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SPRACHBUND - A LINGUISTIC CONCEPT IN HISTORY AND PRESENT TIME

Helmut Wilhelm Schaller
(Germany)

Since Nikolaj Trubetzkoy in 1928 introduced the term “Sprachbund” with a look on the Balkan languages in contrast to the term “language family” like Slavic, Romance or German a long lasting discussion about this term and its application to different European and non-European languages was introduced from 1966, the year of the first International Congress of South-eastern European Studies in Sofia, onwards. The best known and most discussed application of the concept of “Sprachbund”, of course, is the “Balkan-Sprachbund” comprising the majority of South-East European languages, as there are Bulgarian including Macedonian, Serbian and Bosnian, Rumanian with its different representatives in the Balkans, also Albanian and Modern Greek. But there are also other applications of the term “Sprachbund” like the “Donausprachbund” and the “Banat-Sprachbund”. Outside the Balkans we find the concept of a “Lithuanian-Polish Sprachbund” and a “Baltic Sprachbund”.

We have to look at an “exterior structure” of a “Sprachbund”, that means which languages, belonging to different language families, are there represented and we have to look also at an “interior structure” of a “Sprachbund”, that means which common markers are decisive for the languages belonging to a “Sprachbund”. It is generally assumed that phonetic, morphological, syntactic and idiomatic structures are decisive, but lexical correspondences are not valid for a language unit. Finally one has to put the question of the validity of a “Sprachbund-modell”. Will it be represented now by a higher level of a “European language unity” researched by the new linguistic branch “Eurolinguistics” or can one continue with the term “Balkan-Sprachbund”?

It is well-known that linguists had a long-lasting discussion not only on the concept of “Sprachbund”¹ concerning the Balkan languages, but also on the concept of “Sprachgemeinschaft”² concerning the Baltic and Slavic languages beside the traditional term of language family. All these terms are connected with the question of typology and areal linguistics. One has to call in question, if Indoeuropean languages belonging to a “Sprachbund” or to a “Sprachgemeinschaft” show connections with languages outside the area of Indoeuropean languages.

As Östen Dahl has pointed out in a paper on principles of areal typology, this term attempts to characterize languages according to the extent to which linguistic concepts are expressed by morphological, e.g. word-internal modification or by the use of separate words³. Two theoretical trends in linguistics could be observed during 20th century linguistic studies, namely structural linguistics and generative grammar, founded by Noam Chomsky. Structural linguistics or structuralism was en vogue in the first half of the 20th century, generative grammar during the second half of this century. But there is also the comparative method central to historical linguistics, the most important method used to explore linguistic history and, very important to say, independent from all other current trends. It is of course true that languages which belong to one family are genetically related to one another. Thus Indoeuropean languages, including Baltic and Slavic languages as members of the Balto-Slavic “Sprachgemeinschaft/Balto-Slavic language community” show exclusive correspondences⁴, but also the languages of the “Balkan Sprachbund” show a great number of correspondences between South Slavic and non-Slavic Balkan languages, as there are at the top of the tree Albanian, Rumanian and modern Greek, but also outside the “Balkan Sprachbund/Balkan language unity” between Scandinavian languages and Balkan languages concerning e.g. the postpositive article, a typical phenomenon of European languages, especially in German and Roman languages⁵. But there are also correspondences between

¹ Cf. A.Meillet: *Les dialectes indo-européens*. Paris 1908, p.40:

„L’ unité balto-slave est l’une de celles que personne ne conteste, et en effet la ressemblance générale du baltique et du slave est évidente.”

V. Georgiev: *Balto-slavjanskij, germanskij I indoiranskij*. In: *Slavjanska Filologija. Sbornik statej 1*. Moskva 1958. P.7-26.

Helmut W. Schaller: *Sprachbund – Sprachgemeinschaft – Sprachfamilie. Eine vergleichende Betrachtung*. In: *Linguistique Balkanique XXVI*, 1983, 1, p.11-16;

² Ronald Löttsch: *Zum Verhältnis zwischen der genetischen, typologischen und arealen Klassifizierung der slawischen Sprachen und Dialekte*. In: *Zeitschrift für Slawistik 27*, 1982, S.356-363.

³ Östen Dahl: *Principles of areal typology*. In: *Language Typology and Language Universals*. Berlin-New York 2001. P.1056.

⁴ Cf. H.W.Schaller: *Sprachbund – Sprachgemeinschaft - Sprachfamilie. Eine vergleichende Betrachtung*. In: *Linguistique Balkanique XXVI*, 1983, H.1, p.11-16.

⁵ Concerning the term “Sprachbund” cf.: Ekkehard König, Martin Haspelmath: *Der europäische Sprachbund*. In: *Eurolinguistik*. Wiesbaden 1999. S.1127;

Slavic languages as flectional languages and agglutinating languages like Finnish, Hungarian and Turkish. There is an influence of Slavic languages on Hungarian concerning the special word formation of numerals from 11 up to 19 by “one+ten” and so on, found in all Slavic languages, but also in Albanian, Rumanian, but not in Modern Greek, a phenomenon of word formation which is also used in Latvian, but not in Lithuanian. One has to mention the genitive of negated direct objects in Slavic and Baltic languages, the predicative instrumental in Baltic and Slavic languages corresponding perhaps to the Finnish “Essive” and “Translative”, the analytic comparison of adjectives in Balkan languages corresponding perhaps to Turkish analytic forms of comparison.

It seems that there exist internal correspondences within the Indoeuropean languages like analytic inflection, postposition of definite articles beside external correspondences with agglutinating languages in Europe like analytic comparison of adjectives, perhaps a Turkish influence, word formation of numerals or the predicative instrumental. On the premises of language contact it is rather easy to explain the phenomena of internal and external correspondences, but what should one say about correspondences, where no geographical contact can be seen.

As Martin Haspelmath has pointed out, areal typology is not among the traditional fields of linguistics⁶. Areal linguistics on the one hand, and typology on the other have had close ties for a long time. The original motivation of both was the apparent insufficiency of the traditional genetic “family tree/Stammbaum”, the model for the study of relationship between languages. Thus, areal linguistics are traditionally concerned with similarities between geographically contiguous languages, in particular when they cannot be ascribed to a common protolanguage like “Proto-Slavic” and the identification of so-called “Sprachbünde”, the plural of German “Sprachbund”, literally “language union” or as they are often referred to in English, “linguistic areas”. Similarly the aim of typology has been understood as the establishment of a taxonomy of languages based on grammatical and phonological features, independent of genetic relationships. To the extent that typologically interesting features are not evenly spread geographically but tend to cluster in specific areas, there is an obvious

Thomas Stolz: Sprachbund im Baltikum? Estnisch und Lettisch im Zentrum einer sprachlichen Konvergenzlandschaft. Bochum 1991.

Cf. the beginnings of the theory of “Sprachbund” by Nikolaj Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson: N.Trubetzkoy: K charakteristike evrazijskogo jazykovogo sojuza. In: Roman Jakobson: Selected Writings I, The Hague 1971, p.144-201.

⁶ Martin Haspelmath: The European linguistic area: Standard Average European. In: Language Typology and Language Universals. Berlin-New York 2001. p.1492; Harald Haarmann: Aspekte der Arealtypologie: Die Problematik der europäischen Sprachbünde. Tübingen 1976; H. W. Schaller: Genetische und typologische Übereinstimmungen der Balkansprachen mit anderen europäischen Sprachen. In: Linguistique Balkanique XXIX, 1986, 4, p.61-65.

overlap in interests between the two fields. The problem of the morpho-syntactic treatment of Balkan languages was discussed by Harald L. Klagstad on the occasion of the fifth international congress of slavists in Sofia 1963: “Finally, there is the problem of how to describe fruitfully the Balkan languages on a comparative basis as they exist today. It is suggested here that we are in effect confronted by “morphological” words, or those free forms containing none of the above described clitics, or by “syntactic” words, or those free forms containing one or more of these clitics. The border line between morphology and syntax, often considered to be a vague one by linguists, is certainly hard to define here. The word “morpho-syntactics” not a new one in the United States, appears to be the best one not only to indicate the nature of the phenomenon presented by the Balkan linguistic group but also to suggest methods of dealing with the data.”⁷

Following Benjamin Lee Whorf (1941) we have with Romance, Germanic and Balto-Slavic languages, and more marginally also the westernmost Finno-Ugrian a “Standard Average European/SAE”⁸. While the close syntactic parallels among the Balkan languages have struck linguists since the 19th century and the existence of a Balkan Sprachbund has been nearly universally accepted, the European linguistic area has long been neglected. This may at first appear surprising, because the members of the Sprachbund are among the best studied languages of the world. However it is easy to understand why linguists have been slow to appreciate the significance of the similarities among the core European languages. Since most comparative linguists know these languages particularly well, they have tended to see non-European languages as special and unusual, and the similarities among the European languages have not seemed surprising. Thus, it was only toward the end of the 20th century, when more and more has become known about the grammatical properties of the languages of the rest of the world, that linguists realized how particular the core European languages are in some way when seen in the world-wide context.

A linguistic area is particularly striking when it comprises languages from genealogically unrelated languages, but this is not a necessary feature of a Sprachbund. The Balkan languages are all Indo-European languages, but they are from different families within Indo-European, namely Romanian, Slavic, Greek and Albanian. Not all languages of these

⁷ H. L. Klagstad: Toward a morpho-syntactic treatment of the Balkan linguistic group. In: American contributions to the fifth international congress of slavists I, The Hague 1963. S.188-189.

Cf. also H. W. Schaller: Möglichkeiten einer inneren Gliederung des Balkansprachbundes. In: Linguistique Balkanique XX, 1977, 1-2, p. 45-51.

⁸ Benjamin Lee Whorf: The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language. In: Selected writings of B. L. Whorf. Cambridge 1956, p.138: “Core European languages in this linguistic area is sometimes called “Standard Average European”, abbreviated “SAE”.”

families belong to the Balkan linguistic area, so nearly nobody questioned the validity of the Balkan Sprachbund, except Uriel Weinreich in 1958:

“...Linguists have discussed this relationship before viz. under the leading of “Sprachbund” (Roman Jakobson). It is the relation which exists, for example among the Balkan languages of which describes the similarities of the vowel system of Ukrainian, Southeast Yiddish, Rumanian, and Bulgarian, the consonantal similarities of the languages existing from Poland to Japan, or the use of classifiers in South and Southeast Asia.

Yet, although the phenomenon is familiar, the term “Sprachbund” is admittedly unsatisfactory. Its fundamental fault is that it implies a unit, as if a language either were or were not a member of a given Sprachbund. But of course a grouping of this sort has no specific a priori criteria, a group of geographically continuous languages may be classified as a “Sprachbund” ad hoc, with respect to any structural isogloss...it would be preferable, I feel, to abandon these terms and to speak of cases of convergent development and if necessary of convergence areas”⁹

Some linguists trace back languages to their first stage of existence like Gyula Decsy does. They reconstruct the linguistic structure in the past of Europe, as well as an Afroasiatic protolanguage, a Turkish, a Chinese and Uralic protolanguage¹⁰. But our question is here, what are the identities and differences of European languages and how are they influenced by non-Indoeuropean languages. A decisive view on European languages from a typological point of view was made by Ernst Lewy in 1942, analyzing the structure of European languages¹¹. In the case of “Standard Average European/SAE” three entire families of Indoeuropean languages belong to the linguistic area, namely Romance, Germanic and Balto-Slavic. As was pointed out by Haspelmath in 1998 most of the characteristic SAE features can be called also Europeanisms, if the great majority of core European languages possess it, that the geographically adjacent languages lack it, e.g. Celtic in the west, Turkic in the east. Some features are not found in the majority of the world’s languages, e.g. instrumental case of

⁹ U. Weinreich: On the compatibility of genetic relationship and convergent development. In: *Word* 14, 1958, S.374-379, S.378-379.

¹⁰ Gyula Decsy: *Die linguistische Struktur Europas. Vergangenheit, Gegenwart, Zukunft*. Wiesbaden 1973; *The Afroasiatic protolanguage*. Bloomington/Indiana 2002; *The Turkic protolanguage*. Bloomington/Indiana 1998; *The Chinese protolanguage*. Bloomington 2003; *The Uralic protolanguage*. Bloomington 1990.

Cf. also Gyula Decsy: *The linguistic identity of Europe 1: The 62 languages of Europe classified in functional zones*. 2000. 2: *Macrolinguistics and the demostatistics of Europe*. 2000.

Cf. also Hans J. Vermeer. *Untersuchungen zum Bau zentralsüdasiatischer Sprachen (Ein Beitrag zur Sprachbundfrage)*. Heidelberg 1969.

Also Karen H. Ebert: *Südasiens als Sprachbund*. In: *Language Typology and Language Universals*. Berlin-New York 2001. S.1529-1539.

¹¹ Ernst Lewy: *Der Bau der europäischen Sprachen*. Dublin 1942. Published as volume 48 in the “Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy”.

Slavic and Baltic languages, especially with the function of a predicative instrumental. Here we find external correspondences of Slavic and Baltic languages with an agglutinating language. But the predicative instrumental seems not to be an Europeism like the definite article, because its use is restricted to Baltic and Slavic languages, except Bulgarian and Macedonian with its analytic inflections.

Though often genetically only remotely related, in some cases totally unrelated, the Balkan languages share sets of typological features. Their nominal case systems are disintegrated, e.g. in Bulgarian¹², and their verbal systems are analytical to a considerable degree. They have a general tendency towards an explicit marking of grammatical function words, and towards uniformity of morphological markers. As has been pointed out one often notices only the lexicon and the inflections change, while the “manner of expression” remains the same, e.g. the formation of numerals from 11 up to 19 in all Slavic languages, within the Baltic group only in Latvian, in Albanian, in Rumanian and as the only Fenno-ugric language in Hungarian.¹³ This formation of numerals is also found in some dialects of Modern Greek, but in Old Greek we already find general tendencies to use such forms. Very important is the fact that Aromunian and Hungarian extended this word –formation of numerals beyond 20 from 21 up to 29. But both languages are too distant located to suppose a mutual influence. Concerning Latvian we have to ask if it was a Slavic influence or an independent evolution. The same comes into question with Slavic and Rumanian, where we have to see the Latin “unus super decem” – unsprezece in Rumanian. It is the Old Armenian language, which seems to be a result of the common time of Baltic and Slavic languages. As regarding Albanian, Rumanian and Old Armenian they could have been influenced by other

¹² Cf. Jurij S.Maslov: Kām tipologiĉeskata charakteristika na bālgarski ezik, Sfera na morfologiĉeskata tipologija. In: *Ezik i literatura XXXVI*, 1981, Nr.5. p.6-9.

¹³ Cf. G. Reichenkron: Der lokativische Zähltypus für die Reihe 11 bis 19: „eins auf zehn“. In: *Südost-Forschungen* 17, 1958, H.1, p.161:

„Im Albanischen und Rumänischen sind also die Ausdrucksweisen für 11-19 seit Beginn der Überlieferung als feste Verbindungen vorhanden. Während für das Rumänische notfalls eine Nachahmung nach dem Slawischen unter Verwendung von lateinischen Mitteln angenommen werden könnte, die ganz in den Rahmen des sonstigen Verhaltens des Rumänischen gerade bei der Kategorie der Zahlwörter passt, sind für das Albanische derartige Umwandlungen der Zahlenreihen oder anderer Wortarten nach dem Slawischen nicht bekannt.“

Cf. also G.Reichenkron, op.cit.p.161:

„Da diese albanische Ausdrucksweise weder vom Klassisch-Lateinischen noch vom Vulgärlateinischen zu verstehen ist, also jener Sprache, die syntaktisch und morphologisch am stärksten auf das Albanische eingewirkt hat, und da dieser lokativische Typus auch sonst nirgends in der Westromania anzutreffen ist, dürfte es nicht ausgeschlossen sein, dass einmal das Thrako-Illyrische diese lokativische Ausdrucksweise gekannt hat, die sich dann im vorhistorischen Albanisch und vorhistorischen Rumänisch vermittels der Präposition „um-herum, auf“ bzw. „über-hin, auf“ fortgesetzt hat und dann sekundär durch die ähnlich gebaute slawische Ausdrucksweise im Rumänischen gestützt und endgültig gefestigt wurde.“

Cf. also R.Večerka. K vývoj číslovek v balkanských jazycích. In: *Studia balkanica bohemoslovaca*. Brno 1970. S.246.

Indoeuropean languages, perhaps Illyrian or Thracian. In Hungarian we have the imitation of the Slavic word formation of numerals.

Another field not only of Balkan but also European languages concordances seems to be the formation of comparison. Not only in Balkan languages, but also in English we find analytic forms of comparison, with “much” and “more”. Other Indoeuropean languages also use suppletive forms for comparison, in Latin we find “bonus//melior//optimus”, in German “gut//besser//am besten” or in English “bad//worse//worst”. Also in Russian we find suppletive forms, e.g. хороший //лучший or плохой// худший; малый// меньший, много// больше. There are also some irregular forms used in Russian beside regular forms of comparison, e.g. Он моложе меня //He is younger than me; Он будет по умнее нас всех// “He will be wiser than us”.

Comparison of adjectives: Russian: хорошо//лучший, плохой//худший, малый// меньший, много// больше. *Bulgarian:* добър//по- добър//най- добър. *Modern Greek:* καλός//πιο καλός//ό πιο καλός. *Latin:* bonus//melior//optimus. *German:* gut//besser//am besten.

The beginnings of analytic comparison in Bulgarian trace back to Middle Bulgarian, the forms по-богатъ, най-лепа may be compared with Greek comparison, as there are the forms καλός, πιο καλός, ό πιο καλός in Rumanian “bun, mai bun, cel mai bun”. In Bulgarian there are other parallel constructions with “по” and the meaning of a higher degree, e.g. той е по-майстор от тебе = He is the better master than you, ти по- играеш от него = you are playing better than he.¹⁴ As Vladimir Georgiev has pointed out in 1952 there was perhaps a Turkish influence with its analytic forms of comparison, e.g. ”güzel//daha güzel”¹⁵. Analytic comparison can also be found with certain tendencies in Lithuanian, f.e. didis//po-didis” with the meaning “big” and “rather big”¹⁶.

¹⁴ I. Lekov: Otklonenija ot flektivnogo stroja v slavjanskich jazykach. In: Voprosy Jazykoznanija 1956, 2, p.18-26, esp.p.20-21.

Cf. also R.Nahtigal: Die slavischen Sprachen. Abriss der vergleichenden Grammatik. Wiesbaden 1961. S.203: „Im Bulgarischen ging die alte Bildung des Komparativs verloren. Heutzutage bildet es den Komparativ durch Vorsetzen des Präfixes, das auch im Russischen Verwendung findet, vor den Positiv, der aber seinen Akzent bewahrt: по-добър, по-висок usw. Auf eine Besonderheit ist dabei hinzuweisen, dass nämlich auf diese Weise sowie dem superlativischen най- auch Substantive und Verben einer Steigerung fähig sind: по-юнак „ein größerer Held“, най-юнак „der größte Held“ по-обичам „ich liebe mehr“, най-обичам „ich liebe am meisten“.

¹⁵ V. Georgiev: Opit na periodizacija na istorijata na bâlgarskija ezik. In: Izvestija na Instituta za bâlgarski ezik 2, 1952, S.100-101.

¹⁶ Cf. H. W. Schaller: Der bulgarische Komparativ – eine baltoslavische Gemeinsamkeit? In: Linguistique Balkanique XXVII, 1984, 1, p.39-42.

Beside the analytic comparison we have another balkanism and also europeism, namely the postponed article¹⁷, used in Bulgarian, Albanian, Rumanian, but not in Modern Greek, not in Serbian, but in Scandinavian languages as there are Danish, Norwegian and Swedish¹⁸. The postponed article is used with names of mountains, e.g. Bulgarian “Алпите//die Alpen”. The development of postponed articles in Scandinavian languages is a different one, not connected with the Balkan languages, but in any case a “Europeism”.

Concerning Balkan languages we find three types of postponed articles as there are:

- 1.The South Slavic system of articles, postponed and morphologically connected with the noun which they determine, e.g. Bulgarian човекът, жената, мястото ...
- 2.The Albanian-Rumanian system of articles, languages where the article is postponed, morphologically connected with the noun they determine, but there are also a copulative position and function within a nominal group, consisting of a noun and an adjective, e.g. Albanian: “njeriu i mirë”, Rumanian: “omul cel bun”.¹⁹
- 3.The Greek system of articles with the preposition of definite articles, but also with the possibility of a copulative article like in Albanian and Rumanian, e.g. *ὁ ἀνθρωπος ὁ ἄγαθος*.

So we can conclude that there exist internal correspondences within the Indoeuropean languages like analytic inflection and postposition of definite articles beside external correspondences with agglutinating languages in Europe like analytic comparison of adjectives, perhaps a Turkish influence, word formation of numerals from 11 up to 19 or the predicative instrumental with its parallels in Finnish.

¹⁷ Concerning the use of articles in Balkan languages cf. N.Reiter: Der Artikel in den Balkansprachen. In: Zeitschrift für Balkanologie 5, 1967, p.103-119.

¹⁸ Cf. H. W. Schaller: Genetische und typologische Übereinstimmungen der Balkansprachen mit anderen europäischen Sprachen. In: Linguistique Balkanique XXIX, 1986, 4, S.64: „Zieht man z.B. das Schwedische, Dänische und Norwegische gerade beim Artikel zum Vergleich heran, so zeigt sich, dass dieser dort ebenfalls nachgestellt wird, z.B. im Schwedischen „hund/hunden“, hus/huset“ u.a. Der nachgestellte Artikel findet im Schwedischen aber nur dann Verwendung, wenn ein Adjektiv in bestimmter Form dem Substantiv vorangeht, also vergleichbar etwa dem albanische-rumänischen Artikelsystems, soweit es sich dort um einen kopulativen Artikel handelt. Im Schwedischen findet der bestimmte Artikel außerdem dann Verwendung, wenn dem Substantiv ein Demonstrativpronomen vorangeht, z.B. „det stora huset das große Haus“, „den mannen kann jag inde med = den Mann mag ich nicht leiden.“

¹⁹ Cf. W. Stölting: das Artikelsystem im Albanischen und Rumänischen. In: Beiträge zur Südosteuropa-Forschung. München 1966. P.48-78.