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Infinitive reduction in a migrant Shtokavian dialect in Albania: Language contact supporting Balkanization*

Abstract: Under the long-term influence of Albanian, the Shtokavian migrant dialect in Fier and the vicinity (originally the Novi Pazar-Sjenica-Tutin area) has significantly reduced the use of infinitives in verbal complements of modals. Subjunctives have mostly replaced infinitives in these contexts, bringing the dialect closer to Balkan Slavic in structural terms.

Key words: infinitive; the Balkan subjunctive forms; *da*-forms; South Slavic dialectology; Albanian-Slavic language contacts

The prominence of Balkanisms in Balkan Slavic and their paths of grammaticalization have been the subject of long-standing research that has demonstrated both the influence of contacts with non-Slavic languages and the internally driven development of structures attested at earlier stages of linguistic development of East South Slavic. In what follows, I will use a frag-

* The research for this article was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) through the project “Kontakt-induzierter Sprachwandel in Situationen des nicht-stabilen Bilinguismus — seine Grenzen und Modellierung: slavische (soziale) Dialekte in Albanien” (project number (GZ) MA 8750/1-1).

ment of the morpho-syntactic system in the non-Balkan Slavic Shtokavian dialect to show how contact with Albanian has resulted in a transformation that brings the dialect closer in structural terms to Balkan Slavic.

The Shtokavian migrant dialect of Fier: Setting the scene

The data from the Shtokavian dialect in Fier (hereafter Fier Shtokavian — FSh) and the vicinity (the Myzeqe region in southwestern Albania) were collected in 2013 and 2016 in extensive semi-structured interviews with members of the community. It must be stressed that the outline of the community's history represented in this article is based on the informants' words and thus reflects oral history rather than any written documents.¹

FSh has been in contact with Albanian as a subdominant language for almost a century. According to my informants, the history of their community in Fier dates back to the migration of 114 families that in 1924 left the area of Novi Pazar Sandžak (which today lies mostly in southwest Serbia and consists of the municipalities of Novi Pazar, Sjenica, Tutin, and some adjacent areas — hereafter NPST). This is the area of the Novi Pazar-Sjenica (*novopazarsko-sjenički*) dialect(s),² which occupy the northeastern part of the Zeta-Sjenica (*zetsko-sjenički*) dialectal zone of the Shtokavian dialectal complex (*štokavsko narečje*; see Ивић 1956: 156–174; Барјактаревић 1966). The families moved into Albania and in 1933 acquired land in the Fier region. This community settled in Fier and adjacent areas: Rreth Libofsha, Hamil

¹ Previous descriptions within the academic literature of the community in Fier are unknown to me. Its existence is briefly mentioned by N. Shehu, I. Dizdari, and L. Duka (2001) and D. Stjepanović (2013). At the same time, the Fier community is not mentioned by J. Gjinari (1958), who writes extensively about the Albanian dialects of the area, their sociolinguistic situation, and other linguistic groups found in and around Fier. Kl. Steinke and Xh. Ylli (2013: 137), in their voluminous description of the Slavic dialects in Albania, note only that “die 1924 nach Libofsha in der Nähe von Fier eingewanderte Gruppe ist inzwischen fast vollständig assimiliert.” Reports mentioning this group in Serbian media are based on interviews with members of the community. The migration of South Slavic-speaking Muslims from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (and later from Yugoslavia) was mainly in the direction of the Republic of Turkey. There is still a community of migrants from Sandžak in Istanbul. See Giesel (2016) for more information about this group and literature concerning them.

² See more on the possible dialectal differentiation within this area in (Вељовић 2016: 22–36).

(the Dërmenas municipality before the 2015 local government reform in Albania), Petova (formerly the Mbrostar municipality), and Patos. The leader of the local Serbian initiative “Jedinstvo” (“Unity”) mentions 2,500 Serbs (mostly Muslims) in Fier and the vicinity. Without constituting a majority in any of the settlements, they exist in multilingual, multiethnic, and multireligious settings with Orthodox and Muslim (Sunni and Bektashi) Albanians of Myzeqe, Muslim Cham Albanian migrants from what is now northwestern Greece (speakers of Cham Albanian dialects), Albanian migrants from Kosovo (northeastern Gheg Albanian speakers), and Orthodox Aromanians. The lingua franca in this region is standard Albanian (which is structurally close to northern Tosk Albanian dialects of the area). The three members of the community I had the chance to work with in 2013 and 2016 call themselves Serbs and refer to their dialect as Serbian.³

The community is undergoing the process of a language shift: based on my observations, the first generation, which was born in Albania after the migration, still uses the dialect, while many in the second generation no longer speak it. Knowledge of the dialect is continuously degrading among successive generations. Jedinstvo organizes Serbian language courses for children but teaches only standard Serbian. Although the children learn some useful expressions in these courses and also learn to count, sing the Serbian national anthem, and write and read in both Cyrillic and Latin scripts, upon completion they have only a limited understanding of the language and minimal competency in written and spoken Serbian. For the most part Albanian is these children’s preferred language among each other and at home, even though they are exposed to Serbian through satellite television and the Internet.

The contact between Albanian and FSh can be characterized as that between genetically distant⁴ languages with some previously existing common structural features.

³ However, a significant group of the Shtokavian-speaking population in the Fier area prefer to use the terms *bošnjачki* ‘Bosniak’, *bosanski* ‘Bosnian’ as autonyms for their language, and express their Bosnian (or sometimes Albanian) identity, as my expedition in 2021 revealed. The debate over the labelling of this language and the identity of the speakers lies beyond the focus of the present article.

⁴ Albanian < Albanian branch of the Indo-European language family; FSh < Zeta-Rashka Shtokavian dialects < South Slavic subgroup of the Slavic branch of the Indo-European language family.

In terms of the Balkan sprachbund, standard Albanian (and the northern Tosk dialects spoken in Myzeqe) is one of its core languages and attests most of its common structural features (i.e., Balkanisms). (See the discussion in Lindstedt 2000; Русаков 2004.) Balkanisms are unequally represented in the dialectal system of Shtokavian, which lies on the periphery of the sprachbund. The Prizren-Timok dialects, together with Bulgarian and Macedonian standards and their respective dialectal systems, belong to Balkan Slavic, which is at the core of the Balkan sprachbund. The rest of the Shtokavian dialects show a decline in Balkanisms moving from the southeast to the northwest (see, e.g., Birnbaum 1965). The NPST dialects are non-Balkan Slavic, although they still represent several Balkanisms on various levels of the language structure (Greenberg 2000).

Descriptions of the dialect in the area of origin have different absolute time reference. D. Barjaktarević (1966) worked in the field in 1946–1958, and B. Veljović (2016) conducted her fieldwork in 2011–2013; together with their grammatical descriptions of the dialect, they also published some transcripts as well as extensive examples. My own field materials from FSh were collected in 2013 and 2016 in Rreth Libofsha during two short visits.⁵ From the entire 4 hours 20 minutes that I recorded, around 1.5 hours are transcribed (around 10,000 words)⁶ and comprise open semi-structured interviews on the history of the village and ethnography. All interviews were conducted with members of one family (ER, male, born in 1968; his mother, SR, born in 1947; and his father, ÇR, born in the mid-1940s).

The data published by Barjaktarević represent the state of the dialects in the mother area only 20–30 years after the migration of the Fier group, and he specifically targeted older speakers.⁷ For those reasons, Barjaktarević's data can be taken as representative for the mother area at the time the migration took place. Veljović's data are helpful for the process of detecting current trends in the mother dialect.

⁵ The materials of my four-day expedition to Rreth Libofsha, Hamil, and Fier in July, 2021 are being currently transcribed and could not be used for this article.

⁶ I am grateful to Natalija Nikolić and Đorđe Genović for their help in preparing the transcripts.

⁷ The ages of the speakers whose narratives are represented in the appendix to his publication (Барјактаревић 1966: 162–166) range from 53 to 100 years.

The problem of infinitive versus subjunctive

In what follows, I will concentrate on one morpho-syntactic feature of FSh that demonstrates Albanian influence — namely, reductions in the use of infinitives after modal verbs and their replacement with subjunctives. Moreover, I will refer to the finite verbal complements of modal verbs (Shtokavian: *da* + finite forms; Albanian: *t(ë)* + finite forms) as subjunctives without making claims as to their modal status for the sake of a unified formal description of the outcomes of language contact.⁸

The infinitive in South Slavic is a form that dates back to the Proto-Slavic infinitive.⁹ Already in Old Church Slavonic, there was a parallel use of infinitives and subjunctives, or verbal complements with finite verbal forms introduced by the conjunction *da* (< Indo-European deictic pronoun **do*, **di*, БЕР I 1971: 309–310; see the description of the OCS system in МИНЧЕВА 1987: 84 et passim). In Medieval Balkan Slavic, the infinitive was slowly reduced until its almost complete loss in most of the Balkan Slavic dialects (see Мирчев 1978: 235; Конески 1986: 177–180); in the Shtokavian area it was retained (see more on the South Slavic infinitive in Joseph 1983: 101–148). In areal terms, infinitives in South Slavic are more archaic, and subjunctives are an innovation that overtakes the functions of the former (Цыхун 1981: 125–127). The reduction and loss of infinitives and their replacement with subjunctives is considered a Balkanism since K. Sandfeld’s groundbreaking description of common features among the languages of the region (Sandfeld 1930; see also Mišeska Tomić 2006: 413–655¹⁰). The center of the spread of subjunctives in South Slavic is located in western and southeastern Macedonian dialects (Цыхун 1981: 215), which are a part of a broader zone (including the Prizren-Timok dialects) where infinitives do not exist at all (the western border of this zone in South Slavic follows a line from Gjakova/Đakovica to Prishtina to east of the Morava river; idem 130–131). Following this area is the transition-

⁸ In the Albanian grammatical tradition, the subjunctive is considered to be modal (*mënyra lidhore* ‘connective mood’ – Domi 2002: 272–273, 293–294). In the case of South Slavic, there is discussion regarding the categorial status of *da*-forms (see Куцаров 2007: 282; Иванова & Градинарова 2015: 107–117; Kikilo 2020).

⁹ A form “with a suffix *-ti* from a dative of a deverbal nominal stem in **-ti*” (Joseph 1983: 102). The issue of the Old Church Slavonic supine is not germane to this article.

¹⁰ Joseph 1983 presents a complex picture of this process in diachrony and synchrony.

al zone featuring both infinitives and subjunctives (some eastern Bulgarian dialects and the majority of Shtokavian dialects), followed in turn by western South Slavic, where the subjunctive is significantly limited or completely absent (see Banfi 2011; Joseph 1983: 101–148). Standard Serbian has both infinitives and *da*-forms (Ивић 2005: 324–329). In Shtokavian, two formal types of infinitives are attested, the so-called “full” (in ⁺-*ti*) and “truncated” (in ⁺-*t*).¹¹

The NPST dialects as well as FSh belong to the transitional zone: they make use of both infinitives,¹² as seen in examples (1) and (2), and subjunctives (3).

- (1) *to* *ne* *mòr-e*¹³ *bìt* Fier Shtokavian
 this NEG can-PRS.3SG be.INF

‘it can’t be’ (ÇR)

- (2) *mòr-e* *bìt* *i* *da,* *i* *da*
 may-PRS.3SG be.INF and SUBJ and SUBJ

bîr-a *ìme*
 choose-PRS.3SG name.ACC

‘it may be so that he chooses a name’ (ER)

- (3) *mòr-e da* *ùmr-e* *čovèk-a*
 can-PRS.3SG SUBJ kill-PRS.3SG man-ACC.SG

‘(he) can kill a man’ (ÇR)

¹¹ Both types have some further morphological variations. Here and below I use the superscript index (⁺) to show a corresponding standard Serbian form without further (mor)phonological details and possible dialectal variation.

¹² The infinitive in the dialect is mostly truncated (Барјактаревић 1966: 97). Veljović (2016: 196) adds that in the Tutin and Novi Pazar areas only short infinitives are attested, while in Šjenica there are sporadic uses of long infinitives, probably under the influence of the neighboring eastern Herzegovian dialects.

¹³ The verb ⁺*moći* (*mòć/mòj*) has free alternation *-r/-ž-* in the stem auslaut: *mòžel/mòre* ‘can; may’ (see also ВЕЉОВИЋ 2016: 220). It belongs to the E-conjugation type and thus is still distinct from the deontic modal ⁺*morati* (*mórat*). For comparison, see *mòr-e* (may-PRS.3SG) versus *mòr-ā* (must-PRS.3SG).

In Albanian the infinitive exists only in Gheg dialects (with some lexicalized relics in Tosk) and is a periphrastic participle-based form (e.g., Selcë, Kelmend northeastern Gheg dialect: *me de:k-ø* [with die-PTCP] ‘to die’ – Shkurtaj 1975: 124). The northern Tosk Albanian dialects (as well as standard Albanian), with which FSh is in contact, have only the subjunctive,¹⁴ which basically follows the same pattern as the South Slavic subjunctive: it consists of the grammatical particle *t(ë)* + finite verbal forms, mostly equal to the present indicative¹⁵ (see more on the subjunctive in Balkan languages in Friedman 1986; Асенова 2002: 149–152). In the case of a VP with a past time reference (future in the past or matrix Secondary verb in one of the past tenses), the subjunctive in the verbal complement can incorporate the imperfect instead of the present subjunctive (as in 4).

(4)	<i>do-nte</i>	<i>t-a</i>	<i>çndero-nte</i>	northern Tosk
	want-IMPF.3SG	CONJ-ACC.SG	rape-IMPF.3SG	

‘he wanted to rape her’¹⁶ (Martinë: GJINARI 1958: 107)

Apart from the absolute uses of infinitives and subjunctive forms,¹⁷ the variation between these forms is apparent in the scope of the so-called Secondary

¹⁴ Sandžak also has a number of Albanian settlements and had been a site of Slavic-Albanian contact even before the migration (Ивић 1956: 156; Барјактаревић 1966: 12). A large group of Albanians in Sandžak are speakers of a northwestern Gheg migrant dialect from Malësia e Madhe (the tribe [*fis*] of Kelmend). They migrated to Sandžak in the early 18th century and now live in more than a dozen villages in the Tutin and Sjenica areas, on the Peshter Plateau (Gjinari & Shkurtaj 2003: 415–427). Structurally both Shtokavian and Albanian dialects in Sandžak have a similar transitional type of system (with both infinitive and subjunctive forms; see more on the Albanian dialect in Shkurtaj 1975; Mulaku & Bardhi 1978). However, any possible outcomes of language contact with northwestern Gheg would be shared by NPST and FSh.

¹⁵ In PRS.2-3SG special endings differentiate the subjunctive from the indicative (Gjinari 1958: 91–92; Gjinari & Shkurtaj 2003: 233–235). In some other Slavic dialects influenced by Albanian, this can trigger morphological alternations. See, for comparison, the present indicative *zbórv-i* (speak-PRS.3SG) – ‘he speaks’ – versus the present subjunctive *da zbórv-e* (CONJ speak-PRS.3SG) – ‘so that he speaks’ (Boboshtica: Макарцев 2018: 220). My corpus of the recordings from Fier does not include any such examples.

¹⁶ Unfortunately the text sample published by Gjinari is too small and this was the only unambiguous modal with a scope over subjunctive attested in his publication.

¹⁷ For a classification of various uses of *da*-forms in Serbian, see Hansen (2007).

concepts. This is a term coined by R.M.W. Dixon in his typology of complement-taking predicates (2006: 11–13). Dixon opposes Secondary concepts to Primary concepts, which can have an object expressed by an NP or a complement clause. Typologically, Dixon describes the following semantic types within the category of Secondary concepts: Secondary-A (negators, modal, phasal, trying), Secondary-B (‘want,’ ‘wish (for),’ ‘hope (for),’ ‘intend,’ ‘plan (for),’ ‘pretend’), Secondary-C (‘make,’ ‘cause,’ ‘force,’ ‘let,’ ‘help’). When applied to Shtokavian and Albanian data, most of the Secondary concepts are expressed by verbs¹⁸ that can take subjunctive or infinitive forms (depending on the dialect).

Infinitive versus subjunctive in the scope of modals

Because the amount of data from FSh is limited, I will consider the subjunctive versus infinitive variation only in verbal complements of modals — specifically, deontic and dynamic modals (both of which belong to the Secondary-A type). Moreover, the verb (*h*)*tèt/šcèt/ktèt*, ‘want,’ is excluded from my analysis because it is a homonym of the future marker in the dialect. The problem of future tense formation in Balkan languages, aside from the variation in the use of infinitive and subjunctive forms, presupposes analysis of the auxiliary on the grammaticalization cline (from a fully paradigmatic verb to a particle) and thus lies beyond the focus of the present article.

There are two types of modals attested in my FSh data: deontic (+*morati* ‘to have to, must, be obliged to’, +*trebati* ‘to be necessary, one should; to be supposed to, to have to’, +*valjati*: ‘to be necessary, one should’) and dynamic (+*moći* ‘to be able to, can, to be allowed; to know how, can’, +*smeti* ‘to be allowed, be permitted; (neg.) to not be supposed’, +*znati*: ‘to know how, be able’).¹⁹ A detailed description of the modal semantics of these verbs as well

¹⁸ This excludes the negators, which are expressed by particles in both South Slavic and Albanian.

¹⁹ The examples with +*znati* were included if this verb had the meaning “*znati-2*” according to (PCKJ II 1967: 326): “biti vešt u nečem, umeti” (“to be skilled in something, to be able”). The prohibitive marker +*nemoj* has not been found in Fier Shtokavian data; therefore, the examples with it were excluded from Table 1 (but are accounted for in Table 2, since it is attested both in B and in V). The translations for the standard Serbian verbs are provided according to (Benson 1971).

as an outline of the modality expression in standard Serbian can be found in previous literature (Hansen 2007; Lamiroy & Drobñjaković 2009; Ивић 2005: 636–649).

I created the dataset for this study using all the examples of infinitives and subjunctives as verbal complements of these verbs from the publications of Barjaktarević (Барјактаревић 1966: 88–166) and Veljović (Вељовић 2016: 196–212; 387–420) on the NPST dialects and also from my transcripts of FSh. The absolute frequencies and the percentage of infinitives and subjunctives after the abovementioned modals are represented in Table 1.

Table 1. Verbal complements of deontic and dynamic modals in NPST and FSh

		Frequency	Percent
Barjaktarević (NPST, 1940s-1950s)	infinitive	41	66,1
	subjunctive	21	33,9
	Total	62	100,0
Veljović (NPST, 2010s)	infinitive	243	37,1
	subjunctive	412	62,9
	Total	655	100,0
Fier Shtokavian (2010s)	infinitive	2	6,1
	subjunctive	31	93,9
	Total	33	100,0

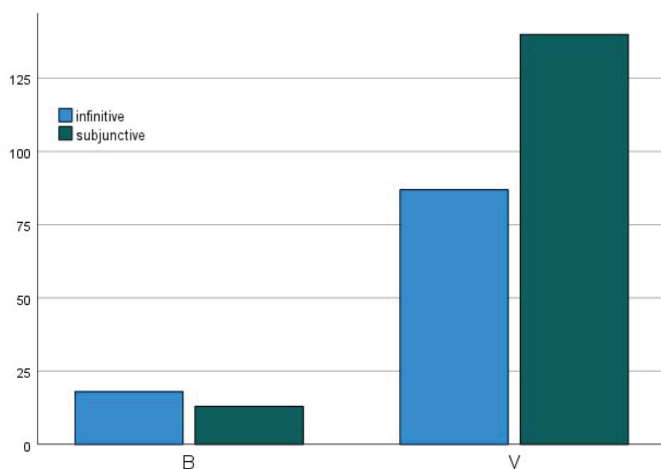
Source: own work.

In the 1940–1950s, as can be inferred from the data published by Barjaktarević, infinitives were the preferred forms in Secondary-A verbal complements in NPST dialects. This presumably reflects the situation prior to migration to the Fier region. In FSh in the 2010s, after almost a century of contact with Albanian, the infinitives are almost completely absent in these contexts. The only two examples of infinitives (1 and 2) occur after the deontic modal *mòre* ‘may. PRS3SG’ and could be interpreted as petrified constructions (cf. the analogous constructions in other Shtokavian dialects: *mòžda*, *mòrda*, *mozbiìt* ‘may be’ – Skok II 1972: 447). In the remaining contexts after the deontic and dynamic modals included into the sample, FSh has only subjunctive forms (cf. 3).

The shift toward the more preferred use of subjunctives can also be seen in NPST in the 2010s, even though the shift appears much less radical within a broader statistical context.

Table 2. Verbal complements of deontic modals in NPST

	infinitive	subjunctive	Total
Barjaktarević (1940s-1950s)	18	13	31
Veljović (2010s)	87	140	227
Total	105	153	258

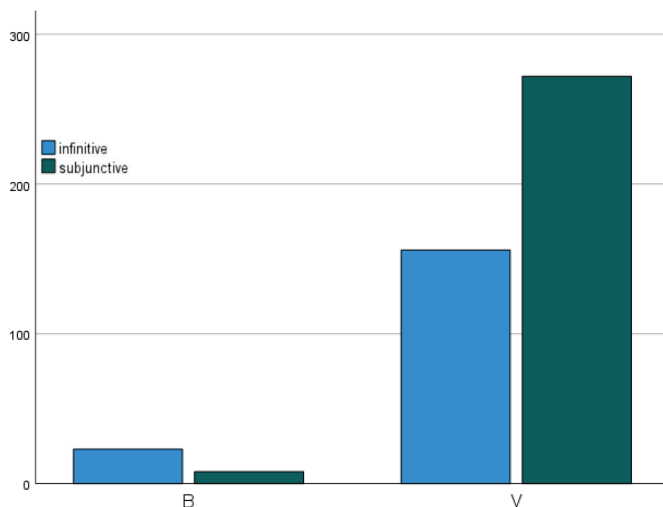


Source: own work.

A Pearson χ^2 -test was performed to examine the distribution of infinitives and subjunctives after the deontic modals in the data published by Barjaktarević (1966) and by Veljović (2016). It showed significant differences: $\chi^2(1, N = 258) = 4.4, p < .05$. While in the 1940s–1950s infinitives were slightly more preferred to subjunctives in the verbal complements of deontic modals, in the 2010s the situation was reversed and speakers used significantly more subjunctives in these contexts.

Table 3. Verbal complements of dynamic modals in NPST

	infinitive	subjunctive	Total
Barjaktarević (1940s-1950s)	23	8	31
Veljović (2010s)	156	272	428
Total	179	280	459



Source: own work.

The same test for the verbal complements of dynamic modals also showed a significant result ($\chi^2(1, N = 459) = 17.31, p < .05$), suggesting that the same process has taken place in these contexts as well.

The shift toward a more frequent use of subjunctives in NPST in the 2010s as compared to the 1940s-1950s can be attributed to the influence of standard Serbian morphosyntax, where subjunctive forms in verbal complements are preferred to infinitives (cf. Lamiroy & Drobnjaković 2009; Kovačević & Milićev 2018 with the discussion of the topic and empirical data).

These changes (both in the Novi Pazar-Sjenica-Tutin area and in Fier Shtokavian after the migration) are even more striking considering the conservative nature of the morphology of the dialect: the morphological marking of the infinitive both in NPST and in FSh still aligns with what D. Barjaktarević described in his seminal study (1966). However, although

the infinitive form is still retained in the morphology of the dialect (both in NPST and FSh), the process of infinitive reduction is attested in both areas: in NPST it can be seen only statistically in the higher preference for the use of subjunctives as compared to the situation in the 1940s–1950s; in FSh qualitative changes also appear to have taken place, and the infinitive is found in only one construction, which can be considered petrified.²⁰

Conclusion

The statistical analysis of the distribution of infinitive and subjunctive forms in the Novi Pazar-Sjenica-Tutin mother area and in its Fier splinter, which emerged as a result of migration, showed the following. The earliest transcripts from the 1940s–1950s, published by D. Barjaktarević and serving as a close representative of the dialect before the migration, show somewhat more frequent use of infinitives in the context of deontic and dynamic modals. The more recent development of the dialect in the mother area as registered in the 2010s (B. Veljović) shows a quantitative preponderance of subjunctives in these contexts, even though in qualitative terms infinitives and subjunctives are still in free variation.²¹

The Fier migrant dialect (as the data collected up to this point suggest) seems to be at a more advanced stage of losing the infinitive, whose appearance is limited in the context of deontic and dynamic modals, and it can even be interpreted as a petrified marker (*mòre bit*, ‘may be’). In these contexts, the subjunctive is used as a single productive form. This process can be explained by the long-standing subdominated contact of Fier Shtokavian with Albanian (both standard and northern Tosk dialects of the region), where the infinitive does not exist and the subjunctive has a structure similar to that in Shtokavian. The question of whether there is still some inter-speaker variation regarding the use of infinitives in the dialect remains an open one.

The process of infinitive reduction in a migrant non-Balkan Slavic dialect that has been in contact with Albanian brings the former closer to Balkan

²⁰ Another context where the infinitive is still retained in the dialect, at least to some extent, is in future forms, which will be addressed in another article.

²¹ It might also suggest that the retreat of the infinitive in FSh represents a result of a pre-existing tendency that was made apparent in NPST only after the FSh speakers left the mother area, however, my data is not enough for making a strong claim about it.

Slavic in structural terms. This case might represent the path of emergence of Balkanisms in South-Slavic dialects as a result of language contact with non-Slavic Balkan languages.

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**Redukcja bezokolicznikowa w dialekcie migrantów sztokawskich w Albanii:
kontakt językowy wspierający bałkanizację
(streszczenie)**

Pod długotrwałym wpływem języka albańskiego sztokawski dialekt migrantów w mieście Fier i okolicach (pierwotnie na obszarze Novi Pazar-Sjenica-Tutin) znacznie ograniczył użycie bezokoliczników w czasownikowych dopełnieniach modalnych. W takich kontekstach w większości bezokoliczniki zostały zastąpione przez subjunctiwę, upodabniając ten dialekt pod względem strukturalnym do bałkańsko-słowiańskiego typu językowego.

Słowa kluczowe: bezokolicznik; bałkańskie formy trybu łączącego/subjunctivu; formy *da*; dialektologia południowosłowiańska; kontakty albańsko-słowiańskie