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Old Albanian

Morphology – Part 2: The Verb ‘to be’



Introduction

- Basic claim/observation:
 - Each form of the present indicative paradigm of ‘be’ in Albanian has its own interesting story to tell, and together they offer insights from a Balkanological, an Indo-European, or a cross-linguistic perspective

Verb 'to be'

Paradigm for present indicative (in *gjuha standarde*, Standard Albanian):

1sg	<i>jam</i>	1pl	<i>jemi</i>
2	<i>je</i>	2	<i>jeni</i>
3	<i>është</i>	3	<i>janë</i>

3sg *ështëë*

- Counterpart to (Tosk) *ështëë* in Geg is *ânsht* (with nasalized vowel)
- *ë* represents Tosk outcome of proto-Albanian nasalized vowel, thus 3sg can be reconstructed as Proto-Albanian **ensti*.
- Where does *-n-* come from?
 - Orel (2000:179): “probably the result of the analogical pressure from the 3 pl.”
 - But his reconstruction for the 3pl form, **es-nti*, is tricky with nonsyllabic *n /C__C*
 - The *-n-* in 3pl is in the ending and not in the stem, so it a much less likely model for introducing into the 3sg stem

3sg *ështëë*

- Hamp (1980: 341) derives *ensti from a phrase with the adverb *H₁en, the “locative of a defective noun ... in late Indo-European”
- He gives parallels to the use of this adverbial (or its equivalent) as a preverb with ‘be’ in locational and existential senses, including the compounded form ἔνειμι ‘be in’ in Greek.
- Thus, “one way or another we may see underneath *ensti an old phrase *én esti < *H₁en *H₁esti”.
- A short form ë, also lengthened ë̄, from dialectal Tosk, derives from the preverb/adverb *H₁en used alone, like ἔνι in post-Classical Greek.

3sg *ështëë*

- Thus we see here the effects of a calquing, thus an early contact-induced change, on a Hellenistic Greek form ἔνεστι 'is (in)'
- In principle, however, as Hamp suggests, Albanian speakers shifting to Greek could have introduced this syntagm and the use of the adverb alone as a predicate into their Greek, due to the influence of their native language

2sg *je*

- This form proves to be an archaism
- Relevant vocalic sound changes for Albanian include:

$e > ja / _ _ CC$

e.g. *jashtë* 'outside' < *e[́]ks-to-
gjashtë 'six' < *se[́]ks-ti-
gjarpër 'snake' < *serp-en-o-

- Thus, 2sg *je* must be not from root-plus-ending *H₁es-si, as explicitly given in Orel 1998, but rather from degeminated *H₁esi
- Albanian *je* is thus parallel to Vedic Sanskrit *asi* and Greek εἶ and maybe, perhaps not coincidentally, early Slavic, e.g. OCS, (*j*)esi

1sg *jam*

- This form proves to be well behaved diachronically
- The sound change of *e* > *ja* / __CC is relevant here, and **e* here > *ja* before *-sm-*
- This form has the interesting property of having influenced the 3rd plural form *janë* as to its onset

3pl *janë*

- *janë* should be < *H₁s-enti, but that would ==> *gjanë* (*s > gj as in *gjarpër* 'snake' (< *serpen-), *e > ja (and *gjja* > *gja*)
- But if from * H₁es-enti, it would ==> *jejanë*
- Thus *jam*, the only form with *ja* by regular sound change, would seem to be model for the 3pl to develop with onset #*ja* (either *gjanë* > *janë* or *jejanë* > *janë*)

3pl *janë*

- This influence is in a manner reminiscent of that seen in Romanian
- 1sg *sînt*, ultimately from Latin *sum*, was remade on basis of 3pl *sînt* (ultimately from Latin *sunt*, maybe though via *suntunt* (cf. 1pl/2pl *sîntem/sînteți*))
- Since there are seemingly “old” lexical connections between Albanian and Romanian (Alb *mosh* ‘age’ ~ Rom *moș* ‘forefather’; see Introduction, Part 4), this could fit in with a hypothesis of early contact between (proto-)Albanian and Balkan Romance

3pl *janë*

- 1sg - 3pl linkage between paradigmatic cells is a cross-linguistically unusual connection (cf. Tantalou and Burzio 2007: 1091 — “cross-linguistically, syncretism ... tends to affect neighboring cells”; but are 1sg and 3pl “neighboring” in any sense?)
- Thus the Albanian form is involved in a development quite possibly induced by contact, either as a giver or a taker.
- However, maybe Greek is a model here, with 1sg εἶμι and 3pl εἶσι (both with first syllable [i]).

2pl *jeni*

- This form shows the effects of intra-paradigmatic analogical influence
- *jeni* cannot be from PIE *H₁s-te (which would likely ==> *shte*) or PIE *H₁es-te (which would likely ==> *jashtë*)
- Rather *jeni* was built on the 2sg form (not unlike the Latin 2sg -s affecting presumed original 2pl -ti* (< *-te) to give -tis) with regular Alb 2pl ending -ni (from PIE particle *nū 'now' via reanalysis, probably starting with imperative)
- Thus while 2sg affecting 2pl is cross-linguistically plausible, if Latin shows that linkage, it could have been a model via contact

1pl *jemi*

- 1pl is not from *esmen or the like (Orel suggests *esmei) due to *e > *ja* sound change, so that expected form would be *jami.
- Rather, looking to other forms with *-e-* via sound change alone leads to 2sg *je* as basis for *jami* > *jemi*, but how would a 2sg form affect a 1pl?
- Such a linkage between paradigmatic cells might be possible, but more likely, there was mediation through innovative 2pl, with “adjacent” cells (1pl <==> 2pl) affected, as found elsewhere (e.g. Modern Greek nonactive 1pl *-omastan*, basis for AGrk 2pl *-esϑe* ==> MGrk *-osastan*)

Verb ‘to be’

Overall, therefore, this one paradigm shows the different sorts of historical influences that have affected Albanian: its heritage as an Indo-European language and its contacts as a language of the Balkans with other languages in the region.

In addition, from the cross-linguistic parallels invoked here, we also see here the possible internal workings of the Albanian system in itself, thus pointing to an added perspective beyond the historical ones, namely Albanian as a natural human language.

Faleminderit për vëmendjen tuaj!

Thank you for your attention!