

The elusive beginnings of Balkan Slavic case loss: Two myths

I Introduction

- The development of the Bulgarian and Macedonian languages is characterized—in contrast to the other Slavic languages—by an almost total loss of case inflection.
- The most important developments leading to case loss can be dated roughly to a period between the 11th and 16th centuries. The process of case loss is illustrated with the following examples:

(1) Old Church Slavonic. *Codex Marianus*, 11th Century (John 1:50).

<i>viděhъ</i>	<i>tę</i>	<i>podъ</i>	<i>smokovъnic-eję</i>
I-saw	you.ACC	PREP	fig_tree-INS
'I saw you under the fig tree'			

(2) (Early) Modern Balkan Slavic. *Tihonravon Damascene*, 17th Century (Dëmina 1985).

<i>si</i>	<i>počinete</i>	<i>pod</i>	<i>dravo-to</i>
REFL	rest.IMP.2PL	PREP	tree-DEF
'rest under the tree!'			

- All evidence that informs us about the historical process is based on written sources that adhere to the Church Slavonic literary tradition. Therefore, the evidence remains indirect until the emergence of the first vernacular-based texts in the 17th century.
- While case-loss cannot be seen as a Balkanism, many characteristics of the process in Balkan Slavic are directly related to the shared features of the Balkan Sprachbund, such as the genitive–dative merger. That is why the beginnings of the case loss are relevant also from the perspective of the Sprachbund.
- Here, I address two problematic questions regarding the written sources. First, I discuss the role of the so-called *Cserged Prayers* as evidence for spoken Bulgarian of the 12th and 13th centuries, and, second, I evaluate the increase in the use of the preposition *кѣ* with the dative in Middle Bulgarian and Macedonian manuscripts.

II The Cserged Prayers

- The Cserged Prayers are a small set of 19th-century copies of earlier manuscripts, consisting of Protestant Lutheran hymns and other texts translated from German and written with Latin alphabet, first studied by Fran Miklosič (Miklosich 1856).

- The Slavic inhabitants of a village called Bolgárcserged in Hungarian, or Cergău Mic in Romanian, were the descendants of Bulgarians who were forced to move from northwestern Bulgaria to Transylvania most likely in the 13th century.
- The reason for their departure remains unclear. Ljubomir Miletič (1987 [1896–1900], 101) was first inclined to think they may have been Bogomils, driven out because of their heresy. Yet later, Miletič (1926, 7) became convinced that they were taken as slaves between 1260–1266 during Stephen V of Hungary's campaign against the Bulgarians.
- The language of the *Cserged Prayers* displays many features of an advanced case loss: Only the dative and genitive–accusative are left in masculine singular, although there are also several dative plural forms. In addition, there is a fully developed definite article, stemming from the demonstrative pronoun **тъ*.

(3) The Hymnal of 1812, hymn 39 (Miletič 1987 [1896–1900], 177–179)

На трети час божи син (с) бичове го биле, главата му је сдарбаха, једин венец от тарније, от бит клоц го облянкоха и го биеха нехарније, карстиот на смартни му час тому бе да го носи.

Um drei ward der Gottessohn mit Geisseln geschmissen, und sein Haupt mit einer Kron von Dornen zerrissen, gekleidet zu Hohn und Spott ward er sehr geschlagen, und das Kreuz zu seinem Tod musst er selber tragen.

- Many scholars have acknowledged the value of the *Cserged Prayers*. Yet, in many occasions, especially regarding the loss of case inflection and the emergence of the definite article, the texts are taken at their face value, representing 13th century spoken Bulgarian (see, e.g., Bernštejn 1948, 233; Svane 1961, 235; Velcheva 2014, 6).
- Gunnar Svane (1961, 235) states that some of the hymns are translations from 16th century German hymns. However, crucially, Miletič (1987 [1896–1900], 116) himself notes that the translations must be based, at the earliest, on a German hymnal, published in 1680.
- This dating gives a minimum of 400 years between the texts and the linguistic variety that they are sometimes taken to represent. This leap of faith is risky, even in the case of the isolation of the speakers.

III Increase in the use of the preposition *кѣ*

- Several researchers have noted an increase in the use of the preposition *кѣ* with the dative instead of the bare dative in the Middle Bulgarian and Macedonian manuscripts (see, e.g., Steinke 1968, 89). This occurs in constructions that express the addressee of communication.

(4) Old Church Slavonic. *Codex Marianus* (Luke 22:48)

и[соус]ъ же рече емоу: иудо лобъзаниемъ ли с[ы]на чл[овѣч]скааго прѣдаши

(5) Old Church Slavonic. *Codex Marianus* (Luke 22:15)

и рече къ нимъ: желѣниемъ се възделѣхъ пасха ѳсти съ вами

- This alleged competition between the dative and the prepositional construction encouraged Karl Meyer (1920, 72–74) to propose that the preposition *къ* paved the way for the new construction with *на* and the accusative in Balkan Slavic. In some more conservative analyses, the increase in the use of the preposition *къ* is, nevertheless, seen as an indication of a development toward an analytic and thus more Balkan language type (for analyticism in the Balkan Sprachbund, see Asenova 2002, 76).
- However, researchers have seldom given any data on the distribution and frequency of the construction, with the exception of Jerzy Rusek (1964, 118), who studied the 13th-century *Hludov Triodion*, counted 107 instances of marking the addressee of the verb *rešti* ‘to speak, say’ with the bare dative and 122 with the preposition, a ratio of 9:8, the bare dative narrowly dominating.
- In comparison with the *Combined Paterikon* from the 14th century, which represents more normativized language than *Hludov Triodion*, the ratio between the constructions is 5:3 in favor of the bare dative. This seems to indicate that, indeed, the construction may reflect a change in the spoken language.
- In comparison with Old Church Slavonic (OCS), at the first glance, there is a clear tendency toward an increase in the use of the prepositional construction in later texts, since in *Codex Marianus* the verb *rešti* occurs without the preposition in five out of six cases. Yet the Gospels differ here dramatically: In Luke, the ratio is 3:2, significantly less in favor of the bare dative.
- Olga Thomason (2006) has studied the use of prepositions in both OCS and the Greek New Testament. Her data shows that the use of the preposition *къ* and the dative in expressing the addressees depends significantly on the construction used in the Greek source text. The Greek preposition *pros* with the accusative coincides with the prepositional construction in OCS:

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Greek	2	14	113	24
OCS	11	13	121	23

The addressee use of the Greek *pros* + accusative and the OCS *къ* + dative constructions in the gospels (Thomason 2006, 23, 139).

- There are strong indications that the source text affects the choice of the construction in a very significant manner, both in OCS and in later texts. To show

this further, in the *Tale of Troy* from the 14th century, which exceptionally does not have a Greek source text, there is only three uses of the prepositional construction compared to 55 cases of the bare dative with the verb *rešti*.

- Rusek (1964, 118–119), too, made a comparison with the source text of the *Hludov Triodion*, showing that while the Greek bare dative corresponds to the bare dative in 9 out of 10 cases, there is more spontaneous use of the prepositional construction, since only 2 out of 3 instances of its use is explained by the Greek model.
- It seems that there may be a small increase in the use of the construction with the preposition *къ* to mark the addressees, independently from the source text. Instead of being a symptom of a change in the spoken language, this may imply increasing formulaicity which can also be an indirect indication of the weakening of the dative case. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of an increase in the use of the preposition *къ* is probably not very significant in the study of the Balkan Slavic case loss.

IV Concluding questions

- Within the study of the Balkan Slavic languages, is there a tendency to date the beginning of changes earlier than what is justifiable by the evidence?
- If so, what are the indications of this for the role of Slavic in the formation of the Balkan Sprachbund?

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