Interculturalia

"Balkan Linguistics as/vs Eurolinguistics" Conference
Iasi, 19-20 September 2011 [1]

An International Academic Event at the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi: the Workshop-Conference of the Commission for Balkan Linguistics, 19−20 September 2011

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Up until the present moment, "Balkan philology" – now also designated as "Balkan linguistics" or "Southeast European linguistics" – has developed as a discipline placed at a crossroads of various types of linguistics, mainly historical-comparative, genealogical and typological. Parallels have been established among closely related languages, such as the South-Slavic ones, as well as between the latter and non-Slavic languages, such as Albanian, Neo-Greek and Romanian. There have also been recent attempts at enlarging the circle of languages taken into consideration, by including Hungarian, Turkish and Romany in Balkanological discussions.

During the final decades of the 20th century, representatives of Balkan linguistics were preoccupied mainly with the study of the so-called "Balkanisms," within the limits of the traditional sectors of linguistics, namely phonetics and phonology, morphosyntax and lexicology, partially also phraseology. Correspondences among Balkan languages were explained mainly as resulting from prolonged contact, but also as due to resurgence of the Palaeobalkan substratum (that is, of speech habits, vestigial vocabulary and grammatical patterns coming from ancient idioms such as Thracian, Dacian and Illyrian) as well as effects of the Greek and the Latin-Romance adstrata.

Field investigation represents the dominant direction in today's Balkan linguistics, which insists on exhaustive study of restricted areas of the Balkan Peninsula; nevertheless, there are important specialists who consider that Balkan linguistics needs more progress on the theoretical plane too. Whereas, theoretically, Balkan linguistics has been focused mainly on the "Balkan union," on "Balkan languages" and on their common elements (the so-called "Balkanisms"), other linguistic directions have emerged too. In that respect, priority is no longer given to written texts and to standard languages, but rather to dialects and subdialects, such as the Bulgarian ones spoken in Albania, the Greek ones spoken in Bulgaria, or the Aromanian ones spoken in Greece, Albania and the Republic of Macedonia.

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Nowadays the "Balkan linguistic union" is also viewed as and interethnic and socio-historical phenomenon, which shows tendencies of either preserving or blurring ethnic boundaries.

The Commission for Balkan Linguistics (CBL), associated with the International Slavistic Commission, was founded in September 1993, during the International Congress of Slavic Studies in Bratislava, as a result of a proposal by Prof. Helmut W. Schaller of the Philipps-University of Marburg. The position of a president was assumed, as usual under such circumstances, by the proponent. There immediately followed invitations to collaboration, in order that the new members should represent as many countries as possible. In 1997, with the financial support of the German Community for Research (Bonn), CBL could organize its constitutive meeting and its first conference proper, in Marburg, with the theme "Current problems of Balkan linguistics". The next conference (2001, in Sankt Petersburg) addressed similar aspects, as well as issues regarding the making of a Linguistic Atlas of the Balkans. At the third conference (2002, Sofia), mainly aspects of the common Balkan vocabulary were discussed. The fourth conference was organized again in Sankt Petersburg (2004), with a thematic focus on small ethnic groups of the Balkan Peninsula. Two years thereafter, in 2006 (Belgrade), the participants tackled aspects of the Romance factor in the area under discussion. Subsequent conferences of CBL took place in Berlin (2008), with the theme "Innovations in the contact linguistics of the Balkan domain – Trends and perspectives," and in Veliko Tărnovo (2009), where the theme was "The verbal system of Balkan languages – Heritage and innovation".

In September 2010, at the University of Vienna, the conference "Balkanisms Today" took place, the organizing institutions being the Austrian Academy and the Institute of Romance Studies. Vienna, as "gateway to the Balkans" appeared as the ideal place for such a conference, taking into account that the Austrian capital had long been known as "the cradle of Balkan linguistics," due to the activity of outstanding scholars such as Bartholomäeus Kopitar and Franz Miklosich. In regard to the historical evolution of the issues proposed for discussion, the organizers of the Vienna conference of 2010 formulated the following statements (as included in the flyer of the conference):

> Since Trubetzkoy (1923) […] linguists have referred to a 'Language Union' (*Sprachbund*), or a 'Balkan Language Union', when speaking about south-eastern European languages. Ever since Sandfeld presented these so-called 'Balkanisms', many researchers (Reichenkron 1962, Schaller 1975, Solta 1980, Asenova 1989, Reiter 1994, Hinrichs 1999, Mišeska-Tomić 2006) have further contributed to this line of research. Thus, most specialists focus on the entirety of Balkan languages and seek to explain them as the expression of mental and pragmatic structures. In contrast, our conference will now focus on the question of how actual and appropriate this approach may seem today.

One more book of general Balkanology should be added to the list given in the quotation above, namely Steinke and Vraciu's *Introducere în lingvistica balcanică* (Iaşi, 1999), to which Prof. Klaus Steinke would refer in the presentation he delivered at the workshop-conference of Iaşi 2011 (see below).

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All the so-far organized conferences of the Commission included organizational meetings too, in which future directions and activities were planned. Such a meeting took place at the Vienna conference too, on which occasion the date and location of the next CBL conferences was fixed: September 2011, in Iaşi, Romania, where the main organizer would be Adrian Poruciuc. (The latter contributed the paper "A new view on the Latin origin of Romanian *(f)sat* 'village', Aromanian *fsat* 'ditch' and Albanian *fshat* 'village'" to the Vienna conference of 2010, whose volume of proceedings was published in 2012.) For the Iaşi conference – which, for administrative reasons, was to become a workshop-conference – the CBL members who met in Vienna accepted the title "Balkan Linguistics as/vs Eurolinguistics," as proposed by the main organizer. It was also during the meeting in Vienna that the CBL members agreed on Göteborg as location of the 2012 CBL conference, with Ingmar Söhrman as main organizer.

According to the data provided by the CBL site (updated in 2012), the leadership of the Commission is represented by Prof. Helmut Schaller (president), Dr. Andrej Sobolev (vice president), and Prof. Thede Kahl (secretary). The full members of the Commission (mostly university people and researchers in various institutes) are 43 in number, from 18 countries (Albania, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, Republic of Macedonia, Republic of Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden, Ukraine, USA). At present, Romania has three full members in the Commission. Nevertheless, Romanian philology has not been very well represented in the activities of CBL. Academic ideology would be one explanation, namely the fact that outstanding Romanian scholars of the past (notably Nicolae Iorga) were against the inclusion of Romania among "Balkanic" countries, and they would present it rather as belonging to Southeast Europe. One result of that attitude was the founding of the Institute of Southeast European Studies in Bucharest. Another (less positive) result was the fact that certain aspects of the Romanian language and civilization have been often discussed by non-Romanian Balkanologists in the absence of Romanian specialists. More particularly, Aromanian lingual aspects have often been referred to Albanian, Greek or Bulgarian ones, without any reference to Daco-Romanian.

We consider that true collaboration between the specialists who regard themselves as Balkanologists and the ones who prefer to appear as specialists in Southeast European studies (or as Eurolinguists) would lead to more credible approaches to issues that both sides are preoccupied with. Such collaboration can sustain the further development not only of Balkan linguistics, but also of Eurolinguistics (a field still in the making) and of linguistics in general. Possibilities of that kind are visible in several of the articles published by CBL members in this issue of *Philologica Jassyensia.*

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