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# THE *JIMAM* PERFECT IN NASHTA (GREECE)

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After carrying out field work on the Slavic dialects spoken in Greece, and more specifically in the village of Liti, I suggested the name *Nashta* "ours" for the dialect so as to respect the usage among the speakers and to emphasize the specific representation they have of their language.

Of the Nashta syntactic features, I shall focus this work on the *jimam* perfect construction with the past passive participle *–no*, *-to*. The Nashta verb system presents the well known Balkan feature, the "have" perfect construction. Other Balkan languages that share the feature are the Romanian and Aromanian dialects, Albanian, Judeo-Spanish, Greek (standard and dialects as spoken in Greece), standard Macedonian and, according to Georgiev and Asenova a "have" perfect is being grammaticalized in Bulgarian as well. Still, we have to consider the emergence of this feature in Nashta by examining the language contact, diffusion or internal parameters that could have been at the origin of it.

## 1. Data

Liti, called Aivati during the Ottoman Empire, is 10 km from Thessaloniki and its population is up to 2841 according to the 2001 census. Nashta is not transmitted from one generation to the next and the only fluent speakers are over 70 years old. They use Nashta only occasionally and their main language is Greek. Speakers born between 1940 and 1950 are 'weak semi-speakers', having a lot of difficulty in using Nashta but being able to understand it, while the generations born after 1950 are either part of the 'rememberers' category, as defined by Campbell and Muntzel 1989, or have no contact with the language at all (Adamou 2005). Therefore the corpus is not spontaneous and the data only concerns the fluent speakers' category.

The perfect in Nashta is constructed with [*jima*+P(erson marker)+ V(erb)+*no/to*]. I consider *jima* and *no/to* a discontinuous perfect form; *jima* takes the person marker, obligatorily, while the verb is in perfective and non-finite form with *no/to*. *Jima* optionally takes the suffixed past marker *–x-*, with the modality markers (*ki, da, neka*) preceding it. The perfect in Nashta has a main meaning of "anteriority" with "resultative" as a secondary

meaning. We define “anterior” as “a situation prior to the reference time” and “resultative” as “a state that exists as a result of past action” (Bybee et al. 1994:52).

(*ki* «intention»)
(*da* «volition») + *jima* + (x) + P1,2… + Verb + *no*/*to*
(*neka* «desire») «Past»
«Anterior», «Resultative»

Consider the evidence:

1. *sko´ljo-to* *´jima-x-a* *za´dvore-no* *´nema-ʃe* *sko´ljo*
school+DEF AUX(have)+PAS+P6 close+PP neg.have+PAS/P3 school
│_____ ANT_____ │
« The school had been closed, there wasn’t any school ».

2. *´jima-ʃe* *i´dno* *u* *´ʃelto* *ne* *´tuva#* *´jima-Ø* *u´mrja-no*
have+PAS/P3 one LOC/ PONC village P4 here AUX(have)+P3 die+PP
│____ RES_____ │
« There was someone in our village, here, he is dead ».

## 2. Grammaticalization

The Nashta perfect is the result of the grammaticalization of a possessive structure into an aspect unit. Syntactically “have” becomes part of an aspect unit while the verbal adjective changes into a non finite verb + the second part of perfect aspect unit.

According to Heine’s (1993:54) grammaticalization parameters we observe in Nashta:

- *Extension* “ i.e. rise of novel grammatical meanings when linguistic expressions are extended to new contexts ”

The “have” construction in Nashta is extended to new contexts and reorganizes the verbal system by completely replacing the [“be”+V+l] perfect. In the beginning of the 20th century, Vaillant and Mazon (1938) noted the loss of the –*l* form in other villages of the area (Sohos) and the same process is described for the Kastoria (Kostur) area (Friedman 1977).

- *Desemanticization* “loss (or generalization) in meaning content ”

For this category we prefer to speak of semantic change instead of “loss” in content meaning since we know that an aspect unit can also have a variety of semantic values even if it is largely dependant on the context.

In this sense desemanticization means that “have”, in this particular structure, loses one of its main semantic properties, which is possession (another basic semantic value of ‘have’ is existential). The syntactic consequence of this semantic change is the compatibility with intransitive verbs as can be seen in example 2.

- *Decategorialization* “ loss in morphosyntactic properties characteristic of lexical or other less grammaticalized forms ”

The verbal adjective in Nashta becomes a non-finite form whereas in the non-grammaticalized structure there was morphological agreement in gender and number with the object. Note that this is still the case in literary Bulgarian.

There is also a restriction on the units that can be placed between “have” and the verb; person markers and the past marker –*x*- are allowed while adverbs, nouns, or other elements are not.

- *Erosion* “ loss in phonetic substance ”

This parameter has not been noted for the moment.

The grammaticalization process of possessive structures into aspect markers is a well-known cross-linguistic phenomenon. Fleischman 1982 and Heine 1997 noted that this process implies that a stative structure becomes dynamic and that the possessor becomes an agent. Consider the following evidence from Bulgarian (Heine 1997):

Stage A

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3. | imam | tezi | lekcii |
| | have.I | these | lectures |
| | « I have | these | lectures ». |

A transitive structure, the subject is the possessor and the object the possessed.

Stage B

4. imam gi napisani
have.I them write.PART.PL
« I have them written ».

The possessed is specified by the verbal adjective.

Stage C

5. imam napisani tezi lekcii
have.I write.PART.PL these lectures
« I have written these lectures ».

The specifier (verbal adjective in Stage B) is interpreted as the verb.

Stage D

6. imame sgotveno
have.we cook.PART
« We have cooked ».

The verb can appear without an object and in the following stages can be used with intransitive verbs.

### 3. Language contact

According to Golab (1984) the 'have' perfect is grammaticalized for the Krushevo bilingual speakers through a copy-chain adjusting the Aromanian and the Macedonian verbal systems of bilinguals. This is a well known process used by bilingual speakers so as to develop parallel semantic structures that are more economic for them (Poplack 1980, Matras 1998).

But how could one explain the phenomenon in Nashta where there is no evidence for Aromanian or Albanian bilingualism? One hypothesis could be contact with another language that presents a 'have' perfect, in the Nashta case Greek, since bilingualism with Greek and Turkish was noted for men, and specifically the upper social classes, before the 20$^{th}$ century, when this change is supposed to have taken place (probably between the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ centuries if we consider the phenomenon in Macedonian). Only active bilingualism of this sort could be considered a contact situation strong enough to influence the Slavic verbal system. We believe that contact with Greek religious texts does not constitute sufficient contact in the case of Nashta; *Evangeliaire de Kulakia*, a religious text translated into local Slavic, is proof that the populations did not understand the texts in Greek.

Greek has two 'have' perfect types with a dialectal distribution (Moser 1988, Horrocks 1997), often analyzed as a double structure that co-exists within one verbal system (Hewson

& Bubenik 1993). The standard system uses a verbal construction [‘have’+non-finite verb] (old infinitive) for an “anterior” invariant (Moser 2003).

GREEK

7. *'ex-o* *'ɟra-psi*

have+P1 write+ invariable marker

│_____ ANT_____ │

“I have written”.

The second form, grammaticalized in some dialects, is the same as in Nashta, [‘have’+verbal adjective]:

GREEK

8. *'ex-o* *ɟra'meno*

have+P1 write non-finite

│_____ ANT_____ │

“I have written”.

I believe that the standard Greek “have” perfect can not be at the origin of a copy process for Nashta. Internal factors must have been at least as important as external factors for such a change to occur in Nashta. As for the second form of the Greek ‘have’ perfect it also presents difficulties for a copy hypothesis since that form is not attested in contemporary Liti Greek. However, we could still admit that standard Greek influence could have altered today’s verbal system although this is unlikely for two reasons: one is that this sort of perfect did persist in other Greek dialects, despite the influence of standard Greek; second, the equivalent “have” perfect in Nashta would have been strong motivation to not totally abandon the perfect form in Greek.

Therefore, I suggest that diffusion through other Slavic dialects is a much more convincing hypothesis for the Nashta ‘have’ perfect. Unfortunately not enough work has been done to be able to confirm precisely how commercial routes and linguistic features join one another in the area. In any case, diffusion should be seen as parallel with internal requirements. If we consider the ‘have’ perfect in Macedonian and Bulgarian we notice that it has a balancing function within the verbal system. As Georgiev pointed out for Bulgarian, the [“be”+V+l] form became charged with polysemy: perfect and evidential uses. The ‘have’ structure took over the “perfect” values and the [“be”+V+l] became specialized for

evidentiality, as can be seen more clearly in Standard Macedonian. Nashta probably went one step further by abandoning the grammatical category of evidentials (and -l forms), most probably under influence from the Greek verbal system which does not use a grammaticalized form for evidentiality, and for specific sociolinguistic reasons as well (indeed, not every Slavic dialect in intense contact with Greek lost the evidential category).

It is important to mention that one finds the same "have" perfect in a grammaticalization process in other Slavic languages, mostly the ones having long been in contact with Germanic and Romance languages which present the feature. Such is the case for the Kashubian and Silesian dialects, Slovenian and Czech. The Russian North-East dialects (from Pskov to Lake Onega) are described as having developed this feature without language contact (Zaxarova and Orlova cited by Friedman 1977). This rapid overview shows that grammaticalization of this particular possessive construction is an internal possibility in Slavic languages, joining a more general Indo-European possibility, even if language contact clearly serves as a catalyser for the process.

Moreover, all the processes described for Nashta are non-marked, joining universal semantic strategies. As Bybee and al. 1994 point out:

- A possessive structure evolves into an aspect category.
- "Resultative" is employed for "evidentials".
- "Have" and "be" perfects evolve from "resultatives" into "anteriors".

## Conclusion

By presenting the Nashta 'have' perfect I have tried to show how one common syntactic feature in a linguistic area can arise through different paths. To understand this variety we need to pay attention to individual dialects and follow the process in detail. This means that it is not because the 'have' perfect is a Balkan feature that all languages that present it automatically acquired it through contact with other languages that present the feature. We have to study whether contact between those languages really took place in the dialect studied (were there any bilingual subjects? Is contact through liturgy sufficient to modify the verbal system?), examine the cases where such a contact did take place but where no copying has been observed; if contact existed we have to examine the chronology of the process (at the time of contact did the feature exist in language A but not yet in language B).

We shouldn't neglect the internal or universal reasons and specify their contribution either as catalyser either as a basic factor.

In this sense Nashta did not have any direct contact with Aromanian or Albanian, and a detailed examination of Greek as a source is not satisfactory. Moreover, internal and universal paths have to be measured as catalysers in a contact language or diffusion situation responsible for the expansion of a 'have' perfect in Nashta as the example of the other Slavic languages makes clear.

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