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# Syntactic doubling and variation

## The case of Romani

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This paper analyses a case of syntactic doubling in Romani: the full doubling of the definite article in NPs including an adjective. This structure (DNDA) is similar to the Greek polydefiniteness and displays the same grammatical optionality. A task was designed to trigger its use and submitted to Albanian Romani native speakers. The results show that an evolution in the nominal constituent order has taken place in contrastive contexts, whereby the community is still split into subgroups experiencing different patterns of language change. This doubling (DNDA) has been used as a kind of bridge from the canonical word order (DAN) to a new one (DNA). Social factors show that this process has been favoured by contact with Albanian and/or Greek.

**Keywords:** syntactic variation, language change, language contact, doubling, polydefiniteness, Romani, Balkans

### 1. Introduction

This paper deals with variation in nominal morphosyntax in the Romani varieties spoken in Albania, involving different constituent orders and the optional full doubling of the definite article in NPs involving an adjective.

Romani is a minority language of Indic origin spoken on all continents and especially in Europe. It shows substantial dialectal variation because of its geographical extension and, given the absence of monolingual speakers, because of the multiple language contact scenarios in which it is involved. The language has not yet been standardised: various attempts have been made in different countries, leading to the emergence of competing norms (Matras 2005, Leggio 2013: 36–44).

Definiteness is marked in Romani by a definite article, a free morpheme placed in the first slot of the nominal phrase (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Linear layout of the noun phrase: principal slots (Matras 2002: 166)

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[preposition] + [determiner] + [quantifier] + [adjective] + noun + [options]

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The positioning of the Romani adjective has not yet been extensively discussed. The descriptions of individual varieties (e.g. Tenser 2005) generally assert that A is placed before N. This is indeed the case in most varieties – and it is also the canonical word order in Indic languages (Masica 1993: 370). Therefore, we can consider the DAN sequence the inherited and canonical word order. A DNA structure is documented in varieties spoken in the Balkans (e.g. former Yugoslavia) or in contact with Romance languages (Romanian, Italian, Spanish). Some authors explain its occurrence as a particular semantic and/or pragmatic device: the adjective “is exposed as an afterthought” (Matras 2002: 167) or as a “comment” (Boretzky 1993: 41). Others explain it as a consequence of language contact with a language postposing A (Soravia 1972: 38).

However, another non-canonical structure is attested in some Balkan varieties: two identical definite articles determining a unique head noun in presence of a postposed A, as in example (1).

- (1) *Istanbul, kaj ćer-ena o film-e o bar-e?*  
 Istanbul where make-3PL DEF.ART.PL film-PL DEF.ART.PL big-PL  
 ‘Istanbul, where they make the great films?’

(Female Arli speaker, age 16, Korca, July 2014)

This structure is very similar to a phenomenon labelled *Determiner Spreading* (Androutsopoulou 1995) or *polydefinite NP* (Kolliakou 2004). Lekakou and Szendrői (2012: 108) define it as “instances of an adjective modifying a noun where the noun and the adjective are each accompanied by their own determiner”. In Romani, this third syntactic variant, DNDA, involves a “focus” (Boretzky 2000: 42) or an “appositional function” (Matras 2002: 97). DNA and DNDA can be considered innovations because A is postposed to N, being thus placed within the postnominal ‘option’ slot. The question remains what can trigger such an optional threefold variation?

## 2. Data and method

Because of the rarity of DNDA (28 tokens in 28 hours of conversational speech), an experiment was designed by Evangelia Adamou to elicit this construction by adapting the *Static Localization Task n°8* of the QUIS (Skopeteas et al. 2006: 93). Pairs of native speakers were asked to manipulate culturally appropriate real-life objects and to describe this manipulation. All informants were given 28 objects contrasting in shape, colour and size. The aim was to lead the speakers to contrast the objects through a restrictive use of attributive adjectives (a feature of Greek polydefinites according to Campos and Stavrou 2004: 141, Lekakou and Szendrői 2012: 125–129).

The task was mostly conducted at the participants’ houses in Korca, Albania, in 2014. Since the investigated structure seems to exist only in the Balkan varieties, those spoken in this border region (Figure 1), in the heart of the Balkans, were perfect candidates for this study.

The task was submitted to thirty-four Romani native speakers stratified by gender, age, education and linguistic variety. Twelve of them can speak Greek because they live/d in Greece or work/ed with Greek people. Twenty-two of them do not know Greek but some have relatives (mostly grand-parents) who do/did.



**Figure 1.** Location of the fieldwork for this study, Korca, Albania

Little is known about the Roma in Albania. Bakker (2001) estimated their numbers at about 90,000 during the 1990s. Only 8301 persons declared themselves as Roma in the 2011 census in Albania, whereas the Council of Europe estimated them at between 80,000 and 150,000, i.e. 3.59% of the total Albanian population (CAHROM 2012).<sup>1</sup> It is not possible to select a representative sample of the Albanian Roma population because the demographics of the population in terms of mean age and age pyramid, professions and differences between the groups remain unknown. I could thus only attempt to get a representative sample of the community as I observed it during my fieldwork (Table 2).

<sup>1</sup> For further sociological information about the Roma in Albania, see De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi (2005).

**Table 2.** Overview of the sample stratification

Variables	Levels	N of informants	Comments
GENDER	Women	16	Speakers who are not married, do not work and are considered “children” by Roma and non-Roma societies. Speakers who tend to be married, work and are considered young adults by the Roma society. Speakers who are married, usually work, have grandchildren and are considered older adults by the Roma society. Speakers who are considered seniors by Roma and non-Roma societies.
	Men	18	
AGE	≤ 15 y. old	4	
	16–39 y. old	16	
	40–59 y. old	8	
	≥ 60 y. old	6	
EDUCATION	0–5 years	13	Speakers who received primary education or no education at all.
	6–12 years	14	Speakers who received junior high education or high-school education (secondary school).
	12+ years	7	Speakers who received higher (post-secondary) education.
VARIETY	Mečkar	6	(see Section 3.2)
	Arli	15	
	Čergar	2	

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 Linguistic factors

Definite NPs containing an attributive adjective were counted according to the following three categories:

- monodefinitive NP with preposed adjective (DAN)
- monodefinitive NP with postposed adjective (DNA)
- polydefinitive NP (DNDA)

Table 3 shows the overall distribution of the definite NPs: the three structures appear in roughly equal proportion. This finding confirms the optionality of the DNDA structure. The proportion of 38% DNDA is very high, which suggests that the pragmatic requirements of the task are indeed highly conducive to the realisation of DNDA.

**Table 3.** Distribution of the definite and indefinite NPs including an adjective

	DAN	DNA	DNDA	Total (DEF)	IND A N	IND N A	IND N IND A	Total (IND)
N tokens	337	316	411	1064	18	32	0	50
Percentage	32	30	38	100	36	64	0	100

On the other hand, the absence of *polyindefinite* constructions (with indefinite NPs) is striking. This could of course stem from the task itself: since all the objects were on the table, the speakers were more prone to use definite articles. Nevertheless, among the few indefinite NPs that were produced, no *polyindefinite* structures occurred. Nor did they occur in the spontaneous speech I collected – this corresponds to the pattern observed in Greek (Lekakou and Szendrői 2012: 109). DEFINITENESS is therefore a relevant linguistic factor.

Regarding the monodefinites, the similar proportion of DAN (32%) and DNA (30%) is of particular interest.<sup>2</sup> Postposition of the adjective is thus not marked in Albanian Romani. Moreover, if we include the *polydefinite* NPs, which also rely on a postposed adjective, postposition represents more than two thirds of the tokens (68%). This suggests that postposition is the unmarked position of the adjective, at least in the context of the task. This finding is also striking for indefinite articles: *ind n a* represents 64% of the indefinite NPs.

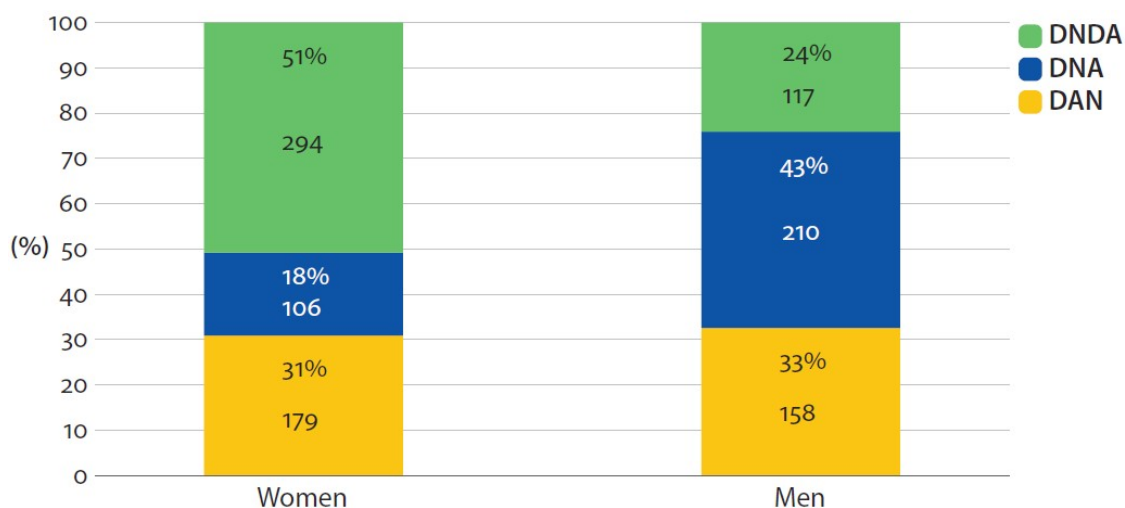
A salient difference with Greek (allowing both DADN and DNDA) is that the adjective must be postposed in Romani *polydefinite* NPs (allowing DNDA but not \*DADN). This suggests a strong correlation between nominal constituent order and *polydefiniteness*. Thus, contrary to Greek (allowing DAN but not \*DNA), the Romani adjective is less flexible in *polydefinites* than in monodefinites (allowing both DAN and DNA).

### 3.2 Social factors

The distribution of the definite NPs including an attributive adjective according to GENDER is represented in Figure 2.

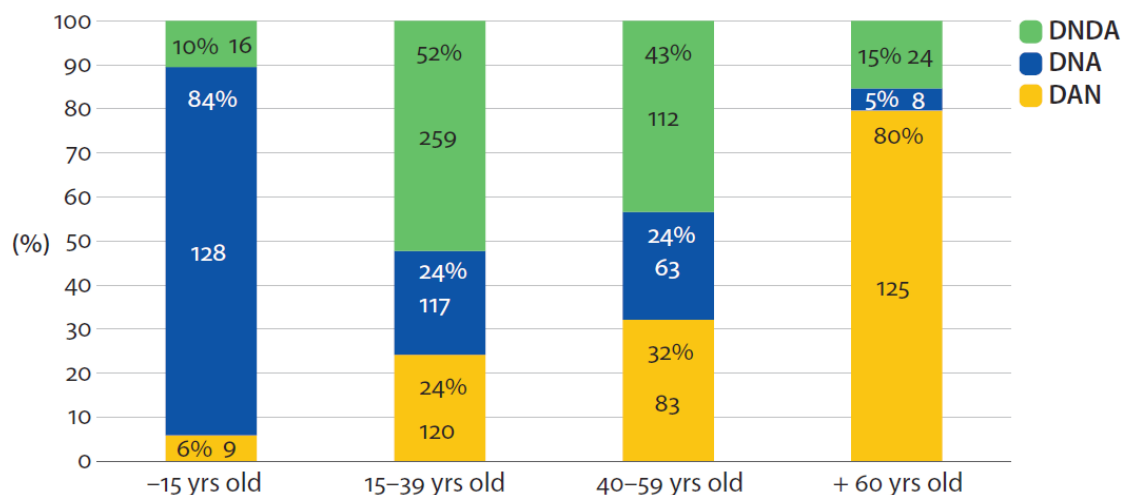
Women mostly used *polydefinite* constructions (51%,  $N = 294$ ) followed by monodefinites with preposed adjectives (31%,  $N = 179$ ). They produced very few monodefinites with postposed adjective (18%,  $N = 106$ ). Men on the other hand mostly used monodefinites with a postposed adjective (43%,  $N = 210$ ). On the whole, women used as many monodefinites as *polydefinites*, which suggests that they preferred to postpose their adjectives. Men used more monodefinites than *polydefinites* but postposed their adjectives as much as women did.

<sup>2</sup> This count excludes the NPs with both preposed and postposed adjectives (DANA).



**Figure 2.** Distribution of the definite NPs within each GENDER

The distribution of the definite NPs including an adjective according to AGE is represented in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Distribution of the definite NPs within each AGE level

We can see that the youngest speakers almost exclusively used the supposedly non-canonical DNA (84%,  $N = 128$ ), while the oldest speakers almost exclusively used the canonical DAN (80%,  $N = 125$ ). Speakers in the middle age range (15–59 years old) show a more balanced usage but favoured DNDA (with 43%,  $N = 112$  and 52%,  $N = 259$ ). On the whole, the youngest and the oldest age brackets almost exclusively used monodefinites. Speakers in the middle age range tended to employ as many mono- as polydefinites, hence postposing rather than preposing the adjective. While DAN was used by all speakers over 15, those under 15 hardly used it. DNA was equally used by all speakers under 60, whereas those over 60 hardly used it.

The systematic decrease in the use of the canonical DAN from the oldest to the youngest speakers is striking, as is the systematic increase in the use of non-canonical DNA from the youngest to the oldest speakers. This finding can be interpreted as evidence of a change

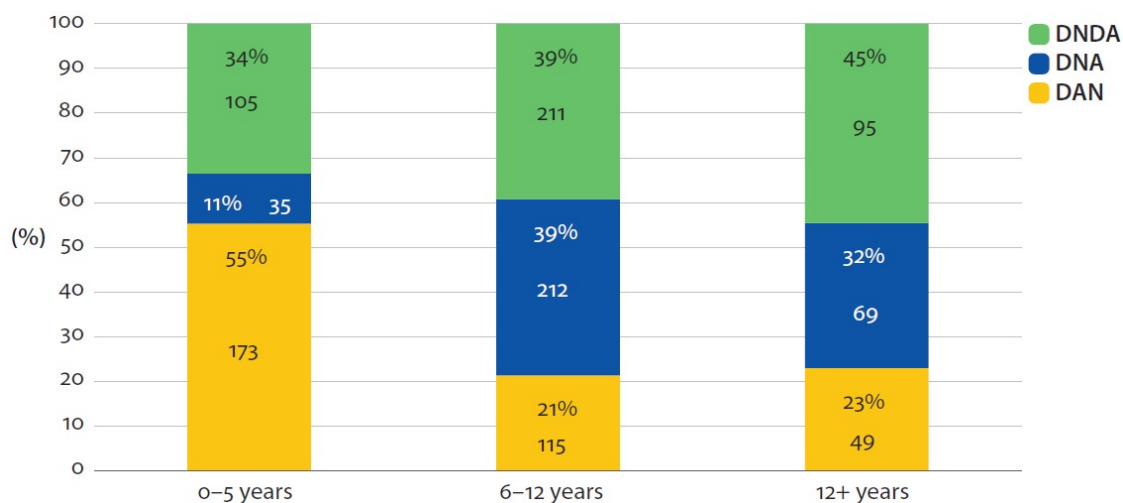
towards increasing postposition of the adjective. Polydefinites, crucially, are most frequently used by middle-aged speakers. Moreover, with the exclusion of the youngest generation, the data reveal a clear slope with age, whereby younger speakers use increasingly more of the DNDA construction. The data could be explained following Sankoff and Blondeau (2007: 562) as any of the following scenarios:

1. The slope with age could be interpreted as an indication of AGE GRADING, whereby change occurs across the life-time of individuals and is cyclical in character: speakers are unstable across their life-time, but no long-term change takes place across the whole community.

2. The findings could be indicative of a GENERATIONAL CHANGE, whereby “individuals may retain their childhood patterns” and a long-term change takes place across the community.

3. Finally, the pattern could reveal LIFESPAN CHANGE, whereby “individual speakers change over their lifespans in the direction of a change in progress in the rest of the community”. Such individual patterns mirror an ongoing historical (long-term) change in the community.

The distribution of the definite NPs including an adjective according to EDUCATION is represented in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of the definite NPs within each EDUCATION level

Speakers with lower education mostly used DAN (55%,  $N = 173$ ). Middle- and highly-educated people, however, used all three structures equally, preferring respectively DNA/DNDA (both 39%,  $N = 212$  and  $N = 211$ ) and DNDA (45%,  $N = 95$ ). On the whole, low-educated speakers favoured monodefinites more than polydefinites, and preposed rather than postposed adjectives. Middle-educated speakers also used monodefinites more than polydefinites, but they preferred to postpose the adjective. Highly-educated speakers equally used mono- and polydefinites, hence postposing more than preposing their



adjectives. The overall pattern is thus for more educated speakers to use polydefinite NPs more frequently.

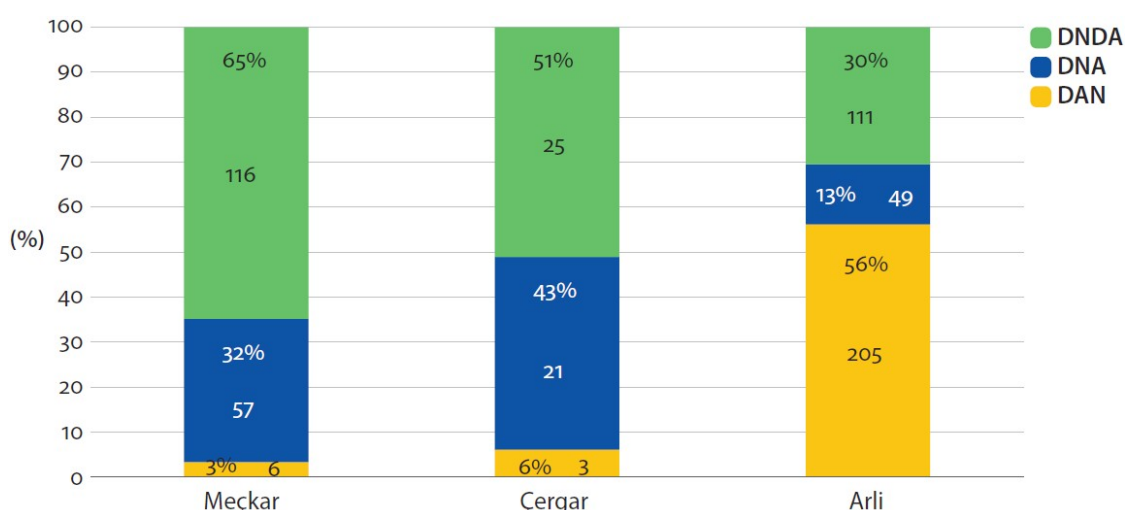
Albanian Roma are split into several communities, but no research is available on the internal differences within those communities. The following description is therefore based on my own field observations and ethnographic interviews. The three main varieties of Romani spoken in Albania correspond to three main sub-groups:

- The *Mečkar* were the first group to settle in Albania several centuries ago, according to informants from all groups. Their variety has been in contact with Albanian longer than any other Romani variety. Greek also greatly influenced the language during a previous stage. *Mečkar* are said to be generally well off and educated.

- The *Čergar* are supposed to have arrived later in the country, namely between the 19th and early 20th centuries. Their variety shows less Greek influence but Balkan Romance and extensive South-Slavic lexical influence. The *Čergar* are far less numerous than the other two groups and are generally considered well off and educated.

- The *Arli* also arrived between the 19th and early 20th centuries from Greece and – formerly – from a Turkish speaking area of the Balkans. The *Arli* variety thus shares an important Greek and Turkish lexical legacy. Indeed, some older people still know Greek but not Turkish. The *Arli* are said to be less wealthy and educated than the other two groups.

All three varieties have been in contact with Greek at various times in the past and are now in contact with Albanian. As far as I know, the three main groups are spread all over Albania and inter-marry with each other. Only those speakers whose parents speak the same variety as themselves were taken into account. Eleven bivarietal speakers were excluded from the sample. The distribution of the definite NPs including an adjective according to VARIETY is represented in Figure 5.



**Figure 5.** Distribution of the definite NPs within each VARIETY.

Mečkar and Čergar speakers strongly favoured DNDA (65%,  $N = 116$  and 51%,  $N = 25$ ) but hardly used the canonical DAN (3%,  $N = 6$  and 6%,  $N = 3$ ), unlike the Arli who mostly used it (56%,  $N = 205$ ). Mečkar and Čergar almost never preposed the adjective. Arli speakers used more monodefinites than polydefinites (30%,  $N = 111$ ) and slightly preferred to prepose the adjective (56%,  $N = 205$ ). Indeed, it seems that DAN is almost exclusively used by Arli. DNA and DNDA are used by every group – but less so by Arli.

## 4. Discussion

In order to understand such syntactic variation, we first have to determine why the repetition of *d* has been adopted. Here too, we can postulate two different hypotheses:

A. The pattern was borrowed from Greek (which is prestigious and displays a similar polydefinite structure) or from Albanian (the current dominant contact language).

B. It is an internal innovation that fills a communicative gap.

In the following, I will briefly explore both hypotheses.

### 4.1 The language contact hypothesis

Roma everywhere are a minority and Romani is always in a subordinate position outside their community: it is not used by the majority (Non-Roma) and their institutions (police, school, etc.). Historical and recent migrations have therefore exposed the varieties spoken by the different sub-groups to the influence of different languages. Matras (2002: 195) proposes a threefold layering of the contact languages (L2) that influence any given Romani variety:

- the *older* L2 has heavily influenced the forerunner of the variety but is no longer spoken by the community.
- the *recent* L2 is only used by the parent or grandparent generation.
- the *current* L2 is the main language of everyday interaction with the non-Romani majority and often within the family alongside Romani.

On the basis of my fieldwork observations and my informants' declarations, I have reconstructed the L2s distribution presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Contact history of the three Albanian Romani varieties

	Mečkar	Čergar	Arli
Older L2	Albanian	Romance	Turkish
	Greek		Greek
	(South-Slavic) <sup>3</sup>		

	<b>Mečkar</b>	<b>Čergar</b>	<b>Arli</b>
Recent L2	Albanian (Greek)	South-Slavic (Greek)	Greek (Turkish)
Current L2	Albanian (Greek) (Italian)	Albanian (Greek) (Italian)	Albanian (Greek) (Italian)

Importantly for the present discussion, the adjective occurs in different positions in those contact languages:

**Table 5.** Possible word orders in definite NPs in the various contact languages

	<b>0 D<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>1 D</b>	<b>2 D +</b>
Albanian			N=D A <sub>class 1</sub> <sup>5</sup> N=D DET A <sub>class 2</sub> <sup>6</sup> (A <sub>class 1</sub> =D N) <sup>7</sup> (DET A <sub>class 2</sub> =D N)
Greek		D A N	D A N D N D A
Turkish	A N <sup>8</sup>		
Romance		N=D A <sup>9</sup> (A=D N) <sup>11</sup>	N=D DET A <sup>10</sup> (N=D A=D, N=D DET A=D) <sup>12</sup>
South-Slavic	A N (Serbian) <sup>13</sup>	A=D N (Macedonian, Bulgarian) <sup>14</sup>	

3 Contact with languages in brackets was occasional and, for Current L2, due to contemporary migrations and/or media exposure.

4 D stands for definiteness morpheme.

5 The Albanian definite article is a (second-position phrasal) postposed suffix/clitic (Lyons 1999: 71, 75–76) or ending (Androutsopoulou 2001: 162).

6 DET, originally a definite article (Lyons 1999: 79–80), is an adjectival article/determiner obligatorily occurring before class-2 adjectives in definite *and* indefinite NPs (see Campos (2008) for an extensive account on Albanian DET).

7 Structures in brackets are possible only with certain adjectives or in particular contexts.

8 Turkish has no definite article (Enç 1991: 9, see also Lyons 1999: 50, 96).

9 The Romanian definite article is a postposed clitic (Lyons 1999: 74–75) or suffix (Cornilescu and Nicolae 2012: 1075–1076). The same holds for Megleno-Romanian (Tomić 2006: 153) and Aromanian (Tomić 2006: 168).

10 See Lyons (1999: 75) and Tomić (2006: 127–128) for Romanian, Tomić (2006: 155) for Megleno-Romanian. Aromanian is the only Romance language that unmarkedly preposes the adjective (Tomić 2006: 169).

11 See Lyons (1999: 80–82), Campos and Stavrou (2004: 161) and especially Cornilescu and Nicolae (2012) for an extensive account of Romanian DET, originally a demonstrative that is today a free-standing adjectival article. See Tomić (2006: 156) for Megleno-Romanian and Tomić (2006: 171) for Aromanian.

12 Only in Aromanian (Campos and Stavrou 2004: 138).

13 Serbian has no definite article (Tomić 2006: 108).

14 Macedonian and Bulgarian definite articles are postposed clitics (Lyons 1999: 73–74). For an extensive account of this topic, see (Tomić 2006: 55–63, 88–94).

Table 5 shows that both Greek and Albanian can display a structure with two determiners:<sup>15</sup> in Greek through full doubling of D, and in Albanian through a mixed structure involving a postposed clitic and an adjectival article. Albanian adjectives are almost always postposed to the noun (Androutsopoulou 2001: 163–164) and most of them require the presence of an adjectival article (Campos 2008). I suggest that Mečkar prefers to postpose A since it has been in contact with Albanian for a longer period than the other varieties. Čergar’s similar preference can be seen as the effect of Romance influence that unmarkedly postposes A.<sup>16</sup> Arli’s lower frequency of postposition is probably a consequence of longer contact with languages that mostly prepose A (Turkish and Greek): its presence could also be due to the recent influence of Albanian.

## 4.2 Socio-linguistic account of the variation

Table 6 predicts which kind of speaker is more prone to favour which variant.

**Table 6.** Socio-linguistic profile of the most plausible speaker for each syntactic variant

	GENDER	AGE	EDUCATION	VARIETY
DAN	(equal)	≥ 60 y. old	0–5 years	Arli
DNA	men	≤ 15 y. old	6+ years	Čergar, Mečkar
DNDA	women	15 to 59 y. old	6+ years	Mečkar, Čergar

The hypothesis that DAN is a retention of an older form is confirmed by its higher frequency amongst older speakers. Speakers in the middle age range had more opportunity to attend school during the “communist” era than older Roma. Schooling results in deepening the speaker’s contact with Albanian (which prefers postposed adjectives), because it is not Romani but Albanian that is taught and practiced at school. That is why less-educated people (regardless of AGE) are expected to behave like older speakers (favouring DAN). The more educated a person is, the more intensive contact they have with the dominant language. Since the level of education has severely decreased since the regime’s fall (De Soto, Beddies and Gedeshi 2005: 53–61), we would expect younger people to favour DAN – but they do not. A possible explanation is the impact of television that dramatically increased the exposure of all the speakers (regardless of GENDER, AGE and EDUCATION) to Albanian (Foulkes and Docherty 1999, the papers in Androutsopoulos 2014). Internet and cell/smartphones may today reinforce this effect.

Contact with Albanian must also be differentiated according to GENDER, a complex construction that “interacts with other social identities” (Meyerhoff 2011: 232). Almost all women 40+ years old in my sample did not attend school; many women work/ed as housewives and do not often go out of their house. Consequently, they generally use

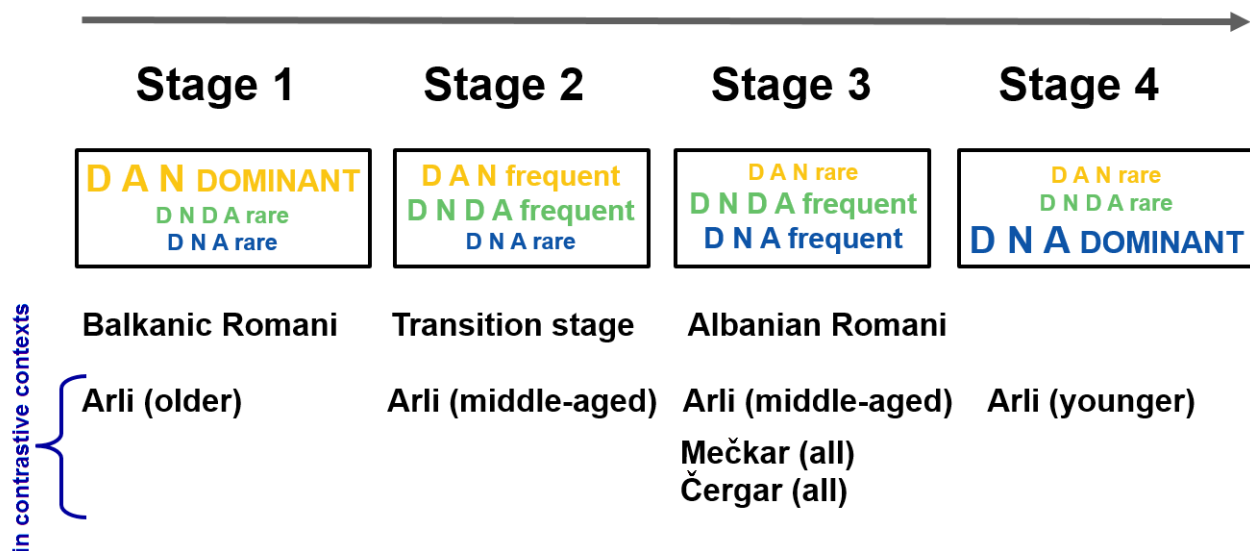
<sup>15</sup> The similarity between Greek and Albanian structures has been discussed by Androutsopoulou (2001), Campos (2008: 1024–1027) and Alexiadou (2014: 84–90).

<sup>16</sup> The South-Slavic influence seems to have been less significant on the syntactic than on the lexical level.

Albanian only in occasional or commercial interactions with Non-Roma people. Men, on the other hand, usually have a broader use of Albanian, experiencing it in more informal situations. For these reasons, I expected women to favour conservative DAN – but they did not. A possible explanation is that “women seem to lead men in the use of the incoming, non-standard variant” (Meyerhoff 2011: 225). The fact that women favour DNDA instead of DNA may be explained by the larger geographical distribution of DNDA (which occurs with most Albanian adjectives and in Greek polydefinites) than DNA (which occurs with few Albanian adjectives). According to Foulkes and Docherty (1999: 16), women tend to be sensitive to the geographical extension of the forms, preferring non-local to local (here conservative Romani) ones.

In order to explain how DNDA has emerged and why it is used more by Mečkar, Čergar and speakers in the middle age range, I propose the scenario described in Figure 6: a change in the nominal constituent order seems to have taken place in Albanian Romani. The initial word order was DAN for all communicative functions and is still used by older/low-educated/Arli speakers. DNDA was probably borrowed from Greek, a language that displays an identical structure with the specific function of restricting the set of the noun’s denotation. It is a case of *pattern replication* (Matras and Sakel 2007, Matras 2009) in contrasting contexts: full doubling of the definite article and postposition of the adjective are its *pivotal features*. This resulted in a long-term change in the replica language Romani, enriching its structural inventory with a calque-like DNDA. DNDA may also have been borrowed from Albanian, in which case the pivotal features were a blank second determiner and adjectival postposition.

### Synthesis: Diachronic scenario



**Figure 6.** Overview of the diachronic scenario

The more innovative order, DNA, is used in my data by younger/educated/Mečkar and Čergar speakers. DNA was probably a further pattern replication from Albanian – rather than from Greek, which does not display any DNA at all. The pivotal feature is the mere

postposition of the adjective, available in both Albanian class-1 and class-2 adjectives and in Romani DNDA structures. The full doubling of the definite article could thus have been used as a kind of bridge from DAN to DNA. If DNA then extends from its primary contrasting function to other communicative functions, it would be a case of *pragmatic unmarking*, a contact-induced grammaticalisation process “from pragmatic to syntactic marking” (Heine 2008: 54).

## 5. Conclusion

Albanian Romani displays polydefiniteness whereby full doubling of the article is possible only with *definite* articles. The analysis of the contact history of the Albanian Romani varieties shows that a change in the nominal constituent order has taken place. The community appears to be split into sub-groups:

- Mečkar and Čergar experience a pattern of STABILITY since they have already completed a change from DAN toward DNDA and DNA.
- Older Arli also experience a pattern of STABILITY since no change has occurred.
- Arli speakers in the middle age range seem to exhibit a pattern of LIFESPAN CHANGE (scenario 3), since the speakers of this cohort have individually changed in the direction of the rest of the community (Mečkar and Čergar).
- Younger Arli seem to be experiencing a change that can be either interpreted as an AGE GRADING (scenario 1) if, by getting older, they increase their use of DNDA – or as a GENERATIONAL CHANGE if the next generation follows them by preferring DNA (scenario 2).

Since such a synchronic study can only provide a snapshot of Albanian Romani, future longitudinal restudies are needed to check this analysis.

I have suggested that the canonical sequence *dan* ceased to be appropriate in contrastive contexts or did not trigger a restrictive interpretation any more. To better suit their communicative needs in contrastive contexts (hypothesis B), Mečkar and Čergar speakers innovated by using DNA. This was possible because DNDA was available and took over a bridging function between initial DAN and target DNA. Polydefiniteness in Romani is a case of pattern replication from Greek that then enabled a second pattern replication from Albanian, a new order DNA (hypothesis A).

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