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TURKISH INFINITIVES IN BALKAN ROMAN: FROM CODESWITCHING TO PARADIGM SHIFT

The replacement of infinitives by subjunctive clauses – which latter are analytic in all cases except West Rumelian Balkan Turkish, where the optative is used – is one of the hallmarks of the Balkan linguistic league, and among the first phenomena to be observed as such (Kopitar 1829). To be sure, as seen clearly in Joséph (1983), there is a continuum of infinitive replacement such that various Balkan languages or dialects have varying manifestations of older or newer infinitival or infinitive-like constructions. We can note here in passing that even the Balkan dialects of Judezmo and Armenian are characterized by a higher degree of infinitive replacement vis-à-vis the non-Balkan dialects of these languages (Friedman 2006, Adamović 2008). In the case of Romani, which, like Judezmo, Sandfeld (1930) excluded from Balkan linguistic study – although in recent decades their place in Balkan linguistics, especially that of Romani, has been firmly established (Friedman 2006) – the use of finite subjunctive clauses (and related constructions) with the subordinating particle te corresponds to Balkan Slavic da, Greek na, Albanian ëtë, and Balkan Romance s-.1 Unlike the Romani future marker ka[m], which particle corresponds exactly to the volo-derived future marking particles of the other Balkan languages, and which is limited to the Romani dialects of the Balkans (Boretzky 2004), Romani te-constructions are characteristic of almost all Romani dialects wherever they are spoken. It can thus be argued that while the dialectal distribution of the Balkan future in Romani is a defining characteristic of the linguistic Balkans, the te-subjunctive is a defining Balkan characteristic in Romani. It is thus significant that, as Boretzky (1996), Matras (2002), and Ellis (2007) have shown, new infinitival constructions have developed in some (mostly Central) Romani dialects outside the Balkans in contact with Hungarian, German, or Slavic. Of particular significance here is that such constructions either involve the generalization of a third person form to all persons (in subordination to te), or, in the case of the wholesale borrowing of a Hungarian infinitive into the Rumungro dialect, the elimination of te. In this contribution I shall
document another instance of a “new” infinitive in Romani, but one that occurs in the Balkans, in contact with Turkish. The most important feature of the Turkish infinitive in Romani is that in at least some instances it is more closely integrated into the relevant dialect than the Hungarian infinitive in Rumungró. As such, the Turkish infinitive represents a more highly integrated categorial borrowing.

Among the dialects of Romani spoken in the Balkans, there are groups that conjugate Turkish verbs using Turkish inflections. The practice itself is consistent with what I have called code compartmentalization in Romani, a phenomenon by means of which native – or perceived native – elements are segregated from foreign ones by means of separate grammatical treatment (Friedman 2009). In the case of some Romani dialects, Turkish conjugations are limited to the two basic tenses that characterize the Romani system: present and preterite, e.g. jazārum ‘I write’, jazām ‘I wrote’ (cf. native kēer ‘I do’, kērdem ‘I did’ in the dialect of Agia Varvara (1999). In other dialects, however, Turkish optatives (as well as other forms that do not concern us here) are also employed. In the case of Turkish optatives, most dialects employ them in subordination to te as in example (1). It is worth noting that such patterns occur in representatives of all three Romani dialect groups of the Balkans (North Balkan, South Balkan, and South Vlax), although the phenomenon is attested mainly in eastern Bulgaria and in Greece (but also in Crimea and, marginally, in Kosovo and Turkey).³

1) Ov avijas me khereste te konulsun mansa. (Slovene 440)
‘He came to my house to speak with me.’

In the Kaspichan Xoraxane, Shumen Xoraxane, and Varna Gadžikano Romani dialects, however, (all of them North Balkan dialects of northeastern Bulgaria) the optative occurs without te, in the first two facultatively and in the last regularly, as in examples (2)-(6):

2) Mi phen baılada te baarson kana tharde amare kera. (Kaspichan Xoraxane 759)
‘My sister began to scream when they burned down our house.’

3) Arachi jom me grastes i gijom ajdajom les. (Kaspichan Xoraxane 1000)
‘Yesterday I took my horse and went to ride it.’

4) Oj iriirijeri o mantuten te pinski an rejaste. (Shumen Xoraxane 878)
‘She pushed people [out of the way] to get on the bus.’

5) O mangela tanaisan o ekesa kaaka. (Shumen Xoraxane 749)
‘He wants to meet someone.’

6) O dad vakerla čevirsin o grastes. (Varna Gadžikano 799)
‘His father told him to return the horse.’

In all of these examples, the word order is Romani and the Turkish optitive is neither preceded nor followed by a Turkish words. This is thus the same sort of code compartmentalization as in the more limited system of Agia Varvara noted above, albeit with more complex morphology. (All Romani dialects with Turkish optatives also have Turkish presents and pasts.)

Examples (7)-(9) from the three abovementioned dialects all contain actual Turkish infinitives, a feature which is correlated with the omission of te when optatives are used. When infinitives occur in these dialects, however, they are usually preceded by another Turkish verb form (and, in the case of (9), using Turkish-influenced word order), which raises the question of whether or not these occurrences of Turkish infinitives are merely code-switches, since speakers of these dialects also know Turkish (which is not, however, the case for all Romani dialects with Turkish conjugations):

7) O phure manusha soviil erannattarm sar sietste terne.
‘The old folks like to talk about their youth.’ (Varna Gadžikano 8564)

8a) Me pheja baılada baarimma kana tharde amare kera. (Shumen Xoraxane 759)

8b) Mi phen baılada bairma kana tharde amaro kher. (Varna Gadžikano 759)
‘My sister began to scream when they burned down our house.’

9) Odva džanma tin dildžake komuinsan. (Kaspichan Xoraxane 863)
‘He knows [how] to speak three languages.’

Example (10), however, is crucial in arguing that, at least in the Shumen Xoraxane dialect, at issue is integration of the infinitive into the Romani compartment of the Romani conjunctive system rather than an actual codeswitch per se.

10) Rači lijom o grastes gijom te ajdamaa (Shumen Xoraxane 1000)
‘Yesterday I took my horse [and] went to ride!’

Here, the infinitive is – unlike the borrowed Hungarian infinitives of Rumungró – subordinated to te and is, moreover, the only Turkish word in the sentence. Furthermore, the word order is Romani, not Turkish, which would normally have the finite verb at the end. It can thus be argued that in at least some cases, Turkish infinitives can occur in Romani as part of the Turkish conjugation of verbs borrowed into Romani rather than being switches from Romani into Turkish (keeping in mind that the phenomenon of Turkish conjugation in Romani is a whole is not dependent on current knowledge of Turkish).

We thus have, at least in the Shumen Xoraxane Romani dialect, an example that indicates the entry of contact-induced infinitives outside the central European area where they are usually found and, moreover, in the Balkans where infinitives historically tended to be replaced by finite constructions. The fact that the dialect or dialects in question are in contact with East Rumelian Turkish, which, like standard Turkish, has a robust infinitive, is clearly a factor. Nonetheless, given the fact that
these Romani dialects are also in intense contact with Bulgarian, it is possible to speculate that the entry of the Turkish infinitive is part of an emblematic identity process, not unlike the significance assigned to the infinitive in recent processes of the differentiation of Croatian from Serbian. The question of infinitivophilia in the case of recent Croatian versus infinitivectomy in recent Serbian, however, takes us beyond the modest scope of the present article and will form part of a larger study.

NOTES

1 I use e- for Balkan Romance since the vowel varies among Romanian, Aromanian, and Megleno-Romanian. Although Matras (2002) argues that the process could have begun during the period of proto-Romani contact with Iranian.

2 In dialects with only present and präteritum Turkish conjugations, the other two basic Romani tenses — imperfect and pluperfect — are formed by suffixing the native marker -mr to the conjugated present or preterit, respectively.

3 All Romani sentences are from Matras, Elšik (2001-2005), although I have adapted the orthography. The names of the dialects are those used there (see Frédéman 2009 for discussion), and the numbers refer to the identifying numbers in the database. Turkish words are given in boldface, recent loans from other languages are in italics.

REFERENCES


