Searching for the Source of Right-Headed Definiteness in the Balkan *Sprachbund*

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Abstract

For many students of syntax it is enthralling to study right-headed determiner phrases in the Balkan languages, though very few venture into the realm of historical linguistics to ask "from where did this Balkan feature arise and when?" The purpose of this paper is to seek an answer to this historical linguistic dilemma, by proposing that this particular feature is the result of intense linguistic contact and the influence of Old Albanian, with the circumstantial argument for Turkish influence made as well. By looking at Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian, and Albanian post-positive articles and inflectional markers for definiteness, it is clear that an Old Albanian (and/or Turkish) influence is at least circumstantially possible. In the future, with greater resources and in-depth study, it is hoped that this topic may be pursued to a more mature conclusion.

Introduction

In the study of historical and sociolinguistics, areas of language convergence are of prime importance, as they provide the puzzles that, when solved, lend valuable insight into the understanding of the processes of language change. A linguistic convergence zone—known as a *Sprachbund*, after the German, and *Языковой союз* (*Yazïkovoy soyuz*), after the

Russian[1]—is a "geographical region containing a group of three or more languages that share some structural features as a result of contact rather than as a result of accident or inheritance from a common ancestor." (Tomason 2000, p. 311). In the Balkan speech community, traditionally labelled the Balkan *Sprachbund*, Albanian, Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian (BCS), Bulgarian, Macedonian, Modern Greek, Romani (especially the Vlax dialect), Romanian, and Turkish share one geographic expanse, in which five branches of the Indo-European family and one of the Turkic family are represented.[2] The focus of this paper will be one morpho-syntactic feature of the Balkan *Sprachbund*, right-headed definiteness as defined by a post-positive article,[3] the goal being to identify how the influence of Old Albanian[4] and/or Turkish may have lent to this development in Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian. By surveying Bulgaro-Macedonian, Romanian, Turkish, and Albanian—the Balkan languages defined by this feature—it can be determined that the appearance and wide-spread use of the post-positive article[5] in Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian during the Late Middle Ages is the result of intense linguistic contact and most likely is derived from the influence of either Old Albanian, though circumstantial evidence forces us to consider the influence of Turkish as a possibility.

Right-Headed Definiteness and Definite Markers

To understand what is meant by right-headed definiteness and post-positive article, the general theory behind definiteness and the development of articles should be examined first, as well as a few pre-emptive considerations, which are important to understand when framing any historical linguistic argument. Definiteness is the grammaticalization of identifiability and nonidentifiability of referents on the part of a speaker and an addressee. Therefore, when a noun is definite it is identifiable by the speaker and the addressee because of shared knowledge or circumstance, called anaphoric definiteness (Hubbard et al 1982, p. 155). Conversely, when a noun is indefinite it is not identifiable by either the speaker or the addressee because of a lack of shared knowledge or circumstance. (SIL International, nd.) Definiteness is most frequently expressed by two types of articles, which themselves are technically demonstrative adjectives: determiners (pro-positive articles which characterize left-headed determiner phrases) and suffixes (post-positive articles (Graur 1967, p.21) [6] which characterize right-headed determiner phrases)—this paper is concerned with the

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[1] The term was coined by Nikolai Trubetzkoy in 1923.

[2] They are Albanian, Greek, Indic, Romance, and Slavic.

[3] When considering the post-positive article, it should be taken in the context of the noun phrase, as Romanian allows for a pro-positive construction when the adjective precedes the noun it modifies, for example *om-ul bun* vs. *bun-ul om* ("the good man").

[4] Old Albanian is meant as the Albanian language as it was spoken and written before the modern era, i.e. as it appears in the earliest manuscripts and during the Ottoman period.

[5] The terms *post-positive article* and *right-headed definiteness* will be used interchangeably throughout the discussion as a means of referring to the same feature; it should be understood that a post-positive article is by its very nature right-headed.

[6] It is Graur's use of this terminology, corroborated with Elson's discussion on the nature of the Bulgarian and Macedonian article that led me to call the definite suffix a "post-positive article," though in Romanian and Albanian it acts more as an inflectional category in the declination of the noun than its Bulgaro-Macedonian counterpart.

latter. Greek and Romani express definiteness by means of a pro-positive article, but the use of suffixation to determine definiteness is more common, found in Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian, and Albanian.[7] Likewise, Turkish uses suffixation to determine definiteness, as will be displayed.

Yet, when looking at the relatives of Bulgaro-Macedonian, especially those in the *Sprachbund* (i.e. BCS or, by extension, nearby Slovenian), there appear no markers of definiteness[8]; even looking at the ancestor of Romanian, Latin, there is no way to mark definiteness. Where, then, did Romanian, Bulgarian, and Macedonian develop markers for definiteness? In his article "How Does a Language Acquire Gender Markers?" Joseph Greenberg addresses how languages without articles develop them, where from, and how they evolve over the course of a language's history—what he calls "the cycle of the definite article." According to Greenberg, the answer lies in demonstrative adjectives, from which articles are inevitably drawn, "a development of which there are numerous and well-attested examples." (Greenberg 1990, p. 152). Because no articles are posited for Proto-Indo-European (Fortson 2010, p.164), the development of articles from demonstratives in the Indo-European languages occurred after the period of Proto-Indo-European unity (Anthony 2007, p.53). Indeed, Greek ὁ, ἡ, τό [9] were still developing into definite articles from demonstratives when Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were being written in the eighth century BCE (Scott 1911, p.156).

Three Considerations

Right-headedness is not unprecedented among the world's languages, nor is it a development specific to the Balkan *Sprachbund*. Turkish, while influential in the Balkans, is not limited geographically to the peninsula, but rather extends across Anatolia. Its genetic cousins in the Turkic family also show definiteness with suffixes, e.g. Tartar *-ni.*(Poppe 1968, p. 34). The Scandinavian languages, beginning with Old Norse and continuing to modern Danish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish, make use of post-positive articles, such as Old Norse *-(i)nn*, *-(i)n*, *-(i)t* (Fortson 2010, p. 375) [10] and Swedish *-en*, *-et.* (Ballardini et al 1993, p. 42). Because right-headed definiteness developed naturally in other languages, the possibility that right-headed definiteness evolved separately as an innovation in each of the Balkan languages defined by this feature must be admitted. In practice, however, this is highly unlikely: the innovation is too widespread and its adoption into Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian is too chronologically telling for it to be an adaptation outside of external

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[7] Evidence from the *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* online database shows that speakers of languages with right-headed determiner phrase structures far outnumber those of left-headed languages, and even surpass the number of speakers when including BCS, which uses no determiners.

[8] With the exception of "long" forms of adjectives, as occur in BCS, which are created by addition of a demonstrative onto the adjectival stem.

[9] Where there are forms given for any gendered language, they will be in the order masculine, feminine, neuter, and plural (if such exists) unless otherwise noted.

[10] Note that the Scandinavian languages, too, switch the article between the noun and the adjective.

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influence. Another theory that has been proposed as the reason behind any and all of the linguistic characteristics shared by the Balkan languages that are not the direct result of genetic relationship, is that of a substratum language, often identified as Thracian or Illyrian—this, too, will be discussed later, in reference to Romanian—and if the theory that Albanian is a descendant of Illyrian is to be taken seriously, this may be a possibility (Hösch 1972 p.22). But in general, such a theory has not been given much credence, and for good reason. It would be difficult to find evidence for an indigenous Balkan language that was being spoken during the time of the Roman and Byzantine habitation of the Balkans, and that was still in existence by the seventh century when the South Slavs invaded. If one is to point to an ancient variety of Albanian (i.e. Illyrian) as the substratum language, one must realize that arguments regarding Albanian's descent from ancient Illyrian are, at best, restricted to the geographical preponderance of both languages, and not based on hard linguistic evidence (Schumacher, 2008). While neither of these explanations will be ascribed to in this study, regardless of their level of factuality, they are worth noting, not only because it is impossible to prove beyond all doubt that which there is no written evidence of (*aut pro*, *aut anti*), but because they are explanations that, with more consideration, may shed light on other shared traits of the Balkan *Sprachbund*.

Right-Headed Definiteness in the Balkan *Sprachbund*

Bulgaro-Macedonian

The first of the Balkan languages we will survey is Bulgaro-Macedonian. While Bulgarian and Macedonian are considered (for both political and less so for linguistic reasons) separate languages, they differ very little in their expressions of definiteness. In Bulgarian the post-positive article is -ът, -та, -то, and –те (Alexander 2000, p.p. 33-34) (plural); in Macedonian it is   -от, -та, -то, and –те (Kramer 2003, p. 51-52). If Greenberg's thesis on the development of the article is correct, then it follows that the definite suffixes in Bulgarian and Macedonian developed from a demonstrative, namely Bulgarian това (/tova/ "that," "this") (Alexander 2000, p. 375) and Macedonian тој, таа, тоа (/toɪ/, /ta:/, /toa/ "this"). (Kramer 2003, p. 497) Mark Elson points out that the Bulgarian and Macedonian post-positive definite articles are "noteworthy for [their] mixture of suffixal and nonsuffixal qualities," as they serve a grammatical function (definiteness) but unlike suffixes they are inflected forms which "constitute a single accentual unit with an already existing word." (Elson 1976, p. 273)[11].

How and why these morphologically atypical forms arose is, as is the case with most linguistic innovations, difficult to say. To be certain, Old Church Slavonic (OCS)—the earliest recorded and first literary Slavic language, as well as the direct predecessor of Bulgarian (and by extension Macedonian)—contained no marker for definiteness, and especially nothing post-positive. However, the demonstratives in Bulgaro-Macedonian are linked to the OCS demonstrative то (/to:/ "that") (Nandris 1959, pp.14-15). It can be said, then, that right-

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[11] It is this mixed use of suffixal and nonsuffixal qualities that makes the markers for right-headed definiteness so difficult to label, as whether they are post-positive article or separate inflectional categories is still debated.

headed definiteness in Bulgarian and Macedonian is an innovation that developed sometime after the first recorded evidence of OCS (998-1027) (Lunt 1959), because though that language was—like Homeric Greek—an artificial dialect, it reflected contemporary early-medieval Bulgarian (Gardiner 2008, p.1). This leaves a gap of nearly 400 years between the first OCS manuscripts and the intervening of the Ottoman Turks into Bulgarian history in the late fourteenth century, though it is known that the appearance of a post-positive article in Bulgaro-Macedonian is more recent than it is antique (Graur, 1967, p. 21). With the evidence from Bulgaro-Macedonian, then, the beginning of an argument in favour of Turkish or Old Albanian influence has been made.

Romanian

In Romanian, as in the other Romance languages (French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, etc.), the definite article developed from the Latin demonstrative *ille*, *illa*, *illud*. It is only in Romanian that the article became post-positive or suffixal: *-ul* and *-a* in the masculine and feminine nominative singular, and *-i* and *-le* in the nominative plural (the article is declinable in all five cases) (Gönczöl-Davies 2008, pp.36-40). The most obvious example of this usage in popular culture is the nickname given to the Romanian fascist militant of the 1930s and '40s, Corneliu Codreanu: *Capitanul* ("the Captain") (Kaplan 1993, p.94). In the past it has been thought that a post-positive article in Romanian may have been the result of a Thracian substratum, the indigenous language spoken in the ancient region of modern Romania, where the Romanian language developed—as early as 587 (Pei, 1976, p.139).[12] However, from textual evidence it is known that the post-position of the Romanian definite marker did not gain ground until after the sixteenth century. At such a late date the influence of Thracian on Romanian is implausible, and Romanian historical linguist Alexandru Graur points out that "the postposition of the determinative is too widely spread in the [Balkan] languages that it might be an indication of the substratum" (Graur, 1967, p.22).

Mario Pei argues that placing the demonstrative in a post-positive position is grammatically allowable in Latin, such as *lupus ille* "that wolf," though *ille lupus* is more frequent (Pei 1976, p.140) this might have been one possible influence on Romanian *lupul* ("the wolf"), pointing towards an internal origin for right-headed definiteness in Romanian. Recalling Graur's statement, this seems unlikely, especially in light of the fact that early Romanian texts provide examples of left-headed use of the definite marker alongside right-headed examples, most commonly with the genitive case, i.e. *ei Tamare* "of Tamara" which later could only be written *Tamarei* (Graur, 1967 p.21) Yet, if examples of left-headed articles appear in the earliest texts as well, it follows that Romanian was undergoing a change at the time we can first glimpse it in written form, which happens to be a century after the establishment of a strong Turkish presence in the Balkans and an Ottoman protectorate over Romania (Pei 1976, p.140). While it is possible Romanian underwent the movement from a left-headed to a

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[12] The earliest record of a language that might be "Romanian" appeared in a seventh-century Byzantine account: *Torna, fratre!* "Turn back, brother!"

right-headed system of definiteness without external influence, it is increasingly justifiable to point toward a common source since the same development occurred in Bulgaro-Macedonian—and at nearly the same time.

Turkish

As in Albanian the Turkish definite marker is inflectional, but unlike Albanian it is enclitic, though there exists an indefinite article, *bir* (Goad and White 2009, p. 203).[13] What this means, then, is that a noun standing on its own, say, *el*, means "the hand" without any inflection, while *bir el*, would make the noun indefinite: "a hand." However, an added level of definiteness—or specificity—may be attained when using the noun as the direct object of a verb, and especially when in conjunction with demonstratives. Furthermore, while a noun in the nominative case is typically the subject of a sentence, a noun may be placed in the objective position (acting as direct object) without being forced to take the objective case ending (Kreider 1945, p.26),[14] but this occurs only if the noun in the objective position is indefinite. Note that when the nominative noun is found in the objective position, it does not have to be paired with the indefinite article, *bir*, because the lack of definiteness may be inferred from the contextualization of the nominative case. For example, *(bir) doktor aradım* literally means "I looked for a doctor," with the noun in the nominative case but in the objective position, showing the object's lack of definiteness (Görgülü 2009, p.10).[15]

That a nominative may be placed in the objective case for the purpose of being indefinite, means that one of the uses of the objective case is to signify definiteness. Because Turkish is a language whose phonology operates under the principles of euphony, or vowel harmony, the objective case ending in Turkish is either *-i*, *-ı* (after front vowel) or *-u*, *-ü* (after back vowel). Thus, *doctoru aradım* means "I looked for the doctor." Where necessary, Turkish may make an objective noun indefinite by use of the indefinite article along with the objective case ending, so that, *bir doctoru aradım* means "I looked for a doctor"— Görgülü points out that this latter construction is what von Heusinger labeled an indefinite specific referent, meaning that the meaning is more literally "a certain doctor," being defined to a certain point between anonymity and definiteness (Görgülü 2009, p.10). While Turkish does not explicitly have a definite article, definiteness is clearly signaled by the use of the objective case, and therefore inflectional endings of the objective case function as definite markers. It is hypothesized that because the Turkish marker for definiteness is right-headed, the development of right-headed definite markers among Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian may have been the result of Turkish control over regions where these languages were spoken.

Albanian

Like Turkish, the Albanian marker for definiteness is inflectional, and like Romanian, the Albanian definite marker is declinable throughout Albanian's six classes. Albanian has four

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[13] *Bir* also has the meaning "one."

[14] While it is recognized that in many Western languages the "objective" case is call

[15] I am indebted to this author for all of the Turkish examples presented herein.

declension paradigms, which are determined by a noun's gender and phonological features, and Albanian nouns have inflectional endings for both their indefinite and definite states. All plural nouns decline the same way, regardless of their singular declension paradigm or gender. The first two declension patterns are mostly masculine nouns, and have the definite endings *-i* (I) and *-u* (II) in the nominative; the third declension is mostly feminine nouns, with the nominative definite ending *-a*; and the fourth declension has the nominative definite ending -t/-ët.[16] The endings for the nominative plural definite are identical to those of the fourth declension (Opitz 2006, p.106). Definiteness is easily distinguishable in Albanian because of the lack of any thematic vowel in the nominative of any of the declensions, and because of the presence of *-t*, *-s*, and *-n* added to the case ending of each indefinite form to create the desired definite case inflection. Just as in Bulgaria and Romania, a Turkish influence in the Albanian homeland began as early as the late fourteenth century, but unlike in Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian, the Albanian system of definite markers pre-dated the Ottoman conquest, and is considered an ancient feature of Albanian. However, it is interesting to note that a syntactic relationship can be drawn between the use of the Albanian indefinite article *një* (Hubbard et al 1982, p.155) and Turkish *bir*, which are optional in both languages but are particularly emphatic when used.

It is apparent from the evidence provided by Albanian that Turkish did indeed have a strong—if not at least superficial—effect on Albanian. Looking at the relationship among the Bulgaro-Macedonian, Romanian, and Albanian post-positive articles (his survey did not include Turkish), Graur posited that there must have been a common influence on all three of these languages to make the article post-positive—he suggests such an influence came from Albanian or Romanian, where the innovation may have formed. It has been shown, however, that Romanian's post-positive article is much younger than Albanian's, and likewise research carried out by linguists at the University of Vienna has discovered that "Old Albanian had a significant influence on the development of many of the Balkan languages" between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and perhaps earlier (Schumacher, no date).

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper for the source of right-headed definiteness in the Balkan *Sprachbund* points to two possibilities: Old Albanian or Turkish, and there is no reason why the development in either Bulgaro-Macedonian or Romanian could not have been influenced by one, or the other, or by both simultaneously. It is true that Old Albanian had a much longer existence in the Balkans and thus had a longer time to exert its influence over either of the two; Old Albanian, then, is the most-likely vehicle for the spreading or promoting of post-positive definiteness among Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian. But while Old Albanian influence is more likely, the arrival of Turkish governmental and linguistic influence in the Balkans and the solidification of post-positive definiteness in Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian soon thereafter cannot be ignored, and the possibility that

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[16] In Albanian orthography, the umlauted 'e' (ë) is pronounced /ə/.

Turkish may have played a role—no matter how slight—in this innovation has to be given ground regardless of the circumstantial nature of such an argument. It should be understood that it will require more textual (read, paleographical) evidence to pinpoint the earliest usages of right-headed definiteness in each of the four languages examined, a detailed comparative study of the syntactic structure of determiner phrases in these languages, and a more in-depth historical study of the sociolinguistic relationship in the Balkans between Turkish and Albanian speakers and the speakers of Bulgaro-Macedonian and Romanian during the Late Middle Ages. It is hoped that the study of post-positive articles in the Balkan *Sprachbund*, in conjunction with larger studies on the effects of (Old) Albanian and Turkish in the Balkans, will push forward our understanding of the major linguistic questions characterizing Balkan *Sprachbund*.

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