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The Balkan Linguistic and Cultural Union: A Holistic Research Program

Abstract: The article¹ proposes a new research program on the Balkan linguistic and cultural union (Balkan Sprachbund and Kulturbund), based on a novel definition of linguistic and cultural union as a group of non-related languages and cultures connected by regular functional correspondences, akin to the presence of regular sound correspondences between languages as a diagnostic feature in the theory of language kinship. It suggests considering diagnostic and union-forming features, correspondences in inventories and rules of distribution of functions of units and categories across different languages and cultures, to test the hypothesis of their inclusion in a linguistic and cultural union.

After a brief overview of the current state of affairs in the scholarly literature on the subject, the article proposes a structured list of 160+ selected polyfunctional categorical features, pertaining to different structural levels of language and culture and presumably demonstrating regular interlinguistic and intercultural Balkan correspondences. The detection of regularity in correspondences and, consequently, the formulation of a hypothesis regarding the existence of a linguistic union with prognostic power is suggested as a possible avenue for resolving the theoretical issue of providing rigorous evidence, through methods of the humanities, of the existence in the history of humanity of a particular type of convergent development of idioethnic languages and cultures, and the observed result of such development — linguistic and cultural unions as distinct language groups (distinct from language families) and distinct cultural associations.

Keywords: linguistic convergence, cultural convergence, Sprachbund definition, Balkan linguistic area, methods of linguistic research, methods in cultural anthropology, regular correspondences in function, polyfunctionality.

The peoples and ethnic groups of Southeastern Europe, diverse in origin and genealogical ties, are united by a centuries-old, shared history and deep ethnocultural interaction, including intense linguistic contacts and lasting and widespread multilingualism. The outcome of this interaction is observed in the form of a specific convergent linguistic and cultural landscape, the explanation of the causes and the establishment of the mechanisms of which pose

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¹ The article utilizes, clarifies, supplements, and significantly expands upon the text and ideas of the author as outlined in Sobolev 2024 (in Russian).

a serious challenge for the humanities. In recent years, linguistic and cultural-anthropological studies in the field of the convergent development of Balkan languages and cultures have increasingly turned to the search for an external determining material, the biological substrate of this convergence, at least in the form of testing the hypothesis on the mutual correlation of genetic, linguistic, and cultural development (Stamatoyannopoulos et al. 2017; Matsumae et al. 2021; Olalde et al. 2024).² The arbitrariness of the connection between biological, cultural, and linguistic development is unquestionable for us. However, the second dominant mainstream direction in the study of convergent development of languages and cultures turns to the question of the possibility of establishing correlations and even regular relationships of causality between external social and cultural-anthropological parameters of a specific contact situation on the one hand, and the characteristics of the interacting languages and cultures, processes of linguistic and cultural variability and change in contact, and the linguistic and cultural outcomes of contact on the other. It is evident that the results of contact-induced development are not always recognizable against the backdrop of internally conditioned, independent development. Moreover, during many years of synchronic study of Balkan languages and cultures, no typologically unique features of Balkan bilingualism and language contact situations were found, and it was impossible to establish the causality of the convergent development of Balkan languages with the observable characteristics of bilingualism and language situations (Sobolev 2021). It was found that the linguistic situation itself does not possess predictive power regarding expected (possible or obligatory) linguistic changes within it, while areal structures have greater predictive power (the position of an idiom within the circle of neighbors predetermines its intralinguistic properties, cf. the predictive power of the position of a periodical element in Mendeleev's table), and the characteristics of the ethno-linguistic groups themselves can be ambivalent. Like other social and cultural-anthropological parameters, the linguistic situation proves to be a useful yet descriptive rather than explanatory category.

When studying the specific convergent linguistic and cultural landscape of Southeastern Europe, methods and approaches from the humanities are applicable quite successfully. In particular, this region has been at the center of

² Consider non-trivial principles for selecting genetic material in research (Olalde et al. 2024, 5479): "...genetic material from 37 unrelated present-day Serb male individuals from Serbia (n=19), Montenegro (n=7), Croatia (n=5), North Macedonia (n=1) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (n=5). Serb individuals were selected according to the following criteria: 1) Self-declared Serbs living on territories of former Yugoslavia where they historically lived. 2) Speakers of the Serbian language. 3) Belonging to families that are or were in the past of Orthodox religion. 4) Knowing or still celebrating their family's Home patron saint, a cultural practice that is characteristic of Serb identity".

theoretical discussions since the early 20th century regarding the principles of identifying and the properties of language unions, and the Balkan Linguistic Union, or Balkan Sprachbund, has been recognized as a prototypical case of a convergent group of languages, although Balkanists have yet to reach a consensus on either the inventory of so-called Balkan linguistic features (Balkanisms) or their areal and intrasystemic distribution. According to the classical definition by N. S. Trubetzkoy (1928), a linguistic union is a group of non-related languages that exhibit significant similarity in syntax, morphology, and sometimes phonetic resemblance, and share a common stock of cultural words but are not connected by a system of phonetic correspondences and inherent elementary lexicon. Balkan languages precisely fit this description. Features commonly considered characteristic of the Balkan linguistic union include the mid-level mid-rise vowel, the post-positive article, object doubling, the convergence of means expressing the benefactive and possessive roles, the loss of the infinitive replaced by the subjunctive, the formation of the future tense using a marker derived from the verb 'to want', shared phraseology, and shared lexicon of Paleo-Balkan, Greek, Latin, Slavic, and Turkish origin. Analogously to linguistic unions, one can assume the existence of cultural unions (Burkhart 2014). Comparing individual Balkan languages with their related languages outside this region allows us to interpret Balkanisms as common linguistic and cultural innovations that occurred specifically in the Balkans. However, it is also necessary to acknowledge that pan-Balkan linguistic features manifest differently in various variants of each individual language, and multilingualism operates differently in different regions and small areas.

The completion of the descriptive stage of Balkan studies in the 20th-21st centuries has allowed the transition from listing brief inventories of the most important similarities (Kopitar 1829; Miklosich 1861) and lists of hundreds of interlinguistic parallels (Sandfeld 1930; Asenova 1989) to overcoming research atomism and establishing rules for the distribution of inter-Balkan similarities and differences in diachrony and diastatic variation. This transition has led to the formation of an understanding of the complexity of the Balkan linguistic area and the multitude of its major and minor components, the areal distribution of similarities and differences among Balkan languages (MDABL 2003–2018; Adamou, Sobolev 2023), and the compilation of dictionaries of pan-Balkan lexemes. With the advent of the digital age, it became possible to represent all the ethno-linguistic diversity of the region, including its dynamics (Gorlov et al. 2023). In the 21st century, "more light has been shed on the specific historical reasons for the convergent development of languages on the Balkan Peninsula" (Desnitskaya 1990). In particular, a significant shift in this area is associated with the implementation of a broad, integrative, holistic approach to language and culture, uniting the efforts of linguists, ethnographers, and cul-

tural anthropologists, rather than a narrowly specialized and methodologically limited approach.

Against this backdrop, the shortcomings of nomothetic explanatory approaches to linguistic unions in general have become evident, leading to aporias regarding the number of languages necessary and sufficient for recognizing a certain group as a union, and to the impossibility of establishing its (geographical) boundaries. Attempts to reduce the “Balkan linguistic type” to common communicative characteristics of oral speech, analyticity, redundancy, ambivalence, and ultimately to hierarchies of borrowing have also proven to be of little utility. It is telling that even searches for language donors of linguistic Balkanization (i.e., the acquisition during the joint development in the Balkan region of so-called Balkanisms — convergent features recognized as union-forming) have not yielded convincing results. Nevertheless, the agnostic approach advocated by a number of specialists in Balkan languages (P. Hr. Ilievski, V. Friedman, B. Joseph) cannot be acknowledged as having heuristic value. The continued search for evidence on the origin of specific union-forming features should remain one of the goals of Balkan linguistics.

The theory of linguistic union has unexpectedly become entirely unclaimed in contemporary Western European Balkan studies, interpreting the Balkan region as a non-unique subregion of Europe. However, the concept and theory of linguistic union are not used for areas outside Europe either (Enfield 2003), shifting the focus to the crucial concept of polyfunctionality of linguistic units and categories for understanding the mechanism of union formation. Furthermore, in Western linguistics, the notion of “Sprachbund” or “linguistic union” has been deconstructed and replaced by the heuristic value of “linguistic area” (Campbell 2017). The existence of such a prototypical union as the Balkan one is disputed (see, for example, WALS), and politically motivated “linguistic unions” such as the “West European Union of Charlemagne” are simultaneously introduced into scientific discourse (Haspelmath 2001). In English-language linguistic literature, objections have been raised against the use of the term “union,” suggesting that it implies agency, the activity of languages “voluntarily entering” into special relationships and choosing this “option,” with calls to replace it with a “more appropriate” term. Strangely enough, this interpretation fails to take into account the speakers themselves (i.e., the speakers of interacting languages and cultures), who, according to their individual and collective ethical principles, possess both subjectivity and agency for any actions during linguistic and cultural interaction (cultural dialogue).

With the rejection of the concept and theory of linguistic union, the results of language contacts are usually considered primarily in terms of borrowing (of varying degrees of adaptation by the recipient language), code-switching, the emergence of a “grammar of bilinguals,” broadly understood linguistic con-

vergence, the emergence of creole languages and pidgins, hybridization, and the formation of mixed languages (O'Shannessy 2021). In a recent comprehensive overview of the issues related to convergence and linguistic union concepts in Western linguistics, the aporias inevitably arising from the loose definition of linguistic unions are summarized, leading to negative conclusions about the "lack of internal value" of the "labels" "linguistic area" and "Sprachbund," and the absence of a "method that would allow establishing linguistic unions (areas) as entities distinct from a random set of languages. Thus, ultimately, areas are established by linguists" (Wiemer 2020, 182–183). Broadly speaking, the generalizations in the field of linguistic contactology are pessimistic: "Specialists in language contact, however, find it difficult to 'tease apart' the processes which led to the emergence of a Sprachbund, leaving the issue unresolved" (Muysken 2013, 726). It is worth noting that the comprehensive review of convergence mechanisms still remains atomistic in scholarship and has not led our colleagues to establish regular (i.e., systematic and predictable) relationships between languages. It can be said that contemporary linguistics outside Russia oscillates between denying such a linguistic entity as a linguistic union and constructing new linguistic unions without proper grounds (sometimes as part of a larger geopolitical projection).

The definition proposed by N. S. Trubetzkoy does not imply the presence of regular, systematic correspondences between the languages that constitute a linguistic union. The lack of a strict definition and incontrovertible evidence for the existence of linguistic unions complicates the very formulation of the task for experimentally testing all scientific hypotheses about the causes, course, mechanisms, and outcomes of linguistic and cultural convergence worldwide and in its specific regions. Also challenging is the purposeful, theoretically oriented collection of authentic, quantitatively and qualitatively relevant, demonstrative primary material on the languages and cultures of the world's peoples. According to the new definition of a linguistic and cultural union, i.e., a convergent group of languages and cultures (Sobolev 2021; 2024), its diagnostic features should be considered as regular, systematic functional correspondences between languages and cultures by analogy with the presence of regular phonetic correspondences, or sound laws between languages as a diagnostic feature in the theory of language kinship. Functional correspondences, or functional laws, should be recognized in the inventories of broadly understood functions (rules of distribution and meanings) of units and categories of different languages that are presumably part of a linguistic union. Thus, the question arises as to whether linguistic and cultural unions are speculative constructs of linguists and anthropologists or an ontological reality, i.e., existing groups of languages and cultures linked by systematic relationships. In this context, languages and cultures that coexist in the same area, thus being combined into a single properly geographical, areal group,

may converge (in whole or in part) into a special areal-typological group, i.e., forming a linguistic union; it is also conceivable to allow for the disintegration of a linguistic union into a properly geographical group of languages.

The results of two projects have laid a sturdy foundation for resolving theoretical issues in the field of historical linguistics and cultural anthropology as a whole, particularly Balkan linguo-cultural anthropogeography. Alongside the ongoing “Minor Dialectological Atlas of Balkan Languages, MDABL,” a new opportunity to explicitly demonstrate a sufficient number of regular functional correspondences between the languages of the Balkan-Carpathian region is provided by the digital Russian-French “Atlas of the Balkan Linguistic Area, ABLA” (<https://abla.cnrs.fr>). The latter involves the development of an online database of contact linguistic phenomena and filling it with primary data attested in Balkan languages. ABLA includes around 100 phonological, morphological, morphosyntactic, syntactic, semantic, and lexical features, as well as sociolinguistic characteristics (<https://abla.cnrs.fr/features>). All features are plotted on a geographical map covering over 60 populated places; each map is accompanied by research commentary. Numerous and complex convergence processes are presented in ABLA based on material significantly exceeding what is currently available in scientific literature.

The problem posed in this article is resolved at a general theoretical level by proving the hypothesis of regular, non-random functional correspondences between languages and cultures as a diagnostic feature of linguistic and cultural unions. In terms of areal typology, the problem is solved by identifying regular, systematic interlinguistic and intercultural correspondences between languages in various areas of Europe, Eurasia, and the world, presumably forming or having formed linguistic unions in the past. In what follows, this article presents the idea of a holistic investigation program of the languages and cultures of the Balkan area aimed at substantiating the hypothesis put forward and forming a theory of linguistic union that possesses predictive power, including in the realm of implicational relationships between phenomena at different levels of language and culture. In its experimental, selective version, the program comprises over 160 questions.

Structural level	Feature (characteristic, category, unit)	Value (expected correspondence or linguistic variant (dialectal difference))
Suprasegmental phonetics	Phonologically relevant length	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence 2. Inventory of units (length, half-length, shortness, extra shortness, additional sound appended to the main one) 3. Lexico-etymological restrictions (original, borrowed lexicon; markedness) 4. Distribution restrictions and rules at the word and phrase level
	Phonologically relevant tones	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence 2. Inventory of units (rising, falling, acute, etc.) 3. Lexico-etymological restrictions (original, borrowed lexicon; markedness) 4. Distribution restrictions and rules at the word and phrase level
	Nasality	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence 2. Distribution of the feature across inventory units 3. Lexico-etymological constraints (native, borrowed lexicon; markedness) 4. Distribution constraints or rules at the word level
	Non-orthotonically units (phonetic enclitics)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence 2. Inventory of units (pronouns, verbs, particles including subjunctive) 3. Distribution constraints and rules 4. Stress on phonetic enclitics
Segmental phonetics and phonology	Vowel sounds and phonemes [y], /y/, [ɛ], /ɛ/, [ɔ], /ɔ/, [ə], /ə/, etc.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence in the inventory 2. Positional constraints and rules of distribution under stress (initial position; final position) 3. Positional constraints and rules of distribution under stress in morphemes (in the root; in derivational morphemes; in inflectional morphemes) 4. Positional constraints and rules of distribution outside of stress in orthotonic words 5. Positional constraints and rules of distribution outside of stress in clitics (pronominal, verbal, subjunctive particles) 6. Positional variant of other vowel phonemes 7. Free variant, doublet of other vowel phonemes 8. Functions in morphophonological alternations (derivational, inflectional) 9. Marker of religious affiliation, social group, gender, bilingualism factor (L2 proficiency), etc. 10. Marker of borrowings, e.g., Turkisms, Romanianisms, Albanianisms, Slavicisms 11. Marker of expression, speech style

	Diphthongs	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence 2. Rising ~ falling 3. Monophthongization rules 4. Diphthongization rules 5. Functions in morphophonological alternations 6. Marker of borrowings, for example, Romanianisms, Albanianisms
Consonants	Simple consonants Palatal and palatalized consonants	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence in the inventory 2. Functions in morphophonological alternations (singular ~ plural nouns; verb inflection)
	Affricates	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence in the inventory 2. Functions in morphophonological alternations (singular ~ plural nouns; verb inflection) 3. Marker of religious affiliation, social group, gender, bilingualism factor (L2 proficiency), etc. 4. Marker of borrowings, for example, Turkisms, Romanianisms, Albanianisms, Slavicisms
Grammatical categories	Gender	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distribution of gender grammemes across parts of speech and lexical-grammatical groups (including grammatical clitics) 2. Distribution of gender grammemes across numbers
	Negation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adnominal (with negative meaning, with meaning 'bad, wrong') 2. Verbal, indicative 3. Verbal, subjunctive 4. Verbal, imperative 5. Verbal, evidential 6. Nominal forms of the verb 7. Interjection
Grammatical categories of nominal parts of speech	Case of the possessor and beneficiary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of formal agreement in nouns 2. Presence ~ absence of formal agreement in full-form, othotonic pronouns 3. Presence ~ absence of formal agreement in pronominal clitics
	Cardinal numeral, adjective, and pronoun 'one' and indefinite article	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of formal matching for all genders 2. Presence ~ absence of formal matching for plural 3. 'first'

	Definiteness (definite article)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Position relative to the head (left, right) 3. Position in a two-member attributive phrase (as the first, second member) 4. Position in a two-member possessive phrase (as the first, second member) 5. Presence of gender, number, and case (inflection) 6. Article as a marker of genitive (possessive) relationship in the phrase 7. Hyperbolic, double definiteness (usage with demonstrative pronouns, in attributive phrases, with proper nouns, toponyms) 8. Omission ~ obligatoriness in terms of kinship despite referentiality 9. Omission ~ obligatoriness in prepositional constructions despite referentiality
	Comparative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence of the comparative grammeme 2. Matching of the comparative and superlative grammemes 3. Distribution of the comparative grammeme across parts of speech 4. Non-comparative meanings of the comparative grammeme (e.g., Macedonian <i>edna postara žena</i> 'a moderately aged woman, not very old')
Grammatical categories of the verb	Aorist	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Functional spectrum (basic function of 'aorist'; expression of a sequence of actions; use in subordinate clauses; duration or iteration; immediate future; gnomic use; conditional; conclusion) 3. Compatibility with the subjunctive particle 4. Compatibility with the future particle
	Imperfect	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Functional spectrum 3. Compatibility with the subjunctive particle 4. Compatibility with the future particle
	Perfect	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Functional spectrum (resultative, experiential, hot news past, mirative, reportative, optative) 3. Compatibility with the subjunctive particle
	Auxiliary verb 'to want'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of formal agreement between the main verb and the auxiliary verb (in negation and without) 2. Functional spectrum (in the future tense without negation, with negation, in the form of future tense in the past) 3. With the meanings 'must', 'to be required'
	Auxiliary verb 'to have'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of formal agreement between the main verb and the auxiliary verb 2. Functional spectrum (in the future without negation, with negation, in the form of future tense in the past) 3. Component of periphrastic verbs

	Subjunctive	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of verbal form 2. Compatibility with a specialized particle (obligatoriness, optionality) 3. Formal-functional spectrum (complement of modal verb, phase verb indicating the beginning and completion of action) 4. Functional-semantic spectrum (condition, imperative, preterit) 5. Compatibility with other particles (full and short subjunctive) 6. Functional-semantic spectrum of combinations with non-subjunctive particles
	Infinitiv	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Functional spectrum (complement of modal verbs, phase verbs, part of the future tense form (including negation), imperative, prohibitive (including part of the form), head of the noun phrase (subject))
	Participle	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Functional spectrum (attribute, perfect, privative ('without', cf. Macedonian <i>ušte nedojden</i> 'he hadn't arrived, when'))
	Deverbal noun	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of form 2. Head of the noun phrase (verbal government, nominal government) 3. Dependent part of the noun phrase 4. Main part of the complex predicate construction 5. Dependent part of the complex predicate construction 6. Tests for negation, for passivization (object/patient topicalization), for object control (nominal/verbal), for compatibility (with adjective/with adverb), for embedding in a dependent clause, for constituent permutation including embedding
Grammatical clitics	Grammatical clitics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of category 2. Inventory by parts of speech 3. Positional distribution (relative to the absolute beginning of the sentence; relative to the first orthotonic word; relative to the verb; in clitic clusters; in negation) 4. Grammatical roles and functions
Traditional culture	<p>Calendar, for example</p> <p>St. George / Hidirellez</p> <p>St. Demetrius</p> <p>Christmas</p> <p>Spring Day</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of ritual 2. Name of the day 3. Date 4. Ontology of rituals 5. Functional spectrum of rituals (apotropaic, symbolic, identity-related, and other functions)

	Rituals, for example Sacrifice Ritual fire	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of the ritual 2. Name of the ritual 3. Chronotope of the ritual 4. Ontology of the ritual (selection of sacrifice, prayers, slaughter, consumption, offering) 5. Functional spectrum of the ritual (apotropaic, symbolic, identity-related, and other functions)
	Birth, naming ceremony, protection against the evil eye	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Semantically transparent names 2. First visit to a new mother 3. Ritual objects of native rituals 4. Prediction of the newborn's fate
	Spiritual fraternity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence of the phenomenon 2. Ontology of the ritual 3. Functions of the spiritual brother in the life cycle 4. Semantics of fraternity 5. Spiritual sorority
	Godparenthood	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Presence ~ absence (masculine and feminine) 2. Ontology of the ritual 3. Functions of the godfather/godmother in the life cycle 4. Semantics of godparenthood
	Wedding: Agents Bride Groom Father-in-law Mother-in-law Bride's maid of honor Groom's brother-in-law Father-in-law Mother-in-law and others	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Names at different stages of the ceremony 2. Functional valencies throughout the entire wedding ceremony (for example father-in-law: going to propose to the bride; meeting the wedding procession; giving money to the bride's side as a dowry so they let the wedding procession pass; showering the bride with candies; going with the bride's party to fetch the bride, leading the bride out of her parents' house, and accompanying her during the move to the groom's house) 3. Ritual objects 4. Clothing
	Wedding: Objects Wedding tree Flag	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Names at different stages of the ceremony 2. Ontology 3. Functional valencies (throughout the entire wedding ceremony)
	Wedding: Chronotope Bride's house Procession Groom's house	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Names at different stages of the ceremony 2. Functional valencies
	Funerals and Demonology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deceased: names 2. Protective rituals: ontology 3. "Resurrected dead": names 4. "Resurrected dead": harmfulness 5. "Resurrected dead": protective rituals

	Elements, Substances, Objects Fire, Water, Air, Earth Bread, Rice, Meat, Wine, Milk	1. Names 2. Ritual: ontology 3. Functional spectrum of the ritual (apotropaic, symbolic, identity-related, and other functions)
	Loci	1. Names 2. Rituals: ontology 3. Functional spectrum of the ritual (apotropaic, symbolic, identity-related, and other functions)
	Processions	1. Names 2. Rituals: ontology 3. Functional spectrum of the ritual (apotropaic, symbolic, identity-related, and other functions)
	Demonology House spirits Water spirits Air spirits and so on	1. Names 2. Harmfulness 3. Usefulness 4. Worship or protection rituals: ontology 5. Functional spectrum of the ritual (apotropaic, symbolic, identity-related, and other functions) 6. Apotropaics
	Phytonymy	1. Plant names 2. Collection or cultivation 3. Collection/cultivation purposes (for aesthetics, household needs, rituals, or for sale) 4. Uses in food, household items (fabrics, bedding, curtains, etc.), and folk medicine 5. Usage in rituals and ceremonies (bouquets, wedding trees, home decoration, structures, enclosures, humans, sacrificial animals) 6. Usage in clothing 7. Location of usage 8. Time of usage 9. Color symbolism (as a color identifier, as a symbol)
	Headwear Men's Women's Children's	1. Names 2. Functions in daily life 3. Ritual functions 4. Symbolic functions 5. Rules of donning, wearing, and removing 6. Prohibitions related to headwear

The project adopts a synchronic orientation: responses to linguistic inquiries and questions pertaining to traditional culture are expected to encompass the period from the early 20th century to the present day. The research is grounded in the domains of internal linguistics and structural linguoculturology, deliberately excluding engagement with various sociolinguistic frameworks, including the concept of translanguaging.

The project envisions the development of a corpus comprising both qualitatively and quantitatively relevant primary linguistic and historical-cultural data, derived through the excerption of published and archival sources. It will also involve a series of corpus-based and structural-grammatical experiments (tests) with data from the Balkan languages. Additionally, a digital tool will be created to enable the attribution, input, glossing, translation, commentary, systematization, and, where appropriate, cartographic visualization of data pertaining to Balkan languages and cultures, thereby facilitating interlinguistic and intercultural comparison.

The project intends to draw upon a wide array of sources of high-quality primary data, including comparative and contrastive grammatical studies of Balkan languages; grammatical and phonetic-phonological descriptions of standard Balkan languages; monographic investigations of specific multifunctional grammatical categories within these languages; grammatical and phonetic-phonological descriptions of Balkan dialects; corpora of Balkan languages and dialects; as well as anthropogeographical, ethnographic, and cultural-historical sources pertaining to Balkan cultures.

The scholarly significance of these issues is fundamental. Their resolution stands to make a substantial contribution to the global advancement of linguistic and ethnological research on Sprach- und Kulturbund phenomena, in both theoretical and applied dimensions, including the development of research technologies. The theoretical, methodological, technological, informational, and practical outputs of the project are poised to establish a new global benchmark for contemporary scholarly inquiry.

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