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TYPOLOGICAL AND AREAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE RESHAPING OF A MACEDONIAN VERBAL ENDING

Brian D. Joseph
The Ohio State University

1. The Problem

In some Macedonian dialects, a first-person plural (1PL) ending *-ne* occurs. It is found, for instance, in Vrbnik (Kramer 2004), in Gorno Kalenik (Hill 1990), and Radozda-Vevcani (Hendriks 1976), among others. It is especially common in the verb 'be' (*sne* 'we are') but it is more widespread in some dialects; for example, aorists in *-f-ne* occur in Radozda-Vevcani, such as *vidofne* 'we saw'.

An important fact about this ending is that it is not just a Macedonian phenomenon within South Slavic. It is found as well in some Bulgarian dialects, as the evidence of the *Bŭlgarski Dialekten Atlas* (BDA) II.189 shows. In particular, the relevant form of 'be', *sne*, is rather common, occurring in a number of areas, and other verbs as well have forms with *-n-* (BDA II.186; III.202), e.g. both *berene* and *beren* 'we carry' occur.

Elsewhere in Macedonian and Bulgarian, 1PL forms with *-m-* occur, e.g. *sme*, *berem/bereme/beremo*, etc. (BDA II.186, III.202), corresponding to the above-cited *-n-*forms, and this is the case more generally also in South Slavic, in the rest of Slavic, and elsewhere in Indo-European. Therefore, *-n-* in 1PL verbal endings seems to be an innovation in Macedonian and Bulgarian, and thus presents an explanatory challenge. In what follows, the bases for this innovation are explored, with an eye to how it can be justified as a natural change both on typological grounds, in terms of what is known about such changes in verb endings in general,

and on areal grounds, in terms of what is known about forces of change within the Balkan context.

2. Towards a Solution

Given that the change in question involves just a small adjustment in the consonantal form of the ending, from labial *m* to dental *n*, one type of explanation that must be considered at the outset is that the innovation is the result of a sound change. However, certain well-founded properties of sound change in general, in particular those that are associated with the so-called "Neogrammarian" hypothesis (see Hock 1976 for discussion), limit the possibilities that one needs to or even can consider. For instance, the assumption that sound change must have a phonetic basis only and cannot have any nonphonetic ("grammatical") conditioning means that a sound change that operated just on *m* occurring in a (1PL) ending (i.e., a "nonroot" *m*) would not be a possible sound change. Similarly, the supposition that sound change is regular, affecting all instances of a segment in a particular (phonetic) environment, means that one reasonable starting point for the change also would not have been possible. In particular, although an assimilation of *m* to *n* after *s* (i.e., *m* > *n* /*s*__) might seem quite natural, taking the frequency of this ending in the verb 'be' as an indicator of a likely starting point for the change, it too would not have been possible, since *-sm-* clusters are preserved in the relevant dialects in contexts where the 1PL form is not involved; for instance, in Gorno Kalenik the verb for 'smile' is *rasmea*, where the *-sm-* is part of the stem. These two constraints on sound change – regularity and phonetic conditioning only – interact in that the latter means that one could not distinguish the putative *sme* > *sne* case from the case of *rasmea* on the basis of an internal morpheme boundary in the former but not the latter, since *ex hypothesi*, sound change could not refer to morpheme boundaries, as they are nonphonetic in nature. Thus an assimilatory explanation for the appearance of 1PL *-ne* is not well motivated.

One might therefore consider a dissimilation of *-f-me* to *-f-ne*, taking the aorist forms as the likely starting point, as the source of innovative 1PL *-ne*. This is certainly conceivable, though perhaps less desirable generally speaking as an explanation, since dissimilation is relatively rare, and certainly, in general, less common than assimilations.

Moreover, if it were possible somehow to overcome the problem for an assimilation account posed by *rasmea*, one might imagine positing assimilation as the source of some instances of *-ne* (specifically, those after (certain) *s*'s) together with dissimilation for others (specifically those after aoristic *-f-*). This would mean positing two differing effects as being at work in reshaping the 1PL ending. It is not necessarily a problem in itself to have to posit two such effects, but it would certainly be curious that they both would have converged on the same form; such a convergence might well lead one to suspect that some other factor or type of factor needs to be identified.

Moreover, any account that starts with a sound change in a restricted environment, e.g. the aoristic *-f-* has to further posit the analogical spread of the innovative ending outside of its original phonetic locus; note for instance that there are Bulgarian dialects with *-ne* after a vowel (e.g. *zovène* 'we call'), where there is no possibility of assimilatory or dissimilatory pressures at work, so that even the spread of a putatively dissimilated *-ne* to the verb 'be' would have to have

an analogical basis. Since analogy most typically has a morphological or grammatical basis, one has to therefore recognize that morphological factors would have to be involved.

All this means that while a sound change could have played some role in the emergence of 1PL –*ne*, more is needed to account fully for the facts. Accordingly, one might consider a purely morphological solution, and such a solution is indeed available. In particular, since the 1PL pronoun begins with *n-* in most dialects of Macedonian and Bulgarian (cf. standard Macedonian *nie*, for instance) – though some admittedly have initial *m-* – an account that starts with that fact suggests itself. Specifically, the claim can be made that innovative 1PL verbal ending –*ne* is the result of analogy with the 1PL pronoun, with the 1PL pronominal form with its initial *n-* infringing on the verbal 1PL ending with its initial –*m-* and inducing the shift to an *n-* initial ending. I turn now to a justification of this analogical account along various dimensions.

3. Justifying the analogical account: Suitable parallels

In order to justify the analogical account suggested here, several similar sorts of developments, both within Slavic and outside of Slavic, can be summoned forth as supporting evidence. These show the typological plausibility of readjustments within the pronominal system in favor of a 1PL –*n-* marking as well as other instances of pronoun-induced analogical influence on verb endings.

For instance, there are historical parallels in Slavic for spread of *n-* for the marking of 1PL. In particular, it is posited that in Common Slavic, as shown most clearly by Old Church Slavonic for example, there was originally an alternation between *m-* in the 1PL nominative pronoun (*my*) and *n-* in the 1PL accusative and oblique forms (*ny*, *nasb*, etc.). Yet, as Lunt (1974: 65) points out, this alternation was leveled out "in [early Slavic of the] K[iev]F[ragsments] ... [where] *ny* functions as nom. pl as well as acc.". That is, *n-* spread throughout the paradigm, and thus can be analyzed as the sole morpheme marking 1PL. The development posited for Macedonian and Bulgarian dialectal 1PL verb ending –*ne* could therefore very well be an extension of this generalization of *n-* as the marker par excellence for first person plurality.

Slavic offers as well some historical and typological parallels for the influence of pronominal forms on the shape of verb endings. In particular, there are occasional examples in early Slavic of the 1PL verbal ending –*my* occurring for expected –*mù*, e.g. *pobyxomy* (vs. expected *pobyxomù*) where the innovative vocalism –*y* is presumably based on the vocalism of the 1PL nominative form *my* (so *Gramatika na Starobùlgarkija Ezik*, p. 296). Possibly relevant here too are the "preseverative" instances of pronouns affecting verb-endings in general cited by Dunkel (2002: 100-101). He gives this Slavic 1PL –*my* as such an example, but notes as well the first person dual ending –*vf* for expected –*va*, where he suggests that the innovative vocalism results from a carry-over ("perseveration" in his terms) of a collocation of pronoun with inflected verb, e.g. **vf jesva* 'we two are' > *vf jesvf*.

Besides these Slavic parallels, similar instances are to be found outside of the subgroup. For instance, a development in New Mexican Spanish offers a typological parallel for pronoun-verb ending linkage and, just coincidentally, for the spread of –*n-* as a marker for 1PL. In particular, as detailed by Janda 1995, in this dialect (and possibly elsewhere too in New World Spanish,

such as rural Mexican dialects), *-nos* is found for original *-mos* in verb forms. Thus, *hablabanos* 'we were speaking' occurs, as opposed to *hablabamos* elsewhere; as Janda suggests, the innovative form of the ending is based on the initial consonantism of the 1PL pronoun *nos(otros)*.

These parallels, as noted above, demonstrate a tendency within South Slavic for the generalization of *n-*, and they show, moreover, that developments involving the interaction of pronominal forms with verb endings are certainly not unexpected or necessarily unusual cross-linguistically. As it happens, parallels closer to home, so to speak, exist too, and these suggest an areal affinity for such developments.

4. Further Typological Parallels with an Areal Twist:

Outside of Slavic but still within the Balkans, a further parallel case is to be found of pronominal-verb ending interaction involving some developments that characterize certain dialectal forms of endings in one Modern Greek verbal category. In particular, as Ruge (1984) has argued, the Modern Greek 1PL/2PL past nonactive endings *-mastan/-sastan*, which derive historically ultimately from Ancient Greek *-mestha* and *-esthe*, respectively, can be analyzed as if they are composed of the weak pronouns (accusative/genitive, as it happens), *mas/sas* 'us, our'/'you, your' plus other formatives. Such an analysis, if an actual part of the history of these endings, would itself reflect historical pressure exerted by pronouns onto the vocalism of the endings, and would explain the shift from *e* to *a* in the vocalic nucleus of the ending. While this connection may be speculative, some speakers, as Ruge points out, must certainly have made such a pronoun-verb ending connection, since innovative third person endings have arisen that are clearly based on pronouns. That is, as opposed to, for example, a 3PL ending *-ondan* elsewhere, one finds dialectally in Greek the innovative 3PL endings *-ondusan/-ondustan*, which are analyzable as *-on + tus + -(t)an*, where *tus* appears to be nothing other than the accusative/genitive pronominal form *tus* 'them, their'. It is in fact hard to motivate the presence of the vocalism *-u-* in these innovative, and possibly also the *-s-*, without invoking the influence of this pronominal form. Moreover, Ruge saw a parallel for this development elsewhere in the Balkans, but not the Slavic situation described here, in the fact that Turkish has congruence (for the most part, but interestingly not in 1PL) between pronominal markers (for possession) and verbal endings (e.g., 1SG *-Im* in verbs = 1SG possessive *-Im*).

In fact, a closer look at Greek offers a further areal parallel that is of interest here. The specifics are that, in both Greek and South Slavic, a similar distribution is found for the thematic vowels in the past tense, in that the difference between *o* and *e* in the Slavic *s-aorist (e.g. *mog-o-xomù* 'we could' extended from an earlier root aorist, *mog-o-mù*) parallels the difference between *a* and *e* in Greek past active endings; in each case *-e-* occurs only in the 2SG and 3SG forms (e.g. Slavic *moz-e-Ø* '(s)he could' / Greek *é-graps-e-Ø* '(s)he wrote'). This shared pattern is relevant in two respects. First, although a parallel in the same general geographic area involving two languages known to be in contact with one another does not in and of itself mean that either language necessarily was influenced by the other, such a situation at least provides a basis upon which a claim of this sort could be made as there is substantive convergent linguistic evidence that needs to be explained. Second, just like the pronoun-verb ending similarities, it shows a pattern shared between Greek and Slavic involving a development within the set of verbal

endings; as such, it adds to the plausibility of some language-contact involvement in these reshapings of verbal endings. Thus, looking to contact between Greek and Macedonian in the analysis of verbal endings, especially if Greek *–ondus(t)an* is a potential model for pronoun-verb ending linkage, is therefore not far-fetched, even though one must withhold any sense of confirmation until there is further investigation.

5. Conclusion

Notwithstanding all these parallels, and especially the areal ones, it is important to emphasize that external pressures need not be invoked here, as there are ample internal pressures within Macedonian -- and Bulgarian too, for that matter -- for a morphologically induced shift of 1PL – *me* to *–ne*. The availability of a model in the pronominal system for the introduction of *–n-* in the corresponding verb ending, coupled with the typological parallels that show pronoun-verb ending interaction to be an attested and thus plausible development, is in essence all a language would need to end up with the outcomes seen in Macedonian, Bulgarian, and Greek. Thus this case represents the classic Balkan puzzle – given plausible causation of both an internal and an external nature, which type of explanation do we favor, or do we recognize both? In the absence of clear evidence one way or the other, the answer too must wait for additional enlightenment, if such is even possible at all here.

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