

The Eastern Romance Languages as Members of the Balkan *Sprachbund*

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Abstract

The purpose of the present article is to compare four Eastern Romance languages, namely Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian, in terms of their morphological and syntactical features typical for the Balkan Sprachbund. The twelve features listed in the work by Jouko Lindstedt (2000) are examined. First, the languages are assessed using Lindstedt's methodology. Afterwards, more sensitive quotients are given depending on the frequency of the phenomena in question. The study has found that the most Balkanized Eastern Romance language is Aromanian, followed by Daco-Romanian and Megleno-Romanian. Istro-Romanian contains the least Balkan innovations.

Keywords: Eastern Romance languages, Balkan *Sprachbund*, Balkanisms, Lindstedt

1. INTRODUCTION

The Balkan *Sprachbund* is a group of languages spoken in the Balkans that have been in contact for many centuries, which allowed them to develop common phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic features. The *Sprachbund*

includes Albanian, Greek, Balkan Slavic, and Balkan Romance. Other languages, such as Romani, Serbian (particularly, the Torlak dialect), and Turkish are sometimes considered peripheral members of the *Sprachbund* (Asenova, 1989: 12; Lindstedt, 2000: 287; Lindstedt, 2015). The term Balkan Romance encompasses four Eastern Romance languages, namely Daco-Romanian, Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian. The same branch is sometimes called Daco-Romance (Maiden, 2016: 91). In certain contexts (Luht; Narumov, 2001: 576), the four varieties are called dialects of Proto-Romanian, which emphasizes that they share a common ancestor. In this article, I opt for the term Eastern Romance *languages* to highlight the differences between the four varieties as well as to avoid confusion with local varieties, e.g. the Fărsherot dialect of Aromanian or *žejãnski* in the case of Istro-Romanian.

The Daco-Romanian language (*limba română*, *românește*) is widely known as Romanian. The term Daco-Romanian is usually used to emphasize that the other three languages are not its dialects. The Daco-Romanian language is the only official language of Romania and Moldova, one of the official languages of the European Union and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in Serbia. The language is spoken by about 28 million people, including 24 million native speakers (Unilat, 2024).

The Aromanian language (*limba armânească*, *armâneashti*) is spoken all over the Balkan Peninsula (Kahl, 2002). However, the only place where the language has an official status is the municipality of Kruševo in North Macedonia (Bliznakovski, 2014: 24-25). Aromanian speakers usually do not live in compact groups. According to the 2021 census, there were 3151 native speakers of Aromanian in North Macedonia, which corresponds to 0.17% of the country's population (Makstat, 2021). According to the 2011 census in Albania, there were 3848 native speakers of Aromanian in the country. They comprise 0.14% of the total population (Instat, 2011a). The 2023 census does not provide the number of Aromanian speakers in the country. However, the number of ethnic Aromanians in Albania amounted to 2459 people (Instat, 2023), which is more than thrice less than 8256 people in 2011 (Instat, 2011b). Estimates about the total amount of native speakers range from 15 thousand active speakers (Narumov, 2001a: 638) to more than 500 thousand (Nevaci, 2013: 18). According to the most recent data available in Ethnologue (2024), the number of native speakers of Aromanian amounts to 210 thousand.

The Megleno-Romanian language (*vlășește*) is spoken by several thousand people in North Macedonia and Greece as well as by their descendants in Turkey, Romania, and Serbia. There were about five thousand native speakers of Megleno-Romanian in 1989 (Salminen, 2007: 258).

The Istro-Romanian language is an Eastern Romance language spoken by several hundred of people living in Istria, a peninsula in North-Western Croatia. It is difficult to estimate the exact number of speakers because many people do not have a strong ethnic or linguistic identity often calling themselves Croatians, Vlachs (Kovačec, 1998: 241-242), or Italians (Lozovanu, 2008: 45). The endonym for the southern varieties of the language is *vlășkë limbë* or *vlășkë limbë*, literally Vlach language, which is an umbrella term for

Eastern Romance languages other than Daco-Romanian, i.e. Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian. Speakers of the northern varieties of Istro-Romanian call the language according to the names of the villages they live in, e.g. *žejanski* for the dwellers of Žejane (Kovačec, 1998: 239). According to a 2010 estimation, the number of native speakers of Istro-Romanian is around 150 (Zegrean, 2012: 1).

Aromanian, Megleno-Romanian, and Istro-Romanian are often treated as dialects of Daco-Romanian in works on the Balkan *Sprachbund*. For instance, Asenova (1989: 12) argues that Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian are 'the most Balkanized dialects' of Romanian. Among other Balkanized dialects she mentions Tosk Albanian, South Western Bulgarian dialects (i.e. Macedonian, which is not considered a separate language by many Bulgarian scholars), and Northern Greek dialects. In other works, the Eastern Romance languages are considered a group of languages but are treated as one entity, namely Balkan Romance (Lindstedt, 2000).

Lindstedt (2000: 288) presents a table with twelve shared morphological and syntactical innovations in the following language groups of the *Sprachbund*: Greek, Albanian, Balkan Slavic, Balkan Romance, and Balkan Romani. Balkan Romance shares the following features: enclitic particles, object reduplication, dative/possessive merger, goal/location merger, *relativum generale*, *volo* future, and analytic comparison. The other five features are marked as a tendency only or occurring in some contact varieties: prepositions instead of cases, loss of infinitive, past future as conditional, *habeo* perfect, and evidentials.

I will first contrast the twelve morphological and syntactical features in four Eastern Romance languages utilizing Lindstedt's approach. Afterward, I will implement a more sensitive method for the same task to distinguish different degrees of the phenomena use in the languages. In other words, I will show whether a tendency

occurs more or less frequently in different languages.

2. MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTICAL INNOVATIONS OF THE BALKAN SPRACHBUND

2.1. Enclitic articles

In all four Eastern Romance languages, enclitic articles are placed at the end of a noun (see Table 1).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Indefinite form	<i>o casă</i> 'a house'	<i>una casă</i>	<i>ună casă</i>	<i>o cășe</i>
Definite form	<i>casa</i> 'the house'	<i>căsa</i> (Narumov, 2001a: 645)	<i>casa</i> (Narumov, 2001c: 676)	<i>câsa</i> (Kovačec, 1998: 271)

Table 1. Enclitic articles in the Eastern Romance languages

It should be noted that in Istro-Romanian no definite articles are used for neuter nouns, e.g. *srebro* '(the) silver' (Kovačec, 1998: 272). However, the lack of a definite article can be reinterpreted as a zero morpheme placed at the end of the noun.

2.2. Object reduplication

In Daco-Romanian, definite direct object is reduplicated with a definite article, e.g. *L-am întâlnit pe Ion* 'I have met Ion' (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 129). The situation is similar in Aromanian with the exception that direct human objects are not additionally marked by a preposition, e.g. *Lu viduj Bendul* 'I saw Bend' (Narumov, 2001a: 646). In Megleno-Romanian, a definite direct object is also reduplicated with a definite article without a preposition (Narumov, 2001c: 680). In Istro-Romanian, subject and direct object are not differentiated morphologically (Narumov, 2001b: 669), e.g. *ĭé s-a firút târd za né spúre fila-s* 'He

tried hard not to reveal his daughter' (Kovačec, 1998: 338).

2.3. Prepositions instead of cases

The Eastern Romance languages are the only Romance languages that have preserved nominal case marking. Daco-Romanian has three cases: Nominative-Accusative, Genitive-Dative, and Vocative, which is twice less than in Latin. Relations between words are more often marked with prepositions rather than cases. For instance, *pe* is the accusative marker for human direct objects (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 130). Aromanian has the same cases as Daco-Romanian (Narumov, 2001a: 645).

Nominal cases have almost disappeared from most dialects of Megleno-Romanian. In most dialects, the Genitive meaning is expressed with the particle *lu*, e.g. *lu feata* 'the girl's'. The Dative meaning is expressed with the particle *la*, e.g. *la un fičór* 'to a guy' (Narumov, 2001c: 676-77).

There are no separate case forms for Nominative-Accusative and Genitive-Dative in southern Istro-Romanian nouns and adjectives. Genitive-Dative is expressed by the particle *lu* which is placed before a noun, e.g. *lu ómu* 'the man's/to the man'. That is not the case in the northern dialect, where the cases have been preserved (Kovačec, 1998: 274-75).

2.4. Dative/possessive merger

In Daco-Romanian, Genitive and Dative have merged into one grammatical case (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 263), e.g. *A spus prietenului său* 'S/he told his/her friend', *mașina prietenului* 'the car of the friend'. In Aromanian, Genitive and Dative are both preceded by the particle *a*, e.g. *căsa a frátelui* 'the brother's house', *đișu a frátelui* 'I told the brother' (Narumov, 2001a: 645). In Megleno-Romanian, Genitive and Dative meanings have distinct markers, *lu* and *la* particles respectively (Narumov, 2001c: 676-77). In the

southern dialect of Istro-Romanian, Genitive-Dative is expressed with the particle *lu*. In the northern dialect, Genitive-Dative is formed either with the particle *lu/la* or in a way similar to Daco-Romanian, e.g. *lu ómu/ómuluj* ‘the man’s/to the man’, *le žénske/žénskel’ej* ‘the woman’s/to the woman’. Sometimes the Genitive meaning is distinguished with the particle *a*, e.g. *a lu ómu* ‘the man’s’ (Kovačec, 1998: 274-76).

2.5. Goal/location merger

In all four Eastern Romance languages, goal and location meanings are expressed in the same way, normally with a preposition (see Table 2).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Example with goal meaning	<i>Mergeam la teatru numai la piesele jucate mult</i> ‘We went to the theatre only to those plays that were played for long’	<i>shi dzua di Sămbăta trăoară intrară tu sinagogă shi nvitsa oaminjli</i> ‘and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach’ (Mark 1:21)	<i>chinisi să si ducă</i> ‘to depart to a village’ (Capidan, 1925: 181)	<i>L-a dús ăŋ cășe dende-ĭ ĭă nascúte</i> ‘She brought him to the house where she was born’ (Kovačec, 1998: 338)
Example with location meaning	<i>Ne-am întâlnit într-o zi la teatru</i> ‘We met one day in the theatre’ (Petrescu, 1930)	<i>Atumtsea tu sinagoga-a lor eara un om putut cu un duh nicurat, tsi ahurhi s-aurlă</i> ‘Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out’ (Mark 1:23)	<i>Coti ari ăŋ buric</i> ‘how much s/he has in (her/his) belly button’ – an idiom about an intelligent and hypocritical person (Capidan, 1928: 169)	<i>E ĭă fóst-a nascúte ăŋ cășe de slăme</i> ‘She was born in a straw house’ (Kovačec, 1998: 338)

Table 2. Goal/location merger in the Eastern Romance languages

2.6. *Relativum generale*

In all four Eastern Romance languages, there is a similar pronoun introducing general clauses. Its inflection by gender, number, and case differs across the languages (see Table 3).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Relative pronoun	<i>care</i>	<i>căre/cări /a cări</i>	<i>cări</i>	<i>carle/cârle</i>
Inflection	By case; additionally, by gender and number in Genitive-Dative (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 536)	By number and case (Narumov, 2001a: 649)	By case in singular (Narumov, 2001c: 677)	By gender, number and case (Kovačec, 1998: 283)

Table 3. *Relativum generale* in the Eastern Romance languages

2.7. Loss of infinitive

In Daco-Romanian, the short infinitive is used in analytical forms of future and conditional as well as in modal constructions with the verb *a putea*, e.g. *Nu pot face asta* ‘I cannot do this’. In the last case, the infinitive can be replaced with a subjunctive. Long infinitive forms are used as part of some set expressions as well as in inverted conditionals, e.g. *cântare-aș* ‘I would sing’ (Luht; Narumov, 2001: 613).

In Aromanian, long infinitive forms are used in several modal constructions denoting obligation, e.g. *Nélu va mîcári* ‘The honey must be eaten’. Short infinitive has completely disappeared (Narumov, 2001a: 647).

There are two forms of infinitive in Megleno-Romanian, long and short. Both forms can be used in periphrases denoting curses, e.g. *Lúpu s-ti máncă di nu vă ti máncă/măncári* ‘Let the wolf eat you but it won’t’. The long infinitive is mostly

used after modal verbs, e.g. *Ti poț duțiri* ‘You can go’ (Narumov, 2001c: 679).

There is no loss of infinitive in Istro-Romanian. The functions of infinitive are the same as in the Chakavian dialects of Croatian (Kovačec, 1998: 288), i.e. an infinitive cannot be replaced with a subjunctive, even in rare cases (Narumov, 2001b: 664) where a verb has subjunctive forms.

2.8. *Volo* future

There are several ways of forming future in Daco-Romanian. In the first one, the auxiliary *vrea* is followed by the truncated infinitive of the main verb, e.g. *voi face* ‘I will do’. A colloquial future is formed by the unchanged auxiliary *o* followed by the present subjunctive, e.g. *o să fac*. Alternatively, the conjugated auxiliary derived from the verb *avea* can be used, e.g. *am să fac* (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 38).

In Aromanian, the future tense is formed with the auxiliary *va(i)* plus *s(i)* plus the main verb in the present subjunctive (Narumov, 2001a: 647), e.g. *va si cântu* ‘I will sing’. A different model exists, with the auxiliary *va(i)* plus the main verb in the present indicative (*Ibidem*).

There is no future tense in Megleno-Romanian. To express future meaning, present subjunctive is used, e.g. *si/să cont* ‘I will sing’. One can also utilize the structure with the periphrasis *veări* plus subjunctive, e.g. *am si ved* ‘I will see’ (Narumov, 2001c: 678).

In Istro-Romanian, the future is formed with the auxiliary verb *vrę* in present and the infinitive of the main verb, e.g. e.g. *jó voį žucă* ‘I will dance’ (Kovačec, 1998: 293-294).

2.9. *Past future as conditional*

In Daco-Romanian, the present conditional consists of the auxiliary verb *avea* followed by a short infinitive of the main verb, e.g. *Dacă ar fi târziu, am merge la culcare* ‘If it were late, we would go to bed’. Conditional is used both in the

antecedent and the consequent (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 50).

In Aromanian, several conditional structures are possible. In the first one, past and future are both marked in the auxiliary as in Bulgarian and English, e.g. *vręa (s) cântu* ‘I would sing’. In the second structure, future is marked in the auxiliary, whereas past is marked in the main verb as in Albanian, Greek, and Macedonian, e.g. *va cântam* (Lindstedt, 2015). Various mixed structures and structures with the main verb in the present subjunctive are also possible, e.g. *vręa/va s’cîntărim* (Narumov, 2001a: 647).

There is no conditional in Megleno-Romanian. To express the meaning of the present conditional in the antecedent, one can use either present indicative or present subjunctive, e.g. *(a)cu cõnt/tucu si cõnt* ‘if I sang’ (Narumov, 2001c: 678). In the consequent, the conditional has the following structure: the unchanged auxiliary *vręa* plus present or past subjunctive, e.g. *Acu-ń zițeáj, vręa si vin* ‘If you had told me, I would come’ (*Idem*, 679).

In Istro-Romanian, the present conditional is formed with a form of the auxiliary verb *vrę* and the infinitive of the main verb, e.g. *jó ręș žucă* ‘I would dance’ (*Idem*, 295). Note that conditional is used both in the antecedent and the consequent, e.g. *Se nu rę fi bóra, rę fi túde maj musăt* ‘If there were no storm, it would be better’ (*Idem*, 305). However, it is not clear whether the auxiliary in conditional clauses is any kind of past tense.

2.10. *Habeo* perfect

Habeo perfect is present in all four Eastern Romance languages (see Table 4).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Example of <i>habeo</i> perfect	<i>am jucat</i> ‘I have played’	<i>am^u cădută</i> ‘I have fallen’	<i>am mănăcăt(ă)</i> ‘I have eaten’	<i>am žucăt</i> ‘I have danced’
Other	simple	simple	<i>sum</i>	N/A

perfect structures	perfect	perfect	perfect	(Kovačec, 1998: 294)
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Table 4. Perfect constructions in the Eastern Romance languages

In Daco-Romanian, the simple perfect is mostly being replaced with *habeo* perfect, the former being mostly used as a narrative tense in literary fiction and southern regional varieties (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 58). In Aromanian, on the other hand, simple perfect is the tense used the most frequently to describe a completed action in the past, whereas the compound (i.e. *habeo*) perfect is rare (Narumov, 2001a: 647). In Megleno-Romanian, the *iri*-auxiliary can be utilized instead of *habeo*, i.e. *săm măncăt(ă)*. However, the *sum* verb is not used as an auxiliary for other tenses, such as pluperfect (Narumov, 2001c: 678).

2.11. Evidentials

While in Daco-Romanian evidentiality is an extremely limited category, it is present in some dialects of Aromanian and Megleno-Romanian (Makartsev, 2014: 21). There is no evidentiality as a separate grammaticalized category in Istro-Romanian (Zegrean, 2012: 43).

In Daco-Romanian, evidentiality is limited to presumptive. In the present, presumptive can be formed with an *oi*-auxiliary and the main verb's infinitive or the same auxiliary plus the infinitive of the verb *fi* plus the main verb's gerund, e.g. *o veni/o fi venind/va fi venind* all three meaning '(s)he may/might be coming'. Still, evidentiality has not been granted the status of a mood (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 41).

In the Fărsherot dialect of Aromanian spoken in Albania and the southwestern part of North Macedonia, evidentiality has developed as a result of contact with other Balkan languages, particularly Albanian. The evidential constructions can be used to express various meanings, such as surprise or doubt, e.g. *Tini fuskă/avuskă dus*

Bitol'i 'You have been/have gone to Bitola' (Friedman, 1994: 81).

In the Megleno-Romanian variety spoken near Gevgelija at both sides of the North Macedonian-Greek border, there are grammaticalized constructions that can have a reported, admirative and dubitative use, e.g. *Ier fost-ăi ăn cătún* 'J'ai entendu parler (on m'a dit) que hier tu étais (as été) au village/à la campagne' (Atanasov, 1990: 220), i.e. 'I heard (I was told) that yesterday you were in the village/in the country'.

2.12. Analytic comparison

In all four languages, the comparative and superlative forms of adjectives are analytical (see Table 5).

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Comparative	<i>mai</i> + adjective	<i>ma/căma</i> + adjective	<i>mai</i> + adjective	<i>măi</i> + adjective
Superlative	linking article + <i>mai</i> + adjective	<i>ma/cama</i> + adjective with postpositive definite article	Daco-Romanian or Aromanian model	<i>măi</i> + adjective or Daco-Romanian model

Table 5. Comparative and superlative in the Eastern Romance languages

In Daco-Romanian, the linking article *cel* agrees with the head noun in gender, number, and case (Pană Dindelegan, 2013: 315), e.g. *cele mai frumoase case* 'the most beautiful houses'. In Aromanian, the postpositive definite article agrees with the head noun in gender, number and case, e.g. *cama marle frate* 'the eldest brother' (Narumov, 2001a: 648). In Megleno-Romanian, either the structure with a linking article or that with a postpositive definite article can be used. In the former model, the adjective can be definite or indefinite, e.g. *țela mai mări/marli* 'the biggest' (Narumov, 2001c: 677). In Istro-Romanian, the difference between comparative and superlative forms is that the analytic element is non-stressed in the former and stressed in the latter (Kovačec,

1998: 279). In rare instances, the Daco-Romanian model can also be used (Zegrean, 2012: 96).

3. Comparison of the languages

The obtained results can be summarized in the following table:

	Linstedt's marking	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Enclitic articles	+	+	+	+	+
Object reduplication	+	+	+	+	-
Prepositions instead of cases	(+)	(+)	(+)	+	(+)
Dative/possessive merger	+	+	+	-	+
Goal/location merger	+	+	+	+	+
<i>Relativum generale</i>	+	+	(+)	+	-
Loss of infinitive	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	-
<i>Volo</i> future	+	+	+	-	+
Past future as conditional	(+)	-	+	-	?
<i>Habeo</i> perfect	(+)	(+)	(+)	(+)	+
Evidentials	(+)	-	(+)	(+)	-
Analytic comparison	+	+	+	+	+
Total index	9.5	8.5	9.5	7.5	6.5+

Table 6. Balkanisms in the Eastern Romance languages by Lindstedt's approach

The disadvantage of the approach is that it does not take into account different frequencies of the morphological and syntactical innovations in the four languages. For instance, *habeo* perfect is the only perfect form in Istro-Romanian. It also exists in the other three languages but it is rarely used in Aromanian and predominantly used in Daco-Romanian and Megleno-Romanian. Therefore, the markings in brackets are given different quotients according to the frequency of the morphological and syntactical phenomena.

	Daco-Romanian	Aromanian	Megleno-Romanian	Istro-Romanian
Enclitic articles	1	1	1	1
Object reduplication	1	1	1	0
Prepositions instead of cases	0.5	0.5	0.75	0.75
Dative / possessive merger	1	1	0	0.75
Goal / location merger	1	1	1	1
<i>Relativum generale</i>	1	0.5	1	0
Loss of infinitive	0.5	0.75	0.75	0
<i>Volo</i> future	0.75	1	0	1
Past future as conditional	0	0.75	0	?
<i>Habeo</i> perfect	0.75	0.25	0.75	1
Evidentials	0.25	0.5	0.5	0
Analytic comparison	1	1	1	1
Total index	8.75	9.25	7.75	6.5+

Table 7. Balkanisms in the Eastern Romance languages by new approach

The quotients are distributed in the following way: 1 – the feature is omnipresent in the language; 0.75 – the feature is very frequent and generally preferred; 0.5 – the feature is neither very frequent nor rare; 0.25 – the feature is rare; 0 – the feature is not present in the language.

4. CONCLUSIONS

In terms of morphological and syntactical features, the most Balkanized Eastern Romance language is Aromanian with a total index of 9.25. It contains all 12 features listed in Lindstedt's work. Aromanian is followed by Daco-Romanian (total index of 8.75 and 11 features) and Megleno-Romanian (total index of 7.75 and 9 features). Istro-Romanian is the least Balkanized language

of the group. Its total index is between 6.5 and 7.5 depending on whether the auxiliary verb in conditional clauses represents a past form or not. Therefore, Istro-Romanian contains 7 or 8 features from Lindstedt's list.

The conclusion does not contradict the claim about the high Balkanization of Megleno-Romanian because phonological (e.g. the schwa sound, reduction of vowels) and lexical features (e.g. common vocabulary, phraseology, and word formation models) of the languages have not been taken into account. Furthermore, the frequency quotients can be recalculated and the total indices readjusted if/when corpora of all four languages are created.

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