

Romani Nominal Inflection: Cases or Postpositions?

Victor A. Friedman

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (U.S.A.)

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In an article on the function of noun phrases in Balkan Slavic, my friend and colleague Zuzanna Topolińska (1986) makes the point that at the sentential level Standard Macedonian has morphological exponents for all the functions associated with the standard inventory of synthetic cases in other Slavic languages, i.e. Macedonian has recreated the Slavic inflectional case system by means of morphosyntactic devices. In this article dedicated to her, I wish to examine another instance of structural change in noun phrases in a language of the Balkans that has also resulted in a system that is the equivalent of an earlier stage, viz. the rise of declension in Romani.¹ In this instance the move has been from the analytic to the synthetic via agglutination, and I would argue that the current situation in Romani derives at least in part from its participation in Balkan language contact. Like other modern Indic languages, Romani lost most of the inherited Indo-European declensional system of Sanskrit and Prakrit - preserving only the nominative, accusative and vocative - and replaced the other cases with a series of postpositions added to the accusative stem. Unlike the other Indic languages, however, Romani does not have a complex set of free standing postpositions. On the contrary, it has only five affixes which more or less correspond in function to the five Sanskrit cases they replaced (dative, locative, genitive, ablative, instrumental). For illustrative purposes, the paradigms of the substantives čhavo 'boy' (masc.) and balval 'wind' (fem.) are given below.²

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	masc.	fem.	masc.	fem.
Nominative	čhavo	balval	čhave	balvala
Vocative	čhav[e]a	balvalie	čhava[n]	balvalaie[
Accusative ³	čhave[s]	balvala	čhaven	balvalen
Dative	čhaveske	balvalake	čhavenge	balvalenge
Locative	čhaveste	balvalate	čhavende	balvalende
Ablative	čhavestar	balvalatar	čhavendar	balvalendar
Instrumental	čhave[s]a[<r>]	balvala[s]a[<r>]	čhavenca<r>	balvalenca<r>

Genitive | čhavesk[or]o... | balvalak[or]o... | čhaveng[or]o... | balvaleng[or]o...

Aside from these affixes, Romani is a strictly prepositional language. Even dialects heavily influenced by postpositional languages, e.g. that of Agia Varvara (Athens), borrows postpositions as prepositions even while keeping Turkish case agreement. Thus, for example, the meaning 'after' is usually expressed by the preposition pala plus the nominative or locative, e.g., pala i Patrighi (Messing 1988:97) 'after Easter', pala adaleste 'after that' (Uhlík 1983:274). The dialect of Agia Varvara, however, also uses the preposition sona from the Turkish postposition sonra, which, as in the Turkish model, takes the ablative case, e.g., sona dui tšonendar 'after two months' (Messing 1988:114) = Turkish iki aydan sonra. Given that what were originally postpositions or postpositional enclitics now form a non-productive, closed set with no more than five members, we have reason to suspect that Romani has made the transition from postpositional enclitics to agglutinative cases.

Most scholars present these affixes either as cases (e.g., Jusuf 1981, Kostov 1962, Ventcel' and Čerenkov 1976) or as postpositions (e.g., Bhatia 1964, Grumet 1985, Hancock 1985) without addressing the question of why one view is preferable to the other. In older works such as Paspatis (1870) and Sampson (1926) the postpositional origin or agglutinative nature of the affixes is stressed, but they are treated as cases nonetheless. Cortiade (forthcoming) presents arguments to justify the analysis of these affixes as postpositions, but no one has attempted to justify the analysis of these affixes as inflectional, which I now propose to do.

The following arguments have been or could be used in favor of a postpositional analysis.

1. The affixes were postpositional in origin and are clearly postpositional in the modern languages of India. Trying to analyze them as cases is forcing Romani into the mold of classical grammar.
2. The adjective can have at most only two case forms, nominative and oblique, e.g., the phrase meaning 'my young bride': mi terni bori (nom.), me terne borja (acc.), me terne borjatar (abl.), etc. Hence, the postposition is modifying the entire phrase.
3. Unlike traditionally inflected Indo-European languages, the Romani affixes do not

differ according to the gender/number of the stem. There are only two cases, and all the affixes are added to the oblique case.

4. The descendants of the Sanskrit locative and ablative, viz. -e, and -al, still survive in a few words, e.g., khere 'at home' (vs khereste 'in the house', and-o kher 'inside the house'), dromal 'along the road' (vs dromestar, kotar-o drom 'from the road'), etc.

5. Two and more rarely three affixes can be combined, e.g., than 'place' > thanesqere 'of the place' > thanesqerençar 'with the ones of the place, i.e. with the locals'; similarly me čhavenqerenqeres8ar 'with the one of those of my children' (a potential form in the Džambaz dialect according to Šaip Jusuf as reported in Cortiade [forthcoming]). Such combination is characteristic of postpositions and prepositions (cf. English into), not cases.

6. In dialects where the stress system has not been seriously disrupted by external influence, stress is oxytonic on native words. The fact that these affixes are unstressed classes them as enclitics.

7. The dative -ke and locative -te are separable and can also occur prepositionally thus pointing to their clitic rather than affixal nature.

The following answers to these arguments can be made.

1. After a millenium or more of separation Romani has diverged significantly from the other Indic languages. It is prepositional rather than postpositional. The fact that its restructured system of agglutinative cases based on former postpositions is closer to Sanskrit than to the modern languages of India reflects Romani's own internal tendencies and not an attempt to impose a Sanskrit analysis on Romani material (cf. Slobin 1986 on recurring structures).

2. Few or no adjectival cases is typical of agglutinating case systems like those found in Altaic and Caucasian languages. The distinction between case and postposition can be seen in a phrase with more than one substantive, e.g. Georgian disa da jmisagan 'from sister and brother' (-isa = gen. case, -gan = enclitic postposition 'from'; cf. Aronson 1969). In Romani, however, the affix must be repeated each time, e.g., Ń thagar vojničenca, pajtonenca, bašalimasa, zurnavenca, davulenca džana e borja te ingelen (Kostov 1962:33) 'The king with soldiers, carts, music, oboes [and] drums

[they] come to get the bride'. Finally, there is the fact that in some dialects of Romani adjectives do agree in case with the substantives they modify, e.g. barestar romestar 'from the big Rom'. (Ventcel' and Čerenkov 1976:308).

3. Romani is typologically distinct from its genetic relatives. The affixes we are studying are agglutinative and so do not reflect any grammatical category other than that of case. Other languages with agglutinating case, e.g. Lak, distinguish two stems, with all oblique cases being added to the oblique stem, e.g., nom. bart 'sour cream', gen. bartlii, dat. bartlin, abl. bartlišša, etc.

4. Survivals of the old locative and ablative are limited to a few individual lexical items and do not constitute cases in modern Romani any more than survivals of the Common Slavic instrumental in Macedonian, e.g. kradum 'stealthily', nazadgazum 'backasswards', can justify a claim that Macedonian has an instrumental case. These non-paradigmatic relic forms are synchronically adverbs and prepositions.

5. The Romani situation is exactly like Georgian double declension. In both languages only the genitive can serve as the base for secondary case endings. Forms such as thaneskerençar 'with [those] of the place' cited above are paralleled exactly by Modern Georgian constructions with a declined genitive, e.g. mta 'mountain', gen. mt-is[a], dat. mta-s, gen.-dat. mt-isa-s 'to [those] of the mountain' as in the expression vlaparakobdit am mtisas, im mtisas 'we talked about this and that (lit. 'about [things] of this mountain, about [things] of that mountain'; Vogt 1971:36). In Old Georgian genitives normally preceded their heads, e.g., mep-isa kal-i 'king's daughter', instr. mep-isa kal-ita. If the genitive followed, however, it took an additional case affix to agree with its head, e.g., kal-i mep-isa-y (nom.), kal-ita mep-isa-yta (instr).

Precisely the same situation holds in Romani dialects such as Mečkar as reported by Cortiade (forthcoming), e.g., me amalesqe phenăça 'with my friend's sister' but e phenăça me amalesqeraça 'with the sister of my friend'. This is clearly an instance of case agreement, no lexical information is carried by the second instrumental marker, only syntactic.

6. There are other bound terminal morphemes of native origin that are not stressed, e.g. the ordinal morpheme -to: štar 'four' > štárto 'fourth', the morpheme -var 'times',

e.g. duj 'two' > dúvar 'twice'. There are also unstressed inflectional affixes that cannot be analyzed as postpositional, e.g. Róma (voc. sg.) vs Romá (nom. pl.), Romnie (voc. sg.) vs Romniá (nom. pl.). Finally, case affixes can cause a shift of stress whereas enclitics do not, e.g., ırgóvtsos 'merchant', ırgovtsóskeri (gen.) but kása 'cash box', kása-da 'cash box, too' (Gilliat-Smith[4] 1911-12:2-8).

7. The relationship of the prepositions ke, te to the case affixes -ke, -te is historical and does not affect the analysis of the latter as synchronic case markers. In modern Balkan Romani the locative preposition te has been replaced by ke, e.g. ki jek aindž = jekhe aindžate 'in a field' (Jusuf 1980:32,33). There are two problems brought out by this example. First, the form ki is governing an indefinite noun phrase, which suggests that ki and ko have been lexicalized and can no longer be treated as elisions of ke plus the definite articles o (masc. nom.) and i (fem. nom.) as has been done in the past. Second, the preposition ke/ki/ko corresponds to two different case affixes. Synchronically, therefore, the preposition cannot be treated as a preposed postposition nor can the case markers be described as preposable.

There are several other arguments that favor the synchronic treatment of Romani case affixes as agglutinative case markers rather than as enclitic postpositions. In morphophonological terms, the alternation between voiced and voiceless stops in the genitive, dative, locative, and ablative must be treated as a progressive assimilation of voicing after sonorants. Progressive voicing assimilation does not occur across word boundaries in Romani. Thus, for example, the initial /t/ of the enclitic ta[r] used as an emphatic marker on verb forms, especially imperatives, remains voiceless regardless of the preceding consonant, e.g., án-ta mánge jek čhuri 'now bring me a knife' (Gilliat-Smith[3]:1910:147), nánghjov-ta 'now strip' (Gilliat-Smith[3]:1910:143). In fact, when voicing assimilation occurs with enclitics or across word boundaries, it is regressive, as can be seen in the following examples: with -da 'and, also, too': Léz-da kaxáv 'Him, too, I shall eat' (Gilliat-Smith[1] 1910:191) (les 'him'); with biš 'twenty': biš džené 'twenty persons' (Gilliat-Smith[4] 1911-12:3).

On the other hand, synchronic progressive assimilation of voicing does occur in other inflectional and derivational contexts. In some dialects, we have it in

derivation, e.g. thud 'milk' > thudvalo 'milky' but rat 'blood' > ratfalo 'bloody' (as well as ratvalo; Uhlik 1983:145). The formation of past participles in Balkan Romani can also be described in terms of progressive assimilation of voicing. After sonorants we have /d/ or /l/, elsewhere /t/ or /l/ e.g. phando or phanlo 'bound' vs bešlo or bešto 'seated'. After vowels /l/ is normal, e.g., ha-lo 'eaten', pi-lo 'drunk', mu-lo 'dead', but /t/ also occurs, e.g., su-to 'slept'. All those cases of vowel + /d/ in the past participle are from stems ending in /v/, which, after Cortiade (forthcoming), can be treated as part of the stem or as epenthetic. Thus, for example, čhivel 'put, throw' can have a variety of past participles in different dialects depending on the treatment of the /v/ as epenthetic - čhito - or as part of the stem with or without elision: čhivdo~čhido. Synchronically, the dental stop past participle formant can be analyzed as basic /t/ with a rule for voicing to /d/ after sonorants. By treating Romani case affixes as inflectional, we can have a single morphophonemic progressive voicing rule that applies within a word at morpheme boundaries and a single regressive voicing rule that applies optionally across word boundaries; thus the separation of morpheme boundary from word boundary in Romani is reinforced by means of different directions of voicing assimilation. If the case affixes are treated as enclitic postpositions, the symmetry breaks down and the generalization is lost.

Finally, we come to the function of the case affixes. There are three principle questions to be addressed: the status of the vocative, the status of the genitive, and grammatical vs lexical function in the other case forms. In a recent article, Schooneveld (1989) has summarized the major arguments surrounding the theoretical question of the vocative as a case. We concur with his conclusion that it is a "case not like the others" (p. 185), i.e., despite its peculiar semantic features, it can still be considered part of a declensional paradigm. The Romani vocative is not enclitic but inflectional, as evidenced by its stress patterns and independent vocalic realizations, and it takes oblique adjective agreement, e.g., Bare raja! 'O great lord!' (Paramičia 1981:84). It is thus clear that insofar as the vocative is a case at all, it is a case in Romani.

The genitive presents a different problem. Unlike the other cases, the genitive

agrees with its head in gender-number-case as can be seen from the following examples: e rakleskoro dad 'the boy's father' (nom. sg.); e rakleskiri daj 'the boy's mother' (nom. sg.); e rakleskere amale[s], amala, amalen, ... 'the boy's friend(s)' (acc.sg., nom.pl., acc.pl.). As a result of this agreement, many analyses treat the genitive as a possessive adjective (e.g., Ventcel' and Čerenkov 1976; Sampson 1926:35). That the genitive can be declined in some dialects and sometimes even agrees in case with the substantive it modifies, as described above, are also cited as facts supporting the analysis of the genitive as a derivational suffix rather than as an inflectional one. There are, however, a number of arguments in favor of not treating the genitive as a case rather than as a derivational marker (cf. Also Grumet 1985):

1. Unlike adjectives, the genitive is modified by an oblique article even when its head is in the nominative, e.g., Liljás pes o trgovtsos, e rakljakoro dad. (Gilliat-Smith[4] 1911-12:4) 'The merchant, the girl's father, set off'.
2. All derivational affixes attach to the bare or nominative stem. Genitives attach to the oblique stem. Moreover, the genitive has the typical inflectional features of being both semantically transparent and totally predictable in its application to all substantives.
3. The genitive is used in meanings that are purely grammatical and cannot be interpreted as possessive adjectival. In some dialects, we find the genitive substituting for the dative, e.g., o phral phenel lengoro 'The brother says to them' and Thovel len opral lengoro ko šero 'He puts them (the trays) onto them (his mother and sister) on the[ir] head[s]' (Gilliat-Smith[3]:146). In most dialects, the preposition bi 'without' takes the genitive, e.g. bi lovengoro 'without money'. Some accounts of Romani treat bi as a prefix added to possessive adjectives to derive a privative adjective, but this account is belied by the fact that bi can occur at the head of entire noun phrases, e.g., bi akale purane gadenqo (Cortiade forthcoming) 'without these old clothes' and in phrases where its function is clearly neither adjectival nor possessive, e.g., bi moro (Kostov 1962:139) 'without me' not 'without my'. Moreover, the prepositional nature of bi and the declensional nature of the genitive account for the fact that in some dialects bi can take a different case, e.g., the instrumental in

Lake pharo ulo bi romesa (Paramičia 1981:83) 'It was difficult for her without [her] husband'.

4. Typologically, declined and agreeing genitives are found in other languages of the world (cf. the Georgian examples cited above, also Daghestanian [Mei'čuk1986:83]).

Including the genitive with the other case affixes accounts for its paradigmatic nature, for the shape of the stem to which it attaches and of the definite article that modifies it, as well as for those meanings and uses that are neither possessive nor adjectival. It also allows for a correct treatment of dialectal variation in preposition and case usage. As we have already seen, head agreement, which is the only possible synchronic justification for treating the genitive affix as derivational rather than inflectional, is a phenomenon to which genitives in general are prone, and using it as the justification for classifying the genitive as a derivational affix leaves all the inflectional features of the Romani genitive unaccounted for.⁴

Our final arguments concern the grammatical versus lexical functions of the affixes. Most of the case affixes of Romani serve purely syntactic functions in addition to their obvious lexical meanings. With the exception of the vocative, all of these affixes can occur both alone and with prepositions in at least some dialects. We have already seen examples of prepositional constructions with all the possible cases except the accusative and dative, e.g., upral me Batimjes sovel xaljom 'I've sworn an oath on my Batim' (Gilliat-Smith[5]1912:283), asal e Romeske 'for the sake of the Rom'. Given that the preposition is carrying the lexical meaning, the function of the case affix in these contexts is syntactic. The dative also functions as the marker of the indirect object, the ethical dative, and other non-concrete functions: oj phenela pe đadeske: 'She says to her father:' (Paramičia 1981:79); Te na kames mange te patjes, đža dikh! 'If you don't want to believe me, go look' (Paramičia 1981:82); Uxtino kaj gelo peske. 'He got up and left.' (lit. went to/for himself; Šejtanov 1933:26). The ablative can be used in comparisons as well as for the agent in passives: Vov si mandar po-barvalo. 'He is richer than I.' (Kostov 1962:133); Ō čhavo thovel pes pe đajatar. 'The child is washed by his mother.' (Kostov 1962:138). The case affixes of Romani serve grammatical, i.e. purely syntactic functions of the type not carried out

by prepositions, enclitics or by word order. They thus differ functionally as well as formally from both prepositions and enclitics.

To summarize, the arguments in favor of treating the Romani nominal affixes as agglutinative case suffixes rather than as enclitic postpositions are the following:

1. The other morphemes affected by the progressive assimilation of voicing rule that accounts for the shape of four out of five of these affixes in the plural are all inflectional and derivational. Enclitics do not assimilate voicing progressively but rather can cause a regressive assimilation.
2. Romani is a strictly prepositional language and the five affixes in question constitute a closed, paradigmatic set. Even dialects heavily influenced by postpositional languages borrow postpositions as prepositions and calque case suffixes with the appropriate Romani case suffix.
3. The case suffixes also perform purely grammatical functions, whereas the enclitics have lexical meaning. In some dialects we even find purely syntactic case agreement within the noun phrase.
4. All those arguments pointing to the postpositional origin of these affixes and/or comparing Romani with its genetic sibling languages are mixing diachronic with synchronic criteria. In a strictly synchronic analysis Romani behaves typologically like other languages with agglutinative case, e.g. Altaic, Kartvelian, and Daghestanian.

It is interesting to note that Romani's restructuring and resurrection of the eight-case system of Sanskrit cannot be construed as something externally imposed. Even if one were to insist on treating these affixes as enclitic postpositions, the fact would remain that the undeniable inflected cases and the old postpositions still constitute a closed set precisely mirroring the earlier Sanskrit situation, a feature not found in any of the modern Indic languages of India. We are reminded not only of Topolińska's (1986) Macedonian example, but also of the verbal system of the southwesternmost Macedonian dialects. In these dialects, as elsewhere in western Macedonian, a new perfect using the auxiliary *ima* 'have' and the past passive participle arose to compete with the old perfect using the auxiliary *sum* 'be' and the

old resultative participle. The rest of western Macedonian reinterpreted the 'be' perfect as an unmarked or non-confirmative past opposed to the markedly confirmative aorist/imperfect, and the 'have' perfect became the new pure resultative. The southwesternmost dialects, however, went on to eliminate the old 'be' perfect in favor of the new 'have' perfect. The ultimate result was a restructured verbal system using new lexical material but reflecting precisely the Late Common Slavic set of past tense categories that had served as the start of the western Macedonian developments (cf. Friedman 1988). In the Romani case system we have another example of an isolated offshoot unconsciously coming back to the structure of the parent language. Since Romani may have reached the Balkans as little as a century or two after the departure from India, the halt of postpositional restructuring typical of Indic languages and shift to the prepositional constructions characteristic of the Indo-European languages of the Balkans may have occurred or been completed on Balkan territory. We can also view the move from postposed analyticity to agglutination as a possible Balkanism like the case/ article systems of Albanian and Romanian or the article system of Macedonian and Bulgarian.

NOTES

¹Most examples are from the non-Vlax Balkan Romani dialects. All examples are cited in the original orthography of the source or standard Latin transcription if the source is in a non-Latin alphabet.

²Square and angled brackets indicate principal dialectal variations within the non-Vlax Balkan group. The genitive is followed by ellipses to indicate the fact that there are also forms in -i and -e depending on the head noun.

³In most dialects, the accusative is only used for animate objects and pronouns while inanimate substantives are left in the nominative. However animate objects in the nominative and inanimate objects in the accusative also occur, e.g., dikhlas jekh butdz∞andlo gadz∞o 'he saw a wise non-Rom' (Paramic∞ia 1981:79); gele ande jekhe ves∞es 'they went into a forest' (Gilliat-Smith [8] 1912:85).

⁴The relationship of substantivized genitives to their sources, e.g. be-r[en]e@ero-

'sailor' < be-ro- 'ship'(Sampson 1926:34), is strictly etymological. The lexicalization of oblique forms is well known in many languages with living case systems, e.g., Russian r'adom both the instrumental case of r'ad 'row' and an adverb meaning 'alongside'. Such derivational processes do not alter the paradigmatic nature of the suffixes involved.

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