological criteria such as the absence of person and number agreement markings would be quite possible. Furthermore, the endings for the forms typically called infinitives were well-defined at all stages of Greek; in fact in late Post-Classical Greek and on into early Medieval Greek, there was essentially one infinitival ending, *-ei(n)*, actually *-sei(n)* for actives and *-thei(n)* for medio-passives (excepting a few passive infinitives in *-astai*, e.g., *'groikastai* 'to hear' found in 16th century Cretan texts and the common infinitive of the verb 'be', namely *eisthai*, occurring as early as the 13th century in the *Chronicle of Morea*). Thus, for early Medieval Greek, it is possible to define the infinitive morphologically as those invariant (i.e., nonagreeing) verbal forms with *-sei(n)* in the active and *-thei(n)* in the passive.

Another approach to defining an infinitive would involve syntactic or functional criteria, being based on how the form was actually used. An approach of this sort implies that there are certain uses which are in some sense "appropriate" to an infinitive, for example, complement to verbs and adjectives, nominalization of verbs, etc. Criteria of this sort work well for Greek, since the morphologically-definable infinitive had several clear-cut uses, some of which continued through early Medieval times; for example, as a verbal complement, compare the wide use of the infinitive as a complement to *thelō* 'want, will' in the future-tense formation most commonly found in vernacular texts of the 12th to 15th centuries, and the sporadic use of the infinitive as a complement to *arkhizō* 'begin', *ēmporō* 'can, be able' in the same period. There were even some innovative uses of the infinitive in Post-Classical Greek, e.g., the use with *ekhō* 'have' as a perfect tense and the adverbial usage known as the Temporal Infinitive—these are summarized and exemplified in (3):

(3) Uses of the infinitive in Medieval Greek
(c. 12th - 15th centuries):

- a. FUTURE \implies *thelō* + "infinitive"
- b. PERFECT \implies *ekhō* + "infinitive"
- c. *arkhizō*: followed by *na* + finite verb or by "infinitive"
- d. Temporal Adverbial: *to* + "infinitive",
e.g. *k' ego, to akousei to, ...*
and I/NOM hear/INF it
ethlibēka
was-aggrieved
'And on hearing it, I was aggrieved'.
(*Chronicle of Morea* 6066 (13th cent.))

This aspect of the use of the infinitive leads into one final criterion that seems to be implicit in most traditional accounts of the infinitive, namely that it have several uses in the grammar and thus allow for some degree of generalization and economy to be gained in the description of the language. Such a criterion also implies a degree of productivity for the form in question, for productivity generally betokens the existence of some grammatical rule-governed process.

Given such possible definitional criteria for an infinitive in Greek, it is interesting to apply them to later stages of the language; in particular, what do these criteria say regarding the late Medieval and Modern Greek verbal forms such as *grapsei* (Modern Greek [grapsi]) in the perfect tense formations with *ekhō* 'have' (Modern Greek [exo]), as in (4):

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| (4) <i>exo grapsi</i> | <i>ixe skotoθi</i> | <i>θa exo grapsi</i> |
| 'I have written' | 'he had been killed' | 'I will have written' |

or even a present active participle like *akugondas* '(while) hearing' as in (5)?

- | | | |
|---|---------------|---------------------|
| (5) <i>akugondas</i> | <i>ta nea</i> | <i>ksafniastika</i> |
| hear/ACT.PPL | the-news/ACC | was-surprised/1SG |
| 'On hearing the news, I was taken aback'. | | |

By the traditional morphological criteria, *grapsi* in *exo grapsi* certainly qualifies as an infinitive, being invariant in form with no person and number agreement markings—however, by the same token, *akugondas* too would qualify as an "infinitive", even though no traditional descriptive grammar of Modern Greek labels it as such. Thus, some consideration of syntactic criteria seems necessary—*akugondas* is essentially adjectival or adverbial in usage and so

A second methodological problem is related to this first one, and concerns the dating of the loss of the infinitive. Clearly any claim of when the infinitive was lost depends to a large extent on what an infinitive is taken to be; i.e., definitional criteria of the sort discussed above become crucial in deciding the dating of this loss. As a result of applying different definitional criteria, different scholars have arrived at widely varying dates for the loss of the infinitive for even so well-studied a language as Greek. For example, Mirambel in a 1961 article dates the loss of the infinitive in colloquial Greek to the 10th century, whereas Hesseling in his 1892 work on the Greek infinitive dates its loss to after the 15th century. Mirambel seems to have taken "infinitive" in roughly its Classical Greek syntactically-defined sense, whereas Hesseling seems to have taken account of innovative uses that arose in Post-Classical Greek, e.g., the Temporal Infinitive, its use with *thelō* as a future tense, etc.

Since no definite answer to the first question was reached, neither can one be reached for this second question. To some extent, Mirambel and Hesseling are both right. Mirambel is right that the infinitive was essentially lost, certainly in its Classical Greek productivity and usage, by the 10th century, but Hesseling is right in identifying systematic traces after that period. The fact that the Medieval Greek usages are somewhat systematic is important, for systematicity implies a degree of generalization and therefore economy possible in the language description. Again the notion of generalization and economy of description can help at the stage of Greek at which the only remaining use of the infinitive was with *ekhō* in the perfect tense—at that point, as noted above, the degree of generality and descriptive economy would be minimal since that was (and is) an isolated usage. Again, though, this question is far from settled, but the relation between dating the infinitive-loss and defining an infinitive is an important one to recognize. (See Joseph (1978: Chapter 2.3- 2.4) for more discussion.)

One final point that must be borne in mind regarding the loss of the infinitive is that from one standpoint, both Greek and another Balkan language which has suffered infinitive-loss to a degree equal to that of Greek, namely Macedonian, are typologically no different after the loss of the infinitive from their status before this loss. In particular, in both Greek and Macedonian, there is still an important

syntactic distinction between finite and nonfinite verb forms (with "finite" to be taken roughly in its traditional sense referring to the presence of person and/or number agreement markings). Thus, Greek and Macedonian (and presumably the other Balkan languages) are still languages with a distinction in their verbal systems between finite and nonfinite verbs; there are languages with no such distinction, for example the Polynesian language Niuean, but Greek and the Balkan languages have not (yet) evolved to such a typological stage.

The syntactic parameters along which the finite/nonfinite distinction is made in Greek and Macedonian are similar. Beside the factor of person agreement with the subject to distinguish two classes of verbs, the placement of clitic pronouns similarly divides the verbal system into two classes. In both Greek and Macedonian, clitic pronouns follow nonfinite verb forms but precede finite ones. Thus one says in Greek *grafondas to* 'writing it' but not **to grafondas*, or in Macedonian *zemajki mu go* 'taking it from him' but not **mu go zemajki*. Furthermore, in Greek, the negative particle *den* is used only with the finite verbs and not the nonfinite ones, i.e., one can say *an den grapso* 'if I don't write' but not **den grafondas* 'not writing'.

These different factors identify the nonfinite forms of Greek as being the present active participle (in *-ondas*), the medio-passive participle (in *-menos*), the imperatives, and probably also forms like *grapsi* in the perfect tenses; the finite forms of Greek are the present and past indicative forms, the subjunctive forms, and the auxiliary-like elements such as *exo* 'have'. In Macedonian, the nonfinite forms can be identified by these factors as the verbal adverb (in *-jki*), the imperatives, the neuter participle (in *-no*) which forms periphrastic perfect forms with *ima* 'have', and possibly also the verbal substantive (in *-nje*); the finite forms of Macedonian are the present indicative verbs, the preterite formed with the "l"-participles plus (optionally) the verb 'to be', and the auxiliary-like elements such as *ima* 'have' or *sum* 'be'.

Taking imperatives as nonfinite forms may seem somewhat controversial or even simply wrong to some people. Such a move, though, does have precedents in the literature (e.g., Bloomfield 1933 takes such a step for English); however, the most important point is that imperatives pattern in these languages with other forms that can be identified as nonfinite by the language-internal criteria mentioned above.

When the question of what constituted "finiteness" was raised earlier, it was shown that criteria such as the presence of person markings or even tense markings failed as universal determinants of finiteness. It may be, then, that using syntactic criteria within each language is the only way of coming up with two classes of verbs which could be identified as finite and nonfinite, respectively. In that case, though, some universal criteria, possibly of a functional nature, are needed to dictate which of these two classes is to be designated FINITE and which NONFINITE, for without such guidelines, the choice would be totally arbitrary from language to language.

Even though this question of definition is far from settled, the fact that Greek and Macedonian still distinguish between two classes of verbs which can be termed finite and nonfinite, despite the loss of their earlier infinitive, a form which might be considered the nonfinite form *par excellence*, is important to the study of the Balkan infinitive-loss phenomenon. It means that care must be taken not to treat the presence or absence of any one form or category, in this case infinitives, as being too important a distinguishing feature, for Greek and Macedonian are in a sense no different typologically at this present stage with no fully-productive infinitive from what they were at earlier stages with an infinitive--the verbal system of each language still makes use of the finite/nonfinite distinction. All that has changed really is the extent to which that distinction is utilized in the system.

Thus, in assessing the status of a Balkan language in the infinitive-loss continuum, it is essential to also consider the relevance of finiteness in the verbal system as a whole and judge the language typologically in terms of the use of this feature as well as in terms of the relative presence or absence of infinitival forms.

To sum up, then, several methodological problems which await an in-depth study of the Balkan infinitive-loss phenomenon have been raised. While no definitive answers have been provided, it is hoped that the asking of the necessary questions can be viewed as an important first step toward the ultimate solution of these problems.

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NOTES

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¹This includes various dialects of these languages, e.g., Aroumanian, as well as languages which were in the Balkans only for a relatively short period of time, such as Romany, the language of the gypsies. As Prof. Wolfgang Schmid of Germany has kindly pointed out to me, this language became a Balkan language between 12th and 14th centuries, lost its infinitive and adopted a Greek construction with *te* from Greek *the* (presumably from *thelet*).

²I am currently undertaking such a study, with my main focus being Greek, and hope to be able to report on my findings in the near future.

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