

THE BALKAN SPRACHBUND IN THE LIGHT OF PHONETIC FEATURES

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ABSTRACT

In the paper the division of the Balkan Sprachbund according to the phonetic features is shown. The main areas are: 1. the Eastern one, 2. the Central Balkanic, 3. the Mediterranean one.

INTRODUCTION

The Balkan Sprachbund is a linguistic community defined by morphosyntactic features. As far as phonetics is concerned it presents a completely different picture as that resulting from morphosyntax. In fact, we cannot speak anymore about the Balkan community. There are, however, several relatively compact areas characterized by a considerable similarity. Borders of these areas often extend beyond the territory of the Balkans.

A certain convergence characterizes: 1. the Eastern microregion, 2. the so-called Mediterranean microregion, and, the less compact 3. the Central Balkanic region.

THE EASTERN BALKANIC AREA

This area consists of the territory of Rumania and Bulgaria, especially their Eastern parts, and the North-Eastern Greece. Apart from Rumanian and Bulgarian it comprises other dialects occurring within its frames, such as Arumanian or Turkish. As in the case of other regions the borders of the Eastern area cannot be precisely defined; particular features have various extensions with central areas overlapping. This area has been considered the center of the phonetic Balkan Sprachbund [1]. In my opinion, it is rather an extension of the Eastern Slavic strip which presents the same phonotactic type. Its pronunciation is characterized by a number of vocalic, as well as consonantal, assimilations — it can be described as an accommodative type of phonotactics.

First of all, this is a kind of syllabic harmony, requiring an adjustment of segments in a syllable with regard to palatalization and/or labialization. However, the realization of this property varies from dialect to dialect. Besides, it regards ei-

ther phonemics or only phonetics. This feature is connected with a rich consonantal system. Apart from that, reductions of vowels in unstressed positions appear in the Eastern area. Generally speaking, unstressed vowels become higher. In Northern Greek, in addition, high unstressed vowels are lost.

The presence of a centralized vowel, functioning as a separate phoneme, is usually considered a Balkanic feature. One or even two centralized vocalic phonemes occur in the languages of Eastern Balkanic area, however with the exception of Greek. On the other hand such a phoneme is also found in the Southern Albanian — a Western Balkanic region.

THE CENTRAL BALKANIC AREA

This is the less compact region, although it is characterized by the most typical Balkanic features. They are concentrated on the strip of land containing Macedonian, Albanian, Greek. However, particular features do not have identical extensions, some of them occur also in Bulgarian, Serbian or Italian. These features are: merger of the palatal affricates, among others resulting from the tendency eliminating palatalization from consonantal systems (this takes place in Albanian, Macedonian and Serbian); the loss of [x] (in the same dialects), a tendency towards proclisis of the clitic forms of personal pronouns and the most characteristic feature of the Balkans — a set of phenomena regarding clusters of a nasal sonorant and homorganic stop obstruent. These facts are linked by the tendency towards functional equivalence of these clusters and corresponding voiced stops. Phenomena contributing to this equivalence are: voicing of stops after nasal sonorants (Greek, Northern Albanian, Southern Italian), a very fused, monosegmental pronunciation of these clusters (Northern Albanian), simplification of the ND clusters to N (Albanian; in Southern Italian the change of ND into NN is found), or to D (Albanian, Northern Greek), appearance of unmotivated voiced stops after nasal sonorants, espe-

cially the change of *mr, ml* into *mbr, mbl* (Albanian), appearance of the unmotivated nasal sonorants before voiced stops (Albanian, Greek), the preservation of the motivated nasal sounds (reflexes of the Old Slavic nasal vowels) before voiced stops, whereas in other contexts nasality is lost (Southern Macedonian dialects). As a result of the tendency towards functional equivalence of the clusters in question and corresponding voiced stops, in some dialects ND and D can replace each other, and generally, options and hesitations in pronunciation of ND clusters are quite frequent in the Balkans.

The most unusual feature, connected with these clusters is that they can appear at the beginning of the word (Albanian, colloquial Greek, dialectal Italian) [2].

In my opinion, this very area should be regarded the center of the phonetic Balkan Sprachbund, and not the Eastern part of the Balkans.

THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA

The Balkan Sprachbund partially overlaps with another linguistic community characterized by certain convergence in the field of phonotactics. Languages and dialects located on the peninsulas of the Mediterranean Sea share, first of all, a similar syllable and word pattern with the last syllable open or closed by a single consonant [3]. Usually it is a sonant or [s]. Consonant clusters in Mediterranean languages have simple acoustic patterns; in final positions they occur quite exceptionally, mainly in loanwords.

Features concerning syllable patterns cut the Greek area into two parts — in the Northern Greek dialects, as a result of vowel reductions, word final syllables can be closed.

Another Mediterranean feature is the restriction on intervocalic voiced stops. In the Romance languages this restriction is solved by fricativization — obligatory (Spanish, Catalan), optional (Portuguese), or it occurs only in colloquial and dialectal speech (Italian). Although fricativization is known in the history of Greek phonetics, today the restriction on intervocalic voiced stops is being solved by the shift of VDV into VNDV. Again this feature does not exist in Northern Greek where the ND clusters have been simplified into D.

These two phonotactic features oppose the Mediterranean languages to other European languages, including the Balkan languages.

The Mediterranean languages share with the Balkanic languages one property, namely in these languages sentences can begin with pronominal clitics. They also have similar question intonation contours [4].

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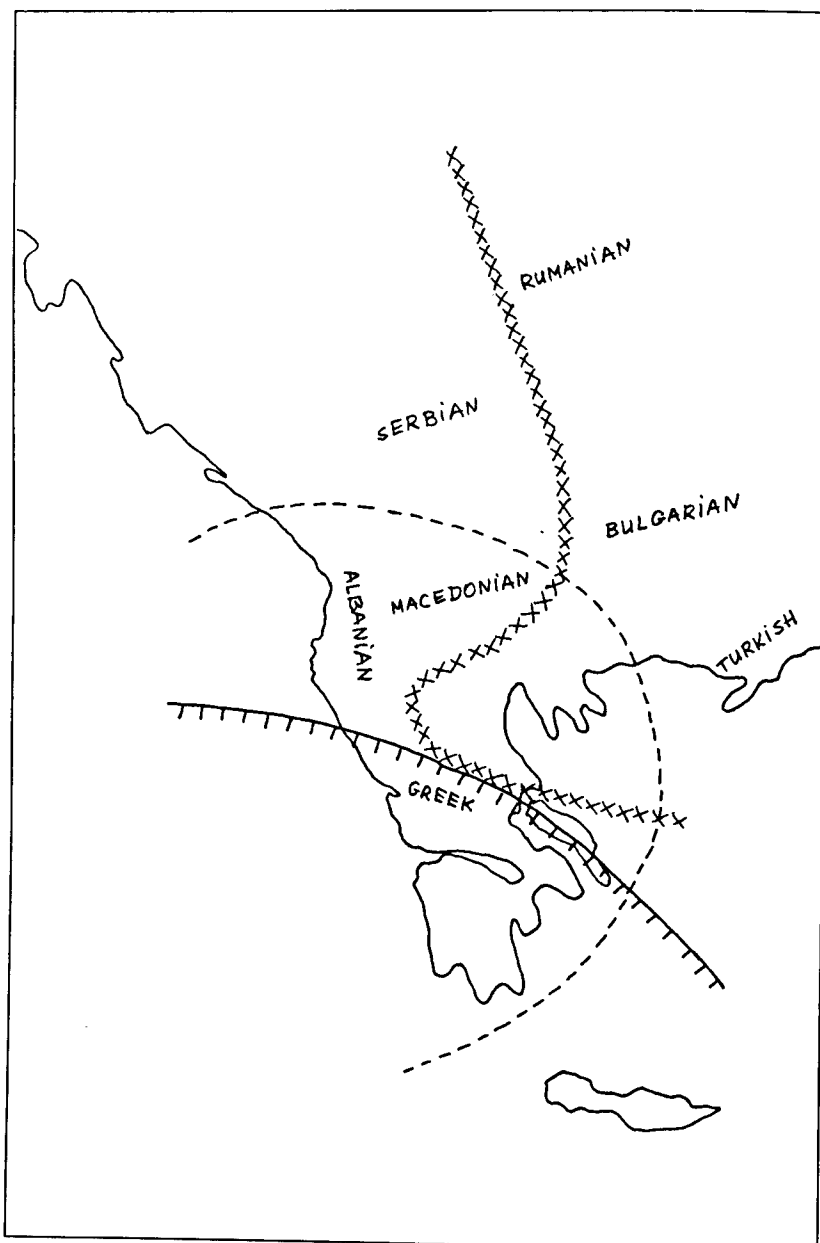


Figure 1. Approximate extensions of particular areas:

- The Central Balkanic Area
- xxxxxxx The Eastern Balkanic Area
- TTTTT The Mediterranean Area