

**STANDARD LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGICAL
SHADOWS: ALBANIAN AT A CROSSROADS**

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Abstract

Any ideological background of the standard language has its own way of perceiving the writing, the meaning and the word values. On the other side, every era "creates" its own discourse, and the first task that a new ruling class embarks on is to 'overthrow' the previous discourse in order to introduce a discursive order, which, of course, comes into being as a part of the ideological interests derived from the policy of language. The current standard Albanian variety has experienced the same route, overturning the previous established discourse until 1972, in arbitrary ways that any standard is inclined to follow. Nowadays, the Albanian standard language stands obviously in disharmony with the pre-maturated, pre-standardised - before 1972 - natural state. However, despite tendencies to qualify it as the truest language piedmont, it remains just one of the many language varieties. Consequently, the ideologically proclaimed as true language has much narrower impact than proclaimed, 45 years onward from the Albanian Orthography Congress of 1972, the standard Albanian variety, or the Unified Language (UL), as the linguists of the former communist system used to dub it, remains a new language, or official language (Orwell, 2005) characterised by a new word register, morphology and word order embodied as a representative discourse. (p. 299). However, the ideological shadows of this discourse couldn't cover the rich arch from the dialects which remains vivid today; with the aim of prospecting a new face of the standard language by adding to many ignored sources still alive in the language of dialects and in the idiomatic discourses. A new policy of language is imminent.

Key words: Standard language, dialect, ideology, discourse, variety, policy

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First ideas for a common Albanian Language

The standardization of Albanian was a slow-moving process.

In spite of fact that “standard languages are also discursive projects, and standardization processes are typically accompanied by the development of specific discourse practices”, the history of standardization of Albanian implies the ideological discursive shadow in the background of these processes.

First efforts to create a common variant of Albanian language were made at the time of the *National Awakening*, besides the formation of the idea of the freedom of the nation. In the 70's of the 19th Century, on the pages of the *Fjamuri i Arbërit* magazine, Jeronim de Rada gave the idea of the creation of the standard Albanian based on Arberian language. Unfortunately, “archaic features of Arberian language in Italy did not provide the slightest opportunity for the Diaspora speech to rise to the scale of a standard pan-Albanian language” (Munishi, 2013, p. 25)

The idea of the common Albanian language was welcome by all most distinguished intellectuals and authors of the time, Sami Frashëri (in a letter to De Rada in 1881 – and Faik Konica on the influential *Albania* journal in 1897, being among them. (Beci, 2000, p. 53).

In particular, this idea has been enforced during the first decades of twentieth century. “The thought of unification of Albanian language also emerges in 1904–1912, is discussed in Faik Konica’s *Albania* journal and is included in the decisions of Congress of Elbasan in September 1909 and thereafter. The Literary Commission set up in Shkoder (1916–1918) made the first major steps towards codification of standard language and revision thereof. They brought the spelling of both variants of the standard language in use closer, in a bid to give a common and simple shape to the way in which our language was written. The decisions made and the criteria set by the Commission were also adopted by the Congress of Teachers, which was held in Lushnjë in 1920” (Kryeziu, 2010, p. 21).

It has been noticed already and rightly that the formation of the Literary Commission of Shkoder was the first conscientious step towards realisation of a genuine language policy and language planning. Practically, this Commission has developed a tangible language policy, which has served a cornerstone for the following steps of the standardisation process.

The convergences between the main dialects of the Albanian became a leading stepping stone toward the new language policy prospect. “In terms of choosing the dialectical basis for the language, the language policy of the Literary Commission has relied on practical reasons, and compromise; the mediate Gheg, or the Elbasan dialect was, in terms of language standard, the closest and most common system to both Albanian dialects and written variants as a dialectal basis” (Munishi, 2013, p. 31).

However, a few researchers, like Arshi Pipa, rather dislike the compromised approach adopted by the Commission, maintaining that the *Commission made* significant compromises in favour of the Tosk dialect. “The main principle applied by the Commission was the phonetic one, which means that the grapheme of a word should match its pronunciation. This principle works well for the Tosks, but not for the Ghegs, who (a) do not pronounce the end *ë*, but do pronounce the mediate one: *Mria, kndoj, vâsh, puntôr, rân*; (Eng. *Wrath, sing, worker, sand*); (b) not only use long vowels, but also compensate for omitting an *ë* by elongating the vowel in the next syllable; (c) nasalise a

series of vowels that are heard as oral in the Tosk; (d) have omitted diphthongs *ue, ie, ye*, which were retained in Tosk (*ua, ie, ye*); and (e) assimilated consonant groups *mb, nd, ngj* në *m, n, nj (/ŋ)*" (Pipa, 2010, p. 24).

He goes one step further by accusing the Literary Commission for destroying the basic principle of the project. In other words, patriotic zeal prevailed over scientific strictness.

Formalisation of Tosk as standard Albanian

Today's standard Albanian was sanctioned at the Albanian Orthography Congress held in 1972 in Tirana. Given that its decisions were arbitrary, just like any other interference with the course of language is, there was a group of scholars that remained content with the conclusions of the Congress, while the other group, here more and there less, opposed the standard.

Even though "standard languages that are based on a single dialectal source (monocentric selection) are rare, and most standard language histories have been shaped by dialect levelling and koinéization" (Deumert, 2004, p. 2), the Albanian political authorities have decided to follow this rare way of standardisation. The desired *multiple ancestors* have been reduced in a structure of single dialect.

Though concessions to the Tosk were evident, during the process of standard Albanian language planning, or *literary Albanian*, as it was dubbed, the leaders of the official language circle were not satisfied yet. Led by the self-declared Marxist Androkli Kostallari, in the 1972 Congress, they pushed the elimination of the northern dialect from the social (official) life further, by formalising Tosk as standard Albanian. Those few Gheg elements that were affixed to the standard variant were rightly, considered to have a complementing and embellishing function.

Accordingly, when we speak of standard Albanian, it is completely anachronous to think of any synthesis or convergence of Albanian dialects, because Tirana language-political circles of the 70's have ignored the fact that the Literary Commission and the Congress of Lushnjë had already suggested Elbasanian as a basis for the unified Albanian and favoured the Tosk dialect. Urged to set the standard hastily, those circles have turned a blind eye to the observations of the most prominent linguists of the time in Albania, such as A. Xhuvani and E. Çabej.

Xhuvani, an opponent of *revolutionary* changes in the development of languages, "called the use of a Tosk ABC by the Gheg scholars "anti-pedagogical" and even "anti-physiological" as much as it impinges on their speaking mechanism in order for them to adapt to a phonetics for which it was produced" (Pipa, 2010, p. 168), whereas Çabej, whose formula was *diversity in unity*, has engaged in a continuous approximation of the two written dialects, a concept that was in utter conflict with the UAL Project of Kostallari and Shuteriqi and their Marxist-Leninist camaraderie. In a word, the suggested linguistic uniformity, distilled from different varieties was transformed into a political decision which had to sanction the official ideological discourse.

The favouring of Tosk, as Pipa maintains, has started with the "compilation of a writers' blacklist, most of whom were Gheg, dead or alive, and many of whom were executed or imprisoned for alleged crimes against the people, but, in fact, it was because of their resistance to or simple dislike for communism" (Pipa, 2010, p. 24).

Their discourse was blamed morally and politically by being excluded from the inner structural power within the new standard language. Moreover, "Stalin's policies of

Russiation of the SU, with Russian as its “zonal language”, have its miniature equivalent in the policy of Toskysation of Albanian language, under the slogan of “Unified Albanian Language (UAL)”, a policy that was actively promoted by Albanian communist leadership and totally by its number one leader, Enver Hoxha. The policy was set in motion tacitly, on the wake of communists’ advent to power. Literary Gheg was not cracked down immediately, so Gheg writers could keep on using their dialect for some time. Yet, Tosk was imposed as nation’s official language. Tosk is the dialect spoken by the majority of political bureau and central committee memberships, government administration members and senior officials, and is used in army and state security structures. Press in general and text books of all levels are in Tosk, which is also the language of the radio, television and media” (Idem, p. 162), Pipa resumes.

Instead of creating a language policy in which case “the language manager might be a legislative assembly writing a national constitution” (Spolsky, 2004, p. 8) and the language policy had to include “efforts to constrain what is considered bad language and to encourage what is considered good language” (Ibid, p. 8), the Congress of Orthography of 1972 was turned into a Language Court by converting the discourse of the Labour Party into official Albanian Language. To some point, as for other items, Albania followed the sample of the Soviet Union, where “the goals of the language planners and policy makers were far from transparent” (Grenoble, 2003, p. 26).

The Prestige of Standard and Ideology

Obviously, the rise of standard Albanian is characterised by paradoxes.

The already stabilised and almost standardised Albanian, especially from the late twenties to the early seventies of the last century, was neglected in favour of ideologically favoured Tosk variety of Albanian, sponsored by the Albania’s Labour Party and his leader, Enver Hoxha, in the Albanian Orthography Congress of 1972. This way, the ideological implication of the Tosk dialect became true through the identification with the regional background of a political leader. Despite the fact that language is larger than dialect, and the *variety* called *language* is expected to consist in broader linguistic units than just a dialect, that wasn’t the case with Albanian standard. Contradiction between “standard language” and “dialect” also relates to the issue of the higher prestige of the standard versus dialect and vernacular. The Albanian experienced a strong ideological engineering from the political level by turning this way the prestige of politics into prestige of Standard Language. Being pushed ideologically, *the new language*, the Albanian standard, eclipsed every intellectual professional opinion by saving for it the etiquette of *the reactionary*. A new discourse was coined, a new main register for ideological narratives as well; consequently, beside the grammatical standardization, a new denotative and connotative level of the Albanian has been suggested, all other systems of language were thrown away as unusual and conservative. The ideological level of the standard became the prestige of the Albanian standard at the same time.

The issue of the failure to learn the standard Albanian in the Gheg speaking areas in particular, should be sought in the very remoteness of this standard to the dialectal discourses, especially to the native Gheg forms in Northern Albania and Kosovo. But that has to do not only with *the individual behaviour of speakers*, but with the very *language structure* of the Albanian Gheg variety as well. Accordingly, in this context, it would be helpful to recall Roland Barthes, who used to make a clear distinction between the concepts of ‘language’ and ‘speaking’ by drawing the already classic conclusion: “There’s

no *Language* without *Speech*, and there's no *Speech* without *Language*. (Barthes, 1987, p. 98)

Simply, the Albanian standard lost the liaison/contact with the previous tradition, especially with speaking discourses within the Gheg area. While "apparently, every language consists of some units that mirror the social traits of the speaker and the listener and the relations between them" (Hudson, 2002, p. 137), the Albanian standard brought the social identity of the national language to the edge of acceptance and rejection from different audiences.

During this period of time (1945-1990) one of the ways in which the Albania's Labour Party sought to impose a communist landmark identity was through the language. The imposition of the unified language occurred as a political action that had promoted a new language policy in the spirit of *Lessons of the Party*. Especially after 1972, a strict government control was imposed over language matters in curricula, public discourses, textbooks, and literary textbooks as well. Despite declarative affirmations that the idiomatic discourse could be used for stylistic purposes, the use of Gheg was practically prohibited as a reactionary language identified with the poetic discourses of authors like Gjergj Fishta and Ernest Koliqi, who were banned and labelled as enemies of the reactionary class. Consequently, Gheg language was usually equivalent with their language. Finally, the language policy was built on the bases of language background. This language policy was mechanically transferred from Albania to the Former Yugoslavia to Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro where, under the rule of the country language policy, the language rifts "have long been both a symptom of ethnic animosity, and a cause for perpetuating and further inflaming ethnic tensions" (D.Greenberg, 2004, p. 13)

While, before 1945, the language policy was used as unifying national force for all Albanian speakers, from that year on ward, the unifying force of the standard Albanian was used for the ideological imposition of communist ideas.

Since the break-up of communist regime in Albania and the establishment of the UN protectorate in Kosovo, in 1999, new approaches toward the language policy were promoted in Kosovo in particular.

Conclusion

In the Appendix of his seminal novel 1984, George Orwell, through the magic of fiction, introduces the purpose of the dictatorship and, hence, the Party's language plans:

"The purpose of Newspeak was not only to provide a medium of expression for the world-view and mental habits proper to the devotees of Ingsoc, but also to make all other modes of thought impossible. It was intended that when Newspeak had been adopted once and for all and Old speak forgotten, a heretical thought – that is, a thought diverging from the principles of Ingsoc – should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words. Its vocabulary was constructed so as to give exact and often very subtle expression to every meaning that a Party member could properly wish to express, while excluding all other meanings and also the possibility of arriving at them by indirect methods. That was achieved partly by inventing new words, but mainly by eliminating words with dangerous meanings and, to the extent possible, by washing secondary meanings of any kind away from the remaining words!" (Orwell, 2005, p. 299)

Through his extraordinary fictional exposition, Orwell explores the relationships of language and thought, ideology and speaking. In a word, "Orwell's ideas are of the

greatest interest to those who are concerned with the nature of authority in language and with language prescription” (Milroy, 1999, p. 37).

The paradox of Albanian developments with regard to the process of language standardization are generated directly from the relationships of language and ideology. The ideological discourse and sensibility have overshadowed the terrestrial, open-minded process of standardization and its enriching and, a posteriori still tends to clench it as a frozen issue, *déjà résolue*. However, the ideological shadows of this discourse couldn't cover the rich arch from many other discursive sources, which remains vivid today, and have to come to account with new challenges of the standard language by adding many ignored sources still alive in the language of dialects and in the idiomatic discourses to it.

It is because of these old ideological shadows and new challenges in the field of everyday life communications that a new policy of Albanian language is imminent. For a while, it seems that Albanian will still remain at a crossroads.

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