

TRACING SYNTACTIC CHANGE IN A *KLEINKORPUSSPRACHE*: TWO CASE STUDIES FROM OLD ALBANIAN

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The paper presents a methodological discussion on the possibilities of a (micro) parametric approach to syntactic reconstruction of Old and pre-literary Albanian, illustrated by a formal analysis of the position of clitics and the verb and the (morpho)syntax of definiteness in the 16th and 17th-century Old Albanian texts. It is argued that, in contrast to Modern Albanian, Old Albanian lacked (that is, was in the process of gradually acquiring) overt V-movement with imperatives in the sentential domain and overt N-movement in the DP domain.

Keywords: Old Albanian, syntactic change, (micro)parametric reconstruction, clitics, V-movement, definiteness, N-movement

СЛЕДЕЊЕ СИНТАКТИЧКА ПРОМЕНА ВО *KLEINKORPUSSPRACHE*: ДВЕ СТУДИИ НА СЛУЧАЈ ОД СТАРОАЛБАНСКИОТ

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Оваа статија претставува методолошка дискусија за можностите за (микро) параметарски пристап за синтактичка реконструкција на стариот и на преткнижевниот албански јазик, илустрирана преку формална анализа на позицијата на клитиките и на глаголот, и (морфо)синтаксата на определеноста во староалбанските текстови во 16 и во 17 век. Во статијата се тврди дека, наспроти модерниот албански, староалбанскиот во тој период се наоѓа во процес на постепено здобивање со експлицитно изразено глаголско движење со императиви во реченичниот домен и експлицитно именско движење во доменот на определената именска група.

Клучни зборови: староалбански, синтаксичка промена, (микро)параметарска реконструкција, клитики, V-движење, определеност, N-движење

1 Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss some methodological issues in the syntactic reconstruction of Old and pre-literary Albanian, relying on formal approaches to syntax and typology. I aim to show how the research into historical syntax of a language with a restricted textual corpus (*Kleinkorpusssprache*), such as (early) Old Albanian,¹ can benefit from combining insights from both diachronic (micro)variation and synchronic linguistic theory and typology, by pursuing a kind of (micro)parametric approach to syntactic reconstruction.²

In addition to diachronic syntax and Albanology, the kind of parametric reconstruction of Old and Proto-Albanian advocated here could be of particular interest to Balkan linguistics, too, given that the most salient areal features characteristic of Albanian and the other languages of the Balkan linguistic area, the so-called *Balkanisms*, are in fact morphosyntactic. Therefore a formal diachronic account of Old Albanian syntax, like the one pursued here, can also aid us in the crucial task of more securely establishing their chronology, by overcoming some of the obstacles of the traditional descriptive approaches.

The paper is divided into two case studies, where the first one, based on the existing formal typological literature on verb movement and cliticization in Albanian and other Balkan languages, serves to introduce and illustrate the overall methodological approach, which is then applied to another set of (micro)data in the second case study, in order to produce a similar movement-based analysis and diachronic reconstruction in the domain of definiteness marking.

2 A (micro)parametric approach to Old Albanian

The earliest secure attestations of Old Albanian (OAlb) amount to several short phrases from the late 15th century (the so-called *Baptismal Formula* from 1462, a replica in Albanian in the Italian Renaissance drama *Epirota* from 1483, and a list of words and phrases in a travelogue by Arnold von Harff from 1497), as well as a fragment of the Gospel of Matthew (*Perikopeja e Ungjillit pas Mateut*), written in the Greek alphabet. It took another half a century for the first longer texts in OAlb to appear, the majority of which are translations of religious literature. These include the *Missal (Meshari)* by Gjon Buzuku, printed in Venice in 1555,

¹ For a discussion of the terms *Großkorpus-* and *Kleinkorpusssprache*, and attempts at their definition, see Mayrhofer (1980: 17 et seq.) and Untermann (1989). In contrast to more typical cases of restricted corpus languages (such as poorly documented languages with no known affiliation, e.g. Etruscan, and poorly known languages with well-understood close relatives, e.g. Continental Celtic, or with well-understood more distant relatives, e.g. Phrygian, for which also the terms *Restsprache* and *Trümmersprache* are proposed), Old Albanian differs because its attestation is more or less continuous since the onset of its written tradition, and the division between the Old Albanian period and the rest of the corpus is therefore somewhat arbitrary. However, the term may also be applied to poorly documented *stages* of otherwise well-documented languages (such as Ogham Irish and Runic Norse, or—for the less common case of a poorer-documented later stage—Crimean Gothic). More precise terms in this context, as well as in reference to Old Albanian, then perhaps would be *Kleinkorpusssprachstufe* or *Kleinkorpusssprachperiode*.

² On parametric change and reconstruction in general see Roberts (2007, 2019).

followed by a translation of catechism (*E mbsuame e krështerë*) by Lekë Matrënga, printed in Rome in 1592, and another one by Pjetër Budi (*Doktrina e kërshenë*) in 1618. Budi has also translated and adapted the text of *Roman Ritual* and the treatise *Specchio di confessione* by Emerio de Bonis (*Pasëqyra e t'rrëfyemit*) in 1621, as well as wrote over 100 pages of original prose and poetry. In addition to Budi, the 17th-century OAlb corpus also includes a Latin-Albanian dictionary (*Dictionarium latino-epiroticum*) by Frang Bardhi (Franciscus Blancus) from 1635, and an original religious treatise in two volumes *Çeta e profetëve* (*Cuneus prophetarum*) by Pjetër Bogdani, printed in Padua in 1685. These five earliest authors are usually taken to represent the canon of OAlb literature (Riza 1952, 2002; Ismajli 2000).

Although quite substantial, the OAlb corpus is rather limited in terms of its thematic scope, while at the same time featuring rather wide dialectal and geographical diversity—from Sicily (Matrënga) to Prizren (Bogdani)³—as well as a broad chronological span—from the mid-16th to well into the 18th century. By detecting patterns of (micro)variation in the OAlb corpus, or between OAlb and Modern Albanian (MAlb), and modelling the observed sets of (micro)data formally, using insights from linguistic theory and typology, in this paper I aim to show how a (micro)parametric approach to a corpus language, such as OAlb, and to historical corpora in general, has the potential to ‘fill in the gaps’ of a diachronic corpus in terms of its size and scope. To illustrate this, I will present in particular a formal analysis of the microvariation in the position of clitics and the verb and the (morpho)syntactic expression of definiteness in Old vs. Modern Albanian, in order to trace syntactic changes (and microchanges) that have occurred in documented Albanian and to provide a syntactic reconstruction of the language in its pre-literary stage.

2.1 Case study I: The position of clitics and the verb

Albanian pronominal clitics are always proclitic to the verb, except with imperatives, which manifest an optional verb-clitic switch, as in (1) (*-j-* in (1b) is anti-hiatic).

- (1) a. *E=* *shiko!*
 3SG.ACC= *look.IMP*
 ‘Watch (it)!’
- b. *Shiko* =*je!*
 look.IMP =*3SG.ACC*
 ‘Watch (it)!’

With a plural imperative form, the verb-clitic switch even results in the clitic splitting the verbal stem from its plural inflection.⁴ This is the case with (2b).

³ Albanian features two major dialects, Gheg and Tosk. With the exception of Italo-Albanian (*Arbëresh*) Matrënga and the Greek-influenced fragment of the Gospel of Matthew, which are both Tosk, all other major OAlb texts are written in the Old Gheg dialect, which additionally sets them apart from the (dominantly) Tosk-based modern standard.

⁴ It should be noted that this behaviour is completely isolated within the Albanian verbal system, in which clitics otherwise never split a verbal stem from its inflection. According to Joseph (2018:

- (2) a. **E=** *shiko* *-ni!*
 3SG.ACC= *look.IMP* *-2PL*
 ‘*Watch.PL (it)!*’
- b. *Shiko* =**je** *-ni!*
 look.IMP = 3SG.ACC *-2PL*
 ‘*Watch.PL (it)!*’

The verb-clitic switch is, however, impossible when imperatives are negated; cf. (3), where the only allowed order of the elements is the one in (3a).

- (3) a. *Mos* **e=** *shiko* *(-ni)!*
 NEG 3SG.ACC= *look.IMP* *(-2PL)*
 ‘*Don’t look/look.PL (at it)!*’
- b. **Mos* *shiko* = **je** *(-ni)!*
 NEG *look.IMP* = 3SG.ACC *(-2PL)*

In addition to the interchangeability of the verb-clitic orders in (1) and (2), an historical variation between OAlb and MAlb has been observed, too, in the frequency of the verb-clitic switch (e.g. in Matzinger 2006: 134 et passim; Topalli 2008: 57–58, i. a.). Namely, in OAlb, the imperative-clitic switch is overall encountered less often than in the modern language, it is generally limited to sentence-initial positions, and even then, the clitic rarely splits the verb stem from its inflection (cf. Schumacher & Matzinger 2013: 119–121), although the structure of both varieties is apparently the same in terms of morphology (4).

- (4) a. **na=** *liro* (in the Lord’s prayer; Buzuku, fol. 25)
 1PL.ACC= *release.IMP*
 ‘*release us*’
- b. **më=** *ëndiglo-ni* (Buzuku; from Matzinger 2006: 134)
 1SG.ACC= *listen.IMP-2PL*
 ‘*listen to me*’
- c. *merr-ni* = **e** (Schumacher & Matzinger 2013: 120)
 take.IMP-2PL = 3SG.ACC
 ‘*take him*’

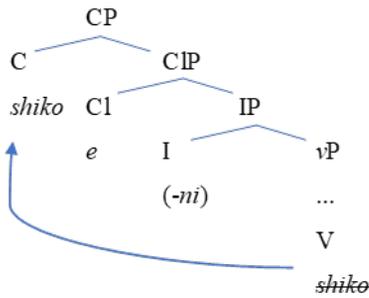
In order to make sense of these facts, I will supply a formal analysis of the imperative-clitic switch (and its absence) in (1)–(4), rooted in the existing literature on formal approaches to Albanian and the Balkan languages, as an initial case study of the two. This will allow me to lay out the details of the methodological approach,

1784): “Admittedly, this placement may say more about the nature of the 2PL ending *-ni* than about the pronoun, since *-ni* shows other signs of having a ‘freer’ status than that of other person/number endings”. A similar pattern, probably contact-induced, is also found in some Northern Greek dialects (see Joseph, op. cit. for further discussion).

which will then be applied in the second case study, the one on the (morpho)syntax of definiteness in OAlb.

Assume that a sentence consists of at least three layers of structure: the propositional domain (left periphery), the inflectional domain (which hosts the inflectional material, such as clitics, agreement and tense features of the clause), and the *vP* domain (hosting the verb and its arguments), as in (5). In order to model the data in (1)–(2) formally, verb (V) movement to (somewhere in) the C-domain (left periphery) is generally posited in the literature (cf. Turano 2000). As the imperative verb undergoes long head movement to C, it leaves the clitic and the inflection behind (6), thus producing the verb-initial surface order as in (1b) or (2b).

- (5) *C-domain (left periphery) > I-domain > vP (predicate) domain*
 (6)



The movement analysis in (6) is further corroborated by adverb placement relative to the imperative verb in Albanian (7), which is the standard diagnostic used to test whether a language undergoes V-movement (since Pollock 1989; cf. also Roberts 1993, 2001).

- (7) a. *Lexo(-ni)* ***gjithmonë*** *me kujdes!*
read.IMP(-2PL) *always* *with care*
 ‘Always read carefully!’

b. [?]*Gjithmonë lexo(ni) me kujdes!* (from Turano 2000)

As the position of adverbs like *gjithmonë* ‘always’ is considered to be fixed, the surface order with the imperative preceding it on the left in (7a) indicates that V-movement did indeed take place in MALb imperative clause. However, this movement is optional in Albanian, as evidenced by the interchangeability of examples in (1)–(2), which is why the reverse order, as in (7b), is not ungrammatical either, albeit it is less frequent and less natural than the verb-initial order in (7a). In other words, the imperative verb need not obligatorily raise to C in MALb, but whenever it does precede the clitics and adverbs, ending up as the sentence-initial element, its position indicates that it has undergone V-to-C movement.

According to Rivero (1994a) and Rivero & Terzi (1995), such V-to-C movement with imperatives is driven by features encoding the logical mood of the clause in the left periphery (the propositional domain of the clause). These authors propose a

typology whereby languages whose imperative verbs have distinctive morphology fall into two classes:

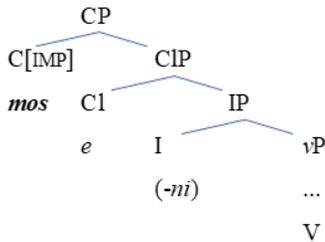
Class I: Imperative verbs with distinctive morphology also have a distinctive syntax (e.g. Modern Greek, Spanish)

Class II: Imperative verbs with distinctive morphology lack a distinctive syntax (e.g. Ancient Greek, Serbo-Croatian)

In a feature-based, Minimalist approach to parametric variation, Class I languages are assumed to have a ‘strong’ imperative feature at C, which has to be checked before Spell-Out, thus causing the imperative verb to move to C overtly (i.e. to show distinctive syntax), under the Principle of Full Interpretation (Chomsky 1986, 1995). In Class II languages, on the other hand, this logical mood feature is ‘weak’ (or alternatively, C hosts no features whatsoever), so that no movement in the overt syntax is needed; rather, the system will ‘procrastinate’ until the derivation ends, and have this feature checked covertly, only at LF.

As for the blocked V-movement in the presence of negation in (3), according to Turano (2000), the prohibitive marker *mos* now occupies the landing position for V-movement (8), by virtue of it being able to check on its own this ‘strong’ imperative feature at C. In that sense, cf. both its imperative use *and* morphology in (9).⁵

(8)



(9)

a. *Mos!*
'Don't (do that)!'

b. *Mos-ni!*
'Don't-2PL (do that)!'

In other words, even the apparent absence of V-movement with negation in Albanian in (3), actually conforms to the syntactic typology proposed by Rivero (1994a) and Rivero & Terzi (1995), given that it is the prohibitive marker *mos* itself that manifests the distinctive imperative syntax in MALb. Thus, given the facts

⁵ An anonymous reviewer points out that the form *mosni* in (9b) may have been calqued from South Slavic: *nemoj* : *mos* :: *nemoj-te* : X, where X = *mos-ni*. Namely, in South Slavic, the plural pendant of *nemoj* ‘don’t’ comes completely naturally, as *nemoj* is etymologically a finite verbal form: thus South Slavic 2SG *nemoj*, 2PL *nemojte* easily (despite the slightly irregular/Allegroform phonology) ← Common Slavic **ne modzi* / **ne modzēte*.

above, MAIb can be classified a Class I language. It bears a ‘strong’ imperative feature at C, encoding the logical mood of the clause, which forces the imperative verb, or the imperative negation marker *mos*, to check it before Spell-Out, in the overt syntax.

Recall, however, that the imperative-clitic switch in MAIb, as in (1)–(2), is optional. This is also observed by Rivero (1994b), who argues for a “non-finite V-movement to C” as an areal feature shared by all Balkan languages. However, “in contrast to [Modern Greek] and Rumanian, Albanian [...] imperative need not raise to C obligatorily” (Rivero 1994b: 108), and instead may merge somewhere lower, in the I-domain.

In principle, there are two possible ways to conceive of this optionality in a diachronic perspective. One is that, given that it is more widespread in the other Balkan languages, the optionality of V-movement in MAIb would suggest that it is a more recent (contact-induced) innovation (so that diachronically, Albanian could be in a transition from Rivero’s Class II to a more Balkan-like Class I language). Alternatively, MAIb could be in the process of loosing this feature (i.e. transitioning from a Class I to a Class II language). In that case, instances of the verb-initial order actually would be relicts of an earlier stage when this word order was in fact more common. However, in the light of a lower frequency of the imperative-clitic order in the OAIb corpus, as in (4), the evidence probably supports the former scenario. This is also pointed out by Topalli (2008: 57–58), according to whom proclisis is older than enclisis, which has resulted from the imperative verb being fronted for focus (i.e., in formal terms, ending up in the left periphery of the clause anyhow).

To conclude, on a microparametric level, Albanian is probably undergoing a syntactic change from a Class II language (with no ‘strong’ features at C) to a Class I language (with ‘strong’ logical mood features emerging at C, that need to be checked overtly in the syntax). In that sense, early OAIb, as well as the pre-literary stages of the language, despite the scarcity or even lack of any textual attestation, can be reconstructed without overt V-movement.

2.2 Case study II: (Morpho)syntax of definiteness

Having shown in the previous section how a (micro)parametric approach to syntactic reconstruction could work in a case study of V-movement in the sentential domain, I will turn now to the nominal (agreement) domain and provide, in essence, an analogous formal analysis of the (morpho)syntax of definiteness in Old vs. Modern Albanian.

Albanian, like Balkan Slavic and Balkan Romance, has grammaticalized a definiteness marker as a suffix on nouns, as in (10), from what was originally a demonstrative pronoun.

- (10) *a. libr-i*
 book-DEF.M.SG
 ‘the book’

b. *letr-a*

letter-DEF.F.SG
‘the letter’

c. *libra-t*

books-DEF.PL *dhe* *CONJ*
‘the books and the letters’

letra-t

letters-DEF.PL

The indefinite article, on the other hand, is fully grammaticalized only in the singular, from the numeral *një* ‘one’ (11a). Like other demonstratives (11b), numerals and quantifiers (11c), the indefinite article normally precedes the noun, which is then in the indefinite form.

- (11) a. *një libër* *dhe* *një* *letër*
 ART book.INDEF *CONJ* *ART* *letter.INDEF*
 ‘a book and a letter’

- b. *ky libër* *dhe* *ajo* *letër*
 this.M.SG *book.INDEF* *CONJ* *that.F.SG* *letter.INDEF*
 ‘this book and that letter’

- c. *këta pesë libra* *dhe* *ato* *shumë* *letra*
 these.M.PL *five books.INDEF* *CONJ* *those.F.PL* *many* *letters.INDEF*
 ‘these five books and those many letters’

Conversely, adjectives follow the noun, which is normally definite when post-modified as in (12a); unless they are focused, in which case the adjective has the definite marker instead (12b). Like the focused adjectives, nominalized adjectives and participles are also, in general, obligatorily definite (*i madh-i* ‘the big one’).

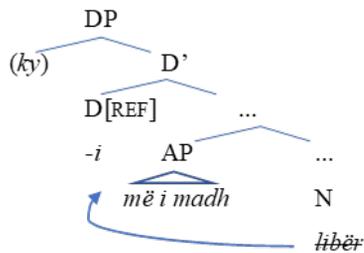
- (12) a. *libr-i* (*më*) *i* *madh*
 book-DEF.M.SG *COMP* *LNK* *big*
 ‘the big(gest) book’

- b. *më* *i* *madh-i* *libër*
 COMP *LNK* *big-DEF.M.SG* *book*
 ‘the biggest book’

A movement operation analogous to V-movement in the sentential domain, involving the noun (N) and a functional head in the structure above it such as D(eterminer), is usually posited in the literature to account for word order patterns inside the DP like these in (10)–(12) (cf. Carstens 2017 for a general overview of N-to-D movement; Dimitrova-Vulchanova & Giusti 1998, Turano 2002, 2003, and references therein, for a more fine-grained analysis of N-movement in Albanian).

Namely, the noun-adjective order and the enclisis of the definite marker on the phrase-level, as in (12), are derived by the noun moving to some higher position (in a long movement all the way to D, or alternatively, to some intermediate head in the functional spine), in order to check some ‘strong’ feature located there, encoding referentiality—the DP analogue of the propositional features from the clausal domain (13).

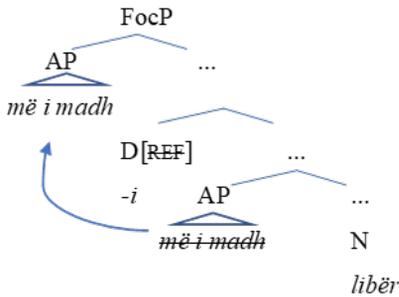
(13)



When this landing position for N-movement (or perhaps a related one, in an agreement relation with it), is already filled by another element, like the demonstrative or numeral in (11), which can check the ‘strong’ feature at D on its own (similarly to the prohibitive marker *mos* substituting for V-movement), then no N-movement takes place, unless forced pragmatically (e.g. *ky libër-i më i madh* ‘this particular biggest book’). In other words, in neutral contexts, the noun will prefer to remain syntactically *in situ* and morphologically indefinite whenever there is another element closer to D to save it from undergoing overt head movement, thus allowing it to ‘procrastinate’ until it reaches the LF interface.

The similar holds true for focused pre-nominal adjectives, as in (12b). Given the commonly proposed structural parallelism between clauses and DPs (pioneered in Abney 1987), one can assume (with Giusti 1996; Aboh 2004 and various subsequent work) analogous Topic/Focus projections in the DP to those in the clausal left periphery, as described by Rizzi (1997), where pre-nominal adjectives in Albanian would eventually end up in the Spec(ifier) position, again in a checking relationship with the ‘strong’ referentiality feature at D, and so with the definite morphology surfacing on the adjective instead of the noun, whose overt movement would in this case again be blocked (14). In the similar case of nominalizations, the adjective moves in a noun-like manner to a Spec position above D to check its referentiality feature, and therefore obligatorily surfaces with the definite marker (as in *i madh-i* ‘the big one’).

(14)



Whenever the noun *is* morphologically definite in MALb, as in (10), that would indicate however that it has undergone overt movement in the syntax, as in (13). Again, languages may vary as to whether this N-movement is syntactically overt or not, but also, in some cases, whether it is optional or obligatory (cf. Longobardi 1994). As was the case with V-to-C movement, here, too, the availability of different definiteness patterns in MALb would indicate the optionality of N-movement in Albanian, or the possibility of a ‘shorter’ movement to another functional projection below D. In any case, given the facts above, MALb can be classified as a language with ‘strong’ referentiality features at D, or at some other functional projection in the extended nominal spine, triggering overt N-movement whenever there is no other functional material in the DP that can licence these features instead.

On the other hand, it has been observed that in OAlb the indefinite marker *një* was less grammaticalized than it is in the modern language, in that it agreed in case with the head noun (Demiraj 2002: 152–153), as in (15).

- (15) *E u afëruo një-i bujar-i*
 CONJ PASS approach.3SG.AOR one-DAT.SG nobleman-DAT.SG
 ‘And he approached a nobleman’

(Buzuku; from Demiraj 2002)

This is usually taken to suggest its relatively recent emergence as an indefinite article, in a grammaticalization process from a true numeral to the indefiniteness marker, that was still ongoing in the OAlb period. As for the definite marker, however, it appears morphologically identical in both OAlb and MALb. As it was already grammaticalized as a suffix in OAlb, it is often assumed to have emerged at an earlier, prehistoric stage (Riza 1958, 1982; Bokshi 1980, 1984, 2010; Hamp 1982; Schumacher 2009: 56–58).⁶ Crucially, however, we do observe some microvariation in the distribution of definiteness marking in the OAlb corpus. On the one hand, occasionally there is what seems to be an excess of case and definiteness marking in phrases with post-nominal adjectives; e.g. (16) in contrast to (12a).

⁶ The grammaticalization of articles is a hotly debated subject in classical Albanology, without *communis opinio*. I intend not to go into more detail on that matter here, but in addition to the works already cited, the interested reader is referred to Spiro (2021) for the most recent synthesis of the issue.

- (16) *a. bir-i* *i* *tij* *mâ* *plak-u* (Buzuku, fol. 50)
son-DEF.M.SG *LNK* *his* *COMP* *old-DEF.M.SG*
 ‘his oldest son’
- b. gjisht-në* *mâ* *të* *vogël-inë* (Buzuku, fol. 48v)
finger-DEF.M.SG.ACC *COMP* *LNK* *little-DEF.M.SG.ACC*
 ‘the littlest finger’

According to Çabej (1977: 76–77), in contrast to MALb, the agreement of post-nominal adjectives with the head noun as in (16) is regular in Buzuku and Bogdani and sporadic in Budi, Bardhi and Matrënga (cf. also Paci 2011: 179–191 and references therein). While on the other hand, an apparent lack of definiteness marking is seldom found, too, e.g. in (17), where we find *natë* ‘night’ in the indefinite form, in contrast to *drit-a* ‘the light’ in the definite form, in what are otherwise formally identical clauses.

- (17) *E* *tha* *Zot-ynë: Kloftë* *bâm* *drit-a.*
CONJ *say.3SG.AOR* *Lord-our be.3SG.OPT* *make.PTCP* *light-DEF.F.SG*
- E* *u* *bâ* *drit-a* [...]
CONJ *PASS* *make.3SG.AOR* *light-DEF.F.SG*
- E* *u* *bâ* *natë* (Buzuku, fol. 69v)
CONJ *PASS* *make.3SG.AOR* *night.INDEF*

‘And our Lord said: May the light be made. And the light was made [...]
 And night was made’

Given the availability of more than one position for definiteness in (16) and the lack of it in (17, *natë*), unlike MALb, we don’t need to posit overt N-movement as in (13) to account for OAlb, even when a nominal here is morphologically definite. Rather, what are superficially identical morphological structures of Old and Modern Albanian, in fact parametrize differently on the syntactic level. Similarly to the ongoing grammaticalization of the indefinite article *një*, the distributional patterns in (16)–(17) may suggest more semantic or pragmatic/discursive (i.e. anaphoric) than fully grammaticalized (morphosyntactic) functions of the definite marker in OAlb, in (partial) contrast to MALb. In (17), for example, *drit-a* may be definite in contrast to *natë* pragmatically, by virtue of the former having been already introduced on the discourse level, and not because any particular syntactic configuration requires either of them to formally surface with the definite marker, as would be the case in MALb.

Lack of overt N-movement in OAlb is further corroborated by the positioning of adjectives in relation to the head noun, which is generally freer in OAlb than in MALb in neutral contexts (Paci 2011: 191–203), cf. e.g. (18) in contrast to MALb (12).

- (18) *U* *bâ* *û* *e* *madh-e*
PASS *make.3SG.AOR* *hunger.INDEF* *LNK* *big-F*
- nd atë dhë,* *e aj zû* *me ardhunë*
in that land.INDEF CONJ he take.3SG.AOR INF come.PTCP
- ndë të madh-e nevojë* (Buzuku; from Paci 2011: 197)
in LNK big-F need.INDEF

'There arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want'

In general, this would mean that, in spite of their identical morphology, OAlb and MAlb differed structurally w. r. t. the existence of 'strong' referentiality features at D, and consequently, w. r. t. the availability of overt N-movement to (somewhere in) the D-domain. In other words, although virtually undetectable on the surface, a rather far-reaching syntactic change was in fact on the way in (early) OAlb.

3 Conclusions

In this paper, I have presented two case studies intended to illustrate how a parametric approach to (micro)variation observed in an otherwise restricted historical corpus can aid in the reconstruction of syntax and tracing syntactic change. In both case studies, I have shown how using the insights of formal approaches to syntax and typology, we can model OAlb data in terms of a formal grammar which supplies for the scarcity of textual attestation and allows us to make informed assumptions about the structure of proto-language.

As concerns the structure of OAlb, in both cases we've seen how this (micro)variation in fact reflects some 'deeper' structural property of this *Kleinkorpus*sprache(stufe), at the same time distinguishing it from MAlb. In particular, I have argued that certain clusters of (micro)data, when illuminated from a formal typological perspective, show that OAlb lacked overt head movement in the syntax, both in the sentential (V-to-C movement with imperatives) and in the nominal domain (N-movement with definite nouns), i.e. that it was in the process of gradually acquiring them (possibly under contact with other Balkan languages). Structures that on the surface appear as identical in Old and Modern Albanian in terms of morphology, thus turn out to reflect rather different underlying syntactic makeups, with a whole array of possible additional structural phenomena that may correlate with this microvariation in the parametric setup of Old vs. Modern Albanian.⁷

In addition, this approach may prove particularly useful as a heuristic in distinguishing structural archaisms from innovations in a language with late attestation such as Albanian. In this particular case, both V-movement and N-movement turn out to be innovations introduced in early OAlb and gradually crystallizing during the entire OAlb period. Formally, the change is reflected in the emergence of

⁷ Although not directly related to a N-to-D movement-based account of definiteness as pursued here, some of the crosslinguistic generalizations assumed to correlate with the (non-)existence of grammaticalized articles, i.e. the functional projection of D above NP, are discussed in more detail in Bošković (2008, 2012).

‘strong’ features in the functional domain, i.e. on functional heads such as C/Fin or D, that need to be checked overtly. From a Balkanological perspective, it is precisely this emergence of ‘strong’ features encoding functional information, probably in a multilingual contact-induced drift for a more explicit syntactic marking and spell-out of functional categories, that can be thought of as the underlying mechanism and the formal motivation for morphosyntactic Balkanization in individual languages, including OAlb, which not only turns out as syntactically less innovative than MAlb, but also at the same time as less Balkanized, despite their largely shared morphology; thus shedding novel light on the position of Albanian within the Balkan Sprachbund.

Finally, a more detailed empirical research into the OAlb corpus is needed in order to further test the analysis presented here with more scrutiny and rigour. The necessary first step in doing so would be constructing a parsed and annotated digital corpus of OAlb. This remains a desideratum for future research.

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