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Edited by
..... Ilona Janyšková
..... & Helena Karlíková
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MARIJA VUČKOVIĆ: ETYMOLOGY AND PRAGMATICS: SERBIAN ŠUNELA ‘QUIET, SILENCE’

Abstract: In the paper I argue that the pragmatic notion of bystander deixis has a crucial role in explaining the origin and meaning of the Serbian word *šunela* ‘quiet, silence’, which I suggest is from the Romani third-person singular present form of the verb *šunél/ašunél* ‘to hear, to listen’. It is assumed that in certain situations, when referring to a bystander, the Romani form, which means ‘(he or she) listens, hears’, might be used as a warning to the addressee to stop talking, to be quiet, and that it passed into Serbian precisely in this pragmatic meaning. **Keywords:** etymology, pragmatics, bystander deixis, lexical borrowing, the Serbian word *šunela* ‘quiet, silence’, the Romani verb *šunél/ašunél* ‘to hear, to listen’.

Serbian *šunela* as a loanword from Romani

As far as I know, the Serbian word *šunéla*¹ probably occurs only in southeast Serbian dialects, where it is well attested. Namely, three dialect dictionaries have recorded it with the same meaning, cf. *šunéla* f. ‘quiet, silence’: A ja šunéla, ne mičem se da me ne osétiv ‘And I remain quiet, I don’t move so as not to be noticed’ Leskovac (Mitrović 1984: 383), *šunéla* interj. ‘silence’ Pirot (Zlatković 1990: 740), and the variant *šunjéla* f. ‘quiet, silence’: Šunjéla tám, da ne bíjem ‘Be quiet over there or I’ll beat you’ Timok (Dinić 2008: 920). An Internet search yields several more attestations of the form *šunela*, which occurs for the most part in forums and blogs with approximately the same meaning.² These findings imply that the word belongs to informal speech, but this source does not tell much about its areal distribution. In addition, there is also the nickname *Šunela* attested in the Vranje area in southeastern Serbia (<http://www.blic.rs/Vesti/Reportaza/9829/Nocni-fudbal-pored-Vranja/print>).

It is worth noting that the lexeme is grammatically defined either as a feminine noun or as an interjection. The examples presented regarding its use as well as data from the Internet suggest that it might lack inflection and therefore be restricted to certain syntactic contexts. It should be mentioned that its equivalents in standard Serbian, that is, the nouns *mîr* and *tišina*, can be used as interjections with the meaning ‘Silence! Be quiet! Stop talking!’ (RMS 3: 377, 6: 221).

- 1 Serbian dialects where this word is attested have an expiratory accent which is indicated with ´ in this paper.
- 2 Cf. http://www.b92.net/mobilni/komentari.php?nav_id=525874, <http://www.dizajnzona.com/forums/lofiversion/index.php?t17512.html>, <http://www.dizajnzona.com/forums/lofiversion/index.php?t42682-1800.htm>, <http://forum.krstarica.com/showthread.php/342719-Surovost-sa-zivotinjama/page15>, <http://ns1.cywiz.net/text/17750/kolektivno-zbogom-zdravom-razumu/>, <http://72.233.78.107/text/18051/Ljiljana-Bulatovic-na-B92/?page=2>.

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I propose that Serbian *šuněla* is related to the Romani verb *šunav*, *ašunav*, *ušunav* ‘to hear, to listen’ (Uhlik 1983: 55 s.v. *čujem*, 345 s.v. *slušam*), *ašuněl* ‘to hear, to listen; to learn’, cf. various forms from Romani dialects spoken in the Balkans: *šuněl* ‘to hear’ Arli and Bugurdži, *ušunel* (Boretzky–Igla 1994: 13, 274), *ašunel/ašunol* ‘to hear, to listen’ Gurbet, *ašunol* ‘id.’ Srem Gurbet and Macedonian Džambazi, *ašunela* ‘id.’ Banat Gurbet, *ašunel/šunel* ‘id.; to obey’ Kalderaš, *šunel* ‘to hear, to listen, to hear saying; to experience, to learn, to find out; to sound’ Sofia Erli, *šunela* ‘to hear, to listen’ Kosovo and Macedonian Arli, ‘id., to pay attention’ Sepeči, and *šunla* ‘to hear, to listen; to obey’ Bugurdži (ROMLEX). The Romani verb goes back to Old Indic *śṛṇoti* ‘hears’, *āśṛṇoti*, cf. Pali *suṇāti* ‘id.’ (Boretzky–Igla 1994: 13, 312). The form *ašun-* is assumed to be an extension of *šun-* rather than derived from *āśṛṇōti* (Turner 1966–1985, 1: 730 s.v. *śṛṇōti*).³ For further I.-E. origin see Pokorny 1959–1969, 1: 605–607 s.v. 1. *kleu-* and LIV 2001: 334 s.v. **kleu-*.

It should be noted that there are mid-twentieth century Serbo-Croatian slang expressions originating from the same Romani word: *šunjisati* ‘to hear, to listen’: *Šunjišem na lopare* ‘I hear with my ears’, *Šunjiši, kako porijan kul hal u kerni!* ‘Listen to the policeman talking rubbish in the pub’, *naje šunje* ‘deaf (literally: (he/she) cannot hear)’, which are, according to Uhlik 1954: 27, 1974: 112, Romani borrowings based on the imperative form *šun* of the Arli dialect verb *šunav* ‘I hear, I listen’. The verb *šunjisati* is formed with the suffix *-is-* of Greek origin, which is broadly used in Balkan languages for the adaptation of borrowed verbs (cf. Skok 1971–1974, 1: 729 s.v. *-isati*¹, Uhlik 1974: 110, Boretzky–Igla 1994a: 57).

In terms of form and origin, the Serbian *šuněla* fits into the group of words consisting of Serbo-Croatian predominantly slang nouns (or at least, non-verbs) and Greek Para-Romani⁴ nouns, which end in *-ela* and *-έλα* respectively and come from Romani verbs, cf. for example S.-Cr. *maravěla* f. ‘a fight, a tussle, a scrimmage’ < Romani *marěl* ‘to beat; to kill, to murder, etc.’, S.-Cr. *bandavěla* f. ‘a prison, a jail’ < Romani *phándel/phandavel* ‘to close; to lock (up); to arrest, to imprison, etc.’, the Kalderaš and Bosnian Gurbet causative form *phandavel* ‘to imprison, to make someone arrest someone; to close, to lock’, S.-Cr. *daravěla* ‘an alarmist, a person who panics easily, a scaremonger’ < Romani *darál* ‘to fear, to be afraid of; to worry; to threaten’, *daravěl* ‘to frighten; to worry; to discourage’, and Greek Para-Romani *πρασάβέλα* ‘lie’ < Romani *prasáva* ‘to mock; to laugh at’, the causative form *prasavěla*, Greek Para-Romani *τσο(υ)ρέλα* ‘theft’, *cjorela* ‘id.’, *curela* ‘id.’ < Romani *čorěl* ‘to steal’ (cf. Vučković 2010). Many of these S.-Cr. and

3 For the dialect distribution of the prothesis of *a-* see Matras 2005: 16.

4 The term is now “well-established in the working context of Romani linguistics as a designation for the use of extensive Romani vocabulary in a non-Romani grammatical framework” (Matras 1998: 9).

Greek Para-Romani nouns are identical to the long form of the third-person singular of respective Romani verbs (cf. Triandaphyllidis 1924: 35, Sechidou 2005: 71–72, Vučković 2010). According to Boretzky-Igla 1994: 394, in the Vlach dialect group of Romani the short form (without the final *-a*) functions as the present tense, while the long form (with *-a*) is often used as the subjunctive or future. Conversely, in Arli, Prilep, Bugurdži, and Sinti dialects the long form serves as the pure present tense, whereas the short form indicates the subjunctive and optionally the present as well (cf. also Matras 2002: 157).

In order to determine more precisely the Romani dialect that was the source of Serbian *šunéla*, one should take into consideration its structural features and areal distribution. More precisely, the donor Romani variety is assumed to be that spoken in southern Serbia⁵ in which the verb *ašunél/šunél* has no prothetic vowel *a-*. It is the Balkan dialect group⁶ that meets these criteria, since nearly all Vlach dialect forms occur with *a-*, as shown above (cf. Matras 2002: 67, 228). Of the Balkan dialects, the criterion of geographic distribution favours Arli and Bugurdži. The latter, spoken in southern Serbia, Kosovo, and Macedonia (Boretzky-Igla 1994: 365, Boretzky 2000, ROMLEX), should be ruled out, because it regularly displays elision of the thematic vowel *e* in the present forms and shift of stress, cf. 3sg *vakérla* ‘speaks’ < *vakeréla* (Boretzky 2000: 119, 123, 136), and above mentioned *šunla* < *šunela*, which is relevant in this case. Finally, there remains Arli, in which the form *šunela* is used and which has been spoken for a long time in Macedonia, Albania, Greece, Kosovo and southern Serbia (Boretzky-Igla 1994: 365, Boretzky 1996, 1998: 4, ROMLEX). To sum up the above, the exact etymon of the Serbian word *šunéla* may be the Romani (probably Arli) third-person singular present form *šunéla* ‘hears, listens’.

As for the variant *šunjéla*, with a palatal *-nj-* instead of *-n-*, this might be the result of a sound change *n > nj* occasionally occurring in the East Serbian Timok-Lužnica dialect, cf. the following examples: *stígnje*, *utéknje*, *usred pladnje*, *dnjévno*, *promrenjiše*, *na onjá svet* (Belić 1905: 220–222). Whether Serbian

- 5 In view of the peripatetic way of life of some Roma groups, this does not seem to be a necessary condition at first sight. However, as will be discussed later, this case of lexical borrowing required regular contact between speakers of the donor and recipient languages. For a brief survey of historical and demographic data on the Roma population in southern Serbia see Stojančević 1981.
- 6 Romani can be divided into four main dialect groups: Balkan, Vlach, Central, and Northern, the first being divided into Northern and Southern Balkan subgroups (Bakker-Matras 1997: xvii). However, Boretzky 2000: 106 prefers the label ‘South Balkan’ to ‘Balkan’ since most Vlach varieties are also spoken in the Balkans. He distinguishes between the South Balkan I and the South Balkan II subgroups, the former comprising Arli, Erli, Sepeči, Paspatian, and some other dialects, the latter Bugurdži, Drindari, and Kalajdži.

šunéla/šunjéla may reflect a variation of the etymon as well is a question that I leave for Romologists to answer.⁷

The hypothesis presented here raises another, more important issue of how to account for the change in meaning and part-of-speech shift from the Romani verb *šunéla* ‘hears, listens’ to the Serbian noun or interjection *šunéla* ‘quiet, silence’. This is a question that I shall now attempt to answer.

Bystander deixis as a clue to the semantic change

In this paper I argue that the pragmatic notion of bystander deixis, elaborated by Rijkhoff (1998), plays a crucial role in clarifying the semantic and word class shift that took place in assumed borrowing process. As pointed out by Rijkhoff 1998: 52, there are many communicative situations in which the form as well as the intention and interpretation of the speaker’s utterance are co-determined by the presence of other attending but non-speaking participants. The author differentiates between three types of such situations in which bystanders play an important role in the speech event. Sometimes the speaker’s utterance is not actually directed to the addressee, but rather to some other person present (Type A). There are also situations in which the speaker wants to hide the content of his utterance from possible eavesdroppers (Type B). On certain occasions the speaker modifies the form of the utterance in order to show respect or politeness to the bystander(s) (Type C).

As will be discussed below, situations of Type B may be highly relevant to an explanation of the meaning of Serbian *šunéla* and therefore will be described in more depth. Rijkhoff 1998: 54–56 notes several strategies employed by speakers in order to exclude possible unratified bystanders from communication: word substitutions that are often on an *ad hoc* basis, the excessive use of jargon or special style that is typical of certain subcultural and professional groups (e.g. thieves, teenagers, medical doctors, etc.), the use of secret languages that can be motivated by ritual or religious as well as by other more profane reasons, and the use of foreign languages. It is well known that Romani serves as a significant source of slang and argot lexicon due to its in-group character. Indeed, it is rarely spoken by non-Roma because of the predominantly marginal socio-cultural status of Romani speakers. For the same reason, Romani is sometimes used as a secret language in the presence of outsiders (Rijkhoff 1998: 55–56, see also Matras 2002: 239).

7 Matras 2002: 50 mentions palatal mutation of the sonorants $n, l > n', l'$ in central Romani dialects.

In addition, the author argues that the study of bystander deixis should take into account many factors such as the topic and aim of the communication, the setting of the speech event, and the socio-cultural properties of all participants in the speech act (Rijkhoff 1998: 58–65). The socio-cultural characteristics of the bystanders, e.g. ethnicity, age, etc., play an important part in Type B situations. In short, “anything that places B[ystander] outside a certain in-group may be a reason for the speaker to employ some form of bystander deixis” (Rijkhoff 1998: 59).

Let us now return to the Serbian *šunéla*. I propose that its meaning has resulted from certain contexts of use of its etymon, which are similar to the speech situations discussed by Rijkhoff as Type B. To be precise, I assume that, in the presence of an unrated bystander, the Romani word denoting ‘(he/she) hears, listens’ may be uttered as a warning to the addressee to stop talking, to be quiet because their conversation can be overheard. The pragmatic meaning of this Romani expression and even the very use of Romani, if the person in earshot is likely not to be a Romani speaker, would be indicators of Type B bystander deixis. Further, I suggest that Romani *šunela* has been borrowed into Serbian precisely in this pragmatically inferred meaning ‘Stop talking! Shut up!’ This assumption is supported by the fact that the loanword functions either as an interjection of similar meaning or as a noun that can be employed as such an interjection. Current use of the Serbian word *šunéla*, as can be seen from the examples cited above, is rather disassociated from the situation-specific contexts within which its source word is employed as bystander deixis. That is to say, the Serbian word can occur in various other situations in which there is no danger of overhearing.

With regard to the borrowing process, one should allow for the possibility that *šunéla* has entered dialect vocabulary indirectly, through some local argot or slang.⁸ Also, it might have been reinforced by association with the phonetically and semantically similar exclamation *šúš* ‘Hush! Sssh! Be quiet!’ Crna Reka (Marković 1986: 493).

The language contact situation

Reconstruction of the borrowing process is based on the assumption that Romani served as a means of in-group secret communication on those occasions when the interlocutors’ interests may have been endangered by the presence

8 Cf. Tzitzilis 2006: 287 who refers to three possible sources of Romani borrowings into the Greek dialects of Epirus: the local Roma population part of which underwent language shift, the secret language of builders used in that region, and some Para-Romani variety.

of outsiders. It is to be further assumed that Romani *šunela* must have been heard by outsiders often enough in the kind of contexts discussed earlier if they were able to catch its pragmatic meaning. It should be noted that warnings such as the one described above are typical of secret languages. Consider, for instance, the following utterance coming from boškački argot that was used in Prizren: Nožice, tákaf slúša! ‘Shut up, be careful what you say, he’s listening!’ (Čemerikić s.v. nožice).

As previously stated, the use of Romani as a secret code has to do with its sociolinguistic status. According to Friedman 2003: 123, this language, in contrast to other Balkan languages, mainly experienced unidirectional multilingualism. In other words, being socio-politically marginalised, speakers of Romani were inevitably multilingual, whereas there was no need for others to learn their language. Friedman also argues that the occurrence of Romani words in slang and secret languages actually speaks in favour of “the relative rarity of bidirectional multilingualism affecting Romani” (ibid.). This explains why the Romani word was borrowed into Serbian in its pragmatic (i.e. context-dependent) rather than its original meaning.

Conclusion

In addition to explaining the origin of the Serbian word *šunela*, the present paper also aims at drawing attention once again to the role of pragmatics in etymological research. Hence, this approach is also in line with the view of Toporov that etymology should turn to “trans-semantics” that is above all oriented towards the notion of context. In other words, it should deal, *inter alia*, with: “‘внеязыковыми’ и ‘внетекстовыми’ реальными, ‘денотатными’ ситуациями, объясняющими или с высокой степенью вероятности предопределяющими, программирующими данную ситуационную конфигурацию, по которой можно выстроить и такую языковую конфигурацию смыслов, что она будет наиболее естественной и вероятной реализацией в языке ‘денотатных’ связей” (Toporov 1994: 128).

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Етимологија и прагматика: српска реч шунела 'мир, тишина'. У раду се истиче улога прагматичког појма деиксе лица које присуствује говорном догађају (али у њему активно не учествује) у тумачењу порекла и значења српске речи *шунела* 'мир, тишина'. Њено порекло се доводи у везу са трећим лицем једнине презента ромског глагола *šunél/ašunél* 'чути, слушати', при чему се износи претпоставка да се у одређеним ситуацијама, када се њиме реферише на неку присутну особу, ромски облик, који значи '(он или она) слуша, чује', може употребити као упозорење саговорнику да ућути, да престане да говори, те да је у српски ушао управо са тим прагматичким значењем.

Марија Вучковић • marivu74@yahoo.com

Институт за српски језик САНУ

Кнез-Михаилова 36, 11000 Београд, Србија