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THE BALKANICITY OF THE RROMANI LANGUAGE

It has been asserted by several well-known researchers in linguistics, such as Rade Uhlik, Kiril Kostov, Victor Friedman and Georges Calvet that Rromani belongs to the so-called Balkanic linguistic league (Sprachbund). Even if the cogency of this belonging is nowadays broadly admitted, it will not be uninteresting to compare the relevant features of the Rromani language with the criteria stated by Franz Miklošič, Jack Feuillet and Bahri Beci in the features they set forth as for the Balkanic languages, not only in the case of the Rromani dialects spoken in the Balkan, but also in the case of the dialects scattered all over Europe — bearing in mind that the dialects spoken outside Europe are anyway represented on our continent.

Although a pioneer in Rromani philology, it is not clear if Franz Miklošič realized the Balkan character, of the Rromani language. Later, we can read in Sandfeld's masterpiece "Linguistique balkanique, problèmes et résultats", that he was aware of the presence of the Rromani language in the Balkans, but, apparently due to the lack of reliable material, he did not devote to the attention it deserves, since he wrote in his introduction (note 2) : "On fera ici abstraction du fait que d'autres langues comme la langue tsigane /.../ sont parlées dans les Balkans". Thus, there are Miklošič's criteria :

1) Future based on a short form of the verb "to want" : most Rromani dialects use the particle **ka** (arch. **kam** in some areas of Bulgaria) from the stem **kam-** "want, like, love", exactly as in most Balkanic languages.

Ex. : **ka merav, ka merav, ka pharrōvav** "I will die, I will die, I will burst" (from a folksong by Esmā Redžepova).

The North-Danubian varieties of Rromani build this tense by suffixing an unstressed **-a** to present tense endings. The preceding example would sound in these varieties : **meràva, meràva, pharrŭvàva**. The latter is possibly an innovation, since the these dialects are in many respects the most innovating ; anyway this future may have arose inside the language, since the atonic **-a** ending exists also in other varieties, but with other values (mainly hypothetic).

2) Lack of infinitive : **de man te piav** "give me to drink" would be the Rromani counterpart of Sandfeld's example in all other Balkanic languages. An article has been written by Victor Friedman about the use of the Rromani modal subordinator **te** in the Balkan context and it would be of the utmost interest to pursue this kind a research for all Balkan features in Rromani.

It will be sufficient here to point out that Balkan Rromani completely lacks a genuine infinitive and that the forms described by some authors as (analytic) infinitives in Rromani outside the Balkans are innovations constructed on the basis of Rromani material in areas where the vernacular has an infinitive. The most common construction is the third person (sing. or pl.) of the present tense frozen with subordinator **te**. The example **de man te piav** sounds in such dialects **de man te-piel** or **de man te-pien** which would mean in Balkan Rromani "give me for him/them to drink".

Heinschinck, quoted by Soravia, argues that the short form of the 3rd person sing. (present tense) in atonic **-i** attached to the stem represents some "restes d'un ancien infinitif" ; he bases this hypothesis on the **-i** form encountered in Gopti Rromani (Licki Sijaci from Slovenia) which indeed fulfills the functions of an infinitive. Even if this hypothesis could be proven, it would be just one more argument in favour of a strong Balkan influence which broke up the "ancient infinitive" (note that the Turkish infinitive resisted such a Balkan influence). Note also that such verbal forms in **-i** exist also in Russia and Ukraina.

In some case, the abstract noun **-(i)pen**, **-(i)ben**, **-(i)pa**, **-(i)mos** etc... has been treated as an infinitive, a statement countered by the observation that this ending is inflected in both number and case (plural **-(i)màta**, oblique case **-(i)imas~**, plural of oblique case **-(i)maten~**), whereas a real infinitive should not be. The question remains unsolved, since the Turkish equivalent (**-mek**, **-mak**), which behaves formally and semantically like the Rromani abstract noun may undergo also specific kinds of inflection (**-meğ-**, **-mağ-**). Note that West Rumelian Turkish substitutes optative for infinitive !

3) A common form for both dative and genitive : apparently one can find this Balkan feature in Rromani, since phrases like **e love e phuresqe(re)** or **e phuresqe love** "the old man's money" present a genitive **phuresqe** identical with the dative form in **phendām e phuresqe** "we said to the old man". One should however bear in mind that the possessive postposition is inflected exactly like any adjective, according to gender (masc. or fem.), number (sing. or pl.) and case (rect. or obl.) of the possessed object ; therefore, the homonymy is restricted to the case when the possessed object is not in the singular, since the ending is then **-o** for the masc. and **-i** for the feminine.

"Possessive endings" :

	General pattern				Gurbet pattern				Archaic pattern			
	MASC.		FEM.		MASC.		FEM.		MASC.		FEM.	
	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.
rect.	-qo	-qe	-qi	-qe	-qo	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qo	-qe	-qi	-qe
obl.	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qe	-qa	-qe

"Dative ending" : **-qe** in all cases.

Actually, the Gurbet dialects substituted **-e** for the ending **-i** of fem. adjective and possessive forms, while on the contrary some other dialects, in both O and E superdialects, as well in Southern Balkans, as say in the Carpatian and Russian and in Kelderash, display a wider variety in keeping in the fem. sg. oblique an **-a** ending which appears to be an archaism.

It is hard to state if we have to deal with a Balkanic convergence of two endings or with an Indic feature, since we encounter in India a similar homonym, namely between the dative and the masculine singular possessive postpositions of Kanauji : **-kō**. The latter is however a rather weak hypothesis due to its very restricted extension in India and the lack of special link with Rromani. Anyway, this ending should have resulted in Rromani in **-qo** realized with an **-o**, not an **-e**, ending and the fact that the consonant with k/g is more important ?? for the criterium.

4) Definite article put after the noun it determines : this feature is not shared by all Balkan languages, since the Greek article is put before the noun. The Rromani article follows the Greek pattern, to which it is partly identical :

	General pattern				Gurbet pattern				Archaic pattern				
	MASC.		FEM.		MASC.		FEM.		MASC.		FEM.		
	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	
rect.	o	o	i	o	o	e	e	e	e	o	le	i	le
obl.	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	e	le	le	la	le

The similarity with the Greek article is limited, even if one assumes that the Greek forms **η** and **οι** developed into Rromani **e (i)** ; the possibility that the article arose from a short diectic form is more likely. As Šaip Jusuf observed, the contact with the Greeks could have influenced the rise of such a part of speech as the article, but the material from which it was constructed was Rromani. In this case, the **l-** forms of the archaic form would constitute an archaism.

Compare :

	Greek article					
	MASC.		FEM.		NEUTER	
	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.
nom.	ο	οι	η	οι	το	τα
acc.	τον	τους	της	τιν	το	τα

Rromani deictic **kadava** "this"
(Central Europe dialects)

	MASC.		FEM.	
	sg.	pl.	sg.	pl.
rect.	kadava	kadale	kadija	kadale
obl.	kadale	kadale	kadala	kadale

to be compared with the archaic pattern (*v. supra*).

5) Frequency of the sound /ə/ : this feature either is not shared by Greek and West Central Macedonian. In Rromani, this sound is especially frequent in the Gurbet dialects and also, clearly, in all borrowings from Bulgarian, Romanian and Albanian where this sound is present. In addition to this, it affects some Rromani stems, as a result of the evolution of **-e-**, especially in Rromania : **khəre** "at home" for common Rromani **khere** and in the Svilen dialect of Bulgaria : [prəj dromë'rësti] "on the path" for common Rromani **pr-e dromorresθe** (from a folksong ; note the co-occurring changes of **e** to **i** or **j** and of **o** to **ë**) ; further example : [mə fe'rəsti tolu 'jasmas, mə pi'rəndi kaɫb 'fɪzmas] "on my head a red cloth, at my feet black boots" (*ibid.*) for common Rromani : **me šeresθe lolo jàsmas, me pirenθe kale ćizmas.**

Further more, even outside these areas, one can notice a tendency of **-e-** to develop into **-ə-**, especially but not exclusively before **-l** ; this occurs not only in lexemes like **šelo** "rope", **šel** "hundred", **devel** "sky, god", **zukel** "dog", **veš** "wood", **šero** "head" etc... but also in one of the most frequent verb endings, namely : **-el(a)** - the 3rd person of singular of the present tense.

6a) Syllabical **m** and **n** at the beginning of words : this feature is not thoroughly reliable, since it looks like we have rather to deal with prenasalized stops **nd** and **mb**

(also [ŋg] and [ŋj]) in Albanian and Greek, which arose after the apheresis of an atonic vowel, developing into regular **d** and **b** in Greek and partly in Southern Albanian. Accordingly, these sounds are to be found in the Rromani dialects of Albania, not only in Albanian borrowings but as well in genuine Rromani words like : (a)**ngar** "coal", (a)**ngarel** "to carry", (a)**mbrol** "pear" etc... The status of initial Rromanian **îm-** and **în-** is disputable.

6b) Palatalization of -l- before -i- : this phenomenon is extremely widespread in Rromani and we devoted a paper to it, since it represents the key of all Rromani polylectal phonemics ; this palatalization took place as a result of contacts with Balkan languages and reflects the complicated system of interferences between them. Let us add here only that the fall of palatized **-l-** does exist, but by no means characterizes the Balkan dialects of Rromani, since it does not concern all of them while it occurs outside the Balkans as well. A similar development exists also for **n** in front of **-i**.

7a) Alteration of n into r or the opposite : no example in Rromani. One can assume that the rhotacism of **n** took place prior to the arrival of the Rromanians in the Balkans.

7b) Alteration of o into u or the opposite : on the contrary, the narrowing of **o** into **u** can be exemplified by many pairs in Rromani : **bokh/bukh** "hunger", **zoralo/zuralo** "strong", **vošta/vušta** "lips", **opre/upre** "upside", **khosel/khusel** "he wipes", **košav/(a)kušav** "he calls names" and the 1-st person past ending **-õm/-ũm/-om/-um** (versus **-em** in E superdialect; cf. also the copula : **sinom/sinõm/sinum** - E superdialect **sem**) etc... In addition, the Svilen dialect of Bulgaria narrows **o** into **u** in different positions, even in the masculine article : **u lolu jàzmas - xaberìci, u kalë òzmas - morìci** "the red cloth - news, the black boots - a grave" (from a folksong). The same can be noticed in some dialects from Prekmurje (Slovenia) and Burgenland (Austria), as well as in Greece.

7c) Alteration of ja (or ã) into e before a syllable containing i : no example in Rromani, except in some areas of Bulgaria.. Outside Rromani, this alternation is limited to Bulgarian and Greek. A similar alternation appears in Kajnas, but it depends entirely on the stress, not on the presence/absence of an **i** in the following syllable.

8) Double personal pronoun : the duplication of the personal pronoun is limited to some dialects ; it has then an stylistic value of emphasis (as in Greek) and is never imposed by syntactic rules (as it is in Rromanian, Macedonian and Albanian).

9) Building of numerals from 11 to 19 by means of a preposition meaning "on" (-na-, -mbë-, -spre-) : actually, as Sandfeld suggests, this feature is possibly a Slavism in Romanian and Albanian or a common feature to Slavic on one hand and Protobalkan on the other, possibly kin to Balto-Slavic. In Rromani, these numerals are built with **deš** "ten" as a first element, followed by **-u-** and the required number of unit, as in the Greek order (except for 11 and 12).

10) Identity of the interrogative adverbs meaning "where" and "whither" : the most common adverb meaning "where" is **kaj**, which means also "whither" ; the form **kate**, characteristic for Albanian Mečkar, also has both meanings, while the form **kània**, which is likely to represent the genuine form for "whither", now sounds obsolete.

We can add to these features a significant number of Balkanic exemes borrowed by all Rromani dialects, including the dialects spoken outside the area under consideration : even in a dialect as remote as Welsh Rromani, Sampson brought to light more than one hundred loan-words from Greek, Southern Slavic and Romanian. The number is reduced to less than a dozen in the various form of Ibero-Rromani also. Note that Turkish loanwords are almost completely lacking in Rromani outside the Balkans, due to the fact that they entered Rromni not in the Anatolian stage of the language, but already in the Balkan peninsula, under the Ottoman rule.

It would be superflous here to give the Rromani for the many idioms listed by Sandfeld ; let us mention only a few of the most characteristic :

ačhilo bi mosqo "he remained silent (without mouth)"

peko with both meanings "baked" and "ripe"

gudlöl "become sweet" or "cause pleasure" in (te) **gudlöl tuqe o marro** "enjoy your bread/meal"

na xal pe manqe "I am not hungry" ("it does not eat itself to me")

(n)**ikavav mo marro** "I earn (extract) my bread"

śundo "heard" and "famous"

zorales "strongly", used with the meaning "very" - usually **but** ; not that **zorales** replaced even **but** in Polish Rromani, after the Romanian model **foarte**, or Northern Albanian **fort**.

Impoverishment of the old Rromani vocabulary also occurred under some Balkan Slavic influences, for example genuine Rromani distinguished **musi** "arm" from **vast** "hand", **plain** "mountain" from **veś** "forest" or **rukħ** "tree" from **kaśt** "wood", but in varieties which went through the Slavic areas where common people capture both meaning in each pair by the second word of the pair, Rromani did the same and lost respectively **musi**, **plain** and **rukħ**.

A specific study could be devoted also to loan translations from Balkan idioms.

"Comme les emprunts directs, les différents calques doivent être d'âge très divers, mais il n'est guère possible de le montrer dans les détails" states Sanfeld. This is especially true for Rromani and it would be worth while to explore every single point of his list in both diachronic and synchronic respect. This would be a contribution of considerable value, not only to Rromology, but also to Balkanology as such, since the Rromanies are known to keep linguistic and ethnological vernacular features even when these have disappeared from the original language or nation.

Different extra-linguistic elements confirm the place of the Rromanies among the Balkan peoples :

— the Balkans were their gateway to Europe ; they were "where it all began" as William G. Lockwood reports, and he adds that

— the Balkans have been a "continual source of European (and American as well as Australian) Gipsies and continue to be a source of new arrivals" (ibid.)

— the Rromanies settled most numerously, most easily and most successfully in the Balkans

— approximately 50% of all Rromanies in the world live in the six Balkanic States

— almost 60% of the Rromani-speaking Rromanies live in the Balkans

— the largest single Rromani community anywhere in the world is Śutka (Шyto Оризари, close to Skopje - Yugoslavia), with around 40.000 inhabitants, probably followed by Kjustendil or Sliven in Bulgaria.

- the main dialectal splits (o/e isogloss and [ʃh/ç] mutation) occurred probably within the Balkan area and almost all dialects are represented in the peninsula
- the most archaic dialects, which serve as the bases of the common Rromani language, are those of the Balkan Rromanies
- and finally, it is in the Balkans that the Rromanies reached the highest level of emancipation and affirmation of their culture (another significant area in this respect is the Ussr, especially Baltic States); this fact is linked with another one : it is in these parts of the world that they enjoy the highest level of consideration and dignity.

One can therefore consider the Balkans as "the secondary fatherland of the Rromanies" and it is by no means an exaggeration to say that other Rromanies, outside the peninsula, represent a secondary diaspora of this Balkanic people. Conversely India can be viewed only as a primary and mythic "fatherland", since no Rromanies live in there currently.