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**ALBANIAN IN THE BALKAN LINGUISTIC LEAGUE: A
RECONSIDERATION OF THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS.**

It is a fundamental principle of Albanian dialectology that the Geg/Tosk split represents the oldest and most significant dialectological division in the transition from Common Albanian to Albanian as it is historically attested. It is likewise a common place that Geg is the less “Balkanized” of the two dialects. On the one hand, the preservation of a distinct optative mood, the remnants of the ablative and, dialectally, the locative, and the complex expression of possessives are pan-Albanian features that are in contrast to general Balkan developments. On the other hand, for example, while classic Balkanisms such as the conditional based on the future-in-the-past, the postposed definite article (which Hamp 1982 argues was already in place during the period of contact with Latin), the analytic comparative, the expression of teens by means of ‘on ten’ (which Hamp 1992:918 connects to pre-Slavic/pre-Albanian areal contact, which would have had to have been in northern Europe given the pan-Slavic but non-Baltic nature of the construction), the development of an analytic subjunctive, and also the use of ‘one’ as an indefinite marker (see Friedman 2003), are pan-Albanian Balkanisms. The Geg infinitive in *me* + short participle (vs the Tosk lack of such a construction) and the future using *kam* ‘have’ + infinitive (vs the Tosk use of a particle derived from ‘will’ + subjunctive) are among the distinctions most commonly cited as non-Balkan characteristics of Geg.

A closer look at the details of Geg dialectology, however, reveals a more complex picture of areal features and contact-induced phenomena. We can note here, for example, the loss of nasality and of a morphologically distinct subjunctive in the town dialect of Dibra, the reduction of nasality in Polog, and the rise of new stressed schwa in Mirdita. In Malësia e Madhe, final devoicing is a phenomenon shared with adjacent Montenegrin dialects. It is worth noting that final devoicing is atypical for most of both

Montenegrin and Geg, and it appears rather to be a Macedonian feature extending into this region. Object doubling tends to be more grammaticalized in the North (as in Macedonian and Aromanian) and more pragmatically conditioned in the south (as in Greek).

In what follows, I show that by examining both morphosyntactic and phonological cases in detail, we see that there is a need to distinguish among contrast, overlap, and internal differentiation, on the one hand, and to distinguish the effects of center/periphery differentiation that can cross old boundaries, on the other. When these developments are viewed in the context of Balkan multilingualism and restructuring, we see that Albanian demonstrates the need for a multifaceted account of contact-induced change.

A number of features, while generally characteristic of Tosk or Geg, actually show either a distribution that indicates a later innovation from center to periphery, from contact on the periphery, or independent regional developments. Thus, for example, the elimination of length, while typical of Tosk, did not reach the southern periphery, which preserves it, as does Geg. On the other hand, final devoicing, typical of Northern Tosk and the transitional zone did not reach the Lab and Çam dialects of the far south (Byron 1979:96), but it occurs in Northwestern Geg (Malësia e Madhe, Shkurtaj 1975:35, 1982:153-54), as well as East Central Geg (Gjinari 1976:119, cf. Beci 1982:61). On the other hand, while stressed schwa is a typically Tosk structural feature, it also occurs in central Geg as a result of later processes of diphthongization. Thus, for example, in Mirdita stressed /i/ and /î/ are diphthongized (and denasalized in the case of /î/) to /ej/, then centralized to /'j/ which can be monophthongized to /' / in words such as *korrëk* 'July', *mullë* 'mill' as well as preserved in Turkisms such as *açëk* 'open' (Beci 1982:42). A similar situation obtains in Debar/Dibra (Basha 1989:1521-52).

Contact between Albanian and Slavic may also have contributed to other dialectal differences at various peripheries. The East Central Geg change of /pl, bl, fl/ to /pj, bj, fj/ parallels the East South Slavic elimination of epenthetic /l' / after jotted labials. (In some Albanian dialects, the glide affricates to a mellow palatal after a stop, which can even be lost, but these are later developments, cf. Hoxha 1975:146, Gjinari 1976:117). Given both the contact of East Central Geg with Macedonian and the fact that this

phenomenon is more widespread in East South Slavic than in Albanian, we can suspect a Slavic impetus. On the other hand, the limitation of this change to morpheme boundaries in East south Slavic argues for a typological parallel development. In the other direction, however, we have the lateral oppositions of Montenegrin and Serbian, which look like the result of an Albanian substratum (see Hamp 2002). Similarly, much of Kosovar Geg and Southeast Serbian share the merger of original mellow and strident palatals (in Albanian orthography, the confusion of *q* with *ç* and *gj* with *xh*). Interestingly enough, this phenomenon is found on territory where we have modern Slavic-Albanian bilingualism but also in Slavic regions where Albanian was spoken at earlier periods. While the change is not particularly old, given its relatively restricted dialectal distribution, its directionality is difficult to determine. (See, however, Ajeti 1998:28-29, Desnickaja 1968:132-33, which suggest that the Albanian change is only about a century old.)

Although the differentiation of Geg and Tosk is sometimes described in terms of relative degrees of conservatism, in fact, both dialects preserve older features, but different ones, and even these are not always uniformly distributed. Nasality is a particularly salient Geg archaism, but in general it is preserved with greater consistency in the West. In Northeastern Geg, the inventory of nasal vowels is generally smaller than in the Northwest, although the precise details are still the subject of debate (Beci 1982:35-37). In East Central Geg, the town dialect of Debar/Dibra, which has an old urban tradition of Albanian-Macedonian bilingualism, completely lacks nasals, as does the Northeastern Geg dialect of Ulcinj/Ulqinj in Montenegro. Even the dialect the Upper Reka (Reka e Epërme/Gorna Reka) region, near Dibra, preserves only a single nasal, viz. open O) (Haruni 1994:20). In my own material from speakers of this dialect, even this last nasal is not consistently realized, and thus, for example, *O)sht* alternates with *Osh* 'is'. This unstable status is also the case in the Tuhin region, to the south and east of Upper Reka (Murati 1989:9). Interestingly enough, the Macedonian dialects of the Debar/Dibra region are unique in Macedonian for preserving a rounded reflex of the Common Slavic back nasal **ǫ* realized variously as [o], [O] or [â]. Given that earlier Albanian â is the source of O)/O in Albanian dialects, we see that the two systems have

converged. Moreover, most Gorans of southwest Kosova/Kosovo and northeast Albania, whose Macedonian dialect is now classed with those of Debar/Dibra (Vidoeski 1986), are fluent in Geg, but their Geg lacks nasality. While most of Geg is conservative in the preservation of nasality, it is the Tosk dialects that preserve older unstressed schwa, and in the extreme south, older consonant clusters of the type /kl, gl/. In a similar vein, it is the Geg dialects that generally have stress retraction in Turkish loans, whereas Tosk is more conservative in its retention of oxytonic stress. Here though, Geg resembles Macedonian and some of the Montenegrin dialects which shift final stress, though at times only from open syllables. In a sense, it can be argued that old Balkan convergences are more characteristic of Tosk, while later convergences are to be seen in Geg, at least in part as a result of differing socio-political historical processes.

Morphosyntactic features are good cases for showing how superficial simplicity masks significant complexity. To illustrate this point I shall take a sample of three features, all of them from the verb, which demonstrate in three different ways the need for a nuanced and synthetic approach to Geg dialectology: The future, the compound perfect, and the admirative. The first shows the need to differentiate contrast from overlap in comparing Geg and Tosk as well as internal differentiation within Geg. The second demonstrates isolated but shared features between Geg and Tosk dialects, and the third illustrates the importance of later center-periphery innovations that overlie the North/South distinction of Geg and Tosk. Most general descriptions of Albanian will identify the future using conjugated present of 'have' (1 sg. *kam* in the standard and many dialects)+infinitive with Geg and the future using an invariant particle derived from 'will' (*do* in the standard and many dialects)+subjunctive with Tosk, the latter being typically Balkan, the former being identified as more similar to Western Romance (or Romance in general). The compound perfect and pluperfect, i.e. constructions using the perfect and pluperfect of 'have' and 'be'+participle to form additional past tenses (e.g. *kam pasë lexue*, *kisha pasë lexue* literally 'I have had read, I had had read') is also usually identified as Geg. On the other hand, the admirative, which is a uniquely Albanian development, albeit one with a Balkan background, generally does not figure in discussions of the differentiation of Geg and Tosk.

Northwestern Geg dialects such as Kelmend, the foothills above Shkodër, Plav, and Gucî (Shkurtaj 1975:54-55, 1982:222, Ahmetaj 1989:298-99) have the markedly Geg future of the type ‘have’+infinitive but also use ‘will’+subjunctive — especially in speculations — and even conjugated *dua* ‘want’+infinitive, as in *Jam i lik e duo me dek* ‘I am ill and will die’ (Shkurtaj 1975:55). Further west, along the left bank of the river Buna, only the ‘will’+subjunctive future occurs (Gjinari 1971:252). A similar situation obtains to the southwest, in Puka (Topalli 1974:316), which is transitional between the Northeast and the Northwest, although its center of gravity is Shkodër in the Northwest. However, in Shkrel, southeast of Kelmend, only ‘will’+subjunctive is used (but also *tash* ‘now’+progressive *po*+present indicative; Beci 1971:298). In the southern part of Northeastern Geg, e.g. Has (Gosturani 1975:237) as well as the Presheva/Preshevo valley (Badallaj 2001:178), the future with ‘have’ is limited to a sense of obligation while ‘will’+subjunctive is more volitive. In Upper Reka, the future with ‘have’+infinitive has been completely replaced by ‘will’+subjunctive (Haruni 1994:76). South of Has and west of Upper Reka, in Luma, the two types of future are in competition, but the ‘will’ type predominates (Hoxha 1975:165, 1990:136). West of Luma, in Mirdita, the ‘will’ future is regular and the ‘have’ future is rare (Beci 1982:84-85). Similarly, in Tuhin, southeast of Upper Reka, the ‘will’ future (with indicative) predominates, although ‘have’+subjunctive also occurs (as it does in the Tosk dialects of Italy [Arbëresh] with relics also in Labëri (Totoni 1971:73). In this region, as in transitional dialects such as Shpat, as well as Luzni (southwest of Peshkopi), the ‘have’+infinitive future uses *për*+verbal noun (= *të*+participle) rather than *me*+participle, which latter construction is extremely rare in Tuhin, although its opposite (with *pa*) is quite common (Murati 1979:41, 44; Çeliku 1971:230; Beci 1974:250). Thus, while Geg does have conjugated ‘have’+infinitive in contexts where Tosk uses invariant ‘will’+subjunctive, the characterization of Geg being opposed to Tosk in a simple binary manner in this respect fails to capture the complexities of Geg usage. In fact, Southern Geg goes with Tosk (including Arvanitika), while Northern Geg and Italian Tosk (i.e., Arbëresh) are linked by the use of ‘have’ as the future marker.

While the compound perfect and pluperfect are typical of Geg, they are also found in Lab (Totoni 1971:73; Gjinari 1989:250). These tenses can be used to render an extra degree of anteriority, as in the following example in which a past event is indicated with an aorist, an event before that with a pluperfect, and an event prior to the second one with a compound pluperfect: *Është e vetmja brengë, që më mbetet - shqiptoi më qartë ai, pasi kishte folur një copë herë, në mënyrë të ngatërruar, për një vajzë të bukur dhe inteligjente, me të cilën e kishin pasë fejuar prindët qysh në fëmijëri* (Demiraj 1976:271). ‘“It’s the only trouble I have.” - he **said** [aorist] more clearly, after he **had spoken** [pluperfect] confusedly for some time about a beautiful and intelligent girl to whom his parents **had engaged** [compound pluperfect] him in childhood.’ It can also be used as a distant past habitual, e.g. *kam pas lexuar shumë libra të tillë* ‘I used to read a lot of books like that’ [implied: ‘a long time ago’ or ‘but not anymore’]. Such tenses can also be used for jocular effect, as in the following example: *Lul: “Gjysh, tregoma një fjali në kohën e shkuar e të tejshkuar.” Tafë: “Shkruaje... Shkruaje... Na kemi pas pasur kafe”* (Rilindja 82.II.3:8). ‘L. [holding a homework assignment] -- Grandpa, tell me a sentence in the past pluperfect T. [thinking] -- Write... Write... [stating] We **used to have** coffee.’ Adding to the effect is the fact that the tense is misidentified in terms of standard Albanian. In the standard, the term *e kryera e tejshkuar* ‘transpast perfect’ refers to an ordinary analytic pluperfect using the aorist rather than the imperfect of the auxiliary (e.g. *pati pasur* rather than *kishte pasur* for ‘had had’). The compound pasts are labeled ‘secondary’ or ‘compound’: *e kryera e dytë, më se e kryera* (or *e kryera e plotë*) *e dytë* or *forma të mbipërbëra të së kryerës/më se të kryerës* or *kohët e përbëra*. In much of Geg, however, analytic perfects replace aorists, especially as auxiliaries. In Luzni, on the eastern edge of West Central Geg Beci (1974:250) has even recorded a medio-passive double compound perfect, i.e. the perfect of ‘have’ used as an auxiliary with the participle of ‘be’ plus the main verb (also a participle): *kan pas qôn bô* ‘they had become’ or ‘they have been made’ (literally ‘have had been done’). The existence of the compound pasts in Lab has also allowed the short participle into the standard language, albeit in a very marginal role.

The admirative is another morphosyntactic category whose use straddles the Geg/Tosk divide (cf. Mindak 1986). Although examples of inverted perfects and pluperfects occur in the oldest Albanian documents (Demiraj 1971), since these were not written until the sixteenth century, their evidence is not decisive for the period prior to contact with Turkish. The development of the inverted perfect into a classic admirative set of paradigms (in which the inverted perfect itself becomes a true present and a new admirative perfect is built using the present admirative auxiliary with a participle [with the same relationship of imperfect to pluperfect in the fullest paradigm]) is especially characteristic of central Albania (from Central Geg to Northern Tosk), where urban centers such as Elbasan were dominated by Turkish. Here, as elsewhere in the Ottoman Balkans, Turkish functioned as a marker of urban identity, and being a town resident meant being able to speak Turkish (see Akan 2000). In Northwestern Geg, the admirative still retains nuances of its meaning as an inverted perfect, especially in rural areas (Çabej 1979: 16-18), and it even shows a tendency toward being eliminated via restrictions on its occurrence. Thus, for example, in Dushmani, 30 km east of Shkodër near the Montenegrin border, the admirative only occurs in the perfect, e.g. *pàska pà[s]*, Standard Albanian *paska pasur* (Cimochowski 1951: 116). In East Central Geg, the present and perfect admirative are viable, but the imperfect and pluperfect are either rare or absent (Hoxha 1975:167, Hoxha 1990:139, Murati 1989:43, Bashi 1989:192). The admirative is absent from the Lab and Çam dialects of the extreme south of Albania and adjacent parts of northern Greece (Altimari 1994, cf. however Totoni 1971:74). Also suggestive is the fact that the admirative is absent from the Arbëresh dialects of Italy and the Arvanitika dialects of Greece, which separated from the main body of Albanian before contact with Turkish. On the other hand, in the Albanian dialects of Ukraine, which separated from the main body of Albanian in the seventeenth century, after approximately two centuries of Turkish contact, there is an inverted perfect, but it is an evidential past and not a present admirative (Kotova 1956). It can thus be argued that the meanings of nonconfirmativity (i.e., surprise, doubt, report, inference) associated with modern admirative usage developed during the Ottoman period, radiating from the center outward in both Geg and Tosk. In this scenario, the

encoding of evidentiality represented by the admirative, while built on native material, probably did not enter the grammatical system until after contact with Turkish. For Albanian (as for Balkan Slavic, whose perfects acquire nuances similar to those found in the admirative) it can be hypothesized that the grammatical encoding of evidentiality began in urban centers where Turkish was widely spoken and had high prestige and spread from there to the countryside. It is worth noting that the admirative is particularly viable in Kosova, where the prestige of Turkish in the towns lasted well into the twentieth century.

A synthetic survey of Albanian dialectological morpho-syntax is a desideratum beyond the scope of this brief paper, but it can be seen from the foregoing material that in synchronic terms (as well as diachronic, beginning with the medieval period), the Geg/Tosk division is not a simple one but rather one of many factors, in a complex series of historical developments and current structures. Let us now turn to the theoretical implications of these data.

In discussing the Balkan *Sprachbund*, it is often the case that reference will be made to ancient and medieval periods as formative or at least generative (in the original meaning of that term). The complexity of the Albanian dialectological picture, however, can be added to the textual evidence that we possess for Hellenic, Romance and Slavic emphasizing the importance of the early modern period (which is to say Ottoman) in the formation of the Balkan linguistic league as we know it. While some types of linguistic change can show considerable antiquity and maintain their integrity over millennia, I would argue that it is in the nature of *Sprachbund* phenomena that the very surface level of morphosyntactic pattern copying (Ross's [2001] *metatypy*) allows for the relatively rapid establishment of the types of changes that result in the similarities that first attracted the attention of linguists to the Balkans as the exemplar of contact linguistics. At the same time, the complexity of the Albanian dialectological data shows us that an integration of microlevel and macrolevel phenomena is essential to a complete and nuanced account of this complex linguistic area. And thus, while the North/South division of rhotacism, nasality, and the other relevant phonological phenomena attest to changes that are ancient or, at the latest, medieval, subsequent isoglosses demonstrate the importance of

center/periphery and urban/rural contrasts in discussing precisely those developments that render Southeastern Europe a significant contact zone in modern terms.

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*A note on Albanian toponyms. In general I have followed the convention of citing Albanian feminine toponyms that end in schwa in the definite and other toponyms in the indefinite.

