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The Status of Albanian in Relation to the Other Balkan Languages

From 1972, i.e. when the standardisation of the Albanian language took place, the Albanian language went through three different socio-political stages that had an impact on its development. The first stage was the one that began in 1972 and lasted until the beginning of the nineties when the transition from totalitarianism to democracy took place in Albania and former Yugoslavia, two countries with the largest number of Albanian speakers. During this first stage, the Albanian language was a second-order language in Kosovo, whereas the official language, i.e. the language of prestige and the language used in government business was Serbo-Croatian, even though a lot of attention was given to the Albanian language especially in Kosovo.

The second stage covers the period from the 90's until the war in Kosovo – the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia and pluralism in Albania. During this period, the apparatus that was taking care of standard Albanian and controlling it in Albania was not that active; in addition, the termination of television

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broadcasting in Albanian and the degradation of the school system in Kosovo meant that the Albanian language came to have an even more inferior status there. The influence of the TV channels led to an increase in the number of Serbian loan-words. However, as a result of the *underground* educational system, the Serbian language was not taught anymore in schools. The number of children who were learning the Serbian language decreased. During this period, the border between Albania and Kosovo was closed, but an opportunity for contact between Albanians in Macedonia and Albania arose.

The third stage was the one after the war in Kosovo, Preševo Valley and Macedonia. A close contact was created between the Albanians at the opposite sides of the borders and the legal position of Albanians in Kosovo, Preševo Valley, Macedonia and Montenegro changed. The spoken standard Albanian, like any other standard language, was neither identical nor unique in all the territories where it was spoken during all of those three phases (Ismajli, 2003, p. 161). It was in contact with other languages in all of the territories where it was used, even though the relation with those languages varied from one territory to another. A description of the status and position of the Albanian language in relation to the other languages in the Balkans provides evidence of this.

The position of the Albanian language within the group of Balkan languages has been treated in earlier studies (Beci, 2002; Ismajli, 2003), as well as its status (Ismajli, 2003; Kramer, 2010; Munishi, 2009).

A review of contemporary research on the state of the field shows the course and the changes in the position and the status of Albanian language in contact with other languages on the Balkans during recent years. However, some official documents used by different linguists need to be revisited. For example, SIL, a basic source for researchers regarding the technical issues of the language, states that the Arbëreshës of Zadar are the Tosk (sic!), whereas all Albanians in Macedonia are the Geg (sic!). Of course, these claims are not worthy of comment. Nowadays, the Albanians occupy the south-west area of the Balkans, and its diaspora occupies the south of Italy, the Croatian coast, Bulgaria and Ukraine. The majority reside in the Balkan area – according to Islami (2003) there are around 6.5 million Albanians (the current data are debatable due to the serious flaws in the registration of the population in Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia). The greatest number of Albanians live in Albania: a census conducted in 2010 reveals a figure of 3.19 million citizens, which is some 100,000 citizens fewer compared to 20 years ago, in 1990. The most reliable

data regarding Kosovo is the data collected by the Agency of Statistics in 2005 and the data of CIA-s World Factbook, according to which the population in Kosovo stands at between 1,9 million and 2,2 million people, 88–92% of whom are of Albanian nationality – according to the last census of the population conducted in former Yugoslavia in 1981 – of 1.73 million people, 1.2 million people were of Albanian nationality. Data of the last census will not be taken into account here as they are considered unreliable due to serious methodological and practical flaws.

As per the last census data, the number of Albanians in the Former Federal Republic of Macedonia reached half a million or 25.17% of the total population. Some 4% of population were Turks. The report on Montenegro is also questionable. The data from 2003 indicate that the population there was 620,000, of that number 48,184 or 8% were Albanians. The Census from 2011 also provides the overall population count, yet there were only 30,000 or 4.91% registered Albanians. In Serbia, in the area which after the year 2000 became known as Preševo Valley, there are over 55,000 Albanians – according to data from 2002, 31,000 Albanians lived in Preševo, over 23,000 Albanians lived in Bujanovac and less than 2000 in Medvedja. There are two groups of Albanians living in Greece – the Chams and the Arvanits. Beci (2002, p. 15) states that some 100,000 Albanians live in Chamëri. According to SIL data (Albanian, Arvanitika, n.d., http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=aat) some 150,000 Arvanites live in Greece, but only 50,000 speak the language. The same source reveals that some 15,000 speakers of Arbanasi live in Zadar. In Ukraine there are 5000 speakers of Albanian (SIL). In each of these places Albanian was in a different contact situation and had a different status in these different places.

In his paper about the language policy of EU and the equality of languages in Kosovo, Munishi (2009) states that consciousness, mentality, overall understanding of the world and values of a particular language community are reflected in a language, as well as the challenges and difficulties which that society faces. In the majority of cases one particular language community lives and acts in one territory with one or more other language communities that speak different languages and the data of the languages used by those communities is reflected in the data and in the reciprocal attitude of those communities. The language transforms into the major parameter for measuring the individual freedom within a social group. The case of Albanian is the best example for that.

Munishi (2009) states that at the beginning of the new millennium the countries of the Western Balkans have set membership in the EU and NATO as their goal. As a result, the countries of the Western Balkans were engaged in accepting and applying the political, economic and institutional standards of the European Union and subsequently reacting to its ideological influence as well. This process has had an impact on cultural and language policies in those states, even though there is a significant gap between the languages and the expansion of functions and domains of language use (Munishi, 2009). Even the countries of the EU have some political issues which have the effect that the language policies of the EU are not applied, as it is the case of non-recognition of the legal existence of the minorities in Greece. (In the area of Aegea, the Macedonian minority are not recognized and as a result even the Slavic dialects are not recognized. The Arvanitika in their various manifestations are in the same situation, however Kramer (2010, p. 24) claims that they are in a somewhat more favourable position than the former. This relates to the development of a programme financed by the EU regarding the protection of the Arvanitika. Yet, the attitude of the EU toward the languages also has an impact on the language policies of the other European countries which have as their aim integration in the EU.

Let us see what the situation is regarding the Albanian language.

Beci (2002) and Kramer (2010) have discussed the situation in Albania. Beci (2002, p. 21) claims that the Greek minority is the largest one, followed by the minorities from Macedonia, Montenegro, the Vlachs and the Romas. The Gorani should not be excluded. In the last set of data, less than 2% of the total population were non-Albanians (as per the last census with ethnographic data from 1989). One observation regarding the last census refers to Section 20 of the Law on Census, in which it is stated that any citizen who declares himself to be of any other nationality from the one registered in his/her birth certificate shall be given a monetary fine. The Greeks and Macedonians are accepted as minorities. Kramer (2010) talks about their education in Albania. The Macedonian children attended schools in the area of Prespë and Korça, the Greek children attended the schools in Gjirokastrë, Saranda and Përmet. Kramer (2010, p. 35) states that this condition does not meet the expectations of the minorities regarding the level of education in a mother tongue. The Albanian language is a language of administration, a language that loans to the minorities, but borrows cultural terms from the Italian and Greek.

Kosova – research regarding its status and position is offered by Ismajli (2003) and Munishi (2009). At the end of the war in Kosovo, an issue regarding the status of the languages used in Kosovo was clarified by means of legal documents (UNMIK Regulations and the Law on use of the languages in Kosovo, The Constitution of Kosovo) and at the central level, Albanian, Serbian and English with extraterritorial status were established as the official languages. On the municipality level the use of the languages of the ethnic communities living in those municipalities is guaranteed. As far as the regulation of the status of the languages at the central level and at the municipality level is concerned, the map of Europe for regional languages or minority languages was taken into consideration as well. In municipalities inhabited by different ethnic communities who constitute at least 5% of the population of that municipality, the language of that community would be an official language of that municipality, in particular the Turkish language in Prizren has the status of an official language in that municipality. Also, in the municipalities inhabited by a specific community, the mother tongue used by more than 3% of the total population of the municipality, in other words the language of that community would have the status of an official language in that municipality. Munishi (2009) also talks about the use of Arabian language from Kuran.

The Albanian language has the status of an official language and is the prestige language, and it is in constant contact with other languages. This contact mostly refers to two Serbian subdialects: the Kosovsko-resavski dialect covering the region of Peja and Mitrovica and the Prizrensko-južnomoravski dialect covering Prizren, Prishtina and Preševo Valley all the way through Niš extending to Aleksinovac in Serbia. This Prizrensko-južnomoravski dialect is also known as the New Štokavian dialect, the Kosovsko-resavski dialect contains aspects of the Kosovsko-metohijski dialect (Okuka, 2007, p. 211). Okuka (2007, p. 211) says that the influence of Albanian and Turkish can be seen in these dialects. Okuka (2007, pp. 242–243) separates the Prizrenski-južnomoravski dialect into two subdialects: Prizrensko-đakovački and Gnjilansko-vranjski. He talks about the influence in the vocalic system from the Albanian, Turkish and Macedonian languages. Okuka puts them all together under the so-called middle Štokavian, also known as the Prizrensko-timočki dialect.

Pavle Ivić and Olga Tomić call the south-east dialects the Torlak dialects and state that they have many characteristics that distinguish them from other Štokavian languages, including standard Serbian (Tomić, 2006, p. 698). The Albanian language is also in contact with the Gorani language.

Munishi described the sociolinguistic situation: “Usage and equality of the languages of the ethnic communities in Kosovo has its issues that are mainly of a practical nature. Some of those issues were addressed in ‘Report on the use of the minority languages in the municipalities in Kosovo’ drafted by the OSCE mission in Kosovo. The report states that even though the government has established a commission for languages, there are still problems in application of the law. In the report it is stated that the Albanian language, just like other minority languages, is not being used to deal with the issues inside Kosovo. The reports of the representative and executive bodies are not published in Albanian in north Kosovo where the majority of the population is of Serbian nationality, whereas in the communities with the majority of Albanian population the reports are rarely published in Serbian” Munishi (2009).

Kosovo is closely involved with the historical and political circumstances which it has experienced in the last 20 years. During the period when Kosovo was a part of the former Yugoslavia, the Serbian language had a prestige and advantage over the Albanian language in the majority of functions and in formal domains. As a result, the Serbian speakers were more privileged. However, after the war in Kosovo, demographic factors resulted in the Albanian language become the first language in Kosovo. Problems in the increase of Albanian-Serbian bilingualism are caused by the lack of contacts between Serbs and Albanians, as a result of political issues and the lack of acceptance of the other language by the new generations. As far as the Turkish language is concerned, its legal status has been degraded in comparison to the status it had at the time when Kosovo was an autonomous province within the SFR Yugoslavia, when it was an official language. In present official documents the Turkish language is not recognized as an official language alongside Albanian and Serbian. The linguistic policy followed in Kosovo regarding the languages of the minority communities is in accordance with the political trends and language policies followed in the EU. In spite of the bad historical experience with Serbia and in spite of the small number of its users, the Kosovo institutions gave the Serbian language the status of an official language and this has not been rejected by Albanian society as a whole. Even though the speakers of Serbian form an absolute minority compared to speakers of Albanian, Serbian is one of the official languages. Nowadays, even though it is spoken by only 5–7% of the total population of Kosovo it has a favourable juridical status, unlike the Albanian language in Macedonia, which is spoken by more than 25% of population in Macedonia.

In Macedonia, in addition to Macedonian, which is the majority language, a considerable number of people speak Albanian, Romani, Turkish, Serbian/Bosnian and Aromanian. The status of the other languages in Macedonia was considered to be a difficult issue during the period after the Second World War until the conflicts in 2001. The Ohrid Agreement of 2001 treats the issue of education and that of the language in eight points under Section 6. This agreement guarantees for all minorities education in the mother tongue, university education in the languages spoken by more than 20% of the population (which includes Albanian), and there have been some positive discussions regarding university education for the minorities, and in addition in the courts a person has the right to listen to a party in his/her mother tongue – translated from the official language.

However point 4 states: “Macedonian shall be the official language in the whole territory of Macedonia and in international relations”.

Section 6 states: “Regarding the local government in Municipalities where a particular community constitutes at least 20 % of the population of the municipality, the language of that community shall be used as an official language, and Macedonian shall be used additionally.”

In consequence Albanians are obliged to be bilingual. With this agreement, even if the Albanian language acquires the status of the official language in Macedonia, the functions and domains of its usage as an official language will remain limited. As a case in point, the 5th Seminar on Albanology (whose specific theme was indeed Albanology) held in Tetovo and Skopje was opened by the rector in Albanian and then his speech was translated into Macedonian.

Moreover, the state apparatus uses other repressive means. Here we should mention that Skopje consists of 10 municipalities including the central area; Cairi and the Saraji are municipalities with Albanians forming a majority of the population. However, even in some other municipalities the Albanians reach the 20% foreseen by point 6 of Section 6 of the Ohrid Agreement. However, the linguistic landscape in Bitpazar will seldom include Albanian. The other case has to do with the municipality of Struga, which is another municipality in Macedonia where the Albanians form the majority. In this municipality, in the restaurants bills provided for tax purposes are given in Cyrillic script, even if the name of the product is in Albanian. The owners of restaurants have explained about the state control over the production and installation of such accounting devices. Therefore, it is another state mechanism used for repression of one language over and against the other languages within the country.

Montenegro. A thorough research project was conducted by Shabani (2007). Even in the Constitution of the Independent Montenegro it is established that in the municipalities inhabited by a substantial number of ethnic communities, the language of those communities will be used as an official language. The main contact is with the Zetsko-raški dialect. According to Okuka (2007, p. 170) this dialect is spoken in the south-west part reaching Ulcinj, then Perast in Kotor, Bijelo Polje and the north part of Kosovo all the way to Mitrovica in the east. Furthermore (Okuka, 2007, p. 55) the Neoštokavian dialects spoken in the central area are separated from those spoken in the southern and northern areas of the Štokavian diasystem in Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. These are: Ijekavian, Ekavian, Ikavian. The Serbs are speakers of Ijekavian and Ekavian; Montenegrins are speakers of Ijekavian. Therefore, the Albanians in Montenegro are in contact with the Ijekavian accent.

Shabani (2007, pp. 123, 124) establishes that the Albanian language in Montenegro maintains considerable stability, and the more the communication becomes official the more the Albanian language is substituted for the Montenegrin language, which is used even by Albanians in official written communication, and the Albanian language becomes the language into which a translation has to be done. Also, when talking to each other about topics such as politics, economy or sport the Albanian speakers code-switch, switching from Albanian into Montenegrin.

In the Preševo Valley – Section 10 of the Constitution of Serbia expresses disapproval of the use of the Serbian language as an official language and the use of the Cyrillic alphabet. Also, according to the Law on the Use of the Languages of 2010 in municipalities inhabited by a large group of minorities, the languages of the minorities are to be used together with the Serbian language as the official language. According to this law, if the minorities compose 2% of the total population, they have the right to address public bodies in their mother tongue and to get a response in their mother tongue. As per the last census, the Albanians compose less than 1% of the total population of Serbia.

The contacts of the Albanians from the Valley is on two levels: direct contact through relations with neighbours and administration and contact through the media, although not on a large scale. The first level seems to be more influential. The characteristics of Serbian among the Albanian speakers living in this area display the linguistic properties of the Prizrensko-južnomoravski dialect and the Gnjilansko-vranjski dialect. According to the results of the test, the usage of Serbian terms among students from the Preševo Valley studying

at the Univeristy of Prishtina was 12% higher in comparison to other students, whereas 72% of the candidates stated that they spoke Serbian. The data are debatable, and they are mentioned only for the purpose of explaining the bilingual situation.

The status of Albanian in Kosovo, Montenegro, Macedonia and the Valley of Preševo has changed in the last 10 years. Rustemi (1979), Ismajli (2003) and other authors have talked about how those changes are reflected with respect to standard Albanian and have discussed the functions of the concept of the standard language – especially functions relating to prestige, unification and separation. However, the change in the status of the Albanian language requires further examination, also with respect to the scope of the status of the Albanian varieties between themselves.

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Status języka albańskiego w porównaniu z innymi językami bałkańskimi

Język albański pozostaje w stałym kontakcie z innymi językami niemal na całym swoim terytorium. Natomiast relacje międzyjęzykowe są różne w zależności od konkretnego miejsca. W tym artykule omówiono status języka albańskiego, w poszczególnych lokacjach jego użycia oraz jego relacje z innymi miejscowymi językami.

Słowa kluczowe: literacki język albański; języki bałkańskie; prestiż języka; języki mniejszościowe; kontakty międzyjęzykowe

The Status of Albanian in Relation to the Other Balkan Languages

Albanian has been in contact with other languages almost in all areas in which it is spoken, whereas the relationship with each of them differs from place to place. This study aims at describing the status of Albanian depending on its place of use and on the contacts it has with other Balkan languages.

Keywords: Standard Albanian language; Balkan languages; prestige; minority languages; languages in contact

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