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Some Positive thoughts on Albanian Negation

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Reaching an 80th birthday in itself is quite an accomplishment, but to have done so after a lifetime so filled with scholarly achievements is especially worthy of note and of honor. In that vein and in recognition of all that the honorand, Academician Titos Jochalas, has contributed to the study of the Albanian language and especially its outlying, diaspora dialects, I present here this brief piece, offering it with considerable admiration and appreciation.

Negation in general is an area of grammar that has captivated the attention of great thinkers in a variety of disciplines, for millennia in fact, reckoning from the musings of the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle. And linguists have gotten into the act here for well over a century, dating at least from Jespersen 1917, a particularly important work that established what has come to be known as "Jespersen's Cycle", and continuing with Horn 1989/2001, a ground-breaking work in its own right.

Negation in Albanian has much to offer the linguist. With regard to synchrony, there is the typologically interesting fact of several functionally and formally distinct negators. That is, there are the indicative negators *s'* and *nuk* 'not', the modal negator *mos* 'not', and two negators with the form [as] — a free word *as* meaning 'and not, nor' and a compound prefixal negator *as-* (as in *asgjë* 'nothing'; cf. *gjë* 'thing') — as well as the free negative utterance *jo* 'no'. With regard to the diachrony of negation in Albanian, there have been several accounts that establish

Indo-European pedigrees for at least some of these negators. For instance, Pedersen 1900 connected the free word *as* 'and not; nor' with Ancient Greek οὐ 'not', a connection that became even more interesting when Cowgill 1960 argued convincingly for connecting οὐ with Armenian *oč'* 'not', with both deriving from a Proto-Indo-European (PIE) metaphorical negative phrase *(ne) ... H_2oyu k^wid 'not; not ever; not on your life' (where *H_2oyu is the PIE word for 'long life'; cf. Sanskrit *āyu-*). This connection involving Albanian negation has been amplified further in (somewhat) recent work of my own (Joseph 2005, 2022), as I have attempted to flesh out this etymology, phonologically, semantically, and even culturally. All of these studies, from Pedersen's to my own, have worked to fit aspects of Albanian negation into a broader — and deeper — Indo-European context.

Even more recently, Hackstein 2020 has produced a detailed account of the historical development of negation in Albanian, offering a unified diachronic account of the Indo-European roots of the wide range of negators in Albanian and their various functions. Hackstein's study is a significant one, to be sure, and his insights deserve a full evaluation of their own. In what follows, I engage in the beginnings of such an evaluation by focusing on just one of the many points that Hackstein makes in his study, concerning just one of the negators, the free negative utterance *jo* 'no'. Significantly, the point in question is one for which Hackstein's argumentation could be bolstered by a consideration of additional data. Even more significantly, with regard to the goal of honoring Dr. Jochalas, the relevant data comes from Albanian of the diaspora.

Hackstein (p. 21) says, quite correctly, that *jo* "functions most prominently as the negative responsive particle", giving a negative answer to a question, like English *no* or German *nein* or Modern Greek όχι. Moreover, on the diachronic side, he observes, again quite correctly, that *jo* "has thus far remained without a convincing etymology" (ibid.), and he ultimately offers an attractive Indo-European

etymology for it.[1] Still, he notes (ibid.) that while one "might feel tempted to hypothesize the borrowing of Turkish *yok* 'there isn't; no'", as the source for *jo*, he ultimately rejects such an explanation of the emergence of *jo* in Albanian. Some further back and forth is needed here, however, because his reasons for rejecting the Turkish hypothesis are not as strong as he thinks, due to additional evidence from Turkish and from the Balkans more generally concerning negation. Nonetheless, his assessment of the ultimate weakness of this hypothesis is undoubtedly correct, as there is even stronger evidence that he does not consider for rejecting it. I turn now to this additional evidence on both sides.

One reason Hackstein gives for rejecting a Turkish etymology is that he is concerned by the fact that "it is not forseeable why a putative loan from Turkish *yok* ought to have lost its final velar in Albanian" (ibid.). As it happens, this is not a compelling reason to reject the Turkish loanword account for *jo*, because there is a variant of *yok* within Turkish itself that lacks the final velar and is used as an emphatic negative utterance, as in *yo yok* 'No! Not at all!', thus providing a potentially ready source for Albanian *jo*. That is, the loss of the velar need not be attributed to Albanian, and rather could reflect a Turkish-internal development that gave the Albanian form rather directly.

A second reason Hackstein gives for rejecting Turkish is that "typologically negations tend not to be borrowed". He does acknowledge that there are cases of the borrowing of negation, and even cites another work of mine on Albanian (and Greek) negation, Joseph 2002: 117, where reference is made to the borrowing of the Modern Greek prohibitive negator μη ([mi]) into Aromanian and Macedonian, in both instances as *mi*. He may be right in general about the borrowing of negation,[2] but within the Balkans at least, there is ample evidence for grammatical markers of negation and negative interjections passing

[1] In particular, he suggests *jo* derives from a negated injunctive 3rd person singular form of 'be', *nēst 'it isn't the case]. I am not totally convinced due to the large number of assumptions about sound changes and morphological adjustments that this account needs, but it does seem plausible on the face of it.

[2] A cross-linguistic study on the borrowing of negation would be a welcome addition to our understanding of what can and perhaps cannot be borrowed. For what it is worth, my own view, here in keeping with position taken in Thomason and Kaufman 1988, is that under the right social circumstances, any linguistic element can be borrowed.

between languages. Ottoman Turkish shows *lā* from Arabic, for instance, for 'no' (Redhouse 1880: 206, s.v. *no*). Moreover, Friedman and Joseph 2022: §4.3.3.3 give numerous examples:

Greek όχι 'no' ⇝ Aromanian *ohi*

Greek μπα 'unh unh; no way' ⇝ Aromanian *ba* 'no', Romanian *ba* 'no!', Bulgarian *ba* 'certainly not'

Turkish *hayır* 'no' ⇝ Agia Varvara Romani *hayır*

Bulgarian *njama*, there is no' ⇝ Wallachian Romanian *neam* 'not at all'

Moreover, even Turkish *yok* itself is borrowed in its emphatic negative sense (not its existential sense), giving Aromanian and Romanian *ioc*, Albanian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian *jok*, and Greek γιοκ. Thus even if borrowing of negation is perhaps unusual from a broad cross-linguistic perspective, in the context of language contact in the Balkans, it is hardly a rare phenomenon.

It would thus seem that the borrowing hypothesis for the etymology of Albanian *jo* has a better chance of being correct than Hackstein thought.

Nonetheless, as indicated above, he undoubtedly is right that Turkish *yo* is a most unlikely source for Albanian *jo*, and this is where the evidence of diasporic Albanian comes into play. In particular, the negative responsive particle *jo* is attested in Arbëresh, the Tosk Albanian dialect of southern Italy and Sicily whose speakers left the Balkans for Italy around the 15th century. This fact is significant because Arbëresh in Italy on the one hand has many Italian loans that are not found in Balkan Tosk, e.g. *kamineta* 'chimney', borrowed from Italian *camineta* 'fireplace', while on the other hand it also lacks Turkish loanwords; the Balkan Tosk form corresponding to *kamineta*, for instance, is *oxhak* 'chimney, fireplace', from Turkish *ocak*. The lack of Turkish loanwords in Arberesh reflects the absence of the dialect from the Balkans

during the period of greatest Turkish influence on Albanian in the region. This absence of Turkish in Arbëresh, coupled with the presence of *jo*, means that positing Turkish as the source for *jo* is extremely problematic.

The first two considerations noted above — the velarless variant *yo* in Turkish and the relative ease of borrowing of negation in the Balkans — both enhance the plausibility of looking to Turkish as the source of Albanian *jo*, but the counter-evidence that Arbëresh provides is in the opposite direction and must be considered decisive. That is, one needs the proper social conditions of contact in order for a borrowing to take place and such conditions simply do not obtain in this case. Thus we might say that Hackstein is right in his assessment but for the wrong reason, and just as Academician Jochalas has shown the importance of the Arvanitika Tosk dialects of Greece for our overall understanding of Albanian, so too can other diasporic dialects help to provide answers to difficult questions in Albanian historical linguistic investigation.

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