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ABSTRACTS – PLENARY SPEAKERS

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IS IT ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO DETERMINE THE SOURCE OF A (LOCAL) BALKANISM?

Local Balkanisms refer to linguistic features that develop in specific geographical or dialectal zones within the Balkans due to prolonged contact and bi-/multilingualism. Unlike broader Balkan structural convergence, such as the loss of the infinitive or the emergence of postposed definite articles, local Balkanisms often do not extend uniformly across all Balkan languages or dialects. Instead, they emerge from micro-level interactions, shaped by historical, social, and geographic factors such as migration routes or trade networks.

An illustrative example of a local Balkanism is differential object marking (DOM), a cross-linguistically common phenomenon in which a language overtly marks a subset of direct objects based on semantic (e.g., animacy, specificity) and/or discourse-pragmatic factors, e.g., topicality or focus (Bossong 1985; Witzlack-Makarevich & Seržant 2018 among others).

In the Balkans, DOM is present in Romanian and some Aromanian dialects, involving the use of the grammaticalized preposition *pe* 'on'. A similar strategy, using the preposition *na* 'to', is employed in peripheral Bulgarian and Macedonian dialects, particularly in contact areas with non-Slavic languages. This pattern has been documented in multiple locations in bilingual or multilingual zones (Topolinjska 1995, Adamou 2010, Asenova & Aleksova 2008, Bužarovska 2017). Several hypotheses regarding the origin of DOM in peripheral Macedonian dialects have been suggested. Older views interpret DOM in Macedonian as a contact phenomenon resulting from interaction with Aromanian (Koneski 1986) or Greek (Topolinjska 1995; Bužarovska 2001), although these explanations do not account for the uneven distribution of this feature. A more balanced explanation includes a combination of external and internal factors (Bužarovska 2020). In multilingual environments, the replicated *na*-pattern serves as a topicalization strategy that disambiguates the roles of sentence participants. The most recent view (Kozhanov et al., forthcoming) suggests that mechanisms such as syntactic reanalysis or analogy with

constructions like dislocated topics introduced by *na* may have contributed to the emergence of DOM, while not excluding language contact.

In this context, Friedman and Joseph (2025) note that while a definitive explanation remains uncertain, the phenomenon is relevant to broader typological and theoretical discussions of DOM. Overall, DOM in certain Balkan Slavic dialects demonstrates how language contact, internal grammatical change, and sociolinguistic dynamics interact to produce region-specific structure, unknown in other Slavic languages.

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