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The Age of the Albanian Admimative:
A Problem in Historical Semantics

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Albanian gives us precious evidence for the reconstruction of Indo-European (see now especially Hamp 2007). At the same time, the lateness of uncontested attestation (fifteenth-sixteenth centuries) leaves a host of questions unanswered. Here I shall turn to a problem that resides at the cusp of Albanian attestation—the age and origin of the admimative mood, which in modern Albanian is a marked nonconfirmative used for expressing surprise, doubt, sarcasm, inference, and explicitly noncomittal reporting. The modern Albanian admimative occurs in four tenses: present, perfect, imperfect, and pluperfect. The first two have their origins in the inverted active perfect and pluperfect (present/imperfect ‘have’ + participle > short participle + present/imperfect ‘have’ [reduced in the imperfect]) and the latter two use the present/imperfect admimative of the auxiliary ‘have’ (active) or ‘be’ (mediopassive) plus the participle.¹

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Table 1: Albanian 1 sg. ‘have’ Nonadmimative and Admimative

While the shape of the Albanian set of admimative paradigms is already approximately modern in the earliest documents, its usages in those texts differ significantly enough from current usages that its semantic development constitutes an historical problem. In his discussion of the age of the admimative, Demiraj (1971) argues convincingly that the admimative paradigms developed from an inverted perfect and not, as Jokl had suggested, from an inverted future, and he even uses two admimatives in part of the argument:

¹Secondary formations using the perfect and pluperfect as auxiliaries also exist. These are given in Table 1 for the sake of completeness, but do not concern us here. See Friedmann 1981 and Friedmann 2005 for further discussion. The modern 1 sg. admimative of ‘have’ is given here as an illustration.

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Po të pranonomisqë shqipja paska pasur dëkur një të ardhme të tipit genë kus, gjurmët e së ciles paskan mbetur vetëm tek format e habitore së tashme, atëherë ky tip së ardhmes duhet të jetë zdhuruar ne një kohe relativisht shumë të vjetër, shume shokët para sëkundit të shqipjes.

"If we accept that Albanian has [supposedly] had at some time a future of the type genë kus ‘been I have’ the traces of which [supposedly] have remained only in the forms of the present affirmative, such a future must have disappeared at a relatively very old period, many centuries before the writing of Albanian.

He also notes that such a future would have become confused with a true inverted perfect, which is attested in both older and modern documents.

An argument that has been used in favor of the relative antiquity of the affirmative is that, unlike, for example, the future using invariant do (‘want/will’), the affirmative is shared by all contiguous Gegg and Tosk dialects. At issue, then, is not the form of the affirmative, which in principle could have preceded the Gegg/Tosk split, but rather the timing of the development of its semantics. On the basis of the oldest Albanian texts (Buzuku, Bogdani, and Bada), Demiraj (1971:47) argues that the affirmative in its entirety predates the Turkish conquest. Here I wish to argue, contrary to Demiraj’s view, that the semantic evidence in the oldest text actually favors the Ottoman period as the time when the Albanian affirmative consolidated the meanings that we find in the standard language today, and, moreover, the path of the development of those meanings does bear the marks of Turkish influence, although in certain respects the development is entirely specific to Albanian itself. Thus, while I agree with Demiraj when he states that there are important differences between the Turkish njej past and the Albanian affirmative, I shall argue here that those differences do not preclude the Ottoman period and Turkish influence as responsible for the current state of affairs, and, moreover, the timing and distribution argue strongly for such influence. As we shall see later, the Albanian dialectological evidence from Gegëtori, Ukraine, and FOPOG also support this conclusion.

The oldest extended Albanian text we have is the 1555 Matirë ‘Missal’ of Gjon Buzuku (critical edition Çebëj 1968). The next oldest extant Albanian author, Pjetër Budi, was born eleven years after the date of the Matirë, and the third oldest author, Pjetër Bogdani, dates from the seventeenth century. All were from northern Geg speaking regions in what was then the Ottoman Empire. Although Demiraj (1971) bases his arguments on all three authors, here I shall examine only the Matirë, which, as a text that is older than subsequent texts by a generation or more, is the best indicator we have of sixteenth-century Albanian usage. Demiraj (1971:41-1) has identified all of the adjectives in the Matirë, and the types alone give us reason for pause. Of 28 occurrences, only three are indicative. The remainder are all conditional, a context in which the affirmative almost never occurs today, but did occur in Arvanitaka (Liotis forthc.). Of these modal forms, 15 are subordinated to the modal (subjunctive) marker t ë and 10 occur in modal constructions subordinated to në in the meaning ‘if’.

Examples (1)-(6) are illustrative of typical ‘admirative’ usage in Buzuku. In each case (as well as in subsequent examples), I have supplied three modern Albanian Gospel translations. The first, by Kristofordi (1872), a native of Elbasan, is in Geg, the second, by Kyriias and Sinas (1930), published in Konça, is in Tosk, and the third, by Filipaj (1980), published in Kosovo, is in the modern Toks-based unified Albanian standard. The English is my own wording. The examples from Buzuku were all published in Demiraj 1971:41-1, which I follow here, but I have checked them against Çebëj’s edition. I have not supplied interlinear translations, but I have boldfaced Buzuku’s affirmative forms along with relevant modal and negative markers and their correspondences in the other works. Of the 25 modal adverbs in Buzuku, 24 have mësht e mënaundës the form of the modern imperfect admirative, i.e. synthetic participle + (reduced) imperfect of ‘have’, and one, given here as (6), is a mediopassive pluperfect admirative, i.e. the imperfect admirative of ’be’ plus participle. None of the translations use adjectives, and, moreover, they variously use the imperfectly, the imperfect anterior future, and the imperfect future future, where Buzuku has what is formally a modal imperfect admirative. The specifics of the correspondences in the various translations need not concern us here. The point is simply to show the variety of modern correspondences to Buzuku’s usage, none of which is admirative.

(1) E ky në mos ish një Sinëzor, nukë të mujtëke me bëm as përdorje kafshë (Buzuku LVII)
Nëd mos isë këpri Perendie nuke mëndëj me bëa asjë. (Kristofordi)
Nëd mos ishte ky nga Perëndë, nukë dotë muntë të bënte asjë. (Kyriias & Sinas)
Po të mos ishte ky njeri prej Hjyt, s’do të mund të bënte asjë. (Filipaj)
"If this man were not from God, he would not be able to do anything."
(John 9:35)

(2) Zot, ti në ishnujë kënu, em vëlë të mos vëzkënujë (Buzuku LXXXIX)
Zot, ndë kënujë kënu jetë em-vëlë s’këtu me ndëkënujë (Kristofordi)
Zot, t’isnujë kënu im vëlë nukë dotë ndësire (Kyriias & Sinas)
Zotën, të këshe qëngi të kënu, im vëlë nuk dotë kështë vëzkënujë (Filipaj)
"Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died." (John 11:22)
(3) Ju ne klenikshhte te shkullit, shkullit tu dashke porsi te vetë (Buzuku LXXXII)
Nde jëna prei bërës, bota dotte donte te vëtine (Kristiforidi)
Te ishitë prej botës, bota dotte donte të sajë; (Kyrias & Sinas)
Po te ishit te botës, bota do t’i donte te vetë (Filipaj)
‘If you were of the world, the world would love its own’ (John 15:19)

(4) e ju ne njihnete muo, Atënë tem ë të njohkshhte (Buzuku LIX)
Nde me dërite mue, kënte me ditun’ e’te e’tem Ate (Kristiforidi)
po te me dinitë mu, dotë dinitë edhe t’im Ate (Kyrias & Sinas)
Po te me njihshet mu, do ta njihshet edhe Atin tim! (Filipaj)
‘If you knew me you would also know my Father’ (John 8:19)

(5) Në njohkshhte muo, Atënë tem për të vërretë të njohkshhte (Buzuku LXXXV)
Nde kënte ngafofe mue, dotë kënte ngafof’ e’te e’tem Ate (Kristiforidi)
Ndë qoftë se më njihnete mu, dotë njihnete edhe t’im Ate (Kyrias & Sinas)
Nëse më njohët mu, do ta njihni edhe Atin tim! (Filipaj)
‘If you knew/had known me, you would also have known my Father’ (John 14:7)

(6) ma mirë të klenk të të mos klenk këlnë. (Buzuku LXVI)
že mirë për atë njerë, mos me pësme fem (Kristiforidi)
ishte mirë për atë njëri të mos kishët lindurë (Kyrias & Sinas)
Më mirë do të kishë që në të të mos kishët lindur aspët! (Filipaj)
‘It would be better for that [one/man] if he had not been born.’ (Matthew 26:24)

Aside from the fact that not one of Buzuku’s modal adjectives correlates to an adjective in modern Albanian, there are other factors suggesting that Buzuku’s usage differs substantially from the modern adjective. First, not one of these examples involves a present or perfect, and only a single example is analytic. In modern Albanian the present occurs far more frequently than the other adjectives, and the perfect is much more frequent than the imperfect or pluperfect (Demiraj 1975:33).

Second, as noted above, 95% of Buzuku’s adjectives are modal, but in modern Albanian modal adjectives are extremely rare in both the written and spoken language, and, according to Demiraj (1975:281), they are basically synonymous with their non-modal equivalents. Buchholz and Fiedler (1987:58) observe that they are limited to a few authors such as Naim Frasheri and Jak Xoxa, who are the sources for (7)–(9), which illustrate the types of contexts, all of them counterfactual, like the examples in Buzuku:

(7) ... ca re të vogla, të zeza pis, sikur të qenëshin tym prej dynamit
‘... a few small clouds, pitch black, as if they actually were dynamite smoke’ (J. Xoxa, cited in Demiraj 1976:182 and Newmark 1982:86)

(8) Sikur e gjiqta të mos paskshë nxjerrë kokën nga gjerja e të mos e paskshë thirrur, kushtedi sa gjatë do të kishë nisetur ashtu, më këmbë në mes të shiur, që ishte shtruar mbi fushë

(9) Të paskshë vrap’ e venët, të kishuajt krahë pëlumbi (N. Frashëri, cited in Demiraj 1971:39 and Buchholz and Fiedler 1987:160)
‘If I had the speed of the north wind, if I had the wings of a dove...’

Of these three modern modal adjectives, (9) is closest to the Arvanitika type cited by Liosis (forthcoming), to be discussed below.

Let us now turn to Buzuku’s three indicative examples. In formal terms, there is one present adhesive, one imperfect, and one perfect. The first example comes from the feast at Cana, where Jesus turns water into wine. The matter of the feast, having tasted the miraculous wine, calls the bridegroom over and says to him: “Every man brings out the good wine first, and when people are drunk he brings out the inferior wine:

(10) e ti ruojtëkë venënë e mirë djerie tash. (Buzuku XXXVIII)
por ti kë ruikutë venënë e mirë ku tashë (Kristiforidi)
po ti ke ruikutë verënë e mirë gjer ndashë. (Kyrias & Sinas)
Të e pask ruikut vertë e mirë deri tani! (Filipaj)
‘but you have kept the good wine until now.’ (John 2:10)

Demiraj argues that Buzuku’s adhesive could be interpreted as having a present meaning, but, aside from the fact that both Latin (suumant) and Greek (τερσανας), as well as Kristiforidi and also Kyrias and Sinas all have perfects, the most telling evidence is Filipaj’s translation. Filipaj had access to Buzuku, and it would appear that here he was influenced by Buzuku’s language in choosing an adhesive. If the “present” adhesive had already shifted to a true present meaning, we would expect Filipaj to have preserved it. The fact that he uses a perfect adhesive indicates that Buzuku’s ruojtëkë was still a marked perfect, albeit one that shows evidence of modern adhesive meaning of surprise from direct observation.

In the one indicative imperfect adhesive, Mary Magdalene goes to Jesus’ tomb and finds the stone removed (and the body gone) and goes running to the disciples and says:

(11) Marrëkishtë Tenëzonë s vorit ... (Buzuku LXVI/2)
Ngritë Zoting prei vori ... (Kristiforidi)
E ngritë Zoinë nga varri ... (Kyrias & Sinas)
E kanë marrë Zotërinë prej varrit ... (Filipaj)
‘They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb [and we don’t know where they have laid him]’ (John 20:23)

Here the Latin is perfect (tulrunt) and the Greek is aorist (σωσ). Kristiforidi and Kyrias and Sinas follow the Greek and Filipaj the Latin. The sense of surprise at a discovery is certainly present, but an imperfect is clearly not called for. Demiraj interprets
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it as an expressive, inverted pluperfect. Here I would agree and go one step further: the use of an inverted pluperfect with perfect meaning parallels the eventual use of the inverted perfect with true present meaning. What we see here, then, is a glimpse of the semantic processes that led to the eventual development of the Albanian admisive as we know it today. This type of usage survives in the fact that if the utterance expresses surprise at a state of affairs that existed prior to the speaker’s discovering it, modern Albanian permits any of the four admisive paradigms. It is precisely and only in such contexts that the Albanian admisive corresponds to admisive usage in Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Turkish (see Friedman 1991/1993 for discussion), a problem to which we shall return.

Our final example is the most problematic of all, and also gives possible insight into Buzuku’s sources. Here, Mary Megalakone aoaioe Jesus’ feet with expensive ointment, and Judas asks why the ointment is not sold and the money given to the poor, and Jesus replies:

(12) Lee atē na ditet se vorit tim ajo kēta pasaka ruojuñën. (Buzuku I.VI)
Len-e: se e ruoiui per diten’ e se voriteme s’eme. (Kristofordi)
Lēr-c: se e ruoju pēr diten’ e tē-kallurit’-tim nēd varrt. (Kyrrias & Sinas)
Lēr-e Le ta bejë kēe pēr diten e varrtim tim! (Filipaj)
‘Leave her alone! Let her keep it! She has kept it for [the day of] my burial.’
(John 12:7)

Here, as Çavej (1963/1, 38) correctly notes, the Latin (Vulgate) has a subjunctive (\(\text{..}\) subget) but the Serbian and Italian are both past (je...dobra/la and ho serbato, respectively). Çavej also cites the Greek εδοκοννες, an admisive that is used in the Greek Orthodox version. The Received version has a perfect (προφθονιον) whereas revised editions follow variant readings with the admisive subjunctive (τιμησοντες). Given that the overwhelming majority of admisives in Buzuku are modal, we might suggest that the meaning here is subjunctive rather than perfect, although the lack of a modal marker argues against this interpretation. It might be, then, that this is a true perfect admisive, but even if it is, its isolated nature indicates that the shift from ontological to personal counterfactual—i.e. nonconfirmative (since surprise implies the existence of a counterfactual expectation, sarcasm is a genuine personal counterfactual, and both inference and report allow for the possibility that the statement might not be factual)—has only just begun.

Turning to the dialectal situation, the evidence supplied by the dialects of Mandraca (in Bulgaria, near the Greek-Turkish border; Sokolova 1963:149-5) and Ukraine (Voronina 1996:99) shows that at the time these dialects separated from the main body of northern Tosk—probably in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, but in any case well after the Ottoman conquest—the formal present admisive had not yet shifted to its current present meaning. Moreover, only synthetic admisives occur in these dialects. In Ukraine, the non-inverted perfect is very rare, and even occurs without the auxiliary, presumably under the influence of Russian. In both di-

alects, the admisive and imperfect are normally used for past events, and the form corresponding to the standard Albanian present admisive is a nonconfirmative past like the Bulgarian and Macedonian past in -l and the Turkish in -miş. It is the normal tense for narrating fairy tales, and it is also used in historical narratives about the distant past as in example (13). By contrast, the admisive and imperfect are the normal tenses for confirmative narratives.

(13) Ato rojtian ni Albaniet. Turku i mendojia shumë maleritë, cqua dhe gra i përciamitë. Ato gandej ikëkën. Vatsian ni Serbiat. Se rojtian ni Serbijat
Juni i shi thuheit Devna. Ga Bulgaria ato dalkan dhe rakan ni Moldavian.
‘They lived (adm.) in Albania. The Turk oppressed (adm.) the mountain folk a lot, he dishonored (adm.) girls and women. They left (aor.) from there. They went (aor.) to Serbia. How long they lived (adm.). I don’t know. From Serbia they came (adm.) to Bulgaria. In Bulgaria they lived (adm.) in Devna. Our village is called (pres.) Devna. From Bulgaria they went out (adm.) and came (adm.) to Moldavia. I don’t know (pres.) what year. Russia took (aor.) Moldavia. And from Moldavia in 1860 we arrived (aor.) in Tavricheskeja Province.’

Demiraj’s (1971:37) speculation that the formal admisive existed in Arbërësh/ Arvanitika on the basis of Rheinhold (1934-77) has been borne out by Liosio (forthcoming). Similar to the situation in Buzuku, all of the nineteenth-century forms from Hydra cited by Liosio, as well as those in Rheinhold 1934 cited by both Demiraj and Liosio, are imperfect subjunctive admisives. While Rheinhold’s examples do seem to be exclamations of surprise, however, Liosio’s examples all occur in the protasis of irrealis conditionals. Although Liosio argues that this counterfactuality emerged from the admisive meaning, I would argue that the evidence in Buzuku suggests that at the time Arvanitika separated from the rest of Tosk, expressive ontological counterfactuality was expressed by an inverted imperfect, as in Buzuku, whereas the assignment of nonconfirmative meaning took place later, hence its absence in Arvanitika.3 With regard to the use of the admisive in Gegëri, Demiraj cites Cordignano’s (1931:85) claim that in some regions of Mësia such a Puka (roughly midway between Shkodër and Kukësi), the admisive is used “a së shënësinë,” but in Dushmani (50 km. east of Shkodër) Simochovski (1931:116) notes that only the perfect admisive occurs. Moreover, one of Cordignano’s examples is formally present admisive but translated as a past: I dyqje dhibjen abëlit ‘Dicen dëgëje la vole al lipo’. To this we can add that perfect admisives are quite frequent in Gëgëric (see for example the 114

1To this can be added the fact that the admisive does not occur in Italian Arbërësh nor in Çarë and in rare in Lab (Demiraj 1971:17). The Arvanitika forms thus look very much like a peripheral archaisin, isolated from the developments in Central Albania (southern Gëgëri and northern Tosks) that spread north more rapidly than south.

3Filipaj’s translation reads literally ‘let her do it’, but this need not concern us here.
songs collected by Albert Lord in 1937 all over northern Albania, now housed in the Milman Parry Collection of Oral Literature at the Harvard University Library). The Geg narrative epic admiring is appears to be a foregrounding device, but this is in need of further study.

Although certain similarities between the Albanian admiring and the nonconfirmative uses of the inherited perfect in Bulgarian and Macedonian have been observed since Weigand (1923, 1924), as I have demonstrated (Friedman 1981, 2003), the two phenomena are related but significantly different. In the case of Balkan Slavic, an unmarked past of perfect origin has developed nonconfirmative uses in opposition to a marked confirmative past, and all instances of apparent present meaning require reference to a previous state of affairs. The same is basically true of the Turkish mi̇j-past. In Albanian, an inverted perfect has developed into a marked nonconfirmative with true present meaning. Thus, for example, in the Albanian translation of Aleko Konstantinov’s Bulgarian novel Bai Gana (Soﬁa, 1894), out of 59 Albanian present admiring, only 8 corresponded to admiring usage of the l-past in the Bulgarian original and 7 to the mi̇j-past in the Turkish translation, and in every case it was a matter of the discovery of a previously existing state of affairs.

What we see in Albanian, therefore, is a combination of language-internal and contact-induced change. The use of the inverted pluperfect as a marked ontological counterfactual appears to have been the original usage out of which the admiring grew, and this usage could have preceded the Geg/Tosk split, although we cannot be sure. The spread of inversion to the perfect and the subsequent shift of the inverted perfect to a true present (and the probably concomitant shift of the inverted pluperfect to an imperfect and creation of analytic admiring paradigms) appears to have taken place in such a way that the core of the innovation actually straddles the river Shkumbi (the division between Geg and Tosk). The innovation did not spread to southern Tosk, nor had it been completed at the time that northern Tosk dialects migrated to Thrace and then northward along the Black Sea, hence the nonconfirmative past meaning of eastern diaspora Tosk “present” admiring, and, at least sometimes, also in northern Gegëri. At the same time, nonconfirmative admiring usage, i.e. the shift from ontological counterfactual to speaker-oriented counterfactual, took place precisely in the context of intensive contact with Turkish, and, in the case of the eastern Tosk diaspora, Balkan Slavic. Moreover, the apparent core of innovation in central Albania would have been the region with the most Turkish influence. Thus, the evidence of the oldest texts combined with the various dialectal developments supports the notion that the Albanian admiring is a specifically Albanian development that was also influenced by Balkan linguistic contact.

References