A Contrastive View of Subordinate Aspect and the Opposition Confirmative/Non-Confirmative in the Balkans with Particular Reference to Macedonian and Turkish

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The Macedonian language occupies a central place among the Balkan languages and at the same time a special position at the periphery of Slavic linguistic territory. Thus from a comparative point of view Macedonian can be investigated as both a Balkan and as a Slavic language. In the comparative study of Macedonian verbal categories there is a clear differentiation between the study of verbal aspect on the one hand and the categories of mood and status on the other. Most often, aspectual categories such as the opposition perfective/imperfective and aorist/imperfect are investigated in the context of other Slavic languages, as in Galton (1976) or Dejanova (1966), which treats Macedonian as an independent language despite the fact that it was published in Sofia after 1956. By contrast, categories pertaining to mood and status distinctions are most often compared in the context of Balkan linguistics. Thus, for example, we have Golab’s (1964a) classic study of Balkan conditionals in the South Slavic languages in which he examines the modal uses of the anterior future of the Macedonian type že napraveše ‘will/have done’ and its corresponding constructions in Romanian, Arumanian, Greek and Albanian as well as the corresponding Turkish type yapacak ‘will/have done.’ Golab (1960) was also the first to describe the status system of Macedonian — which he labels as “the morphological and semantic opposition of the perceptive and imperceptive forms” — in terms of calquing from Turkish, although the Turkish connection had already been noted for Bulgarian by Conev (1910-1911), only five years after Trifonov (1905) published the first modern account of the so-called witnessed/reported opposition in Bulgarian.

This is not to say that verbal aspect has been completely ignored in Balkan linguistics. On the contrary, we have, for example, Friedler (1970), the main point of which is that Balkan Slavic verbal aspect is more complex than that of that rest of Slavic and that aspectual oppositions in the Balkan languages are not readily comparable. Thus, for example, in Bulgarian the
interchangeability becomes manifest. The phenomenon is not due to a shared aspectuality, but due to a shared marking involving pastness.

What I wish to do in this paper is examine the subordinate aspectual distinction in Macedonian and Turkish, namely the opposition aorist/imperfect. Although this opposition is defined in similar or identical terms in both languages, occurrences of the respective forms in translations are not isomorphic. I believe that a comparison of the Macedonian phenomenon with what appears on the surface to be the same thing in Turkish will both highlight the internal structure of Macedonian and suggest additional evidence of Macedonian’s contact with its Balkan linguistic neighbors. My main points will be that aspectual marking has shifted or is shifting from the imperfect to the aorist in Macedonian, that this shift is highlighted by a comparison with the functioning of Turkish aspect, and that while consistent with the internal structure of Macedonian, the conditions leading to this shift are characteristic of the area of greatest Balkan linguistic contact.

For Macedonian the opposition in question is that exemplified by the pair napravi/pravev, which are labeled minato opredeleno svršeno vreme and minato opredeleno nesvršeno vreme 'past definite and past indefinite tense,' respectively, in traditional Macedonian grammar. For 'Turkish, I shall use the term aorist to refer to the past tense in -di of the type yapim, known in classical Turkish grammar as mazli qılınuv' witnessed past' and in modern Turkish grammatical terminology as belirli, gürülten, kesin or simply di-li geçmiş zaman 'known, witnessed, definite or di-past tense.' I shall use the term 'imperfect' to refer to the past tense in -yordu of the type yapıyordu, known in classical Turkish grammar as hikayet hal and in modern terminology as şimdiki zamanın hikayesi or şimdiki zamanın öykülenmesi literally 'present of narration' but usually glossed as 'imperfect tense' or 'past continuous.'

It is necessary to comment here both on the terminology and the choice of paradigms for consideration. I have chosen to use the terms ‘aorist’ and ‘imperfect’ for both languages for the sake of conciseness and in view of their establishment in Slavistic and general linguistic literature. The Macedonian literary language, like the western dialects on which it is based, has lost the opposition perfective/imperfective in the aorist, that is to say the type praviv is obsolete and in terms of the modern system no longer exists except for some speakers of the older generations. I first indicated this fact in Friedman (1977:134-35), where I noted that in the course of my fieldwork in 1973-74 a number of recent college graduates (even those from Eastern Macedonia) rejected the sentences from Koneski (1967) using

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imperfective aorists as not only unacceptable, but incomprehensible. While Dejanova (1966) already observed the tendency for Macedonian to use a
perfective aorist where Bulgarian uses an imperfective aorist, it is important
to note that the choice of substitution — perfective aorist or imperfective
imperfect — depends on the context. Consider example (1) taken from
Koneski (1967:427):

(1) A. ne treba, Boško, dosta pivme.
    ‘Oh, it’s not necessary/we shouldn’t, Boško, we drank enough.’

Younger speakers suggested the perfective sme napile before the
imperfective sme piele as the preferred substitute. But in example (2),
which is also cited in Koneski (1967:423), the imperfect držše was
preferred to the aorist zadrža as the acceptable replacement:

(2) Go drža tamo cel tri dni i tri noći.
    ‘They kept him there for three whole days and nights.’

Note also the shift to the l-form in the substitution in the first example.
(The loss of the imperfective aorist has been discussed at length in
Koneski et al. 1989).

Another restriction on the data considered here arises from the
fact that like the perfective present in western Macedonian and in the
literary language, the Macedonian perfective imperfect of the type
napravev is restricted to modal and subordinated contexts. Thus, in the
indicative past-tense independent clauses that constitute the basis of the
present investigation, aorists are always perfective and imperfects are
imperfective.

With regard to Turkish, it is necessary to observe that in
grammars written in Western languages the term ‘aorist’ is used to refer
to the paradigm formed with the suffix -r of the type yapar,
known in Turkish grammar as the muzari or geniş zaman ‘broad tense.’
This usage comes from the original meaning of the Greek α + oristós
which means ‘not limitable’ or ‘not definable.’ Nonetheless, without
discussing the changes that resulted in the current terminological situation, I
shall use the term ‘aorist’ in this paper to refer to both the Turkish di-past
and the Macedonian aorist for the sake of consistency. As for the term
‘imperfect,’ I am limiting it here to the paradigm in -yordu, although this
term could also be applied to paradigms exemplified by the forms yapardi
and yapacakt known in Turkish grammatical terminology respectively

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as the muzari hikâyesi or geniş zamanın hikâyesi, literally ‘narrated
broad tense’ and the niyetti istikbal hikâyesi or gelecek zamanın hikâyesi,
literally ‘narrated future tense.’ These two paradigms can also correspond
to the Macedonian imperfect, but they are excluded from consideration here
because they are not strictly indicative but often have modal meanings
Corresponding to the Macedonian hypothetical conditional of the type bi
pravel or bi napravil or else to the perfective imperfect, especially used as
an expectative conditional of the type ke napraveše. In other words, only
the Turkish imperfect in -yordu has a purely indicative meaning that should
Correspond consistently to the Macedonian imperfective imperfect. Other
categories, including that of status, will be excluded from this comparison
in order to concentrate effectively on this single feature which, according to
the definitions of the respective languages, should exhibit an exact
Correspondence in every instance, although as will be shown, such is not
always the case.

Before continuing with the exposition of aspect, however, I wish
to make a brief digression on the category of status. First of all, I concur with Kuryłowicz (1956), Goląb (1964), Janakiev (1962), Lyons
(1969), and Aronson (1977), among others, when they define mood in
terms of the ontological qualification of the narrated event as real or
unreal. From this it follows, for example, that the future, like the conditional, imperative and optative, is a mood rather than a tense,
since the events denoted by it are unreal. It also follows that a
category occurring in indicative forms and expressing the speaker’s
evaluation of the truth-value of the event as opposed to its objective
reality is not a mood but something else. Jakobson (1957) has called
the category evidential, but given that the subjective evaluation in
question is not based on the evidence of the event itself but rather on
the speaker’s attitude toward the source of information, I prefer to
follow Aronson’s (1977) use of Whorf’s (1938) original term status.
I have argued elsewhere that in both Turkish and Macedonian the
synthetic imperfect and aorist are marked for confirmative status
(Friedman 1979), that is they specify the speaker’s willingness to vouch
for the truth of the narrated event. Consider in this light examples (3-7).

(Conversation:60X686)
Zuzua: “Blaje was in Moscow.” Kosta: “Yes, I know he
was.”
In (3), Zuza introduces a story about Blaže's recent trip to Moscow using the verbal *l*-form (descended from the old perfect), since she wishes to emphasize that she was not in Moscow herself. In his response, however, Kosta, who was also not in Moscow with Blaže and therefore has only hearsay evidence, responds with the synthetic past to indicate that he is aware of the fact, i.e., that he knows about it and that there is no question as to its veracity.

(4) Kaži kako begaže. (Friedman 1977:30)  
'Tell [the story of] how you ran away.'

Similarly in (4) a daughter is asking her mother to tell the story of how she, the mother, became a begažka 'run-away bride,' an event of which the daughter knows only from hearsay.

(5) No potoja se služila raboti za koi ne znaev. (NM 19/V/74:5)  
'But after that things happened which I didn't know about.'

(6) Vo Vukovar, spored poslednje së uste nepotvrdeni informacii, životie gl zagubiia 12 specijalci i trojca civilii. (NM 4/V/91:1)  
'In Vukovar, according to information which has not yet been confirmed, twelve members of the special forces and three civilians lost their lives.'

In examples (5) and (6) it is clear from the contexts of the sentences themselves that synthetic pasts are used not because the events in question were witnessed by the narrators, nor because the narrators wish to pretend they were witnessed, but simply because they wish to vouch for the veracity of the statements.

(7) — Yoooo, dün seni Halklar Tiyatrosuna giriçek gürmüştüm ve hemen sonra eczaneden çikarken gördümde hastanın sandını da ... (Birlik 1/II/86:21)  
— Eee, aşgolsun de birader, beni tiyatroya giriçek gördün de ...  
— Noooo, yesterday I saw you go into the National Theater and right afterwards I saw [you] coming out of the pharmacy and I thought you were sick ...  
— Well, good for you, buddy, so you saw me going into the theater ...

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Similarly in (7) the second speaker knows that the first one saw him only from that first one's report, yet he uses an aorist because he does not doubt that he was seen even if he was unaware of it at the time. In all of these examples, the speakers using the confirmative forms had not witnessed the events they were describing, they simply accepted them as facts and thus stated them with full confirmation. By contrast, the descendants of the Common Slavic and Common Turkic perfects in -*l*- and -*miš*, respectively, are unmarked for status, that is they do not specify confirmation and therefore are used both in contexts where confirmation is irrelevant, as in resultative contexts, and where it is specifically withheld, as in reported, admiring, and dubitative contexts. Since we are limiting our consideration here to the aorist/imperfect opposition in the synthetic paradigms in Macedonian and the corresponding parts using the marker -*di* in Turkish, however, it suffices to observe that they are marked for confirmative status in both languages. In the definitions to follow, therefore, we are omitting formulations of marking for status, as this category does not affect the aspectual considerations at issue here.

A survey of the definitions of ‘aorist’ and ‘imperfect’ in the two languages under consideration highlights the similarities with which they are viewed. Thus, for example in his definition of the aorist, Koneski (1967:423) writes: *So ova vreme se iskažuva minato dejstvo što go sfakame vo negovata završenost* 'By means of this tense is expressed a past action that we comprehend in its completeness.' Lunt (1952:90) writes that the action is viewed as having taken place before the moment of utterance and that, unlike the imperfect, it does not specify contemporaneity. Usikov (1985:95) writes that the aorist ordinarily expresses an action in its concrete entirety (*v ego konkretnoj celostnosti*). The Turkish aorist (*di*-past) is defined by Lewis (1967:127) as the simple past, by Underhill (1976:18) as denoting an action which took place at a definite time in the past, by Kononov (1956:231) as denoting a single event completely finished by the moment of speech (corresponding to the Russian perfective past), and by Deny (1921:396) as the *passé déterminé*, which in the Turkish of Előve (1941:374) is translated *muayyen mazi*. Thus both the Macedonian and the Turkish aorist are defined in terms of pastness, completion or wholeness, and definiteness. The connection between these meanings and markedness relations will be considered after the definitions of the imperfect.

In Macedonian, as in the other Slavic languages that preserve the opposition aorist/imperfect, answers to the question of the chief meaning of the imperfect can be divided into two principal groups:

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durativity or progressivity on the one hand and coordination or simultaneity on the other. Thus, for example, Koneski (1967:426) represents the first view when he writes: ‘So ova vreme se iskažuva dejstvoto što ni se pretstavava vo svoeto odvijanje, što go vosprimame kako izvesen tek, a ne go opažame vo negovata izvršenost.’ By means of this tense is expressed an action that is presented to us in its development, which we perceive (accept) as a certain course (flow) and which we do not comprehend in its completeness.’ On the other hand, Lunt (1952:87) espouses the second view with the statement that the general meaning of the imperfect is that of ‘action viewed as contemporaneous with another moment in the past.’ In writing of the meaning of the Turkish suffix -yor, Aksu-Koç (1988:18) states that it prototypically indicates progressive aspect, that is the on-goingness of the event referred to, although it can also be used to indicate habitual activity. When we add the suffix -di (which becomes -du after -yor by the laws of Turkish vowel harmony), the action is shifted to the plane of the past. Other grammarians of Turkish such as Kononov (1956:231), Underhill (1976:48), and Ergin (1972:298) specify that the Turkish imperfect in -yor du denotes an unfinished action taking place at a definite time in the past, and Kononov adds that it corresponds to the Russian imperfective past.

Thus we see that in both Macedonian and Turkish the aorist and imperfect are defined in virtually identical terms. Basically, the aorist denotes a single, punctuated, usually completed event as a point advancing a connected narrative whereas the imperfect denotes duration, coordination, an event in progress or backgrounded and not advancing the narrative. Indeed, Koschmieder (1953) had already observed the correspondence between Slavic perfective and imperfective aspect and the Turkish paradigms in -di and -yor du decades ago. But what is of interest for this paper are those examples where the expected correspondence does NOT occur, for it is precisely in those cases that we can seek those factors differentiating the Macedonian and Turkish aspectual phenomena and thus come to a deeper understanding of their respective markedness relationships. In comparing translations from one language into the other or from a third language into both we do find significant divergences from the expected correspondences. Thus, for example, in the Macedonian and Turkish translations of Šoloxov's (1975) Russian novella Sud'ba čełoveka ‘The Fate of Man,’ aorists and imperfects constitute virtually identical percentages of the total finite verb forms in both translations (about 30% aorist and 15% imperfect). However, there are 45 examples where the correspondences are the opposite of those that would be expected, that is one language’s imperfect corresponds to the other language’s aorist. Of these non-correspondences, 28 — which is to say more than 60% — are of the type Macedonian imperfect-Turkish aorist. In a collection of Macedonian short stories translated into Turkish (Zekeriya n.d.) we find similar percentages of past tenses, and of 42 non-correspondences, 36 — that is, 85% — are of this same type: Macedonian imperfect-Turkish aorist.

Examples (8-19) are typical representatives of these non-correspondences:

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‘At first I was working in a carpenter shop, then I moved to a factory and learned to be a locksmith.’

(9) ‘Zažito ti mene tolu dogo me barasé!’
Mu odgovoriv: ‘Jai tèbe, sinko, i vo Germanija te barav, i vo Polska, i cela Belorusija ja izodiv i ja propatuvav, a ti vo Urajipsik si bil.’ (Šoloxov 1970:33)
‘Why did you spend such a long time looking for me?’ I answered him: ‘I looked for you (everywhere,) in Germany, in Poland, I traveled all over Byelorussia, and you turned out to be in Urajipsik.’

(10) Ete, toa ti eto se reko: svadba bez svirki i pesni ... Sandre denes se ženeše bez belčikite tapani .... Tri meseci se miluva. Tri meseci, brgu mina, kako tri zimski dni. (Maleški 1969:101)
Ište, tırkistiz, çalıg:ız dijün buna derler ... Sandre bugün. Belçik köyü dvarvarla külalmadan dijün yapiyor, seviniyor.”

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(16) Üste od previot den jas namisliv da se vratam kaj svoite. (Šohlov 1970:18)
Esr düştümüm danikadan beri kep kaçağa düşünümüydum. (Šohlov 1969:24)
'From the very first day I thought about how to get back to my own people.'

(17) Se zanišav, no dostovav na noze. (Šohlov 1970:30)
Ayakların yanını, ama yine de ayakta durnyordum. (Šohlov 1969:37)
'I swayed, but I remained on my feet.'

(18) Istriv neko zevo dozari, izedov malku i vo džebovite kladov za rezerva. (Šohlov 1970:19)
Danelleri ellerimin içinde eziyor, bir azını yiyor, bir azını ilerde yemek için ceblerine dolduruyordum. (Šohlov 1969:25)
'I shocked a few grains in my palms, ate a few, and put the rest in my pocket as a reserve.'

(19) Našite se privleka vo Grčija. Ostane Sandre vo Vrbjani. (Maleski 1969:102)
Bizimkiler Yunanistan'a çekiliyorlardı. Sandre Vrbjanin'de kaldı. (Zekeriya n.d.:14)
'Our folk retreated to Greece. Sandre was left in Vrbjani.'

Looking first at the Macedonian imperfects corresponding to Turkish aorists (8-15) we see that examples (9), (11), (12), and (13) are all modified by dolgo/uzun zaman 'for a long time.' Except for example (13), which could be conceived of as a state, these examples are all atelic activities in Vendler's (1957) terms. Similarly, examples (8), (10), and (14) also denote atelic activities. In the case of (15), however, we have the portrayal of an achievement in the course of its development, i.e., as an activity, since the village provides a telos (goal). In general, however, the Macedonian imperfects are describing actions without endpoints in terms of duration, whereas the Turkish aorists present these same events as past occurrences without any additional specification — although it is clear that in terms of traditional definitions we would expect the form corresponding to the
Slavic imperfective, which is not what we have. On the other hand, in the examples showing Macedonian aorists corresponding to Turkish imperfects (16-19) we see that examples (16), (17), and (19) are all basically activities (or in [17] an activity and a state) that in Turkish are portrayed in the course of their occurrence and which in Macedonian have essentially been telicized (i.e., portrayed as goal-oriented) and thus transformed into either inchoative (16, 17) or finished (17, 19) achievements (or in [19] as an accomplishment). Example (18) is not really an exact match (Turkish would be koydum or koyuyordum) but the point is still that the Macedonian accomplishment is portrayed in Turkish as an activity in the course of its development. In terms of markedness relations, it is interesting to note here that the Macedonian aorists are in a sense adding a nuance of perfective markedness by telicizing events that are basically activities, while Turkish is using its imperfect to emphasize the durational nature of the events in question.

The Macedonian and Turkish aspectual systems in terms of the opposition aorist/imperfect can be characterized by the fact that in Turkish the aorist is the least marked, most general past tense whereas the Macedonian aorist is limited to perfective verbs, which is to say that for all practical purposes it is marked for perfectivity. In his monograph on the Macedonian verb, Elson (1990) argues that the aorist is marked with respect to the imperfect on morphological grounds; namely that certain markers (stem vowels in other treatments) can occur only as indicators of the aorist (namely ŝ, š, Ŏ as in vidov, rešiv, čuv), while the indicators used in the imperfect (leč, /a/, as in praveše, gledaše) can also occur in the aorist (as in počaav, somlev), to which he adds as evidence the fact that the imperfect stem provided the basis for new forms, such as the imperfect -form, whereas the aorist stem did not. In my own work, I have insisted that it is the imperfect which is marked based on the aorist’s display of characteristics generally associated with (although not necessarily diagnostic of) unmarked forms such as greater frequency and less morphophonemic regularity, and based on the imperfect’s semantic specification of durativity as opposed to the aorist’s lack of a subspectral specification. I argue in favor of durativity rather than coordination as the invariant meaning of the imperfect on the basis of examples such as numbers (4), (8), (13) as well as (20).

Examples (8), (13), and (20) show imperfects with sequential rather than coordinated action, while in the example of the request for the story of the begalka in (4) the action described by begaše ‘ran away’ was neither sequential nor coordinated but purely durative. Also, when looking at the comparison of Macedonian and Turkish usage it is clear that duration rather than coordination is the guiding concept. Still, while we see that the Turkish aorist is unmarked for aspect and carries marking only for tense (past) and status (confirmative), it is also true that the Macedonian aorist, in view of the obsolescence of the imperfective aorist, occurs only with perfective verbs. Now if we accept the widely held view that in Macedonian as elsewhere in Slavic the perfective aspect is marked with respect to imperfective, then it would appear that in the Macedonian literary language at the end of the 20th century the aorist must be treated as marked or becoming marked with respect to the imperfect. Moreover, the comparison with Turkish verbal aspect in which we see that the Macedonian imperfect often corresponds to the unmarked Turkish aspect lends credence to the hypothesis that it is the imperfect that is or is becoming unmarked.

From the point of view of Balkan linguistics we should add that the loss of the imperfective aorist: originated in Western Macedonia, where linguistic contact has been most complex: with Albanian, Greek, Aromanian, Romani, and formerly with Judezmo, as well as with Turkish. In Albanian translations, too, we more often see a Macedonian imperfect corresponding to an Albanian aorist rather than vice versa, as in example (21), which is the Albanian translation of the example (8):

Example (22) illustrates this same type of correspondence, i.e. Albanian and Turkish aorist but Macedonian imperfect. We can also note that as in (20), the Macedonian imperfects denote sequential actions:
attention to the interaction of context with meaning.

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