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Balkan Syntax and (Universal) Principles of Grammar

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Balkan Syntax and (Universal) Principles of Grammar

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Introduction – Morpho-Syntactic Convergences and Current Linguistic Theory

In this volume, which grew out of a workshop on Balkan morpho-syntax organized by the editors as part of 2013 annual meeting of Societas Linguistica Europaea, held in Split, Croatia, we reassess what is now known about balancing the effects of linguistic universals and language-particular elements of structure in various languages of the Balkans, especially in the wake of intense language contact in the region over centuries that has led to many convergent features in Balkan syntax, and in related matters of grammar, in particular with regard to morpho-syntax and the syntax-semantics interface. Such investigations shed light on the causes of Balkan convergence in these domains.

The convergent aspects of Balkan linguistic structure – known in the literature since Selišč̆ev 1925 as 'Balkanisms' – are not just a random collection of acquired features (loan constructions, calques, syntactic borrowings, etc.) as can be the case with contact-induced innovations among two or more neighbouring dialects; rather, they are deeply integrated into the structure of some or all of the Balkan languages. Contact here has produced specific effects leading to a Sprachbund – a "language union"[1] or better understood as a "convergence zone" – which go beyond a simple areal explanation and raise a number of theoretical questions in such areas of study as diverse as contact linguistics, language variation, language change, typology, grammaticalization, and universal grammar, specifically:

a) What processes of **language contact can affect the syntax of languages?** Are they the same processes that affect other components of a language, e.g. borrowing, calquing, interference (transfer), etc., or are there syntax-specific processes, perhaps, e.g., code-switching, or processes specific to other domains of grammar?
b) **What types of linguistic structures are favored by bi- or multilingual speakers**, i.e., are they based on similarities or entirely new, or such that they can be identified more easily cross-linguistically? What are the structural

1 Trubetzkoy (1923) was the first to use such terminology, in his original Russian, *jazykovoj sojuz*, which translates rather literally into English as "linguistic union". However, connotations of the word *union* in English make this a less than felicitous term (e.g., a "linguistic union" like the Balkans is very different from, say, the *European Union*), so that the contributors to this volume, and most other scholars, also use the term *Sprachbund*, borrowed from the German.

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conditions which facilitate innovations or retentions (the duel between innovative and the conservative tendencies)?

c) **Do usual processes of language change that affect other domains**, such as analogy or socially determined diffusion, **play a role in Balkan morpho-syntactic convergence**?

d) **Are all aspects of morpho-syntax equally prone to being affected in language contact** or do language universals "exempt" certain parts of the morphology and the syntax from contact effects? More specifically, which grammatical properties and distinctions (e.g. *pro*-drop, word order type, etc.) can be borrowed and which cannot be borrowed, if any?

Summarizing research results of the last two decades, the 12 papers in this volume, representing a variety of theoretical frameworks (contact linguistics, functional linguistics, typology, areal linguistics, and generative grammar), seek to provide a state-of-the art answer to these questions in relation to the main focus of the volume: exploring the nature and the effects of "universal" or more "deeply embedded" principles of syntax on morpho-syntactic convergences, in the formation and the diffusion of the common Balkan types, and their role in constraining the outcomes of language change in the Sprachbund situation. This issue receives multiple answers, combining insights from different frameworks and pointing towards a bridge-like understanding of language variation and language change at the crossroads between social factors underlying contact situations and the nature of possible grammars.

The empirical coverage in this volume presents varieties and phenomena that have not been considered in a broad Balkan and theoretical context before. Each section is built around a specific theoretical problem whose significance for the study of Balkan morpho-syntactic convergences and convergence in general is being evaluated by each paper.

In Part I, **Contact Phenomena, Causes and Types of Explanations**, first, **Petya Asenova** examines critically the relation between the European linguistic union and the Balkan Sprachbund, considered by some (e.g. Hock 1988, Heine and Kuteva 2006) to be a constitutive part of the former. She outlines a typology of Europeanisms vis-à-vis Balkanisms, an exercise that is methodologically particularly useful. In line with her own extensive work (cf. in particular Asenova 2002 [1989]), the author concludes that in the hierarchy of the linguistic system, primacy is given to morphology, and consequently that the characteristic features in a Sprachbund situation pertain to morphology and morpho-syntax , as the major Balkanisms do.

This part is also dedicated to the potential causes for convergences involving syntax across various Balkan languages, and specifically to those processes of

language contact that affect the (morpho)-syntax of Balkan languages, as well as to the degree to which language contact interacts with parametric variation between Sprachbund languages in terms of both form and content. Different methodological solutions are proposed for the empirical phenomena under scrutiny, which for the most part constitute novel findings.

Victor Friedman's paper contributes to Bisang's (2004, 2006) argument in favor of an integrative approach to language change utilizing typology, dialectology, sociolinguistics, and contact linguistics. The author examines the use of the Slavic interrogative particle *li* in Arli Romani to mark dubitativity in declarative sentences and demonstrates how typological (universal) and areal (contact) explanations can be used together in a nuanced fashion, and without conflation, to account for language change in this case.

The next important question in this section is what can be borrowed and what cannot be borrowed in contact situations leading to convergence in syntactic properties. This issue is discussed in **Andrey Sobolev**'s paper in the light of the borrowability hierarchy and it is argued that features/functional content higher on the borrowability hierarchy should be amenable to a definition as a Balkanism, while features/functional content lower on the same hierarchy should be considered "anti-Balkanisms". The paper presents the author's views on the state of affairs in Balkan linguistics and presents theoretical, methodological and practical results he has obtained in the last decade in the field of comparative-historical and contrastive Balkan linguistics, especially with regard to (morpho-)syntax.

In a discussion of the effects of borrowing on the formation of the Balkan Sprachbund, **Jouko Lindstedt** widens the perspective of contact phenomena to diachrony and explores the relative degree of probability of two sociolinguistic scenarios, proposed by Trudgill (2011), that have arguably led to the establishment of the Balkan morpho-syntactic type, characterized by explicit analytic marking of grammatical features. Commenting on the degree of analytism of each of the Balkan language groups, and rejecting "simplification" and "complexification" as possible ways of characterizing the outcomes of language contact in the Balkans, he then goes on to propose a third kind of contact situation, namely adult-based long-term, stable, mutual and intense multilingualism, which he argues is directly related to the need for increasing 'intertranslatability' between the contact languages.

Part II, **Balkan Syntax and Universal Principles of Grammar**, is dedicated to the issue of whether syntactic convergence is a "deep" phenomenon, in which abstract elements and different levels of representation such as those posited in some syntactic theories come into play, or a strictly "surface" phenomenon, in which just overt strings of words and morphemes are involved and not any deeper apparatus underlying them. The papers in this section highlight the underlying

tension between the two schools of thought: the "universal" (based on the theory of parameters and universal principles of grammar) and the "areal" (based on relative principles and contact-determined) and provide numerous insights into this complex matter.

Raúl Aranovich connects in his paper to the highly contentful proposals of this part by showing that the distribution of impersonal reflexive constructions in the Balkans represents a case in which language contact comes into (apparent) conflict with the theory of parameters. The author proposes an areal account, arguing that it provides a better explanation than Parameter Theory does for the (illusory) clustering of features found across impersonal reflexives, raising the question of how predictive formal principles of grammar are when dealing with language contact. The author's own proposal strongly favors a "compromise" solution according to which the transfer of superficial features from one language to another in situations of intense language contact can override the parameter settings of an otherwise "deep" Universal Grammar principle.

Andrea Sims and **Brian Joseph** take up the issue of the relation between syntax and morphology in accounting for the Balkan verbal complex in regard to the order of functional elements and their morphological and semantic content. Using the verbal complex as a testing ground, the authors argue for the hypothesis that morphologization processes proceed at different rates in different languages, depending on the particularities of the language or languages involved. They also discuss the ramifications of their proposal for the specific type of contact explanation that can be assumed for the formation of the verbal complex, and more broadly, for morphologization processes both specifically and generally within the boundaries of a Sprachbund.

Iliyana Krapova and **Guglielmo Cinque** address the question of why the phenomenon of clitic climbing is absent in the bona fide Balkan languages (even if present in the non-Balkan languages belonging to the same language families). In relating the issue to the absence (or reduction) of the infinitive, the authors argue that the apparently finite "subjunctive" that the Balkan languages have developed in order to replace the missing infinitive is in fact a more complex structure that covers three distinct categories: Restructuring (Raising), involving modal and aspectual verbs, Control, and Romance-like subjunctive constructions. In particular, they analyze the restructuring modal and aspectual verbs in terms of a monoclausal rather than a bi-clausal structure, arguing that monoclausality is independent of both the presence of an infinitive and clitic climbing, which is actually instantiated to a limited extent in some dialectal Balkan varieties. The authors eventually attempt an explanation for the lack of clitic climbing in standard Balkan languages in terms of a universal syntactic principle responsible for the "freezing" of the clitic in the post-particle position in which it shows up superficially.

Dalina Kallulli discusses another phenomenon, clitic doubling, that has close bearing on the issue of universal principles as driving forces behind grammaticalization. What distinguishes this paper from previous work on this much-researched topic is the proposed analogy with the phenomenon of differential object marking (DOM), which is argued to be another typological offspring of the same universal principle that guides the distribution of features relevant to both phenomena (prominence, specificity, topicality, etc.), namely the so-called D-hierarchy of Kiparsky (2008). The author also comments on some interesting consequences of this principle, such as the so-called "person case constraint" (PCC), whose effects extend beyond the Balkans and are thus to be seen as language-specific realizations of the ways in which the "universal" (in the sense of Universal Grammar) mitigates the "particular".

From a comparative perspective, finally, **Lena Baunaz** and **Eric Lander** offer a discussion of the nature of complementizers in the Balkan and Slavic languages and demonstrate points of systematic syncretisms between complementizers and demonstratives, and relative and *wh*-pronouns. The view that complementizers are internally complex items that can be decomposed into smaller units, as elements of a unique functional sequence, receives a strictly formal and novel explanation spelled out in the framework of the nanosyntax approach (developed at the University of Tromsø).

Part III, **Variation in the Sprachbund**, is dedicated to parametric and microparametric variation internal to the Sprachbund. The focus in the three papers is on the Balkan subjunctive, which is another of the most salient Balkan linguistic features and a complex area of comparative research extending over the last several decades. Parts of this chapter evaluate recent insights into the conclusions reached in the seminal work of Brian Joseph (1983)[2] and how they can be integrated into current frameworks of typology and generative linguistics. The Balkan subjunctive is more widely distributed than most of its cross-linguistic counterparts, and as a consequence is more semantically diverse. While this inevitably increases the theoretical difficulties related to reaching any type of cross-linguistic definition of the subjunctive mood as such, the area is a fruitful field of investigation since it opens a window to both the syntax-semantics as well as to the morphology-syntax interface. At the same time it raises important questions of contact and its effects on the language-particular realization of common developmental models.

Eleni Bužarovska and **Liljana Mitkovska**'s paper analyzes in great detail one type of modal construction (*habere* ('have'-based) constructions) in the

2 Needless to say, this is the judgement of only one of the editors!

Balkans and focuses on its semantic variability and internal typology. In order to explain why Balkan Slavic has developed several Balkan features to a higher degree than the other Sprachbund languages, the authors conjecture that grammatical borrowing that favours change towards analytism may occur both when L1 speakers regularly use another language as well as when L2 speakers transfer features from their native languages.

Gabriela Bîlbîie and **Alexandru Mardale** discuss the Romanian subjunctive and its mixed Balkan-Romance character, drawing a distinction between, and studying the details of, main and embedded clause occurrences. They pay particular attention to the use of the subjunctive in main interrogative clauses, where there are cross-Balkan parallels, and also tackle the thorny question of whether the subjunctive marker in Romanian and other Balkan languages is a true complementizer or not.

Finally, **Tomislav Sočanac** seeks to explain the distribution of the Balkan subjunctive and the semantic diversity underlying some peculiar patterns not represented in apparently analogous structures outside of the Balkans. The analysis put forward in the paper develops out of the assumption of a unitary clause-type structure at the deeper level enriched, however, with a syntactic mechanism (structural truncation) to which the differences in pattern realization are attributed. At the same time, the importance of the syntax-semantics interface is highlighted whereby different complements are allowed to send different "chunks" of the basic subjunctive CP clause structure to the interface with semantics.

These studies, individually and collectively, make for a compelling view of morpho-syntax, syntactic change, and the languages of the Balkans, leaving little to say beyond what is included in the chapters that follow. Still, by way of concluding, it is fair to ask: Why the Balkans? Why should the focus of these studies of the interplay of universals and the particular in morpho-syntactic change take as its backdrop the peninsula that is southeastern Europe and is home to so many languages and now, so many nations? Is there something about the Balkans that makes this region a particularly useful venue for the languages that serve as the basis for this sort of study?

In principle, of course, the study of the syntax-semantics and syntax-morpho-syntax interfaces could be carried out on any language or any set of languages in any part of the world. Still, the Balkans do present some features that make it an ideal testing ground for especially the historical side of such study, but with interesting synchronic perspectives as well.

First, the Balkans show an interesting variety and mix of languages – there are representatives of five different branches of Indo-European (Albanian, Greek, Indic (via Romani), Italic (via Romance), and Slavic) and a non-Indo-European

family (Turkic). Even if the language mix is skewed towards Indo-European, there is still great diversity of structure and history to reckon with here.

Second, especially with regard to the historical enterprise represented here but with synchronic relevance, the Balkans offer the researcher the ability to distinguish between various causes of similarities among languages, especially inheritance, contact, and universality. Hamp (1977: 279) has emphasized that the first two are complementary, not competing, "twin faces of diachronic linguistics", two key ways of understanding the sources of similarities and differences between languages. It is only possible to understand what has been caused by contact if we have a clear idea of what is inherited, and in converse fashion, it is only possible to determine what is inherited if we can eliminate contact-related similarities. Typological perspectives come into play as well here because of how they inform us as to the possibility of independent origin of a given feature in two or more languages; that is, typologically common features need not be inherited, and might reflect simply the ability of speakers to create structures out of existing material guided by universals.

Third, again primarily on the historical side of the ledger, we are in the fortunate position of having a very deep history involving most of the languages, in terms of both direct attestation and comparative evidence based on related languages. As for direct attestation, we have records of Greek since the 15th century BC (Mycenaean Greek) but also a wealth of material on Greek of the Classical and Hellenistic periods; for Balkan Romance, we have Latin, attested since the 7th century BC and with a vast amount of materials from the Classical era and beyond; in the case of Slavic, there are the Old Church Slavonic texts that date from the 9th century AD, but also some indirect testimony in the form of loanwords into the various languages, including Albanian, from the time the Slavs entered the Balkans in the 6th century; as for Indic and Romani, the evidence of Old Indic as seen in Sanskrit, with texts dating to about 1200 BC, and of Middle Indic (the Prākrits) provides a key historical basis for understanding the development of Romani; finally, as for Albanian, except for some earlier traces, it is attested substantially only via texts from the 16th century.[3] Our knowledge of the prehistory of Albanian especially, though the same can be said for the other languages, comes primarily from the Comparative Method and the way in which it allows for a reasonable "triangulation" of Albanian prehistory through comparisons with corresponding features of other Indo-European languages. As a result, even in the absence of direct attestation, comparative evidence gives a fairly clear

3 The same can essentially be said for Turkish; while Old Turkic inscriptions are attested from the 8th century, the most relevant variety of Turkish for the Balkans — Ottoman Turkish — has texts only as early as roughly the 13th century.

picture of what the language was like before the intense contact leading to the Sprachbund.

Fourth, as noted in various places already, the Balkans show the effects of intense contact among speakers of different languages, and of multilingualism, a result of speaker contact. Friedman and Joseph (to appear, 2019) refer to the important effects in the Balkans of mutual multi-lateral multi-directional multilingualism,[4] and its role in shaping the languages of the Balkan Sprachbund. Contact and multilingualism bring out universals – language is stripped down to its essentials, and universal aspects of communication and structure come to the fore because the words and structures one is used to using with fellow speakers do not work with speakers of another language.

Thus in all these ways, the Balkans provide important insights into all of the leading themes of the studies in this volume: They allow us to tease apart the universal and the particular, the particular being especially where details of history, whether the genealogy sort of history or the contact sort of history, cannot be ignored. They show us, moreover, the value of paying attention to dialects and the relevance of geography, and the facts of concern here lend themselves well to showing the value of formalism in extending our understanding of structure. We thus invite the reader to share in what the Balkan languages have to offer on the intellectual front as far as linguistics is concerned.

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4 Thus with their own "4-M model" in language contact (rivaling that of Myers-Scotton 1993, referring to four morpheme types and how they behave in contact situations).

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