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Albanian Historic Syllabics

Eric P. Hamp

The Kenneth E. Naylor Memorial Lecture Series
in South Slavic and Balkan Linguistics, No. 9

2015

An Appreciation of Eric P. Hamp and of his Many Contributions to Historical Linguistics[1]

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For the past year,[2] the plan for this year's lecture[3] has been that it would be given by Eric Hamp, who, as it happens, was one of Kenneth Naylor's teachers when Ken was a doctoral student at the University of Chicago in the mid-1960s. In this part of my introduction I generally turn my attention to the speaker and say something about that person and his or her career and such, and I had planned to start this portion with an appreciation of some numbers, generally round and auspicious numbers — adapting the tradition of Jewish gematria numerology, as it were.

Eric Hamp is now in his 90th year — I first met him in 1980, when he was in his 60th year, and as I now approach my own 60th year (actually, a year and a half away but it looms close enough), reflecting on where he was 30 years ago professionally and where I have come since then makes me realize that I still have quite a ways to go. The 30 years that I have known him have been for me important, educational, and formative years with Eric's guidance and tutelage being a major part of that, particularly from a professional perspective. These numbers loom large in my life, and the portion – more than half, to be exact -- that has included contact with Eric has been a particularly enriching one.

Speaking of numbers, though, this year's is the 13th Naylor Lecture, and we know that 13 in the Christian tradition is not a lucky number. In the Jewish tradition of my Sephardic ancestors (on my father's side), however, it is blessed, since it is the total number of the tribes of Israel — the twelve tribes with territories — plus Levi, the priestly tribe that was supraterritorial in much the same way that Eric's knowledge is supradisciplinary; he is, after all, Professor Emeritus in three Departments (Linguistics, Slavic Languages and Literatures, and Psychology (Cognition and Communication)) plus the Committee on the Ancient Mediterranean World at the University of Chicago. And I certainly wish Eric many more years of his amazingly productive and enlightening scholarship.

Still, there is a misfortune that has altered the nature of today's proceedings (I should have known …). The reason I am up here along with my colleague, collaborator, and friend, Victor Friedman, is that Eric was hospitalized on Tuesday of this week for some heart-related problems he was having, and he has been kept in the hospital (near his now-hometown in Michigan). He is doing well,[4] but traveling to Columbus was out of the question. In scrambling to figure out how to fill the time, and how to justify the wonderful reception that follows the lecture, I came up with the idea of making this an appreciation of Eric and his work, his scholarly career, his effect on others, and his effect on me

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[1] This is a lightly edited version of the remarks I made on Friday, 10 April 2010; the time references from 2010 have been retained herein, though see the footnotes for temporal updating and clarification. I thank Victor Friedman for his help with the numerological aspects of this offering.

[2] I.e., since early in 2009.

[3] I.e., 2010.

[4] Here I should say, using a Balkan, in this case Greek, means of warding off the evil eye, σκόρδα σκόρδα σκόρδα ([skórða skórða skórða]) 'Garlic garlic garlic!'.

personally. Victor, a Naylor Lecturer himself and a former student of Eric's and a colleague of his as well at the University of Chicago, was willing to join me here on the podium to talk about Eric and to offer our assessment of some of his significant contributions to our field.

Eric has contributed to so many areas within the overall field of Linguistics that enumerating them alone would take a long time, but we will try to do so. I will focus on those contributions that fall within the realm of historical linguistics, with mention of some of the things that I have learned from him, by way of showing just how extensive his scholarly scope and influence are; Victor will talk about Eric as a Balkanist.

Eric has made enormous contributions to historical linguistics in general, including the study of sound change, morphological change, etymology, syntactic change, the history of various languages and language families, language relationships, principles and methods of subgrouping and dialectology, especially Indo-European linguistics, and within Indo-European particularly Celtic, Baltic, and Albanian, but with a deep appreciation of and command of Greek, Latin, Slavic, Armenian, Indo-Iranian, and Hittite, with occasional forays into Germanic and Tocharian, as well as some of the lesser-examined languages such as Messapic. In short, he covers the entire family, and perhaps most significant is the fact that he has often focused attention on languages within the various branches that do not get the attention they deserve. For instance, while most Indo-Europeanists who include Celtic in their work talk mainly about Old Irish, Eric has delved deeply into Welsh and Scots Gaelic. It is this interest in the lesser-attended-to languages that surely is behind his intense interest in Albanian, work that led him into the Balkans and into the world of Balkan linguistics and language contact.

As far as general linguistics is concerned, he has always been a champion of careful phonetic transcription, of informed phonemic analysis, and of the niceties of phraseology. His interests extend to various language families outside of Indo-European, including those of North and South America and of Asia and the Pacific.[5]

Let me turn now to some specifics that I have learned from Eric, as they range over many of the areas I have mentioned. My students and advisees will recognize some of these things especially, as not only have they informed my outlook on language and language change but they have also provided important guidelines for all budding historical linguists to follow, and so I have passed them along to students in my classes. I make no bones about it and often in teaching these things will make it clear that Eric has always been one of my heroes in historical linguistics, a role model for how to do research in our field. As I mention these, I will not only state these lessons but also spend a bit of time introducing them and placing them in context:

- "Lexical diffusion means you haven't done your homework":[6] lexical diffusion is the notion that sound change spreads by a special mechanism from one lexical item to

[5] Some relatively early publications of his, from 1958, show these interests and attest not just to the breadth of his probing into language but also to the fertility of his mind: "Protopopoluca Internal Relationships" (*IJAL* 24.150-3), "A Question on Ocaina Syllables" (*IJAL* 24.239-40), "Karok Syllables" (*IJAL* 24.240-1), "Wahgi (New Guinea) Prosodic Phonemes" (*Oceania* 29.62-4), and "Vowel Harmony in Classical Mongolian" (*Word* 14.291-4).

[6] I give this as a quote since these are the exact words I remember Eric saying to me; see below for the date and circumstances of this statement.

another, working its way through the lexicon, the whole of the vocabulary of a language. In its most basic form, lexical diffusion means that different words that are homophones, and are pronounced the same, for instance *bear* (the animal) and *bare* (meaning 'naked'), could develop differently when a sound change that would, say, alter the vowel sound [ej] before an [r] was active in the language.

This might not seem like much of an issue, but if homophones can develop differently when potentially affected by a sound change, that would mean that the Neogrammarian view of how sound change operates, namely that it is entirely determined by phonetics, by just the string of sounds involved with no concern for the meaning of that string of sounds or the type of word (e.g., noun versus adjective), could not be maintained.

Eric is a staunch advocate of the Neogrammarian view – as am I – as he feels that it provides an important explanatory basis for understanding much of what goes on in the development of sound systems, so for him, lexical diffusion is a challenge that requires one to go back and look over the data more carefully, i.e. to do one's homework, so to speak, and find an explanation that is consistent with the Neogrammarian view.[7] Positing lexical diffusion as a basis for "explaining" apparent exceptions to sound changes, as Eric saw it, is too facile, too easy a cop-out.

As for me, I was troubled by a few seeming cases of lexical diffusion but wasn't sure what to do with them, so I asked Eric about it when I had a chance in the Spring of 1984 (if I remember right) in Chicago as we were going into a session of the Chicago Linguistic Society annual meeting; it was then that he made the remark about homework to me and it has stuck with me ever since, fundamentally changing the way I thought about sound change. And now, as my students will attest, I am as ardent a supporter of Neogrammarianism as there is!

- Speaking of the Neogrammarians, Eric has long maintained that embracing Neogrammarian sound change holds us to a higher degree of accountability than in any science in that every single "stray" item, every potential counterexample to a sound change must be accounted for. One unexplained exception kills the whole deal! By contrast, he has said, leftover stray particles for a particle physicist would be construed as mere "noise", but in historical linguistics we have what he has called the "queen" of the historical sciences and we are held to a higher standard when it comes to accounting for all the data.

- Another important insight that Eric has championed that bears on Neogrammarian sound change has to do with Verner's Law and its place in history. Verner's Law is the "amendment" to the famous Grimm's Law outlining the development of the Proto-Indo-European stop consonants into Germanic; among other things, a PIE *t normally developed into a "th" (i.e. [θ]); in some words, though, it seemed to develop into a "ð", the voiced counterpart of "th", seemingly without rhyme or reason. Verner recognized that there was an operative condition on the development of *t once one paid attention to the placement of stress in the words in question, and Verner thus

[7] Such an account would, for instance, look to analogical interference in the development of one or more of the homophones, or to differential phonetic conditioning (e.g. phrasal intonational factors) that distinguished the homophones, or some such differentiating factor.

solved the problem and at the same time showed that apparent exceptions to a sound law can be explained as a sub-law in themselves. It was thus a striking example of the scientific method in action in linguistics, in that Verner took up the challenge posed by seemingly irregular and inexplicable behavior and developed a hypothesis to explain that behavior as being actually a regularity (in accord with good Neogrammarian principles). For Eric, this is one of the great discoveries in science in general, and for that reason, he has argued, it deserves to be taught in high school science classes; he has said, correctly if you ask me, that it is just as significant and just as important methodologically as Boyle's Law (about the inverse relationship between pressure and volume for ideal gases held constant at a given temperature – propounded in 1662 by Robert Boyle).

- Eric is a master etymologist, having discovered convincing origins for many words all around the Indo-European family, yet at the same time, he has said that etymology is the most "brittle" of the historical language sciences. It is so because on the one hand so much of what we do in historical linguistics depends on establishing an historical connection between two forms, that is, giving the forms an etymology, a history, an origin, yet on the other hand it is often hard to prove a proposed etymology, as it is just a hypothesis about the word's origin. Hence, while foundational, it is at the same time brittle and subject to revision and even rejection.

- Finally, in that vein, Eric has long insisted that one has to nail down all the details of a proposed etymology or account. It is not enough to just engage in handwaving and to leave some aspect of an account to chance. One of his favorite examples is the so-called *s*-mobile in Indo-European, the phenomenon in which one finds words that seem to be the same occurring something with an initial *s*- and sometimes without the *s*-, as in Greek *tegos* / *stegos* 'roof'. Since (in good Neogrammarian fashion) one cannot say that the initial *s*- is just deleted – or added – willy-nilly, one has to either find, he would say, some function for the *s*- (e.g. as a meaningful prefixal element) or else find a phonetic context in which it could plausibly be added (or deleted). For the record, he sees the *s*-mobile phenomenon as reflecting an absorption of a final *–s#* of the preceding word onto the initial of the following word, essentially adjusting (or redistributing) the word-boundary, and this account takes some confirmation from the fact that *–s#* is by far the most prevalent final consonant reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European, occurring in numerous grammatical endings.

And, I can add that just about everything I know about Albanian emanates from conversations I have had with Eric over the years. One recent case with an interesting history is something I learned from him in October of 1983, while I was attending a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) in Kansas City; in the course of a conversation Eric Hamp was having with Ronelle Alexander of the University of California, Berkeley, that I was privileged to be in on, I distinctly remember him offering an etymology for Albanian *po*, the word for 'yes' deriving it from an affirmative particle *pe (found in Latin *quip-pe* 'why so?') plus a form *H_1est of the verb

'to be',[8] so that 'yes' is actually *"it-is-so" (with *pe-H_1est → *pēst from which *po* derives directly). I can even see him in my mind's eye writing on a blackboard in the meeting room we were in as he was talking about it. That stuck with me and was a centerpiece of a paper I wrote last year[9] on the development of other uses of an element *po* in Albanian (the details of which are not important here). I wanted to cite Eric's idea properly yet I was worried by the fact that as best I could tell, in the years since 1983, this idea of his about *po* had never been published. When I thought to ask Eric about it a few years ago, he did not remember ever having said such a thing, though he admitted that it could very well be right. I know that I certainly did not make that up myself, since in 1983 I did not know enough about Albanian to be able to advance such an etymology. Thus in my paper, I included a footnote with this curious history of the idea, ensuring in that way that Eric received proper credit for a brilliant etymology!

Furthermore, speaking of giving credit, by way in part of honoring Eric's contribution to our understanding of language contact, Victor and I in a presentation yesterday at the Balkan and South Slavic Conference unveiled a labeling for a type of loanword that is rampant in the Balkans and which derives from and thus is indicative of the conditions that gave rise to the Balkan Sprachbund – the geographically connected languages that show striking structural convergence due to intense and sustained and intimate language contact. These loanwords emanate from conversational interaction between speakers, on an everyday and regular basis, and so we dubbed them loans that are "Essentially Rooted In Conversation", i.e. E.R.I.C. loans, and we will continue to use that designation.[10]

Eric's mind is ever fertile and active, and so I end here with something new that he has discovered, even in his 90th year, from a paper to appear in *Journal of Greek Linguistics*.[11] In particular, in a characteristically short (one-page long) but pithy and insightful piece on some unusual and unexpected initial *o-*'s in Ancient Greek, he turns his attention to *obolos* / *odelos* 'spit' and connects these forms with Albanian *hell* 'spit' and also *halë* 'fishbone' (from different formations but from a common root). What is important about this proposal is that it does not just clarify a detail about the etymology of a Greek word that was otherwise obscure (and simultaneously about some Albanian words) but it also provides further evidence for one somewhat controversial construct that Eric has championed for decades, based on Albanian evidence, namely the need to recognize *H_4 for PIE, a fourth "laryngeal" consonant — where most Indo-Europeanists draw the line at three such consonants — that gave #h- in Albanian; this is controversial because it is widely believed that only in the very early attested Anatolian branch of Indo-European, e.g. in languages like Hittite or Luwian, attested from the second millennium B.C. from ancient

[8] This form can be understood as a 3rd person singular form of the imperfect injunctive, a "tense" (known from Vedic Sanskrit and Homeric Greek) that marks timelessness.

[9] I.e., 2009, since published in 2011 as "The Puzzle of Albanian *po*", in *Indo-European syntax and pragmatics: contrastive approaches*, ed. by Eirik Welo (*Oslo Studies in Language* 3.3), pp. 27-40 (Oslo: University of Oslo).

[10] The notion of "ERIC loans" is elaborated on further now in our 2014 article "Lessons from Judezmo about the Balkan Sprachbund and Contact Linguistics", published in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 226, pp. 3-23, and it occupies a key position in the chapter on the Balkan lexicon in our forthcoming book *The Balkan Languages* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[11] This paper, entitled "Notes on Ancient Greek #o-", was published in the *Journal of Greek Linguistics* in 2010, volume 10.2, pp. 115-116.

Anatolia, does one find a consonant outcome of the laryngeals. For Eric, writing in 1965,[12] Albanian shows clear evidence of such a consonantal development but only if one recognizes a fourth laryngeal alongside the more usual three. His several Albanian forms cited in 1965 have not convinced most Indo-Europeanists, so the addition of two more forms that are consistent with that posited development is an important advance indeed.

As you might imagine, I am a big fan of Eric's — in fact, someone in recent months established a Facebook page for him and I, along with hundreds of others, immediately became a "fan" of that page. I took the photo on the Naylor brochure off of that page and when I told Eric that I had gotten a picture of him from his Facebook page, his response was "What's Facebook?".

I now turn the podium over to Victor for a further appreciation and further new insights of Eric's.

[12] "Evidence in Albanian", in *Evidence for Laryngeals*, ed. by Werner Winter, pp. 123-141 (The Hague: Mouton).