Peirce, Albanians, and Vlahs: Semiotics and Status in the Balkan Sprachbund

I. Introduction

The Albanian nonconfirmative (mënyre habitore) is a unique development in the languages of Europe, albeit one closely connected to the semantics of similar verbal forms in other languages of the Balkans as well as the Caucasus and elsewhere (e.g. Balkan Slavic, Balkan Romance, Turkish, Georgian, Lak, etc., cf. Friedman 1988, 1994). Diachronically derived from an inverted perfect (auxiliary + participle > participle + auxiliary), the Albanian nonconfirmative has three functions: 1) the expression of surprise at a newly discovered fact or event (admirative), 2) the sarcastic or ironic rejection of a previous statement (dubitative), and 3) the neutral expression of information that the speaker chooses not to vouch for (nonguarantee).

In this paper, I shall show that the three functions of the Albanian nonconfirmative can be illuminated by Peircean trichotomies and particularly by the theory of interpretants. In its tripartite semantic nature, the nonconfirmative embodies within itself a kind of triadic semiosis, thus illustrating the recursiveness of the semiotic process. I shall also discuss the nonconfirmative’s relation to Balkan language contact, particularly between Albanian and Aromanian. My approach to language contact is inspired by Andrews’ (1990:44–80) discussion of insights gained from Peirce in relation to second language teaching. Andrews (1990:76–80) shows that in second language learning, the order of acquisition of interpretants is crucial in understanding the speaker’s ability to manipulate grammatical categories. A key difference between L2 acquisition via the traditional language classroom and language contact per se is the presence of the community in the case of contact. The existence of two different L1 communities, for each of which the other’s L1 is an L2, creates a situation in which differences in the acquisitions of interpretants and the interpretation of signs can become systematized as language change via language contact.

II. Nonconfirmativity

In order to provide a context for the discussion, I shall begin with the placement of nonconfirmativity within a theory of generic grammatical categories.
category expressed by paradigms such as the Albanian nonconfirmative is often referred to in current literature as *evidential*. Although the observation of this type of category by grammarians of some of the languages of the Balkans goes back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g. Dozon 1879, Trifonov 1905, Conen 1910/11), we shall begin with Jakobson’s (1957/71) formulation. According to Jacobsen (1986), the term *evidential* was first used for a generic verbal category, albeit as a “tentative label,” by Jakobson, apparently under the influence of Boas’ work on Native American languages (Boas 1911), especially Kwakiutl (Boas 1947:237, 245), where the term itself is apparently first attested. Jacobsen (1986:5) makes the point that Jakobson’s formulation of the category as the relation of a narrated event and narrated speech event to the speech event (E}$/E^*$/E//), is too closely linked to a specific type of evidential, the quotative, and he suggests that the category is better defined as the relationship of the narrated event to the participant in the speech event (E}$/P^*$/), a formulation first proposed by Aronson (1977) in his redefinition of the category of status and utilized by Friedman (1977) in his work on Macedonian, one of the languages cited by Jakobson as exemplifying the use of evidentiality as a grammatical category.

In a later work, Aronson (1991) questions the need for a separate evidential generic category, since every apparent occurrence of an evidential can be analyzed as a type of status, but he does not explicitly exclude evidential from his table of generic categories (see Friedman 1998). In view of the results of the aforementioned research, I shall employ the term *status* when referring to the generic grammatical category, the terms *confirmative* and *nonconfirmative* when referring to invariant meanings of that category, and the terms *admirative, dubitative, and nonguarantive* when referring to contextual variant meanings of the nonconfirmative.

III. The Albanian Nonconfirmative

The Albanian verbal system has two sets of indicative paradigms, one of which specifies nonconfirmative status, the other of which does not. Table 1 illustrates the indicative paradigm of the first singular of the verb meaning ‘have’, which also functions as the auxiliary forming the analytic past tenses. Table 2 gives the complete set of nonconfirmative person markers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present</th>
<th>Unmarked</th>
<th>Nonconfirmative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>kam</td>
<td>paskam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfect</td>
<td>kam pasur</td>
<td>paskam pasur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperfect</td>
<td>kisha</td>
<td>paskësha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: 1SG indicative of ‘have’ in Albanian

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRES</th>
<th>IMPF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SG</td>
<td>PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>-kam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>-ke</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>-ka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Personal desinences of the nonconfirmative

As indicated earlier, the nonconfirmative paradigm is derived diachronically from an inverted perfect (and pluperfect), but in modern Standard Albanian this diachronic connection has been completely severed, and two independent paradigmatic sets now exist. The decisive moment of separation can be located at that point in time when the nonconfirmative of the type *paskam* ceased to have a past meaning (lost its marking for pastness) and became a present.

Although the opposition confirmative/nonconfirmative can be viewed as a typical Jakobsonian binary opposition (dyad), when the category of nonconfirmativity is taken by itself—as it must be in Albanian, where there is no grammatical marking for confirmativity—there emerges a trichotomy of contextual variant meanings that correspond in illuminating ways to Peirce’s (and also Bühler’s 1934) view of language. The concepts of surprise (admirative), ironic or sarcastic disbelief (dubitative), and withholding personal confirmation (nonguarantive), which together comprise the possible meanings of marked nonconfirmatives in the Balkans, can be seen to echo Peircean trichotomies as well as Bühler’s three functions of language—emotive, appellative, and cognitive—corresponding to the three persons: addressee, addressee, and other.

Let us take a simple Albanian example and examine it in this light:

1a. Qumështë është i verdhë.
1b. Qumështë qenka i verdhë.
1c. ‘The milk is yellow’
for an nonguarantee to be uttered without either surprise or disbelief it must refer to a third person or other conditioning factor. The nonguarantee is cognitive rather than emotive or appellative. It involves objective evaluation rather than surprise or refutation. It thus reflects a type of Thirdness. It involves a mental element—often, but not always, inference or report—and it mediates between the acceptance of admirativity and the rejection of dubitativity by neither accepting nor rejecting but rather constating. It treats the information as of relative value. Here qenka has a logical dynamic interpretant (usual; Shapiro 1983:65).

Thus, nonconfirmative status in Albanian by its very specification of speaker attitude partakes of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, of (emotion in and of itself on the part of) the speaker, of (resistance of the speaker to the addressee, and of a cognitive evaluation (but not guaranteeing) of something that is outside the speaker and the addressee. The sign mediated by these interpretants, within the Albanian grammatical system, is the former inverted perfect which has ceased to be a perfect and has been completely transformed into a present.

IV. The Aromanian nonconfirmative

In the Aromanian dialect of the Frasheriote Vlachs of the village of Beala Di Supră (Macedonian Gorna Belica) in southwestern Macedonia, the syllable -ka, which in Albanian is the third person singular present imperative suffix, has been taken over as an invariant particle marking nonconfirmativity by attaching to a participial base. Table 3 illustrates the parallels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNMARKED</th>
<th>NONCONFIRMATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>present</strong></td>
<td>Aromanian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ali lukrată</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>perfect</strong></td>
<td>ave lukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pluperfect</strong> (imperf.)</td>
<td>by avukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>double</strong></td>
<td>by avukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>perfect</strong></td>
<td>ave lukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pluperfect</strong> (aor.)</td>
<td>by avukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>second</strong></td>
<td>by avukră</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>pluperfect</strong> (aor.)</td>
<td>by avukră</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Aromanian (Fărșălot—Beala Di Supră) & Albanian indicative present & synthetic pasts (3sg ‘work’) cf. Markovik 1996
The primary difference between the Albanian and Aromanian morphologies can be seen in the fact that in Aromanian -ka functions as a particle that does not inflect, e.g. Aromanian mini fushka, tini fushka, nās fushka = Albanian unë qenkam, ti qenke, ai qenka 'I am, you are, he is (nonconfirmative)'. Moreover, since the particle is invariant, the only possibilities for forming past tenses are by means of a nonconfirmative auxiliary verb, hence the absence of a synthetic imperfect nonconfirmative in Aromanian. However, in terms of the three possible interpretations (admirative, dubitative, nonguarantee), the Aromanian nonconfirmative is exactly parallel to the Albanian, and thus sentences (2a) and (2b) are exact translations of (1a) and (1b), respectively:

2a. Laptile esti galbin
2b. Laptile fushka galbin
'The milk is yellow.'

Since the semantics of the present nonconfirmatives of the two languages are identical, and moreover the Aromanian is borrowed from the Albanian (for morphological details, see Friedman 1994), there is no need to repeat the three possible meanings of (2b) here. Rather, we shall proceed to a discussion of the semiosis of language contact that bear on the current situation.

V. Interpretants and Contact

Let us now consider how the question of interpretants affects our understanding of the difference between language acquisition and language contact. I am using the phrase language acquisition here as shorthand for second language (L2) acquisition taking place in a formal, i.e. classroom, setting. The acquisition of L2 in this sense is an individual affair; it is the relationship of student to teacher. I differentiate this from language contact in the sense of a situation in which a community of L1 speakers acquire L2 informally, as the result of being in contact with the L2 community. I have in mind here a situation in which both L1 and L2 are represented by communities of speakers. In this sense, then, language contact is a collective affair, and moreover has the potential to affect structural change in either L1, L2, or both. Andrews (1990:64–76), in writing about the acquisition of Russian aspect in an English-language classroom situation in which Russian is the target language (L2), makes the point that while a native speaker acquires the interpretants necessary for a competent performance in the order emotional (feeling)–energetic (production)–logical (generalized rule), the L2 learner is first presented with the rule, then attempts to apply it, and only if the learner has a chance to interact with an L1 community will there be a possibility for acquiring the ‘feel’ for correct usage in all its contexts. In language contact, however, as in L1 acquisition, the speaker is not normally confronted with rules. However, at the same time, the speaker has already incorporated an L1 system before the L2 system. Thus, while interpretants may be acquired in the same order, the signs that they interpret may be interpreted differently.

The ordering emotive-energetic-logical is also not unproblematic in approaching the development of the nonconfirmative. From theoretical considerations, it would follow that of the three levels of nonconfirmatvity, the admirative (emotive) should develop first, followed by the energetic (dubitative), and finally the logical (nonguarantee). In the case of languages with the development of nonconfirmative meaning in the already existing perfect, this does not appear to have been the case (cf. van Wijk 1933 for Slavic); rather the logical appears to have preceded the emotional. This type of change, however, took place in the face of the development of marked confirming meaning in the synthetic pasts and is therefore not necessarily applicable to the Albanian case. In Albanian, there must have been a point at which the inverted perfect ceased to be perfect and became present. Judging from the uses of the old perfect in Slavic and Turkish with apparent present meaning (see note 10), it is arguable that emotive usage was the first such “jump” resulting ultimately in a “catastrophic change” (cf. Andrews 1997) in the Albanian system that produced an entirely new set of paradigms. In this case, it was the creation of a new emotive interpretant of the sign of the inverted perfect that led to the elaboration of the system as we see it today. This being the case, the development of the nonconfirmative in Albanian could have followed the order of acquisition of interpretants as described by Andrews (1990). In the case of the Aromanian dialect of Beala Di Suprâ, the entire set of interpretants was apparently in place at the time of contact, and thus the entire “habit” (in Peirce’s sense) may have been acquired as a whole through a process of indexical iconification (see below).

In Albanian, it was the entire process of postponing the auxiliary to the participle and then creating new paradigms once the meaning of the inverted perfect had shifted to a present that signified nonconfirmativity. The semiotic process was a complex interaction of morphosyntactic inversion and the creation of new interpretants for the new signs. The process moved from immediate to dynamic to final and from emotive to energetic to logical. The Făsăloşi Aromanian speakers of Beala Di Suprâ, however, upon coming into contact with Albanian, perceived the -ka of the third person singular present Albanian nonconfirmative as an iconic index of nonconfirmativity and created a new immediate interpretant out of the final interpretant of a single Albanian sign, which in its turn went through stages of
becoming dynamic and final (cf. Andrews 1997). It is important to note that this change of habit apparently occurred without conscious perception on the part of speakers. At the time of my fieldwork together with Marjan Markovik’ (1992) the Aromanian nonconfirmative had never been detected, and speakers were unaware of its existence despite the fact that they used it freely.

VI. Conclusion

In studying nonconfirmativity, the striking similarities of Albanian to Balkan Slavic and Turkish—or to Georgian or Tadjik, for that matter (cf. Friedman 1979)—raise the question of autochthony versus contact as the origin of marked status categories, an issue that remains much debated and unresolved. The typological explanation that the focus of perfects on their results leads to a psychological separation of the past event from the speaker is attractive and not new (cf. Lohmann 1937). At the very least, the case of Beala Di Supră Aromanian demonstrates unequivocally that status categories can indeed enter a language due to change of habit resulting from language contact. Moreover, a Peircean approach to linguistic analysis can illuminate the process of structural borrowing via abductive reinterpretation. Despite Benveniste’s (1969/74) criticism, itself criticized by Jakobson (1977/1985, cf. also Hanks 1996:48–51 and especially Réthoré 1986), Peirce’s semiotics can illuminate specific linguistic problems. An analysis of the Albanian nonconfirmative and its transfer to Aromanian illustrates both the usefulness and the recursive nature of Peirce’s trichotomous approach to the sign, at the same time showing how mental processes can be grammaticalized and subsequently transformed via the reinterpretation of signs and their interpreants in the course of language contact.

Endnotes

1 Literally, mënry habitore means ‘mood of surprise (habi)’, and it is normally translated with the term ‘admirative’ in English, after the usage introduced by Dozon (1879:226). Unfortunately, the term admirative also refers to the contextual variant meaning ‘surprise’, which is only one of the meanings of the Albanian mënry habitore and is moreover a term applied to usages of other verb forms expressing similar nuances of surprise in other languages (e.g. Weigand 1923–24 on Bulgarian). Therefore, in this paper I shall use the label Albanian nonconfirmative, which refers to the invariant meaning of the mënry habitore, to name the paradigmatic set as a whole and shall limit the term admirative to the contextual variant meaning of ‘surprise’.

2 The term dubitative is also an infelicitous but traditional term (cf., e.g. Deny 1921:354). This usage does not express so mild an uncertainty as doubt, but rather a sarcastic or ironic rejection. Haiman (1995:330) proposes the term sarcastive, but since sarcasm and irony are not identical, we shall simply stick to the traditional label here.

3 Normally such information is derived from a report, deduction, faulty memory, etc. None of these sources of evidence, however, determine the usage. The choice is based solely on the speaker’s attitude. The fact that this attitude will, in the normal course of events, be influenced by the source of the information does not grammaticalize the source of information over the speaker’s attitude toward it. In English, the adverb apparently is often used to render this effect (cf. Friedman 1977:49–50).

4 I am using terms such as grammatical and category in their Jakobsonian structuralist senses.

5 A separate issue is why such categories should be so difficult to detect. None of the earliest grammatical descriptions of any of the languages in question contains any references to the category in question. In the case of Balkan Romance, nonconfirmativity remained undetected until late in the twentieth century (see Friedman 1994).

6 Jakobson’s Prachtextemplar is the putative difference between Bulgarian zamina glossed ‘I bear witness; it sailed’ and zaminal glossed ‘it is claimed to have sailed’. I have demonstrated elsewhere (Friedman 1977, 1982) that the difference is not due to the source of the information but rather to the speaker’s attitude toward the information itself (see also Fielder 1995, 1997; for a different view, see Chvany 1988). A single example from Macedonian will suffice:

No potoa se slučija raboti za koi ne znaev
‘But then things happened that I didn’t know about’

Although the sentence is in Macedonian, it is equally valid in Bulgarian, mutatis mutandis. The verb form slučija ‘happened’ is in the confirmative because the speaker (as it happens in this case, Richard Nixon) is convinced that the events happened despite the fact that his only evidence is a report.

7 The present stem of ‘have’ is k- while the aorist/participial stem is pat- (~pas-). The imperfect kish- was diachronically reduced to kēsh- in the admira-
tive. In Standard Albanian, the nonconfirmative is based on the short participle, but the opposition between the short participle and the long participle in -r- need not concern us here. Orthographic <ë> represents the Albanian schwa. The participle of the verb ‘be’ is qenë (cf. example (1) below).

8 In languages such as Macedonian and Turkish, the relationship of nonconfirmativity to the overall verbal system differs significantly from languages such as Albanian and Aromanian, since the former possess marked confirmatives, and nonconfirmativity has developed as a contextual variant meaning of the old perfect without, however, displacing the perfect functions (see Friedman 1988, 1994). These complications, however, are not of concern to the present endeavor.


10 In languages such as Bulgarian, Macedonian, Turkish, and Georgian (and Swedish) such expressions of surprise at newly discovered facts can sometimes use perfect or perfect-derived forms with apparent present admirative meaning, thus appearing to stand outside the temporal system in the same way that interjections can stand outside the phonological system. Although I have argued elsewhere (Friedman 1988) that such expressions must always refer to a pre-existing state and thus nonetheless have an expressive resultative meaning, still, the use of a perfect to refer to a newly discovered albeit pre-existing fact is not intuitively obvious. This is seen in the confusion suffered by English-speaking students encountering these usages for the first time. Moreover, in Albanian itself, the type of admirative usage found in the other languages permits a past as well as a present nonconfirmative, as can be seen in the following Albanian translations of a sentence that occurs twice in the Bulgarian novel Baj Ganjo (see Friedman 1994 for details):

Brex, hepten magare bil tozi čovek. (Bulgarian original)
Brex, epten magare bil toj čovek! (Macedonian translation)
Brej! gomar i madh paska genë [perfect] ky njeri!
(Albanian translation)
Ore, fare gomar paskēsh genë [pluperfect] ky njeri!
(Albanian translation)
‘What a complete ass that guy is!’

The difference between the Albanian paradigm and the admirative usages of the other languages cited above is demonstrated by the fact that the Albanian present nonconfirmative is a true present that can describe an event at the moment at which it actually occurs, whereas the other languages cannot use their perfects in this context. Thus, for example, upon seeing someone unexpectedly begin running, it is grammatically correct to shout in Albanian Vrapuaka! or even Po vrapuaka! (with the progressive marker po), whereas, e.g., the Macedonian old perfect begal or the Bulgarian bjagal would not be acceptable in such a context. (The same applies, mutatis mutandis, to the other languages mentioned above.)

11 To be sure, surprise is the result of a stimulus and thus enters into indexicality (CP 2.254–65, 2.274–302), and thus secondness (Parmentier 1994:17). As a linguistic expression it obviously embodies all the various relevant elements of the sign relation. But in terms of the trichotomy of person within language, surprise does not require the existence of another person in order to function as surprise. The speaker is sufficient.

12 While it is also possible for the refutation to be directed at a statement made by a third person, nonetheless the existence of an addressee is requisite for dubitative meaning while that of a third person is not.

13 The factor could even be the uncertain memory of the speaker, but whatever it is, it is conceived of as a Third.

14 These Aromanians came to Beala Di Suprā from Albania about a century ago. All are bilingual in Aromanian and Macedonian; earlier generations were also fluent in Albanian and Greek. At present, the village of Beala Di Suprā is not inhabited in the winter, during which time the villagers live in Ohrid or Struga. I discovered the Aromanian nonconfirmative in 1992 with the help of Marjan Markovik. We are indebted to his uncle, Tomislav Manovski / Toma Mani, as well as Vasilie Balukoski / Šilja Baljuk, Andon Labrovski / Ndona Ljabru, and Kosta Panovski / Koči Pani who so generously and hospitably shared their knowledge of their native language. See Friedman (1994) for additional details.

15 I am leaving to one side the question of simultaneous acquisition of more than one language in bilingual households. While there are cases where one must speak rather in terms of $L_1$ and $L_1'$, in general, contact situations are those with an identifiable $L_1$ and $L_2$. 
The debate over contact versus internal motivation in the rise of the confirmative / nonconfirmative opposition in Balkan Slavic and Albanian vis-à-vis Turkish rests primarily on the relative weight given to details of similarity and difference (Demiraj 1971, Friedman 1978, Y'lli 1989). The occurrence of similar semantic associations in native languages of North America, e.g. Takelma, where the quotative particle is also used to express admirativity (Sapir 1922:158–59, 200–1), suggests their universality, without, however, ruling out the possibility of contact-induced change in the Balkans and possibly the Caucasus.

See Sadock (1996) for a trenchant critique of some other approaches to the implications of language-specific data.

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Works Cited


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