

BRIAN JOSEPH

Old Albanian

Morphosyntactic Structures – Part 5: Progressive *po*

Aspectual marker *po*

- Aspectual marker *po*: progressive (continuative) aspect marker, denoting “a momentary action in progress” (Newmark et al. 1982: 36)
- Occurs with present tense and imperfect tense:

Agimi po këndon ‘Agim is singing’ (Present)

Agimi po këndonte ‘Agim was singing’ (Imperfect)

- Present tense without *po* denotes a general state:

Agimi këndon ‘Agim sings’ (habitually, i.e. ‘is a singer’)

Aspectual marker *po*

- Alternative way of expressing progressivity: “the verb **jam** [‘be’] in the present or imperfect followed by a gerundive introduced by **duke**” (Newmark et al. 1982: 36) e.g.:

Agimi është duke kënduar ‘Agim is singing’

po more generally

- There is a wide range of meanings and thus functions associated with the form *po*.

Particle:

- affirmative particle: ‘yes; indeed’
- confirmative tag in questions: ‘is that right?’
- confirmative identifier: ‘exactly; precisely; the very’
- indicator of momentaneous (on-going) activity

Interjection: • ‘oh say! Say! But say!’

Conjunction: • ‘but’; ‘if; if only’

Chronology and dialectology of *po*

- Progressive *po* occurs in Old Albanian, with instances in Buzuku, e.g.

lazëri *miku* *ynë po ënfle*
Lazarus.NOM friend.NOM our PO sleeps.PRS.3SG
'Our friend Lazarus is sleeping'

- Progressive *po* occurs in both Geg and Tosk, but not in outlying dialects of Tosk (Arvanitika or Arbëresh), where *duke* (in the forms *tuke, tue*) + Participle occur (an option in the standard language)

Etymology of progressive *po*

- Slavic aspectual prefix *po*?
 - Some South Slavic instances of *po* seem relevant, e.g. Slovene *pobolévati* ‘keep getting sick, but not seriously’ (repeated action) or Serbian *po-plakati* ‘to weep for a while’ (brief duration)
 - but, most instances of aspectual *po* in Slavic are perfectivizing not imperfectivizing
 - and, the South Slavic instances are not specifically the “momentary action in progress” of Albanian *po*
 - moreover, Slavic influence on Albanian is largely lexical not grammatical

Etymology of progressive *po*

- Related to *po(r)* ‘but’?
- Albanian affirmative particle *po*?
- But how to motivate the semantic shift for each possibility?
 - no clear way of getting from ‘but’ to progressivity
 - going from affirmative sense has a better basis

Etymology of progressive *po*

An important suggestion from Eric Hamp:

- affirmative *po* from PIE *pēst
- *pēst = asseverative particle *pe (cf. Latin *quippe* ‘of course’) + *H₁est (3sg injunctive of ‘be’)
- association of *H₁es- ‘be’ with truth (cf. Sanskrit *satya*- ‘true’)
- thus, *pēst = emphatic ‘it is true’, e.g. ‘it is just so’

Etymology of progressive *po*

An important typological parallel — English *just*:

- momentary and progressive: *I am just now stepping off of the plane*
- Indian English *just now* as progressive marker

Indian English

I am knowing this

I am going to school

I am just now going home

British English

I know this

I go to school

I am going home

Progressive *po* as a grammatical element

Progressive *po* is embedded in the grammar of the verb phrase as an exclusively preverbal element.

Much of Albanian grammatical material in the verb phrase is preverbal (e.g. future marker *do*, negation markers *nuk* or *s'*, past nonactive/mediopassive marker *u*, etc.), so fixing of *po* as preverbal is in line with Albanian internal typology.

Progressive *po* as a grammatical element

Balkan context:

- Modern Greek expands overt aspect marking beyond what is in Ancient Greek (e.g. present imperfective overtly marked with *-n-*, as in *lino* ‘loosen’ from AGrk *luō*)
- Perhaps more tellingly, aspect is a crucial part of Balkan Slavic verb morphosyntax
- Positing Slavic influence for the emergence of overt aspectual marking would explain absence of *po* in outlying dialects, where there was less or no contact with Slavic

Conclusion

- Thus, as in so many cases, understanding Albanian historical developments require attention to Albanian as an Indo-European language, Albanian as a Balkan language, and Albanian as a natural human language.

Faleminderit për vëmendjen tuaj!

Thank you for your attention!