

Inheritance versus Borrowing in Albanian Etymology: The case of *eja**

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ABSTRACT: A key challenge in Albanological studies has been etymological work to distinguish between items inherited from Proto-Indo-European and items that have been borrowed. I treat here one word whose source has been controversial, namely exhortative *eja* ‘Come on!’. While it is usually taken as a borrowing, e.g. from Greek *ela*, among other explanations, I offer here a proposal equating it with Hittite *ehu*, also an exhortative, from PIE *Hei#Hou. I explore the consequences for Albanian historical phonology that this etymology entails and place this etymological proposal in the broader context of searching for Albanian's roots.

A key question in Albanological linguistic studies concerns how much of what can be seen in Albanian grammatical structure and lexis is inherited from Proto-Indo-European and how much has been borrowed. Related to that is a question pertaining just to borrowing, namely just what the nature, the chronology, and the location were — thus covering both temporal (“Zeitlich”) and spatial (“Räumlich”) dimensions — for the contact relationship between Albanian and a donor language for any particular instance of a loanword that might be identified. These questions are important because the answers to them get at the heart of the search for the roots of the Albanian language and by extension, the search for the roots of the Albanians as a people. However,

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general answers to these questions are hard to come by, for each grammatical feature and each lexical item for which these questions are asked can yield a different answer depending on the results of careful examination and analysis in each case.

A case in point, the subject of this study, is the exhortative element *eja* meaning ‘come!’ or ‘C’mon!’, with a plural form *ejani*, and a glide-less by-form *ea*. This form functions as the imperative — a suppletive one — to *vij* ‘come’. Many suggestions for the etymology of *eja* have been made over the years. Çabej (1976: I.70-71) devotes a whole page to this small word, suggesting that there is indeed some controversy surrounding it, and offers the following possibilities for sources of *eja*:¹

| | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------------------|
| Modern Greek | έλα ‘c’mon!’ | (e.g. Camarda) |
| Turkish | ala ‘come on!’ | (e.g. Meyer) |
| Turkish | ey ‘see here!’ | (e.g. Tagliavini)) |
| Ancient Greek | εἶα ‘come on!’ | (e.g. Çabej) |
| Latin | eia ‘come on!’ | (e.g. Çabej) |

It is interesting to note that in all of the possibilities given above by Çabej, *eja* is taken as a borrowing. The different authors posit different source languages, but everyone, apparently, sees it as a borrowing. In each case, different eras and/or different places for the contact would have to be envisioned, with a borrowing from Ancient Greek or Latin taking place in the early centuries after Christ or before, and a Turkish borrowing being during the Ottoman era; a Modern Greek source would presumably be located in the Medieval Greek period, depending on

¹It is to be noted that neither Orel 1998 nor Demiraj 1997 have anything to say about *eja*.

when ἔλα, an innovative (and suppletive) imperative associated with ἐρχομαι ‘come’ replacing the suppletive Ancient Greek imperative ἐλθέ, entered the language.

All of the forms given as possible sources, *ela/ala*, etc., are close enough phonetically to *eja* to make them plausible sources for *eja* if a borrowing explanation is called for. And, it is acknowledged that such forms can be borrowed: Latin *eia* is generally taken to be a borrowing from the Ancient Greek form, for instance, (and other examples are given below). Moreover, various facts about borrowing in Albanian and in the Balkans more generally enhance that plausibility. In particular, one of the possible sources, Modern Greek *ela*, is generally taken to be the most likely source of Macedonian and Bulgarian exhortative *ela* ‘c’mon’. Furthermore, other exhortatives in the Balkans seem to have been borrowed fairly freely, especially the group of *hajde/ajde/ande* found in one form or another in just about all the languages, e.g. Albanian *hajde*, Romanian *hayde*, Greek *ajde/ande*, Macedonian *ajde*, inter alia, where the most likely ultimate source is Turkish.² And, there are words that are functionally related to exhortatives that have spread widely, such as informal register terms of address (e.g. the widespread *brel/re/ore* (etc.), ultimately of Greek origin (Joseph 1997)) and attention-getting particles (e.g. the *xa* of Albanian, which matches, and is probably the source of, Greek *dza* ‘here I am!’). Finally, exhortatives fit in with the Balkan pattern of intimate loans that are tied to conversational interaction, what Friedman & Joseph (2014, 2016: Chap. 4) call “ERIC loans”, i.e. loans that are “Essentially Rooted In Conversation”; ERIC loans include discourse markers such as connectives (e.g. ‘or’, in the widespread *ja ... ja* ‘either ... or’, ultimately from Turkish (Matras 2009: 194), and ‘but’, as in the ubiquitous *ama* which is all over the Balkans (Fielder 2008), whatever its ultimate source might be), attitudinal words (e.g. the widespread forms from

² I say “ultimate source” since it is quite possible that the immediate source of the word in a given language was not Turkish but some other Balkan language, e.g. Macedonian as the source for Greek.

Turkish *acaba* ‘I wonder, oh?!’ such as Aromanian *hağiba/ağēaba*, Macedonian *adžaba*, or Albanian *belqim*, Aromanian *belchi*, Bulgarian *belki* ‘maybe; probably; as if’, dialectal Greek *belki(m)* ‘perhaps, maybe’, all from Turkish *belki(m)*, and expressives (as in Macedonian and Albanian *demek*, used as challenging sorts of expressions meaning ‘oh yeah?!, oh really?!’, borrowed from Turkish *demek* ‘that is to say’).

These considerations all contribute to a circumstantial argument for the plausibility of treating *eja* as a loanword. However, the borrowing hypothesis is not unproblematic, for various reasons. First, *eja* is attested in the Buzuku text of 1555 so that a Turkish source becomes somewhat difficult to maintain. And, in any case, if Turkish *ey* is indeed involved — and it can be pointed out that Albanian *ej* ‘hey!’ seems to be from *ey* directly — it is unclear what the final *-a* of *eja* is; there is no obvious source for it within either Turkish or Albanian,³ yet in principle one should be able to account for every bit of a word being etymologized. Also, as Çabej points out, Turkish *ala* — and this holds for Greek *ἐλα* too — runs into phonetic problems, as one would not expect *-l-* to give *-j-* in loans.

Furthermore, if either Ancient Greek *εἶα* or Latin *eia* is involved, there are some possible phonological problems. If *eja* were borrowed from Greek *εἶα*, presumably it was a very early loan, so it should perhaps show the development of *ei* before a vowel seen in **treies* ‘three’ > *tre*, and thus occur without *-j-* and possibly without the *-a* due to reductions affecting final syllables; if Latin were the source, so that the borrowing would have occurred at a later time, *eia* might well remain as such in Albanian but the **treies* development and final syllable developments

³ As Michiel de Vaan and Joachim Matzinger have reminded me, one might think of the deictic element in *ai/ajo* ‘this one (M/F)’ or the adverbial **-a* one sees in Greek and Latin (presumably from **-H₂* as the marker of the neuter plural). Still, one has to ask what specific function they would serve here and how they would form a composite with **ej*.

could still have been relevant and thus problematic. With regard to the *-j-*, the variant form *ea* becomes interesting and possibly significant; if *ea* were the older form, the *-j-* of the seemingly primary form *eja* would then presumably be a later, secondary, phonetic development that arose in the transition from a front vowel *e* to a back vowel *a* (assuming the *-a* either survived or is motivated in some other way).

It is thus not clear that taking *eja* to be a borrowing is all that well motivated when one takes into account details of the particular forms involved rather than just general, circumstantial, considerations about borrowing in the Balkans. It may be, then, that — drawing on what Eric Hamp has shown repeatedly in his work, namely that sometimes Albanian words might seem not to have an Indo-European pedigree just because one has not looked hard enough — perhaps it is time to look around Indo-European more and not be swayed by general considerations in searching for an etymology for *eja*. And, indeed, to judge from the etymological literature on *eja*, no one has considered the possibility that *eja* is not a borrowing. Searching for an etymology in which *eja* is an inherited lexical item does not mean that an Indo-European source, if found and thus reflecting inheritance from Proto-Indo-European, is automatically to be given primacy over a borrowing account;⁴ rather, such a source, if available and plausible, must be considered and weighed against other possibilities as to their respective merits or lack thereof.

As it turns out, there is a suitable Indo-European source for *eja* that has heretofore been overlooked. In particular, Albanian *eja* has a cognate formation in Hittite with which it can be equated in form, function, and composition. The Hittite form in question is *ehu* ‘come!’, an exhortative that serves as an imperative to the verb *uwa-* ‘come’. The source of Hittite *ehu*

⁴ As has sometimes been suggested — see Joseph (1985:96) for some remarks on this point.

admittedly is controversial and opinions differ on its etymology,⁵ but the most recent treatment of Hittite etymology, Kloekhorst 2008, following Oettinger 1979, regards *ehu* as deriving from a Proto-Indo-European pre-form $*H_1\epsilon i \text{ } *H_2ou$, in which $*H_1\epsilon i$ - is the root for ‘go’ (as in Latin *eō*, Greek *εἶμι*, among others), and $*H_2ou$ is the directional particle seen in Sanskrit *ava* ‘off, away’, Greek *αὖ* ‘again, towards’ (where the *α*- points to $*H_2$, as does Hittite *h*). The development of $*-ou$ to *u* in Hittite is regular, as shown by *huhha*- ‘grandfather’, cognate with Latin *avus*, and thus from $*H_2ouH_2o-$, and all else in the derivation of *ehu* from $*H_1\epsilon i$ - H_2ou is perfectly regular. One refinement that might be made — one that turns out to be important to some details of development for Albanian *eja* — is to overtly recognize word boundaries between $*H_1\epsilon i$ and $*H_2ou$ originally, as is implicit, it seems, in Kloekhorst’s use of a separate asterisk for each form;⁶ the particles such as $*H_2ou$ had, as Sanskrit *ava* shows, an independence that allows them to be considered separate (accented) words in their own right, so that the reconstruction can be more explicitly given as $*\#H_1\epsilon i \# H_2ou \#$, using # for a word boundary.

There are some issues with the proposal to connect *eja* and *ehu* that need to be worked out, but from a semantic and functional standpoint, the equation seems impeccable, inasmuch as the two forms match perfectly in use, even down to the detail of being suppletive imperatives to verbs meaning ‘come’. Moreover, in this equation, there is a suitable source for the *-a* of *eja*.

⁵ See Puhvel (1984: 251-2) for a fine summary of the views up to the early 1980s. Puhvel himself sees *ehu* as “an early, interjectionalized form of [the middle] imperative” of *iya*- ‘go’, with the *-hu* being connected, for him, to the middle imperative ending *-hut*.

⁶ In this way, and others, Kloekhorst improves on Oettinger, as the latter had both $*H_1$ and an apparent morpheme boundary only separating the two pieces, thus $*H_1\epsilon y$ - H_1aw . Whatever is to be decided about the quality of the laryngeal in the directional particle, the alteration to a separating word boundary is a step towards a more realistic reconstruction from the point of view of Proto-Indo-European syntax.

Phonologically, $*H_2ou > a$ in Albanian is unproblematic; since $*o$ and $*a$ merged in Albanian (cf. *natë* ‘night’ < $*nok^w ti$ -), one can compare the outcome seen in the development of *thatë* ‘dry’ from $*saus$ - (cf. Greek $\alpha\upsilon\sigma$) as well as the treatment of *au* in Latin loanwords, e.g. *paucus* > *pak* ‘few’, or *aurum* > *ar* ‘gold’, for parallels to the emergence of *-a* in *eja*. On the other hand, the development of the $*e_i$ in the first part of the reconstruction, the root $*H_1e_i$ -, is not entirely clear; there are few or no unambiguous cases due to possibility of IE ablaut: *dimër* ‘winter’ could be $*gheimon$ - as in Greek $\chiειμών$ or $*ghimon$ - as in Sanskrit *himant*-, and similarly, *ik*- ‘go off’ could have either $*H_1e_i$ - or $*H_1i$ -. The best case may be *e* in *ec* ‘walk’, if based on the root $*H_1e_i$ -, the *-c* of *ec* could then be from a $*-d$ - extension, as seen with this root in the present stem in Slavic, e.g. Old Church Slavonic *id-ŕ* ‘I go’, perhaps in a desiderative formation, thus $*H_1e_i-d-H_1se$ - with loss of the interior laryngeal (perhaps syncopated if first vocalized) and devoicing of the resulting $*-d-s-$ to *ts*, spelled < c >, and the admittedly ad hoc assumption of a semantic shift of ‘I wish to go’ to ‘I walk’ (i.e. I make that wish happen).

One additional problem with the proposed derivation of *eja* is where the *-j-* would have come from, especially if an interior intervocalic $*-j-$ was regularly lost, as the development of *tre* discussed above would suggest. One possibility already alluded to is that the variant *ea* is the regular outcome and the *-j-* is a secondary and later development from that. There are two further relatively simple solutions to this problem as well. First, in $*H_1e_i-H_2ou$, there is a laryngeal involved, and though it was ultimately lost before the vowel in $*H_2ou$, it could have remained long enough to give a different context for $*e_i$ from what is seen in *ec* (pre-laryngeal rather than pre-stop) and different from the purely intervocalic development seen in $*tre_iēs$ ‘three’.

Finally, there is the issue of the retention of final *-a*, without a reduction to *ë* found with many vowels in final syllables (cf., again, *natë* ‘night’ < *nok^wti-) or outright loss (as with the first person singular verbal ending *-m* in *jam* ‘I am’ or *kam* ‘I have’, from *H₁esmi and *kapmi respectively). The solution here lies in the recognition, as alluded to above, that at an early stage, an imperative *H₁ei and the particle *H₂ou were separate words, thus forming a phrase *#H₁ei# #H₂ou#; if such a phrase remained as a phrase somewhat late on the way into Albanian, univerbating only relatively recently, each piece would have survived intact as a monosyllable without the effects of final syllable reduction or truncation, giving *ej ## a and later simply *eja*.⁷

Thus all of the potential problems with connecting *eja* and *ehu* can be dealt with fairly handily so that they can be said to form a true word (or maybe phrasal) equation. By contrast, the borrowing account has difficulties that are not so easily taken care of. Therefore, *eja*, a word which has seemed to all observers to be a loanword in Albanian, a word for which the only controversy was which language was the source language for the loan, turns out to be part of Albanian’s earlier Indo-European heritage and not its later Balkan heritage.

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⁷ This means, of course, that the univerbation seen in Hittite and that seen in Albanian were independent; given that all of the Indo-European languages eventually show univerbation of the directional particles (labeled “preverbs” in some accounts), this is not a difficult assumption to make. In fact, it is a necessary one, given what is known about the chronology of the univerbation in various languages (e.g. as seen in the passage from Vedic Sanskrit into Classical Sanskrit or from Homeric Greek into Classical Greek), even if the dictates of the Comparative Method might lead one to want to project the univerbation back into the proto-language.

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