Morphological Cross-Linguistic Parallelisms among the Nominal Systems of Balkan Languages (I)

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Abstract

Having been spoken for centuries within a limited geographical region – the Balkan Peninsula – the Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian languages have necessarily been in permanent contact. Whether prolonged or relatively short, direct or indirect, such contact between typologically but not genealogically related languages has eventually led to the emergence, in two or several Balkan languages, of certain linguistic similarities which linguists acknowledge today as (phonetic, morphological, syntactic or lexical) Balkanisms. This paper addresses some of these parallelisms apparent in the nominal systems of the Balkan languages, namely the definite article and the genitive possessive article, as well as noun cases and genders. While not aiming at exhaustiveness, this study reviews theories of outstanding Romanian and foreign linguists on these issues, and illustrates such views with manifold cross-linguistic examples.

Key Words: *morphology, similarities, Romanian, Albanian, Greek, Bulgarian.*

Starting from the premise that grammar, with its major branches, morphology and syntax, represents the most stable area of a language and the one least susceptible to loans and influences from other languages, the existence of elements common to the Balkan languages (viz. Romanian, Greek, Albanian and Bulgarian) can only be explained by appeal to the historical fact of secular coexistence of the Romanians, the Greeks, the Albanians and the Bulgarians within the Balkan and Danubian-Pontic region. Morphosyntax is the structural nucleus of a language, and at this level the typological identities between the Balkan languages – which form a linguistic Balkan unit – are living proof of their prolonged, stable symbiosis. Due to their direct local contacts, across centuries, two or three Balkan languages have evolved common linguistic features. Such features may owe either to the existence of a shared substratum, as in the case of Romanian and Albanian because of their Thracian-Illyrian substratum, or to loans from one Balkan language to another.

The striking similarities between Romanian, Albanian and Bulgarian (to which we can add Greek for certain similarities) regarding the postposition of the definite article, the replacement of the infinitive of the *non possum facere* type with the conjunctive of the *non possum ut faciam* type, and the formation of the future tense with the auxiliary *volo* ("to want/wish"), were noted for the first time in 1829 by linguist Bartholomew Kopitar. Later, Franz Miklosich added further cross-linguistic similarities, such as the syncretism of the genitive with the dative, the sound *ă* shared by Albanian, Romanian and Bulgarian, the doubling of the personal pronoun as direct and indirect object, the formation of the numerals from 11 to 19 on the Slavic model. These linguists believed that the cross-linguistic similarities found among the Balkan languages were due to the influence of the substratum language. Later, in the early twentieth century, the linguist A. Selișcev first advanced the hypothesis that the cross-linguistic similarities among the Balkan languages could originate in their mutual influences triggered by bilingualism, insofar as their sharing of a common space made the inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula speak two different languages on a regular basis in order to communicate to each other. An outstanding contribution to the listing of an impressive phonetic, morphological, lexical and syntactic Balkan inventory was made by Kristian Sandfeld, the father of Balkan studies, who has

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provided a comprehensive summary of the cross-linguistic similarities among the Balkan languages, such as the propensity of the Balkan languages for parataxis or phraseological concordances.

Using the comparative-historical method, in what follows we will review a number of features common to the nominal system of the Balkan languages, and also endeavour to outline the cross-linguistic parallelism of their grammatical structures both diachronically and synchronically.

1. One similarity noted by linguists is the *postposition and agglutination of the definite article* in Romanian, Albanian and Bulgarian. By contrast, in Greek the definite article is fronted: it precedes the noun and is realized as a separate morpheme altogether. Thus:

a. in Romanian:

masc. sg. *-(u)l/-le*: copil - copil**ul** ("child" - "**the** child" [i.e. child=DEF][1]), ministru - ministru**l** ("minister" - "**the** minister"), frate - frate**le** ("brother" - "**the** brother"); masc. pl. *-i*: copii - copii**i** ("children" - "**the** children" [i.e. children=DEF])), miniștri - miniștri**i** ("ministers" - "**the** ministers"), frați - frați**i** ("brothers" - "**the** brothers");

fem. sg. *-a / -ua*: casă - cas**a** ("house" - "**the** house" [i.e. house=DEF]), facultate - facultate**a** ("faculty" - "**the** faculty"), cafea - cafea**ua** ("coffee" - "**the** coffee"); fem. pl. *-le*: case - case**le** ("houses" - "**the** houses" [i.e. houses=DEF]), facultăți - facultăți**le** ("faculties" - "**the** faculties"), cafele - cafele**le** (coffee=PL- coffee=PL=DEF);

neut. sg. *-(u)l*: taxi - taxi**ul** ("taxi" - "**the** taxi" [i.e. taxi=DEF]), creion - creion**ul** ("pencil" - "**the** pencil"), studiu - studiu**l** ("study" - "**the** study"); neut. pl. *-le:* taxiuri - taxiuri**le** ("taxis" - "**the** taxis" [i.e. taxis=DEF]), creioane - creioane**le** ("pencils" - "**the** pencils"), studii - studii**le** ("studies" - "**the** studies");

b. in Albanian:

masc. sg. *-i:* gur - gur**i** ("stone" - "**the** stone" [i.e. stone=DEF]), libër - libr**i** ("book" - "**the** book"); masc. pl. *-t:* libra - libra**t** ("books" - "**the** books" [i.e. books=DEF]);

fem. sg. *-a:* vajzë - vajz**a** ("girl" - "**the** girl" [i.e. girl=DEF]); fem. pl. *-t:* vajza - vajza**t** ("girls" - "**the** girls" [i.e. girls=DEF]);

neut. sg. *-t:* të folur**it** ("**the** speech"), të qeshurit ("**the** laughter"); neut. pl. *-t*: të qeshurat ("**the** laughters");

c. in Bulgarian:

masc. sg. -а/-ът: мъж - мъж**а** / мъж**ът** ("man" - "**the** man" [i.e. man=DEF]): in Bulgarian the definite article for masculine nouns has both a short form (**-а**), when the noun is a direct object, and a long form (**-ът**), when it is the subject of the clause; masc. pl. *-me:* мъже - мъже**те** ("men" - "**the** men" [i.e. men=DEF]);

fem. sg. -а*:* жена - жена**та** ("woman" - "**the** woman" [i.e. woman=DEF]), вода - вода**та** ("water" - "**the** water"); fem. pl. *-me*: жени - жени**те** ("women" - "**the** women" [i.e. women=DEF]), води - води**те** ("water" - "**the** water");

neut. sg. -то*:* дете - дете**то** ("child" - "**the** child" [i.e. child=DEF]); neut. pl. *-ma:* деца - деца**та** ("children" - "**the** children" [i.e. children=DEF]);

d. in Greek:

masc. sg. *ο:* άνδρας - **ο** άνδρας ("man" - "**the** man"), άνθρωπος - **ο** άνθρωπος ("man" - "**the** man": general reference to the human species); masc. pl. *οι:* άνδρες - **οι** άνδρες ("men" - "**the** men"), άνθρωποι - **οι** άνθρωποι ("men" - "**the** men": general reference to the human species);

[1] We use "DEF" to indicate the position of the definite article only where it differs from English, in this case realized as a noun ending, thence "=", yet exclusively for the first example in each class.

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fem. sg. *η:* κοπέλα - **η** κοπέλα (“girl” - “**the** girl”); γυναίκα - **η** γυναίκα (“woman” - “**the** woman”), вода - вода**та** (“water” - “**the** water”); fem. pl. *οι:* κοπέλες - **οι** κοπέλες (“girls” - “**the** girls”); γυναίκες - **οι** γυναίκες (“women” - “**the** women”);

neut. sg. *ο:* τετράδιο - **το** τεδραδιο (“notebook” - “**the** notebook”), παιδί - **το** παιδί (“child” - “**the** child”); neut. pl. *τα:* τετράδια - **τα** τετράδια (“notebooks” - “**the** notebooks”), παιδιά - ***τα*** *παιδιά* (“children” - “**the** children”).

The postposition of the definite article is one of the most important Balkan language features, which linguists have studied especially diachronically. However, as regards hypotheses of the origin of this phenomenon, its enforcement and expansion in languages such as Albanian, Romanian, Bulgarian and Macedonian, its specific operation in these languages, opinions may differ and at times even diverge. Some linguists contend that the Thracian-Illyrian substratum shared by Romanian and Albanian would have encouraged the emergence of the enclitic definite article in the two languages, while other linguists maintain either the spontaneous evolution of the postposition of the definite article in either language or an influence: either Greek or Romanian on Bulgarian, (according to Al. Graur, Al. Rosetti), either Old Slavic or Bulgarian on Romanian (Iv. Gălăbov) (cf. Rosetti 253). Be that as it may, it is noteworthy that the postposition of the definite article in Bulgarian, Macedonian and Romanian renders these languages distinct from the other Slavic and Romance languages, respectively, to which they are genealogically related. The phenomenon does not occur in any other Slavic language, lacking as they do the article, nor in the other Romance languages, whose definite article is exclusively proclitic. Greek is the only Balkan language which resembles western Romance languages in that the definite article is independent and proclitic.

The similarity of definite article postposition in the Balkan languages, save for Greek, has been noticed by linguists for a long time – ever since Kopitar’s study (1829) – and is still disputed, even as experts are agreed on including the postposed definite article within the category of Balkan peculiarities. In Romania, B. P. Hasdeu was the first linguist who has ever mentioned the phenomenon; he explained it by appeal to the preference of Romanian for the noun + adjective word order: *omul bun* (*the kind person* [i.e. *person*=DEF *kind*]), *băiatul harnic* (*the hard-working boy*), *fata frumoasă* (*the beautiful girl*). The same is true of Albanian, a language which also uses the noun + adjective construction: *njieriu i mirë* (*the kind man* [*man* DEF *kind*), *vajza e bukur* (*the beautiful girl*). It may be concluded that in Romanian and Albanian the postposing of the definite article was triggered by the postposition of the adjective which modifies the noun. This feature distinguishes Romanian from the other Romance languages, all of which have the definite article in proclitic position (fr. *le cahier, la maison*), and has persuaded linguists to explain the phenomenon by reference to the similar construction in Albanian (Brâncuș 47, Rosetti 253). By contrast, in Latin, where word order was unrestricted, the adjective could be equally pre- and postnominal, yet it typically preceded the noun; inverting the typical word order had affective and expressive valence: *longa navia*, “long boat,” *navis longa*, “boat of the long type” (Rosetti 253). The case is different in Romanian, as we have seen, where the word order is typically noun + adjective: *omul bun* (*the kind person* [i.e. *person*=DEF *kind*]), *fata frumoasă* (*the beautiful girl*); their inversion in literary works has a poetic value: *bunul om, frumoasa fată*. We must emphasize, though, that irrespective of word order, exclusively the word in front position carries the definite article in Modern Romanian: *bun**ul** om* / *om**ul** bun*.

The Latin adjective + noun construction resurfaces in Modern Bulgarian, where the adjective is exclusively prenominal and agglutinates the definite article: добри**я**/**т** човек, “the kind man” [i.e. kind=DEF man], работливо**то** момче, “the hard-working boy,” красиво**то** момиче, “the beautiful girl.” Under no circumstances can the adjective and noun swap places. The postposing of the definite article in Bulgarian complies with the rules of the Indo-European enclitic demonstrative pronoun; as an inchoate construction which had emerged already in Common Slavic, the phenomenon must be prior to the thirteenth century (Rosetti 253). Accordingly, the postposition of the definite article in these three languages shows a clear distinction between Romanian and Albanian, on the one hand, due

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to similar enclisis (*fat**a** frumoasă / vajz**a** e bukur*), and Bulgarian (красиво**то** момиче), on the other. Nonetheless, in accounting for the evolution of enclisis in Bulgarian, a phenomenon already present in Common Slavic, we should also factor in the Balkan context.

If for Albanian linguists are agreed that during the time when it was being influenced by Latin the definite article was postposed – Eq. Çabej extends the phenomenon to the pre-Roman age, while Demiraj relates it to the age of rhotacism in the Tosk dialect, hence before the seventh–eighth centuries – the same is not true of Bulgarian too. On the contrary, here opinions differ. Some linguists (P. Skok, Iv. Gălăbov) contend that the definite article's postposition had occurred already in Common Bulgarian; on the contrary, others (K. Mirčev, Kr. Sandfeld) claim that the postposed article is a more recent phenomenon in Bulgarian than in Romanian and Albanian, as it emerged late during the evolution of Bulgarian – in the sixteenth century – and was merely calqued on the Romanian definite article structure: *drakulu* > *drakula*. In Bulgarian the article system has been gradually restricted: **-ът**/**-та**/**-те**/**-то**. However, Macedonian Slavic and some Bulgarian dialects spoken in the Rodopi Mountains still have certain forms of enclitic definite article also attested in Old Bulgarian: **-от**/**-ов**/**-он** for the masculine, **-та**/**-ва**/**-на** for the feminine and **-то**/**-во**/**-но** for the neuter; in the plural the definite article is **-те**/**-ве**/**-не** for all genders. We can notice, therefore, a very clear-cut and straightforward distinction between Romanian and Albanian, on the one hand, and Bulgarian and Macedonian, on the other. To sum up, the origin of postposing the definite article in Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian and Macedonian Slavic has certainly divided linguists. However, to be able to date the phenomenon as accurately as possible and to establish whence it expanded geographically, we ought to factor in a multitude of influences, such as the role of the substratum for Romanian and Albanian, the Latin influence following the Roman conquest of the Balkans since Latin became the official language of the new Roman province, calques on neighbouring language patterns, as well as mutual influences among Balkan languages in close contact.

To better understand the use of the definite article in the Balkan languages, we should commence from the classic definition of the definite article as "the inflected part of speech which determines and individualizes the noun, adjective or (less often) other parts of speech and which marks various grammatical positions of the words it determines" (*DEX s.v.*). In all Balkan languages the definite article individualizes the noun it determines, thus defining it restrictively for the interlocutors. However, each language has its own instruments (e.g. articles, prepositions) and features to do so. In Romanian, for instance, when the noun is followed by a preposition with the accusative, it is typically not determined: *Merg la munte* (*I'm going into the mountains* [i.e. … *into [-DEF] mountains*]) */ Stau pe scaun* (*I'm sitting on the chair*). On the contrary, when it is followed by a modifier, the noun carries an enclitic definite article: *Merg la munte**le** înalt* (*I'm going into **the** high mountains* [i.e … into mountains=DEF high]) */ Stau pe scaun**ul** roșu* (*I'm sitting on **the** red chair*).

The same happens in Albanian, where the article and prepositions with the accusative operate like in Romanian: *Karrigjia është në dhomë*, "The chair is in the room" [i.e. … is in [-DEF] room] / *Fëmija qëndron mbi karrige*, "The child is sitting on the chair" (preposition with Acc. + zero article noun) / *Fëmija qëndron mbi karrig**en** e lartë*, "The child is sitting on **the** high chair" / *Kabineti i doktorit është në kat**in** e dytë*, "The doctor's practice is on **the** second floor" (prep. with Acc. + definite article noun + modifier).

Bulgarian is, however, different. When followed by a preposition of place, nouns must carry either the definite article or the indefinite article: Столът е в стая**та**, "The chair is in **the** room" [i.e. … in room=DEF] / Детето сяда на стол**а**, "The child is sitting on **the** chair." Exceptionally, in certain formulaic phrases the noun carries no article: Отивам на лекар, "I'm going to the doctor" [i.e. … to [-DEF] doctor"] / Спя на хотел, "I'm staying at a hotel" / Отивам на гости, "I'm going on a visit."

In Modern Greek, the prepositions with the accusative originate in the preposition *σε* ("at / in / to / on") + the definite article in the accusative *τον* / *την* / *το* / *τους* / *τις* / *τα*, which results in the compounds *στον* / *στην* / *στο* / *στους* / *στις* / *στα* ("at / in / to / towards / on"). Thus: *Το παιδί κάθεται **στην** καρέκλα*, "The child is sitting on **the** chair" [i.e. … on chair=DEF] / *Πάω **στον** γιατρό*, "I'm

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going to **the** doctor" / *Το βιβλίο είναι κάτω **στο** κρεβάτι*, "The book is under the bed" (prep. with Acc. *σε* + the definite article in Acc. fem. sg. *την* / masc. sg. *τον* / neut. sg. *το*).

To sum up, the comparative approach to the Balkan languages with respect to the use of the definite article shows that Romanian and Albanian share this feature in common, while Bulgarian and Greek have evolved their own parametric settings, which in Bulgarian owes to the proclivity for enclisis that had emerged already in Common Slavic.

2. Another feature which concerns us here is the existence of certain forms of prenominal (proclitic) article in the Balkan languages. Thus:

a. All Balkan languages have *the indefinite article*, yet with realizations that differ from one language to another. In Romanian: masc. / fem. sg. **un / o** (**un** băiat / **o** fată, "**a** boy / **a** girl"), masc. fem. neut. pl. **niște** (**niște** băieți / **niște** fete, "**some** boys / **some** girls"). In Albanian there are only two forms: all genders sg. **një** (**një** vajzë, "a girl", **një** libër, "a book") and all genders pl. **disa** (**disa** vajza "some girls," **disa** djem, "some boys"). Bulgarian shares the pattern of Greek for the singular, i.e. distinct forms for the three genders: masc. sg. **един**, fem. sg. **една**, neut. sg. **едно** (**един** мъж, "a man," **една** жена, "a woman," **едно** дете, "a child"), but the pattern of Romanian and Albanian for the plural, where the indefinite article is identical for all three genders: masc. fem. neut. pl. **един** (**едни** мъже, "some men," **едни** жени, "some women," **едни** деца, "some children"). Greek has different forms of the indefinite article for the three genders in the singular: masc. sg. **ένας**, neut. sg. **ένα**, fem. sg. **μια** (**ένας** άνδρας, "a man," **ένα** παιδί, "a child," **μια** γυναίκα, "a woman"), but no indefinite article in the plural, where its function has been taken over by other word classes.

b. Another type of prenominal article that occurs in both Romanian and Albanian is *the genitive possessive article*, in the pattern noun + noun in the genitive. Albanian linguist Sh. Demiraj argues that this type of proclitic article is well developed in both languages: "Albanian has evolved historically an article system which occurs in no other Indo-European languages, save for Romanian" (Demiraj 72). In Romanian, the genitive possessive article has distinct forms (masc. neut. sg. **al,** fem. sg. **a**, masc. pl. **ai**, fem. neut. pl. **ale**) as a function of the gender and number of the preceding noun to which the article refers (the genitive possessive article agrees in gender and number with the noun which refers to the possessed object); accordingly, the genitive possessive article is a supplementary determiner of the preceding noun: (un) caiet **al** fetei, "(a) notebook **of** the girl," (o) carte **a** fetei, "(a) book **of** the girl," (niște) pantofi **ai** fetei, "(some) shoes **of** the girl," (niște) cărți **ale** fetei, "(some) books **of** the girl." In Albanian, the genitive possessive article has only three forms: masc. sg. **i**, fem. sg. **e**, and **të** for all genders in the plural: (një) libër (masc. sg.) **i** vajzës, "(a) book **of** the girl," (një) fletore (fem. sg.) **e** vajzës, "(a) notebook **of** the girl," (disa) libri (masc. pl.) **të** vajzës "(some) books **of** the girl" / (disa) këpuca (fem. pl.) **të** fëmijës, "(some) shoes **of** the child." Historically, Romanian derived its genitive possessive article from Latin: *ad + illu > al, ad + illa > a, ad + illi > ai, ad + (i)lle > ale*; it is used either when a noun with zero article or with the indefinite article is followed by another noun, with no preposition, or when between the two nouns forming the nominal group are interposed other elements: *locuința stabilă de la nordul Dunării **a** populațiilor de limbă romanică*, "the stable habitation, to the north of the Danube, **of** Romance language peoples" (Rosetti 240). On the contrary, in Albanian the genitive possessive article is used in all genitive constructions.

There are major differences between Albanian and Romanian, on the one hand, and Bulgarian and Greek, on the other, as regards the genitive possessive article since the latter Balkan group does not have it. However, in Bulgarian its function has been taken up by the preposition with the accusative *на*; accordingly, the nominal group of the type zero article noun / indefinite article noun Nom./Acc. + noun Gen. has been replaced in Bulgarian by the group zero article noun / indefinite article noun Nom./Acc. + prep. **на** + noun Acc.: (една) тетрадка **на** момичето, "(a) book **of** the girl," (едни) книги **на** момичето, "(some) books **of** the girl." On the contrary, in Greek the relationship between the possessed object and its possessor is shown by the definite article in the genitive: masc.

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neut. sg. **του**, fem. sg. **της**, masc. neut. fem. pl. **των**: (ένα) βιβλίο **του** παιδιού, "(a) book **of** the child," (ένα) βιβλίο **της** κοπέλας, "(a) book **of** the girl," βιβλία **των** παιδιών, "books **of** the children," βιβλία **των** κοπέλων, "books **of** the girls."

c. In Romanian and Albanian there exists *the adjectival article* as a distinct morphological class. The adjectival article links the two components of the nominal group in the structure noun with definite article modified by a postposed qualifying adjective, precedes the adjective and agrees with the noun it determines. Its forms in Romanian are: masc. neut. sg. **cel**, fem. sg. **cea**, masc. pl. **cei**, fem. neut. pl **cele** (fata **cea** frumoasă, "**the** beautiful girl" [i.e. girl ADJ.ART. beautiful]; băiatul **cel** rău, "**the** mean boy"; scaunele **cele** mari, "**the** big chairs"; copiii **cei** răi, "**the** mean children"), and in Albanian: masc. sg. **i**, fem. sg. **e**, masc. fem. neut. pl. **të** (vajza **e** bukur, "**the** beautiful girl" [i.e. girl ADJ.ART. beautiful]; djali **i** keq, "**the** mean boy"; male **të** larta, "**the** high mountains"; shtëpi **të** bukura, "**the** beautiful house"). If in Albanian the forms of the adjectival article merely double the noun ending, in Modern Romanian these forms derive from the demonstrative pronoun *acel, acea, acei, acele*, which in turn derive from the Latin structure *ecce + ille, ecce + illa* etc. operating as adjectival attribute in Old Romanian. Over time, these forms have lost their lexical and grammatical content insofar as their role could be identified as morphemes intended to emphasize the qualitative content of the noun. (Demonstratives become articles through the elision of initial *a*: *acel* > *cel, acea* > *cea, acei* > *cei, acele* > *cele*.) It is noteworthy that the Romanian and Albanian construction definite article noun + adjectival article + adjective does not appear in Bulgarian and Greek. We would like to argue that in the latter group of Balkan languages, the adjectival article is absent because the modifying adjective always precedes the noun. Thus, structures like, in Greek: η όμορφη κοπέλα, "(the) beautiful girl," το καλό παιδί, "(the) good boy", οι καλοί άνθρωποι, "(the) good people," and in Bulgarian: добрия/т човек, "(the) good man," работливото момче, "(the) hard-working boy," красивото момиче, "(the) beautiful girl," can be translated into Romanian on the pattern: definite article noun +/- adjectival article + adjective.

3. As an inflected word class, the noun in the Balkan languages can also raise interesting problems concerning both gender and case.

All Balkan languages (wherein we do not include Turkish) have three genders: masculine, feminine and neuter, and two numbers: singular and plural. Of the three genders, only the neuter poses certain problems. Linguists are divided with respect to the origin of the neuter. The Latin language tended to eliminate the neuter by changing such nouns to either the masculine or the feminine gender; however, of the modern Romance languages, only Romanian and Italian preserve the neuter (in the latter it is used for collective nouns), while all others have lost it. Originally, the neuter included exclusively non-animate nouns; over time, changes in perspective have led to including names of objects within the masculine or feminine gender too (Rosetti 136). Subsequent to its disappearance in Latin, the neuter emerged, nevertheless, in Romanian, probably at the time of Common Romanian, where it carried the same endings as it does today: the masculine ending in the singular and the feminine ending in the plural. While such inflection allotment is not Latin in origin, Romanian does preserve the plural Latin endings proper, i.e. -**e** and -**uri**: *caiet* - *caiet**e*** (notebook, sg. - pl.), *tren* - *tren**uri*** (train, sg. - pl.). Al. Rosetti explains the re-emergence of the neuter in Romanian as "a response against the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign" insofar as "the tendency to motivate [gender allotment] will appear and reappear during the evolution of languages," so that "the creation of the neuter should be construed as the [linguistic] necessity to mark off the distinction between *the animate* and *the non-animate*" (Rosetti 384). On the other hand, Gr. Brâncuș argues that in Romanian the neuter, "enforced through contamination with the Slavic language," would "rather owe to the influence of the substratum" (Brâncuș 76). Accordingly, while in Romanian the neuter certainly cannot be of Slavic origin, as some linguists contend, it cannot be argued to have been reinforced through the influence of Slavic loanwords either, since a number of Slavic neuter loan nouns are now feminine in both Romanian and Albanian: Sl. сито (sieve) > Rom. *sită* / Alb. *sitë*; Sl. вĕдро (bucket) > Rom.

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vadră / Alb. *vedrë*. The Albanian neuter nouns are syntactically similar to the Romanian ones; nevertheless, Albanian distinguishes between the neuter proper, an early gender originating in the Thracian-Illyrian substratum, and *dual gender* neuter, a later gender. In Modern Albanian only few nouns are neuter, and the category tends to diminish and be phased out. Most originally neuter nouns have become either masculine, e.g. *mal* / *male* ("mountain"), or feminine, e.g. *të ngrenja* ("eating"). Neuter nouns always carry the prenominal *të* determiner and derive from either adjectives or verbal participles; they do not generally carry the indefinite article, and occur mostly in phrases: *të folurit*, "speech" / *të folurat*, "speeches"; *të dëgjuorit*, "listening" / *të dëgjuorat*, "listenings."

The neuter gender is a substantive class in all Balkan languages of Slavic origin: Bulgarian, Macedonian and Serbian have inherited it from Old Slavic, with the specific **-о** ending (yet there also exist neuter nouns ending in **-е** or **-ме**), and the category is comprised of both non-animate and animate nouns: дърво, "tree"; дете, "child." Greek neuter nouns are also either animate or non-animate, and form a substantive class: *δένδρο*, "tree"; *παιδί*, "child"; *μάθημα*, "lesson"*, αρνί*, "lamb."

With regard to case inflection, all Balkan languages tend to change to its analytic realization, a decrease in the number of cases, the syncretism of the genitive and the dative, and the neutralization of the stative/action contrast. Given the bilingualism, yet also multilingualism, of the Balkans, each of these languages has influenced the evolution of one linguistic phenomenon or another in the region. Suffice to mention here the early disappearance of the locative and the instrumental cases in Bulgarian and Macedonian Slavic due to the influence of the language spoken by the ancient Greeks and the ancestors of the Romanians. However, these cases are still in use in Modern Serbian and other Slavic languages. In Modern Bulgarian and Macedonian Slavic, which are analytic languages, case endings are absent, which entails a unique form of the noun for all cases: Nom./Acc./Gen./Dat. (fem. sg. -/+ def. art.) жена, "woman" - жената, "the woman" [woman=DEF], (fem. pl. -/+ def. art.) жени, "women" - жените, "the women" [women=DEF]; (neut. sg. -/+ def. art.) дете, "child" - детето, "the child," (neut. pl. -/+ def. art.) деца, "children" - децата, "the children"; (masc. sg. -/+ def. art.) мъж, "man" - мъжа/мъжът, "the man," (masc. sg. -/+ def. art.) мъже, "men" - мъжете, "the men."

Greek inflection has three distinct case forms for masculine nouns ending in *-ος* (Nom., Gen., Acc.), but only two case forms for masculine nouns ending in **-ας/-ης/-ες**, as well as for feminine and neuter nouns (Nom. sg., Acc. = Gen. sg.; Nom. = Acc. pl., Gen. pl. for masculine; Nom. = Acc., Gen. for neuter): masc. Nom. sg. ο άνθροπος, "(the) man" - Nom. pl. οι άνθρωποι, "(the) men," Gen. sg. του ανθρώπου, "(the) man's" - Gen. pl. των άνθρωπων, "(the) men's," Acc. sg. το άνθρωπο, "(the) man" - Acc. pl. τους ανθρώπους, "(the) men"; fem. Nom.Acc. sg. η / την κοπέλα, "(the) girl" - Nom.Acc. pl. οι / τις κοπέλες, "(the) girls," Gen. sg. της κοπέλας, "(the) girl's" - Gen. pl. των κοπέλων, "(the) girls' "; neut. Nom.Acc. sg. το δέντρο, "(the) tree" - Nom.Acc. pl. τα δέντρα, "(the) trees," Gen. sg. του δέντρου, "of (the) tree" - Gen. pl. των δέντρων, "of (the) "trees."

Romanian has direct cases, i.e. Nom./Acc., and oblique ones, i.e. Gen./Dat.; nouns carrying the definite article have more distinct case forms than nouns carrying the indefinite article. A slight case contrast is apparent with nouns carrying the indefinite article which have only two forms: feminine Nom. = Acc. *casă* (house), but *case* (houses) for the other cases with both numbers; masculine and neuter Nom.Acc.Gen.Dat. sg. *lup* (wolf) / *caiet* (notebook) and Nom.Acc.Gen.Dat. pl. *lupi* (wolves) / *caiete* (notebooks). Romanian nouns carrying the definite article have two case endings for the singular and plural, irrespective of their gender, thus:

Nom.Acc. sg: *casa* (the house) / *studentul* (the student) / *caietul* (the notebook)

Nom.Acc. pl. *casele* (the houses) / *studenții* (the students) / *caietele* (the notebooks)

Gen.Dat. sg. *casei / studentului / caietului*

Gen.Dat. pl. *caselor / studenților / caietelor*

In Albanian, nouns carrying the indefinite article have two case endings in the singular but three in the plural: Nom.Acc. sg. *mal*, "mountain," *vajzë*, "girl," *lule*, "flower"; Gen.Dat.Abl. sg. *mali, vajze, luleje*; Nom.Acc. pl. *male*, "mountains," *vajze*, "girls," *lule*, "flowers"; Gen.Dat. pl. *maleve, vaijzave, luleve;* Abl. pl. *malesh, vajzash, lulesh.* When they carry the definite article, masculine and

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feminine nouns have three case endings in the singular but two in the plural: Nom. sg. *mali*, "the mountain," *vajza*, "the girl"; Acc.sg. *malin, vajzën*; Gen.Dat.Abl. sg. *malit*, "of/to the mountain," *vajzës*, "of/to the girl"; Nom.Acc. pl. *malit*, "the mountains," *vajzat*, "the girls"; Gen.Dat.Abl. pl. *malevet, vajzavet.* On the contrary, neuter nouns stand apart since they typically have no declension.

We can notice from the above description that nouns in the genitive and the dative have identical forms, which linguists regard as a formal conflation of the two cases. The genitive–dative syncretism occurs in Modern Romanian, Albanian, Bulgarian and Greek. The generalization of this phenomenon, moreover, might be due to the substratum; however, a similar tendency may be noted in late Vulgar Latin (Brâncuș 47), with various inconsistencies in noun declension.

As regards the modern Balkan languages, we can note in Albanian the decrease and reorganization of the types of declension in the singular but their conflation in the plural through the emergence of a shared plural stem in contrast with the one in the singular, as well as the decrease in the number of cases and their reorganization, with the disappearance of certain case endings. In Greek, already in the third century A.D. the accusative and the genitive tended to be used interchangeably to replace the dative; Modern Greek has no dative case, which has been replaced by the accusative (with the preposition *σε*, "at/in"), as we shall see shortly. The same tendency to substitute the accusative for the dative is also apparent in Romanian, where dative constructions such as the normative *dau de mâncare copiilor* ("I am feeding the children") are replaced more and more often with the non-literary *dau de mâncare* ***la*** *copii*; the innovation may owe to the influence of Greek and Bulgarian, where the latter language – which has no genitive case any longer – uses the accusative (with the preposition на, "at/of") to express the dative.

To sum up, the formal conflation of the genitive and the dative cases in the Balkan languages appears as follows:

Romanian:	*casa fetei* (Gen.) (the girl's house)	/	*i-am spus fetei* (Dat.) (I told the girl)
Albanian:	*shtëpia e vajzës* (Gen.)	/	*i thashë vajzës* (Dat.)
Greek:	το σπίτι της κοπέλας (Gen.)	/	είπα στην κοπέλα (Dat.)
Bulgarian:	къщата на момичето (Gen.)	/	казах (й) на момичето (Dat.)

Considering that Romanian and Albanian are more conservative of the prototype than other Indo-European languages are and also that they preserve certain features from the Thracian-Illyrian substratum, we ought to address the vocative case too. The existence of the vocative in Romanian cannot be fully accounted for by appeal to either the language's Romance character or its substratum. Late Latin tended to reduce the number of cases: nouns belonging to all declesions had the vocative identical with the nominative save for those belonging to the second declension, where masculine nouns ending in *-us* displayed *-e* in the vocative (Nom. *dominus*, "lord" - Voc. *Domine!*); Romanian has inherited the *-e* vocative ending for masculine nouns: *doamne!* ("lord!"), *Ioane!* (John!). The same Latin legacy is apparent in Greek, where certain masculine nouns ending in *-ος* also display *-e* in the vocative: Nom. *άγγελος*, "angel" > Voc. *Άγγελε!*; Nom. *χριστιανός*, "Christian" > Voc. *χριστιανέ!*; their Latin counterparts are respectively *angĕlus,-i* and *christianus,-i*, both second declension masculine nouns whose vocative is *angĕle!* and *christiane!* However, both Romanian and Albanian have the feminine nouns display *-o* in the vocative, which is of Slavic origin; the two languages share this feature with Bulgarian and Macedonian: жено! "woman!" in Bulgarian and Macedonian, *soro!* "sister!", *Mario!* "Mary!", *babo!* "old woman!" in Romanian, *nëno!* "mother!" in Albanian.

As can be seen, the Balkan languages share a series of linguistic similarities which owe to the centuries-long coexistence of their native speakers in the Balkan Peninsula. Since the discovery of common linguistic features shared by Albanian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Macedonian and Greek – languages which are typologically but not genealogically related – linguists have endeavoured to identify their origin, whether or not shared in common, and to establish the starting point and the influence pattern from one language to another, which has not always been successful. Apart from the Balkan features which I have reviewed here, viewed as the most compelling, experts have identified

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other peculiar features of the Balkan languages which account for what is regarded as a linguistic Balkan unit.

To conclude, even if there is not always perfect cross-linguistic similarity among the Balkan languages, nevertheless they are comparable in certain respects. This is why further research in the field should build up on robust arguments regarding the existence and convergent or divergent evolution of certain linguistic phenomena peculiar to the Balkan languages.

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