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EDITED BY

MICHAEL S. FLIER
VJACHESLAV VSEV. IVANOV
JOS SCHAeken
DEAN S. WORTH
Boundaries and Borders in Balkan Slavic

Victor A. Friedman

In a series of articles, Henrik Birnbaum (1965, 1966a, 1968) discussed the question of South versus Balkan Slavic (this latter term introduced in Birnbaum 1966a, cf. Alexander 2006: 27), the position of the Torlak dialects of Serbian, and the position of areal linguistics within explanatory models (see also Birnbaum 1968). His delegation of language contact to secondary status as a basis for language classification (in opposition to genetic or typological factors; cf. Comrie 1981 vs Hamp 1977) finds echoes in some currents of modern Pidgin and Creole studies (e.g. Mufwene 2001, Pargman 2002), where the argument is made that the distinction between internal and external motivations of language change is both difficult to draw and not necessarily qualitatively different from language change as such. Nonetheless, Birnbaum’s (1966) agreement with Ivč (1963) concerning the Torlak dialects of Serbian as specifically Balkan vis-à-vis the rest of Serbian keeps Trubetzkoy’s (1923, 1928) classic distinction between genetic and areal change relevant, albeit in a secondary classificatory position. At the same time, Birnbaum (1966) agrees with Ivč (1963) that the Torlak dialects are basically Serbian, in contrast to Hamm (1965), who labels all the Balkan features of Torlak ‘Bulgarian’ from what he calls a “linguistic point of view” (but cf. Sobolev 1989, 1993, 1994, 1996). Part of the problem here is the equation of ‘Balkan’ with ‘Bulgarian’. The recent publication of a Bulgarian dialect atlas (Kočev 2001) that defines Bulgarian according to the boundaries given in Mladenov (1929), treating most (but not all) of Balkan Slavic as Bulgarian, can be viewed as a throwback to the beginning of the twentieth century, when linguistic boundaries were invoked in disputes about political boundaries. While in recent decades Bulgarian linguists have unrelentingly claimed Macedonian dialects as Bulgarian (a claim that the wording of the February 1999 agreement between Bulgaria and Macedonia leaves room for), Bulgarian claims on Serbian dialects have varied over time. Henrik was concerned with precision of terminology, as in Birnbaum (1966b), which treats the temporal delimitation of Proto-Slavic vs Common Slavic. The question of naming in Balkan Slavic dialectology is both spatio-temporal and influenced by extra-linguistic factors, and the essentialization of isoglosses in the invocation of “purely linguistic” criteria raises questions of linguistic methodology and politics. In this article I wish to turn to an issue that would have concerned
Henrik himself were he still with us to discuss it, namely the question of a western extent for Balkan Slavic and the seemingly endless debate concerning where to draw the line, as it were.

The position of Torlak has been the subject of debate almost since the dialect region was first described as such by Belić (1905). Belić’s northern and western boundaries for the Prizren-Timok dialect are roughly the same as those still recognized in South Slavic dialectology today, except that in the 1980s he steered at what was then the Serbian-Turkish border south of Podujevo and west of Medveđa, i.e., basically omitting the dialects of southern Kosovo. When Belić was writing, Serbian and Bulgarian were recognized as separate languages and, in their standard versions, were functioning as the vehicles of power in their respective nation-states. The territories of those nation states, however, were considerably smaller than they would later become during the course of the twentieth century, and even those borders that had been drawn were contested. Bulgaria continued (and to some extent continues) to smart under the diplomatic defeat (from a Bulgarian point of view) of the Treaty of Berlin, and both Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian linguists and politicians instrumentalized dialectology as a tool for making territorial claims. Thus, for Belić (cited in d’Estournelles de Constant 1914: 29), Serbian extended roughly to the rivers Iskūr and Struma in western Bulgaria, while for Mladenov (1929), the northern and western Bulgarian boundary began at the White Drin on the Albanian border then went to Prizren, then north of Strpče, south of Kačanik, north to Gnjilane, and south to Preševo, turning north to Žitni Potok, Prokuplje, Deligrad, then east to Boljevac, and along the Crna and Timok (but straight across the bend that dips south to Zaječar) to the Danube. Aside from competing claims between Bulgarian and Serbo-Croatian actors for hegemony over the Torlak dialects, there is also the debate within Serbo-Croatian circles over the relation of Torlak to other dialects of the former Serbo-Croatian. Rešetić (1907) already raised the issue of giving Torlak a separate status on the same order as Kajkavian vis-à-vis Štokavian and Čakavian, and while Ivić (1956) includes Torlak with Štokavian, Ivić (1958) does not, and Ivić (1963) assigns the Torlak dialects a special place (posebno mesto) within Štokavian.

1 Some dialects in the region were described or mentioned in earlier works — see Ivić (1985, 125–26) for bibliography — but Belić’s is the first comprehensive, seminal work. See Alexander (1975: 11–19, 2000: 29–38) for a critical survey up to that period. For additional details on the Torlak debate and a rich bibliography see Alexander (2000: 37, 65–116) as well as Filolohištės facultutė u Nišė et al (1994).

2 As recently as January 2003, I heard the quip “Bulgaria is the only nation that borders on itself” in a context that was only half-joking.

At issue here is a fundamental methodological question of diachronic and synchronic linguistics, namely the role attributed to language change in different times and in different parts of the grammar. As Birnbaum (1966a) has noted, the conflict over Torlak is the classic competition between the “tree” and “wave” models of linguistic differentiation, or, rather, between two temporally different waves. The older, which is already discernible in the oldest Slavic texts, is mainly phonological and morphological and differentiates West South Slavic and East South Slavic. The latter, which dates from the late medieval and early modern periods, is primarily morphosyntactic and distinguishes Balkan from Non-Balkan Slavic (cf. Alexander 1983). The situation of Torlak is, in this respect, comparable to the situation of Macedonian, and thus it is worth citing Vaillant’s description of that debate (the translation is mine):

The problem of Macedonian Slavic is that of its place within South Slavic and its relation with the two neighboring linguistic groups of Serbian and Bulgarian and its membership in one of these groups.... The question is hotly debated, which demonstrates that it is not obvious to everyone. Some bring up Bulgarian traits of Macedonian, others Serbian ones. They battle fiercely, brandishing the postposed article or the treatment of ĉ, delivering blows with jers or the nasal vowels; the battle is confused and unmethodical ... and it demonstrates that Macedonian furnishes arms to both camps. (1938: 196–97)

If one were to add in phrases such as ‘loss of tone/length distinctions’ and ‘analytic declension’, one could easily substitute ‘Torlak’ for ‘Macedonian’. The patterning of isoglosses runs through Torlak in a tighter bundle and then fans out through Macedonia (cf. Ivić 1958: 35–39), but of concern to us here is not just the distinction between dialect and language but also that between isogloss and territorial claim.

From its earliest mappings, the representations of Torlak have been influenced by politics. As noted above, when Belić drew his first map in 1905, those dialects that were spoken in what was still Turkey were not included. Mladenov’s (1929) definition of Bulgarian appears to follow the definite article isogloss across part of Kosovo and then switches to the isogloss for the elimination of vocalic length when it gets to the Serbian border (cf. Vukadinović 1996: 197–202). This methodology basically follows the border mapped by the treaty of San Stefano from the White Drin across Mt. Šar to Skopska Crna Gora, but, whereas the western San Stefano boundary included Vranja and Pirot but not Niš and Zaječar and ended at the confluence of the Timok and Danube (which is also the northwestern corner of the modern Bulgarian border), Mladenov’s boundary went north to Prokuplje and Deligrad then ran northeast through
Boljevac and north of Zaječar before following the Timok. Some modern versions run even further north, encountering the Danube across from Turnu Severin in Romania (e.g., Velev 1998).

The treatment of Torlak in Ivč (1956, 1958, 1985) rests in large part on Belić’s (1905) pioneering work, but with some modifications based on later data and analyses. The basic northern and western isogloss for Ivč is determined by the absence of prosodic length (and tone) leaving only stress as a distinctive prosodic feature. This boundary begins on the Albanian border just south of Dečani and goes to Obilić at the confluence of the Lab and Sitnica, then follows the Lab northeast then turns east to the south of Podujevo, north to Stalač (west of Prokuplje) then east across Mount Rtnj, south of the Crna and continues to the Bulgarian border south of Zaječar. Between Ivč (1956) and Ivč (1985), however, two changes in the demarcation of the southern and eastern Torlak boundaries can be observed. In Ivč (1956) the southern and eastern boundary follows the Macedonian-Kosovo-Bulgarian political border, omitting the Dimitrovgrad (Caribrod) and Bosilegrad (Bosilgrad) districts but including the region in Serbia east of Trn (Trn) between the Vlasina River and the Bulgarian border. Thus, the Gora district in the southwestern corner of Kosovo (from Dragaši southward) is included as part of Torlak, as is a smaller space on the Bulgarian border between the Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad districts, which latter are ethnically and therefore linguistically identified as Bulgarian (but transitional to Serbian). In Ivč (1985), however, the southern and eastern boundary begins at the Albanian border north of Gora then follows the Macedonian northern political border to the Bosilegrad district, then north to the Bulgarian-Serbian political border north of Dimitrovgrad without including the area of territory east of the Vlasina. Here, Gora, like the Gostivar region (Upper Polog) is left blank, i.e., identified as Macedonian, and the Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad districts are connected by a thin strip of territory that includes part of the Crna Trava district, west of Trn. It is worth noting that the Dimitrovgrad and Bosilegrad districts as well as Belogradčik and Breznik in Bulgaria are defined by Ivč (1956, 1985) as Transitional Bulgarian dialects, and the Macedonian dialects between the northern state border at Mt. Sar and a line running south of Tetovo through Skopje, south of Sveti Nikole

5San Stefano Bulgaria also included Kačanik, which is in Kosovo. In the map appended to the 1979 Bulgarian translation of Mladenov (1929), Kačanik is excluded, but then the boundary jogs north to Gužljane and south of Preševo before heading north to Žiti Potok.

6See Alexander (1975 and 1993) for details of subclassification based on prosody.

7See especially Remetić (1996) on problems of phonological representation of some Torlak data.

In the case of the change of status of Gora, a number of isoglosses justified its assignment to Macedonian: A three-way opposition in a postposed indefinite article (Vidinoki 1986, pace Alexander 2000: 19–20), fixed antepenultimate stress (pace Alexander 2000: 23), and schwa as the reflex of the back nasal. Of these three, fixed antepenultimate stress is also found in Srečča Župa, just to the east of Gora and south of Štip, but this remains assigned to Serbian as it lacks the postposed article, and back nasal consistently gives /i/ in roots (Pavlović 1939: 41).

Turning now to Kočev (1988: 15) and Kočev (2001: 55), we see differences that resemble changes in Serbian dialectology, but from the other direction. Thus, the northern border of Bulgarian in Kočev (1988) follows the northern border of the Republic of Macedonia to Skopje Crna Gora, then northeast between Bela Palanka and Pirot to Midžor on the Bulgarian border, while the boundary in Kočev (2001) begins at the Albanian border north of Gora to the political border between Macedonia and Kosovo, then (apparently) along the border between Serbia and Kosovo, north to Stalač and straight across Rtnj and the Crna and Timok rivers to the Danube, i.e., Mladenov’s inclusion of Gužljane is omitted. With respect to the Torlak dialects, Kočev (1988) resembles Ivč (1985), although from just south of Pirot, Kočev’s Bulgarian extends beyond the river Vlasina but not as far as the Morava, i.e., the Lužnica and Zaplje sub-groups (south of Pirot and east of the Southern Morava) are included, but not Timok and Svrljig (north of Pirot and east of the Southern Morava). Kočev (2001) however, includes all of the Timok-Lužnica and Svrljig-Zaplje dialects, as well as the South Morava dialects of Serbia, but not of Kosovo. As in Mladenov (1929), the boundary also appears to follow the course of the Crna to the Timok to the Danube without making the dip to exclude Boljevac and Zaječar, but the topography is too simplified and unmarked to be certain.

When we look at the linguistic features on which these divisions are supposed to be based, we find that there is a confusion on Kočev’s part between areal and typological features. Kočev (2001: 55) gives a list of ten “oblič tipologišni osobenosti na burlgarske govor 12 tekine istorijski granici” “common typological features of the Bulgarian dialects in their historical bor-
ders'. Of these ten features, numbers 3–10 correspond to those listed in Kočev (1988: 15), except that 'multiple forms for past and future tenses' is formulated in terms of preservation of the imperfect and aorist.

1. expiratory stress accent and absence of pitch
2. absence of vocalic quantity
3. analytical nominal system (substantive and adjective)
4. definite article
5. object reduplication
6. analytic comparison of nouns, verbs, and adverbs
7. analytic infinitive with da-clause
8. multiple forms for past and future tenses
9. analytic future using a particle
10. presence of the reported mood in the verb

Aside from the fact that it is unclear what 'historical borders' refers to, since the boundaries given in the 2001 atlas do not correspond exactly to any actual period in Bulgarian history, the labeling of the features as 'typological' fails to grasp the difference between shared phonological and morpho-syntactic innovations and resemblances owing to universal tendencies. There is also the problem that the boundaries set by the atlas do not correspond exactly to any of these features: Most of them go beyond these borders, while some do not exceed them. Nor is there any explanation for why the 1988 and 2001 boundaries differ.

Although Ivč (1985: 123) makes the point that if only structural characteristics (here, areal features) were taken into account in language classification, then Macedonian and Bulgarian would be treated as genetically closer to Arumanian and Romanian than to the rest of Slavic, if one thinks in terms of shared innovations, it is not unfair to distinguish an older — mostly phonological and morphological — layer from a later, mostly morpho-syntactic one. An important point is that Macedonian, Bulgarian, and the Torlak dialects of Serbian are structurally closer to Romanian and Arumanian than to the rest of Slavic owing to specific historical developments, but this does not prevent the genetic classification as Slavic languages. As noted above, within South Slavic genetic classification we can distinguish West and East as well as the areal notions of Balkan and Balkan, and these two pairs are distinguished by historical levels of causality. The West/East split is based on strictly internal, older phonological and morphological innovations while the non-Balkan/Balkan split is based on later, mostly morpho-syntactic, innovations. Ivč (1956, 1985: 110–113) gives a mixed list in his definition of the Prizren-Timok region:

1. preservation of /h/ as a reflex of vocalic *t to a greater or lesser extent (greater in the east, lesser in the west)
2. loss of length, no tone, free stress
3. simplified declension
4. analytic comparative
5. loss of infinitive [use of da clauses]
6. doubled oblique pronouns
7. schwa from both jers
8. loss of /r/
9. phonemic /dz/
10. use of the aorist and imperfect
11. dative as possessive
12. large numbers of Turkisms

The features as formulated for Ivč's list come much closer to corresponding to the boundaries he describes.

The West/East split detailed in Ivč (1958: 35–39) can be partially summarized in the table on the following page. These features tend to bunch up along the Serbo-Bulgarian border — most of them actually on Bulgarian state territory (see Sobolev 1993: 229) — and then fan out as they move south into Macedonia. An example of the arbitrariness (from a "strictly linguistic" point of view) of nationality assignment is seen in the reflexes of vocalic /h/ and /h/, for which the only two dialects along the Serbo-Bulgarian border that pattern alike are Bosilegrad, which is Bulgarian-identified, and Lužnica, which is Serbian-identified (Sobolev 1993: 93).

In discussing the language/dialect distinction, Chambers and Trudgill (1998: 23) do not mince words: "Bulgarian politicians [and linguists — VAF] often argue that Macedonian is simply a dialect of Bulgarian — which is really a way of saying, of course, that they feel Macedonia ought to be part of Bulgaria." And, we can add, the same applies at times to Torlak Serbian. This is explicit in Kočev (2001: 33–34), which describes the atlas as "a fundamental project of national relevance" for providing "authentic evidence of the unity of the Bulgarian language continuum." An example of how such an orientation affects the presentation of dialectal facts is to be seen in map 4 (p. 62) of that atlas, which is supposed to give reflexes of Common Slavic initial *vâfbuzâ*: The development to /v/ rather than /v+/vowel, which is typical of Serbian, and also found in northern Macedonia and western Bulgaria, is not specified at all but given a color labeled "drugo javlenje" 'different phenomenon'; apparently this i

Ivč (1956, 1958, 1985) give more features than are listed here, but these will suffice for our purposes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>West</th>
<th>East</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>merged reflexes of front and back jer</td>
<td>loss of epenthetic /y/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rounded reflex of back nasal</td>
<td>/l/ becomes velar/clear before back/front vowels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v-jer &gt; u</td>
<td>hardening of /l/ before /l/ and /e/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monophonemic reflexes of *ij/*idj</td>
<td>development of /l/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>čr-</em> &gt; cr-</td>
<td>final devoicing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of /l/</td>
<td>postponed definite article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>čiš- &gt; sv-</td>
<td>loss of fem. acc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generalization of soft fem. pl.</td>
<td>generalization of hard fem. pl.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masc./neut. gen.-acc. -ga</td>
<td>loss of gender in pl. adj.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem. dat. pronouns joj, ju</td>
<td>fem. dat. i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of final sibilant in 1 sg. nom. personal pronoun</td>
<td>1 pl. nom. personal pronoun n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>generalization of 1 sg. pres. -m</td>
<td>extension of -x- to 2 pl. aorist/imperfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of 3 pl. pres. -t</td>
<td>generalization of 3 pl. imperfect -x- to the aorist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 pl. pres. -mo</td>
<td>loss of deictics in ov-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ot &gt; od 'from'</td>
<td>derived imperfective present loses -je</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'when' loses -g-</td>
<td>'when' loses -d-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

because giving the reflex is contrary to the project of demonstrating 'unity.' Chambers and Trudgill (1998: 9-12), using, among other examples, events in the history of Swedish and Danish, make a distinction between autonomous and heteronomous dialects in relation to standard languages. Prior to 1658, the territory of what is now southernmost Sweden was part of Denmark, and the Scandinavian dialects there were classed as Danish. After the territory became part of Sweden in 1658, however, the dialects were classed as Swedish, which is how they are considered to this day. The dialects themselves have not changed, but the standard languages to which they became heteronomous did. The situation of Bosilegrad and Dimitrovgrad is quite similar. These two districts were awarded to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes by the Treaty of

*The term 'Serbian' is used here to mean 'West South Slavic dialects of Serbia whose speakers do not identify as Bulgarian.' In recent years, however, as the successor states of former Yugoslavia have consolidated, the Torlak dialects — defined in Ivč 1985) using a combination of actual isoglosses and the recognition of identity politics — can still be viewed as genetically Serbian and areally Balkan.*
References


Golden Marketing, 2003), where the boundaries of Torlak itself, however, remain the same as those of Ivić (1985).


Department of Slavic Languages
University of Chicago
1130 E 59th St
Chicago, IL 60637 USA
vfriedm@uchicago.edu