

## THE ALTERNATION OF VO- AND VA- IN THE DIALECTS OF ALBANIAN

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In the early twentieth century Albanian had two traditional dialects which, while mutually intelligible, exhibited several phonological differences. These were Gheg, which was and to some extent still is, spoken in the north; and Tosk the dialect of the south. One of the differences between these two traditional dialects of Albanian is the alternation of word initial vo- with va-. In the northern dialect, Gheg, words which begin with vo- will in the southern dialect, Tosk, begin with va-. For example, Gheg vorfër 'poor', vorr 'grave' and votër 'hearth' corresponds to Tosk varfër, varr, and vater.

Albanian is an Indo-European language. This means that the Albanian spoken today can be traced back to Proto Indo European through a series of regular sound changes. Several important linguists who have worked on reconstructing proto Albanian and the regular correspondences of Proto and Modern Albanian phonemes with their Proto Indo European counterparts include: Gustav Meyer, Franz Bopp, Eqrem Çabej, and Shaban Demiraj.

In her work of 1976 Selection Among Alternates in Language Standardization: The Case of Albanian Janet Byron citing Çabej claims the dialect alternation described above is derived from original PIE \*o > vo- > va-. Robert Beekes in his 1995 Comparative Indo-European Linguistics an Introduction citing Demiraj claims that \*a > va- > vo-.

This paper investigates the problem of these opposite derivations. It begins with a review of the two main opinions regarding the reconstructed phonemes of ProtoIndoEuropean, with especial attention given to the vowels and sonorants. Next the paper examines the sound changes that occurred prehistorically in Albanian, and among other changes explicitly states a vowel shift which must have occurred and which was instrumental in creating this dialect difference as it led to the existence of word initial wo- later vo-. Next the paper compares the etymologies of the attested incidences of the vo-/va- phenomenon in Albanian and shows that there was a continuous development from ProtoIndoEuropean which produced word initial wa-. From the information of two analyses described above the paper concludes that at one period wo- and wa- coexisted in a situation of free variation in Albanian and that different interpretations of the archiphoneme resulted in the different dialects standardizing different variants. For Gheg the archiphoneme was wo- (later vo-) while for Tosk it became wa- (later va-). This is the true development of the dialect difference and not, as Çabej and Demiraj have proposed, that one dialect developed from the other.

PROTO INDO EUROPEAN

There are two opinions regarding the composition of the vowel system of ProtoIndoEuropean. The two views differ in the number of vowels reconstructed and in the phonetic character of these phonemes. In the first view, four vowels and two semi-vowels are reconstructed for PIE. In the second view, there are seven vowels and two semi-vowels with the two semi-vowels having two allophones each.

Table one shows the first view:

**TABLE ONE**  
Proto Indo-European Phonemes  
(Based on Beekes 1995)

SONORANTS					
liquids	r	l			
nasals	m	n			
semi-vowels	i	u			
VOWELS					
short	e	o			
long	ē	ō			
DIPHTHONGS					
	ei				
		eu			
				oi	
					ou

This first view posits the phonemic vowels \*e, \*o, \*ē, and \*ō. Length is believed to have been phonemic in PIE. \*a is not a phoneme of PIE in this system. Instead \*a is believed to be derived from a laryngeal in front of \*e (a < \*He), and to have occurred early on in many Indo-European languages. Also in this PIE vocalic system there are six sonorants reconstructed including the two semi-vowels \*i and \*u, two liquids \*l and \*r, and two nasals \*n and \*m. These sonorants can function syllabically and are considered to have properties of both vowels and consonants. Table one shows the phonemic inventory of PIE from this perspective.

Table two shows the second view:

**TABLE TWO**  
**Proto Indo-European Phonemes**  
 (Based on Arlotto 1972)

SONORANTS	consonantal		vocalic	
liquids	r	l	ɾ	ɿ
nasals	m	n	ɱ	ɳ
semi-vowels	j (y)	u (w)	ɨ	ʉ
VOWELS	front			back
high	e	ē		
mid			ə	o
low		a	ā	

The second view posits the following seven original PIE pure vowels \*e, \*ə, \*o, \*a, \*ē, \*ō, and \*ā. In this system, there are three vowels (e, o, a) which have a phonemic distinction of length and schwa which does not. This system also has the six resonants \*i, \*u, \*l, \*r, \*n, \*m of the earlier view, but proposes that these had two allophonic variants, one voiceless and one non syllabic indicated by the diacritics ̣ and ̤ respectively. Also, non syllabic j̣ and ụ are sometimes written as y and w. Table two gives the PIE phonemes according to this second point of view.

Regardless of which phonemic system one accepts the important information to note is that \*a, whether it is originally derived from an \*eH or was already present, does occur in the early form of Indo-European from which Albanian developed. And it is important to note that the semi vowels y or w are also present in PIE.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF ALBANIAN FROM PIE

Table three, which is shown on the next page, is taken from Mircea Radulescu's 1984 article in the Journal of Indo-European Studies. The table provides the PIE to Albanian correspondences established by Eqrem Çabej. On the page following the next page is Table four which comes from Beekes 1995. Table four shows the correspondences that Shaban Demiraj establishes. Beekes book has an appendix that lists all of Demiraj's Albanian derivations.

Looking at their proposals we see the two linguists differ. Çabej has \* short a which he reduces to schwa (\*a > a > é); Çabej further reduces \* short o to schwa (\*o > a > é). Demiraj does not establish a \* short a for PIE instead he posits an

intermediate stage *\*a* in the correspondence *\*o* > *ë* to account for the presence of *a* in Albanian. The two scholars also differ in how they treat the diphthongs. Demiraĳ reduces all diphthongs to monophthongs, except for *\*au* which he sees as the origin of both *a* and *ve-*. Ćabeĳ denies *o* < *\*a* and *e* < *\*oi*, but posits that some *\*ai* yield *a* and some *oi*.

**TABLE THREE**  
Ćabeĳ's Correspondences of PIE to Albanian  
(From Radulescu:1984)

Corresponding Phonemes
<i>*a</i> > <i>a</i> > <i>e</i>
<i>*e</i> > <i>ie</i> > <i>e</i> > <i>ë</i>
<i>*o</i> > <i>a</i> > <i>ë</i> > <i>vo-</i> ( <i>va-</i> in Gheg) [Byron]
<i>*i</i> > <i>i</i>
<i>*u</i> > <i>u</i>
<i>*ā</i> > <i>o</i>
<i>*ē</i> > <i>o</i>
<i>*ō</i> > <i>e</i>
<i>*ū</i> > <i>y</i> > <i>i</i>
<i>*ai</i> > <i>ai</i>
<i>*ai</i> > <i>o</i>
<i>*ei</i> > <i>i</i>
<i>*au</i> > <i>a</i>
<i>*ou</i> > <i>a</i> or <i>e</i>
<i>*eu</i> > <i>e</i>
<i>*oi</i> > <i>ai</i>
<i>*oi</i> > <i>e</i>
<i>*i</i> > <i>j</i> or <i>gj</i>
<i>*u</i> > <i>v-</i>

Note: the symbol *e* is used in Albanian to represent a reduced vowel or schwa sound.

TABLE FOUR  
Demiraj's Correspondences  
(from Beekes:1995)

*e > je > ie > ja > i > e	dheg <sup>wh</sup> > djeg 'burn' melh, > miell 'flour' h, eg <sup>h</sup> s > jashtë 'outside' Hneptos > nip 'nephew' leg' > mbledh 'gather'
*o > a (a > e)	nok <sup>o</sup> t > nate 'night'
*oN > aN ( > è in Tosk)	g <sup>h</sup> yonos > zaN/zé 'voice'
*i > i	*h <sub>2</sub> id <sup>h</sup> > hidhur 'bitter'
*u > u	*dru > dru 'tree'
*ā > o > va- (vo- in Gheg)	mehtë <sup>r</sup> > motër 'mother' *ātr or Lat. atrium > vater 'hearth'
*ē > *ā > o > *ō > ue (ua in Tosk)	mēh,t > mot 'year' mēh,ns > muej/muaj 'month'
*ō > e	nōs > ne 'we'
*ai > e	*aig' > edh 'baby goat'
*oi > e	*stoig > shteg 'path'
*ei > i	*g <sup>h</sup> eimen > dimer 'winter'
*au > a > ve-	*kleh <sub>2</sub> u > qaj 'cry' *h <sub>2</sub> eus > vesh 'egg'
*ou > o > a	*h <sub>2</sub> oug > ag 'dawn'
*eu > o > e	*skeud > hedh 'throw'
*j > gj or 0	*henjehs > ngjesh 'girt one'
*u > v- or 0	*uos > vesh 'dress'

It is clear that Demiraj believes that the \*a he lists is a reconstruction of an early Indo-European but not PIE, because in his examples where he sets up the correspondences between \*a and modern Albanian the PIE word has a \*e plus a laryngeal. Çabej on the other hand seems to follow the seven vowel system as he lists both proto \*a and \*ā. Also, Demiraj posits that the vowel combination \*au > ve. This suggestion was originally proposed by Gustav Meyer as will be seen below.

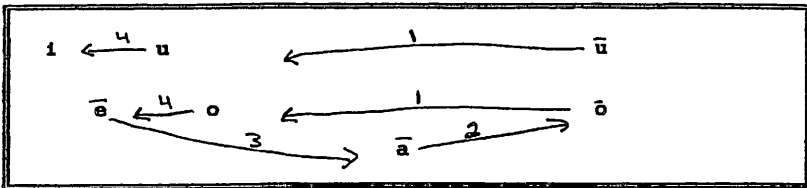
## SOUND CHANGES

Examination of the above data leads to a proposal of four sound changes. The first is a vowel shift, the second is that \* short o -> a, the third shows that \* long  $\bar{o}$  became short o. and the fourth is midvowels became diphthongs.

Table five schematizes the first change. The vowel shift of early Albanian is as follows:

- 1st) long u and long o fronted (becoming u and o respectively)
- 2nd) long a raised to long o
- 3rd) long e lowered to long a
- 4th) u and o became i and e respectively.

TABLE 5  
Albanian Vowel Shift



Sound changes which followed the vowel shift

- 2)  $\bar{o} \rightarrow a$
- 3)  $\bar{o} \rightarrow o$
- 4)  $e \rightarrow je$  and  $o \rightarrow wo$

The second sound change was short o became short a. This left short o vacant so the third sound change is that long  $\bar{o}$  became short o. The fourth sound change is that the mid vowels became diphthongs. As shown by  $e \rightarrow je$  (or  $ye$ ) and  $o \rightarrow wo$ . These sound changes show how initial  $wo-$  and later  $vo-$  (through further delabialization) resulted in Albanian.

DEVELOPMENT OF  $wo-/wa-$  FROM PIE

Evidence from other linguists' reconstructions show that  $wq-$  and  $w\bar{a}-$  occurs independently of the above processes by development of the Proto IndoEuropean semi-vowels in Albanian. These merged into  $w\bar{a}-$  so that Albanian had  $w\bar{a}-$  from PIE and  $wq-$  from vowel shift. Both of which delabialized into  $vo-$  and  $va-$ . To show this we can examine several incidences of PIE into Albanian.

Stuart Mann writes about various reconstructions and the linguists who deduced them in his articles in Language on the PIE vowels and semi-vowels in Albanian. His sources are Franz Bopp and Gustav Meyer. Table six gives the reconstructions of Franz Bopp while Table seven is the reconstructions of Gustav Meyer.

**TABLE SIX**  
Franz Bopp's Reconstructions  
(From Mann:1950)

*a > a	*dhǎljo > dal/dolla 'go out' *bhalis > bal 'white spot' *qadhom > va/vau 'ford'
*o > a	*moli > mal 'mountain' *soq <sup>u</sup> us > gjaku 'blood' *qorghos > varg 'line'
*su > v-	*suet > vetë 'self'

**TABLE SEVEN**  
Gustav Meyer's Reconstructions  
(From Mann:1950)

*a > a	*dhǎljo > dal, dolla *ghrabhos > grabë 'water hole'
*ā > o	*bhātos > botë 'world' *yanos > vonë 'late' *sthānos > shtone 'catchment'
*au > a > ve-	*grauia > gra 'women' *kaujo > thaj 'dry' *augos > ag 'dawn' *suet > vetë 'self'
*ē > o (>ue)	*mē > mos 'don't' *qesos > kohë 'time'
*i > i	*pio > pi 'drink'
*ō > e	*skōlos > hell 'spit'
*u > u	*tundo > tund 'shake' *bhungos > bundë 'gnarl'
*ū > i	*tū > ti 'you' *mūs > mi 'mouse'
*oi > e	*stoigho > shteg 'path'
*ei > i	*leisa > lijë 'mark'
*uo > va-, vo-	page 462 G. Meyer's <u>Etymologisches</u> (reprint 1982)

There is some debate over Bopp's work, but note that Robert Fowkes (1946), using Bopp's reconstruction of  $*sy > v$ , relates English sward 'a grassy strip' to other Indo-European cognates all of which are derived from PIE  $*suer$  'cover'. Fowkes offers Albanian varr 'grave' as one of the reflexes of  $*suer$ . Meyer's etymologies have stood the test of time.

It is important to note here that in Standard Albanian (a dialect of Albanian common only to the late twentieth century, which has adopted the same phonology as the traditional southern dialect, Tosk) there are words which begin with both vo- and va-. The dialect difference between Gheg and Tosk exists in the use by Gheg speakers of only vo- word initially and not va-.

On the following page is Table eight. Table eight lists the words beginning with vo- and the words beginning with va- in Standard Albanian. It also provides the reconstructions available for these words. These reconstructions are from Mann's Comparative Indo-European Dictionary (1984-1987) unless otherwise noted. This information provides us evidence that word initial vo- and va- developed from the PIE semivowel w-. It also shows that wo- and wa- merged into wa-. A later change caused wa- to become va-.

The above descriptions have shown two important phenomena which help us to understand how the modern dialect difference between vo- and va- developed. First we have seen how wo- developed as a result of regular sound changes starting with the Albanian vowel shift. Second we have seen how through use of reconstructed Proto Indo European word initial wq- and wa- developed from PIE semivowels and that wq- and wa- merged into wa-. Thus word initial wq- and wa- are the result of two independent developments.

These two developments resulted in a situation where both va- and vo- coexisted as an initial portion. This variation was retained in Tosk, but vo- was interpreted as the archiphoneme (For discussion of this conception of an archiphoneme see Hans Hock (1991:57-59)) in Gheg causing them to pronounce all the words with the initial sequence as vo- through analogy. Evidence for this comes from the development of the borrowing from old Greek, possibly through Latin, of the word orphanos which became varfër in Tosk but vorfër in Gheg.

#### CONCLUSION

To conclude, Various opinions have been expressed concerning the how, why, and when of the divergence of the two traditional dialects of the Albanian language, Gheg and Tosk. These range from J.G. Hahn's proposal (with which Meyer agreed) that the dialects are a continuation of variation found already in Illyrian, to C. Tagliavini's proposal the dialectal division occurred as late as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Beci:1984). Modern



TABLE EIGHT  
(From Fjalor Shqip Anglisht 1981)

The words beginning with vo- in Standard Albanian are:

<u>vobekesi</u> 'poverty',	
<u>voce</u> 'little girl',	< * <u>v</u> ākios 'puny'
<u>vocerr</u> 'tiny',	< * <u>v</u> akios 'puny'
<u>vogël</u> 'little',	< * <u>v</u> ēghros 'slim'
<u>volant</u> 'fly wheel',	
<u>voli</u> 'convenience',	
<u>volitsh</u> 'handy',	
<u>volte</u> 'death rattle',	
<u>vona</u> 'late',	< * <u>v</u> ān 'dally'
<u>vorb</u> 'whirlwind',	
<u>voz</u> 'barrel',	
<u>vozit</u> 'row'.	

Words beginning with va- in Standard Albanian (vo- in Gheg) are:

<u>va-u</u> 'ford',	< * <u>v</u> adho 'go, wade'
<u>vade</u> 'expiration day',	
<u>vade</u> 'ditch',	
<u>vadites</u> 'irrigation canal'	
<u>vageloj</u> 'to dim',	< * <u>v</u> aghols 'faint, dimness'
<u>vaj</u> 'oil',	
<u>vaj</u> 'dirge',	< * <u>v</u> ai 'sorrow'
<u>vaj</u> 'nurse',	
<u>vajtj</u> 'return ticket',	
<u>vajtur</u> 'dead',	
<u>vajze</u> 'girl',	
<u>vak-ët</u> 'tepid',	
<u>vakëf</u> 'temple',	
<u>val</u> 'wave',	
<u>valim</u> 'boiling',	< * <u>v</u> ol 'boiling heat'
<u>valixh</u> 'suitcase',	
<u>valle</u> 'dance',	
<u>vallë</u> 'perhaps',	
<u>vap</u> 'heat'	
<u>var</u> 'to hook',	
<u>varfer</u> 'poor',	
<u>varg</u> 'chain',	
<u>vargan</u> 'caravan',	
<u>varr</u> 'grave',	
<u>vat-ër</u> 'hearth',	
<u>vatan</u> 'fatherland',	
<u>vath</u> 'sheep pen',	
<u>vazhdim</u> , 'continue',	
<u>vash</u> 'girl'.	

The hyphen indicates a case morpheme which makes the reconstruction more apparent.

scholars know that the above dates are incorrect. Illyrian is not sufficiently evidenced for most linguists to acknowledge it as a language, and documents from the fifteenth century onwards give evidence that the dialect division had already occurred. The time of divergence occurs sometime before the 15th century and after Rome had established an empire.

E. Çabej has studied the rise and formation of the traditional dialects of Albanian extensively. Quoting Çabej, Bahri Beci (1984) writes the following in the 1984 anthology Problems of the Formation of the Albanian People, Their Language and Culture:

examining the dialectal features mentioned above in the light of these sources and placing them in the framework of time, it turns out that they have been formed at different periods, .... Of the phonetic changes at the start of the literary period, the beginnings of which...coincide with the period of Ottoman occupation of the country [late fifteenth century], the disappearance of the unstressed è in the middle and at the end of words in both dialects had only partly taken place....Also more ancient and belonging to the pre-literary period the nasal a into ë, of the initial vo- into va-, in rhotacism and unvoicing of terminal voiced consonants all these being features of Toskerishtë.

This is in accordance with Byron's (1976) summary of the vo-/va-dialect feature in her work which reads, "Tosk initial va-corresponding to Geg vo-: historically from \*o-, further delabialized in Tosk (Çabej 1959) e.g. G voRR 'grave,tomb' = T varr."

Çabej's proposal is in direct opposition to Demiraj's reconstruction, "\*a- > va-, G vo- vatër/votër 'hearth' if \*atr- or from Lat. atrium" (Beekes:1995). Adherence to different viewpoints regarding the reconstruction of the PIE vowel system may partly account for this differing opinion. Also, the difference in which vowel became which may also arise from opposed viewpoints on dialects, i.e., lacking other evidence the acceptance of vo- as older because overall Tosk is believed to be more innovative than Geg. Neither Çabej or Demiraj agree with Bopp who reconstructs \*sue > va-. Mann does not directly address the issue, although he does reconstruct u > ve.

Studying the data presented above, it would seem that both Demiraj and Çabej's reconstructions of the dialect difference are misleading. Both linguists want to argue that one dialect arose from the other, but as we have seen the difference arose from competing alternations which both dialects originally had. The reason the confusion results is that both linguists ignore the implicit vowel shift that their reconstructions demonstrate. They do not relate the subsequent sound changes that result in wo- to the wo-/wa- which already existed through development of the Indo-European semivowel in Albanian. We have seen Two separate

developments occurred not just one which led to competition between vo- and va- as the appropriate word initial variant. vo- won out in the northern dialect Gheg and va- won out in the southern dialect Tosk.

Knowledge of another dialect difference supports this view. In Gheg kam the word for have is used as the auxiliary verb in the construction of the future tense. In Tosk do the word for will/want is employed. The development of want as future auxiliary is common to the Balkan "sprachbund" (Hock:1988). But it is interesting to note that in Balkan Latin there existed a period when the two construction were both employed. It is very plausible that this was the case in Albanian. If this is true it shows us another instance where there existed two competing variants with one being realized in Gheg and the other in Tosk.

We have seen in the case of Albanian that when studying historical dialect divergence historical reconstructions are not enough. Sociolinguistic methods help us to understand the sound changes in tandem. And it is important to recognize the interdependency of speakers beliefs about origins of sounds and the sound changes themselves as the main force behind dialect divergence.

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