THE PLACE OF BALKAN LINGUISTICS IN UNDERSTANDING BALKAN HISTORY AND BALKAN MODERNITY

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The title of this conference, "Pour une nouvelle conception de la coopération sud-est européenne" sounds a note that expresses hope and yet provokes reactions of irony among scholars in the United States and elsewhere. On the positive side, it is certainly time to seek new models of scholarship due to significant theoretical advances and changes in all the disciplines of the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences since the epoch-making First International Congress of Southeast European Studies was held in Sofia almost thirty years ago (26 August - 1 September, 1968). In the Social Sciences, for example, scholars of anthropology, sociology, political science, and economics have turned their attention to Eastern Europe with increasing frequency, and these disciplines have received fresh impetus within Eastern Europe itself. Changes in the political landscape have been especially conducive to increased contacts among scholars and disciplines, but at the same time the specific conditions of Southeastern Europe leave it in danger of double marginalization. By this I mean the relegation of Southeastern Europe to peripheral status within an Eastern Europe that is already marginal with respect to Western Europe.

The self-constructed political and economic centrality of Western Europe in its relationship with Eastern Europe is too obvious to require comment. Reflections of this construction can be seen in the fact that "Europe" is used by itself in a variety of contexts to mean "Western Europe", e.g. European Union, European standards, or an incident that occurred when I was observing the 1994 Macedonian census in my capacity as a senior policy and political analyst covering Macedonia (for the Analysis and Assessment Unit, organized by dr. Susan Woodward, for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General. Mr. Yasushi Akaishi, attached to the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) stationed in Former Yugoslavia...). A politician accompanying me into a restricted building explained to the guard "To je od Evropa", "He is from Europe", meaning an external political entity exercising its power in Macedonia. The centrality of the West European agenda extends to the study of Eastern Europe, which has seen significant growth since the events of 1989. Scholarly activity concerning Southeastern Europe, however, is lagging behind the so-called northern tier, i.e. Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Thus, for example, in the United States, where the American Council of Learned Societies administers special funds for the study of European languages, more than 90% of the applications are for the four national languages of the northern tier - Czech, Hungarian, Polish, and Slovak, leaving only a handful of individuals applying to study the many national languages of Southeastern Europe (Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian, Slovenian,
Former Serbo-Croatian, etc., to say nothing of transnational languages such as Romani and Arumanian.

But if the events of 1989 and beyond have initiated a period of great openness and innovation in some areas, they have also seen the onset of disaster in Former Yugoslavia, and the threat of the spread of war. It is for this reason that the idea of a conference on Southeast European cooperation is greeted with a certain amount of skepticism and irony at least in the United States. While there is a complex tapestry of social, economic, and political tensions being manifested in varying forms in all of Southeastern Europe - as throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (and even in Western Europe itself) - the most striking feature of Southeastern Europe is the use of ethnicity, language, and religion to rally these conflicts. As one of the primary determiners of ethnicity, language is often made to play a defining role in these disputes. And thus, a new understanding of Balkan linguistics becomes crucial in promoting a balanced view of the present and past, and also of the future.

In her 1994 article in the Slavic Review (vol. 53, pp. 453-82) entitled „The Balkans: From Discovery to Invention”, Maria Todorova has accurately criticized some recent Western attempts to account for the motivations of the current Balkan wars with invocations of „ancient hatreds” and „distant tribal pasts” used by writers and politicians as such Robert Kaplan (author of Balkan Ghosts, see Henry Cooperta’s review in Slavic Review) and George F. Kennan (author of the new preface to the 1993 reissue of the 1914 Report of the International Commission to Inquire Into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars). We can note here in passing that no such rhetoric has been employed in any attempt to explain the rise of anti-Semitism in Europe in recent years. There is a much more complex dynamic operating between the West and Southeastern Europe.

Pointing out that expert power depends on the perception of its target, not on the quality of its information. Todorova (1994: 461-82) accuses figures such as Kaplan and Kennan of reinventing the Balkans as a minister alter ego by means of which the West essentializes itself. This is especially clear in the Republic of Macedonia, which has been forced into a kind of liminal, quasi-sovereign status by Great Powers such as the United States and Canada and supranational organizations such as the Council of Europe, who have allowed little powers, such as Greece, to determine their policies in this regard. An example of the liminal state in which the Republic of Macedonia has been held was the extraordinary 1994 census, which was funded by the Council of Europe and European Union at the behest of the Working group for human rights and minorities within the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia (ICEY) (MIJN-NEWS November 25, 1992).

The events leading up to the 1994 census and subsequent developments show a pattern of manipulations and fragmentations of ethnic and linguistic identities utilizing legitimating grievances to benefit certain types of political elites. At the time of the census, my assessment was that it would prove a statistical success but a political failure. Insofar as it has not resulted in any significant changes in the figures - both official and purported - on which ethnically based political relations are determined, this prediction has held true. The ICOM final report, written with uncritical, affirmed that the census was carried out according to „European” or „International” standards, but it has been refuted by the Albanian political actors who brought it about. On the 26 January 1995, the Constitutional Court ruled that article 35 of the census law, which governs language use, was unconstitutional, i.e., contrary to article seven of the constitution, which declares Macedonian the official language and guarantees (or restricts) official minority language use at (or to) the local level. Thus the census law solved nothing in this respect, the debate continues and the Republic of Macedonia remains the most marginalized and sovereign state in Europe.

If one of the purposes of that externally sponsored census was to promote in one way or another greater stability in Macedonia, the current role of the European mediators in the continued conflict appears to be serving not merely separatist political ends, but general destabilization. In a recent editorial published by the outspoken albeit still government dependent weekly „Pula”, Ambassador Ahrens is cited in the following terms: „Ahrens [sic] developed a thesis of a parallel existence instead of a common existence between ethnic groups in Macedonia, particularly between Macedonians and ethnic Albanians. According to Ahrens, there was never a true coexistence, but nationalities in Macedonia have always led parallel lives”. He said he had the feeling that he probably knows more about Albanian history and culture than the average Macedonian. Also, he had the impression that nationalities had aversions to one and other. He backed this claim by the fact that there are no mixed marriages, and there are ethnic tensions in both public and private communication, especially between Macedonians and Albanians”. [Macedonian Information Liaison Service (translated from „Pula”, 3 February, 1995)].

This is a significant departure from Ahrens’ admonishment to Albanian politicians at the beginning of the census, when they were still threatening a boycott. At that time, Ahrens told them they were in the same boat with the Macedonians, and that if they – the Albanians – rocked the boat they would both drown. His newly reported tack, assuming that the report is accurate, is an exemplary instance of a present construction being projected onto the past. By means of his perceived „expert” (cf. Todorova, 1994) authority, Ahrens succeeds in imposing a view of Macedonian reality that at the same time serves the interest of the local political elite that gives him his International legitimacy and promotes a version of the history of Macedonia that is not only at variance with concrete evidence but helps to rally modern ethnic conflicts.

In a slightly broader context, Todorova (1994) falls into a similar trap of projecting the present onto the past, albeit for quite different reasons, when she attempts to demonstrate that the only meanings for the term „Balkanism” are „politically and ethnically fragmented” and, citing Berovski (1993, The Incredibile Balkans), „Austro-Hungarian political policy relating to the Balkans”. In fact, there is a very widely accepted meaning of the term Balkanism that is precisely the opposite of fragmented. In linguistics, a Balkanism is a feature shared among the unrelated or only distantly related languages of the Balkans. The grammatical structures of the Balkan languages attest to centuries of multilingualism and interethnic contact at the most intimate levels. Thus, for example, the developments of perfects in „have” or the repletions of infinitives with subjunctive clauses shared by Balkan Slavic, Balkan Romance, Albanian, Greek, and even
some Balkan Turkish dialects result from people speaking each other’s languages. During the 1994 census, Debar proved to be the most intractable commune (for reason relating more to competition between the periphery and the center than between ethnolanguages), and in the end was the only commune in which the census was not completed. And yet, the Albanian and Macedonian dialects of the Debar region provide a striking example of phonological similarity that results from centuries of bilingualism. Thus, for example, the Gag dialect of the Debar region is the only North Albanian dialect to have lost nasality, while the development of a low rounded vowel from back nasal in the rural Macedonian dialects of this area parallels the Gag development.

An understanding of the basic linguistic commonality and intercommunication that led to the formation of the Balkan linguistic league is essential to placing notions of Balkan history and modernity in their proper perspective. It is clear from the phonological and morpho-syntactic structures of the languages—as well as from their shared vocabularies and semantics—that the modern-day preachers of divisiveness, separation, and lack of communication are not basing their arguments on the actual history of Southeastern Europe. Rather they are attempting to project onto the past an image created in the present to further individual or elite political goals. A new model of Balkan cooperation must recognize the deep ties that bind together all of the Balkan languages and the people that speak them, while at the same time accepting the historical developments that have led to the differentiation of languages and identities.

While on the one hand the distantly related Balkan languages must be viewed in terms of those features that they developed in common in the course of centuries of areal contact, modern process of ethnic differentiation and national formation must also be respected. Thus, on the one hand, it is unconstructive to ignore the centuries of relations between Albanian and Macedonian when in fact it is their similarities that have much to teach us about language contact. On the other hand, the processes of the differentiation of Macedonian from Bulgarian, both as languages and as identities from a single South Slavic stock, must also be respected. Danish and Norwegian share a common history and development and even a common literary language until the last century. The two languages are mutually intelligible, and according to my Scandinavian informants, bilingual agreements are signed at the highest levels and negotiations conducted without the aid of interpreters. And yet, anyone at the end of the twentieth century insisting that Norwegian is a dialect of Danish or vice versa would be deemed laughable.

In investigating both the processes of divergence and convergence in the Balkans there is much to be gained from newer types of theoretical approaches such as sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and pragmatics. Let us consider here just the single example of object reduplication, a well-known Balkanism that is nonetheless still worthy of considerable investigation.

Working recently in discourse frameworks, scholars such as Zlatka Guenicheva and John Leaflgren have demonstrated that reduplicated objects in Bulgarian, e.g., ,,Krouta Ijla jude deto" ("the child eats the pear") express topicalization or thematization, i.e., they serve a context-dependent discourse function rather than being governed by grammatical rule. This explains the considerable variation that occurs in this phenomenon in Bulgarian. In Macedonian and Albanian, however, such reduplication is grammaticalized and thus more or less obligatory. The rules for Arumanian resemble those for Macedonian (see Golab, 1984). Those for Daco-Romanian and Greek are more like Bulgarian (see Lipovac, 1978). The Romani dialects also vary in the degree of consistency with which they reduplicate in accordance with their distance from the core of this phenomenon. Expressions of topicalization in the Balkan Slavic continuum and Albanian demonstrate how one language's variation can be another's grammar. Moreover, this grammaticalization is reflected even more strongly in one of the contact languages, and this continuum of variation in synchronic space reflects diachronic developments. The evidence from Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Albanian suggests that classic Balkanisms such as object reduplication began with pragmatically conditioned constructions that became grammaticalized to varying degrees in different languages. The motivation for the differentiating factors can be sought at least in part in the complexity of language contact. Multilingual contact was more complex in southeastern Macedonia than in northeastern Bulgaria. Southeastern Bulgaria was dominated by Bulgarian and Turkish, with other Balkan languages represented only by a few villages or urban quarters. In southwestern Macedonia, relatively compact Macedonian, Albanian, Greek, and Arumanian speaking areas all converged along with significant populations speaking Turkish, Romani, and Judezmo. It can thus be suggested that the more complex multilingualism of southeastern Macedonia and the resultant greater need for clarity in communication contributed to the strengthening of pragmatic devices into grammaticalized features. In term of historical developments, it can also be argued that the dialects of the Slavs who dominated the territory of Bulgaria replaced the languages of the populations previously settled there, while Macedonia represents the periphery of the dominance of Balkan Slavic and the linguistic process was one of prolonged multilingualism among compact masses of different populations.

It is worthy of note that this continuum of variation to fixed structures is reflected at other linguistic levels as well. Thus, for example, of all the South Slavic dialects, it is only in those of western Macedonia that the historically mobile stress of Slavic becomes phonetically fixed, usually on the antepenultimate syllable. As one moves north and east of this region stress becomes less predictable and more variable. In Albanian, stress is generally morphophonemically predictable, being fixed on the last syllable of the stem, although there are certain classes of exceptions. Similarly, Greek and Arumanian have rules limiting the placement of stress. Moreover, in western Macedonian as in Albanian, Greek, and Vlah, elision occur at the head of a finite verb phrase, even in absolute initial position, whereas in eastern Macedonian, as in Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian, older rules forbidding such a shift are still in force.

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It can thus be argued that the structural convergences known as Balkanisms must have begun as discourse-bound variations that resulted in part from communicative needs and desires and in part from competing grammatical systems. Balkanisms began as variation when speakers of different languages attempted to communicate more effectively and mediated between the languages of their interactants and the structures of their native languages. The place of these Balkanisms in the systems of the various languages can be described in terms of a continuum from pragmatically conditioned variation to grammaticalization, which in turn suggests that discourse functions are not merely subject to borrowing but actually serve as entry points for the development of structural change (cf. Prince, 1988). The grammaticalization of discourse functions tends to occur in those regions where multilingualism is more complex. Moreover, the process of the grammaticalization of pragmatic devices is itself reflected in dialectal variation. This degree of grammaticalization constitutes an additional category of isoglosses requiring further study. In focusing on variation in a morphosyntactic phenomenon shared by the Balkan Slavic continuum and Albanian I have tried to show how a synchronic continuum from discourse-based variation in Bulgarian through grammaticalization in Macedonian and Albanian can be interpreted as reflecting the diachronic development of grammatical competition through language contact.

In the course of this presentation, I have tried to make two essential points about a new conception of Southeast European cooperation based on the study of Balkan linguistics. The first is that an understanding of the commonalities that led to the creation of a Balkan linguistic league as well as both linguistic and geopolitical developments that led to differentiation within that league must never be lost sight of. The convergences should not be ignored in a projection of the present upon the past, neither should divergences be designated in a attempt to extend hegemony. I have in mind here particularly the independence of the Macedonian language and of the Republic of Macedonia. My second point is that new approaches to theoretical linguistics, especially areas that examine how language related to its social context on the one hand (sociolinguistics) and to its speech context on the other (discourse analysis, pragmatics) offer fruitful new insights into the creation, maintenance, and dissolution of Balkan linguistic phenomena. This should be reflected in the Eighth AISEE Congress.

I would like to close my exposition with a concrete proposal that relates not merely to Balkan linguistics but to new models in general and Southeastern Europe in particular. At the Seventh International Congress of Southeast European Studies, there was only a single purely linguistic theme: "Hellenisms, the influence of Latin, and Turkisms in the Balkan languages: original semantics and the evolution of meaning". The theme "Is there a Balkan mentality? The evidence of written culture and figurative language” involved language but not linguistics. For the Eighth Congress, I suggest that we take a lesson from another international scholarly organization that has been dramatically affected by the events since 1989: The International Committee of Slavists. In addition to eight