

Agnia Desnickaja's contribution to the study of transitional speeches in Albanian language

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Summary

The main object of Russian albanologist Agnia Desnickaja's monograph "Albanian language and its dialects" is the study of Albanian language dialects, their contemporary division and classification and the relations with geographic and socio-historical range of development of Albanian language. Among other things, she draws an analytic review of dialectic characteristics in the speeches of transitional type, which form a streak of regions in the south stream of Shkumbin river (an indicator of boundary between gheg and tosk dialectic regions) known as the zone of transitional speeches. Distinctive characteristics, typical dialectic elements and their interlacement in these transitional speeches are analysed and classified by the author based on assessments of researches of Albanian dialectologists, such as J. Gjinari, Q. Haxhihasani, M. Çeliku, also persuasively reasoned by the author herself. Careful and profound research of these speeches done by Desnickaja helped not only to identify gheg and tosk characteristic features localized in these areas, but also to study the most complex occurrences related to their formation that reflect historic, cultural and social developments which are decisive for Albanian dialects themselves.

Key words: *transitional speeches, gheg vocalism, tosk rhotacism, contamination of dialectic characteristics, borrowings.*

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Introduction

Dealing with transitional speeches in Desnickaja's monograph "Albanian language and its dialects" (1972) is considered by the author herself as very interesting in the linguistic aspect with major importance for the domain of historic dialectology. Therefore, the interlacement of the characteristics of the two dialects is identified as a universal feature for all speeches of this transitional area, which impedes defining basic influences of one or the other type in their creation.¹

In order to identify restrictive factors, Desnickaja made reference to researches of some Albanian scholars, such as J. Gjinari, Q. Haxhihasani, M. Çeliku, stating that "they have given a clear synopsis of the linguistic type, which was formed in the boundary of two basic dialectic regions".² Based on these data, she emphasizes the geographic position of these regions, economic and administrative relations, influence of town centres (of Elbasan, Peqin, Berat) and the movement and mixing of population, as historic defining factors "of creation of specific linguistic land-shaft".³

The speech of Myzeqe region

Desnickaja begins the analysis and categorization of these speeches from the western periphery with the wide plain of Myzeqe, stretching out along the Adriatic seacoast, in the border between the lower flow of Shkumbin in the north and Vjosa in the south. Aiming to display the main elements of the two dialects, interlocked in the speech of this transitional

¹ Agnia Desnickaja, *Gjuha shqipe dhe dialektet e saj*, Prishtinë, Enti i teksteve dhe i mjeteve mësimore, 1972, p.184.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

region, Desnickaja puts into perspective the tosk character of the southern part in contrast to the northern part, which is characterized by a gradual increase of gheg dialectic elements with a tendency to spread from south to north.⁴

Lushnje is precisely the town which marks the area where the characteristic elements of transitional speech of the region are demonstrated, typifying the speech in the north and the northeast of town, which geographically connect with gheg regions of the south on the other bank of Shkumbin river, as a speech of south gheg.⁵

Opposite a number of specific gheg occurrences, that characterize the speech of northern periphery of Myzeqe dialectic region, such as : 1) the nasality of vowels in emphatic position: *frê, pê, hî, ullî, hûnna, gjû*; 2) the monophthongization of diphthongs *ue>û, ye>ÿ, ie>î*: *dûr* (<duer), *grû* (<grue), *fÿll* (<fyell), *dill* (<diell); 3) the consecutive assimilation *mb>n, nd>n*: *mush* (<mbush), *pamuku* (<pambuku), *naloj* (<ndaloj); 4) the group *vo-* in the beginning of the word: *voj* (in middle toskë *vaj*), *vorr* (t. varr), *votër* (t. vatër), *i vorfën* (t. i varfër); 5) the lack of rhotacism: *ullîni* (kr.t. ulliri), *gruni* (t. gruri), *dimni* (t. dimëri); 6) the shifting of accent from the last syllable to the penultimate syllable in nouns borrowed from Turkish language: *téqe* (t. teqé), *híle* (t. hilé), ecj., Desnickaja presents typical influential elements of tosk speech, which coexist with gheg forms in parallel variants, for example: 1) the presence of diphthong *ua* of tosk alongside forms with *-u(û)*, which was gained from the old diphthong *-ue* : *thu//thua, gru//grua, mu//mua*; 2) the group *va-* (characteristics for tosk speech) along the group *-vo* in the beginning of the word: *vor, votër, i vokët* and at the same time *varr, vaj, i varfër*; 3) the appearance of rhotacism, that arises as a

⁴ Jorgji Gjinari, *Të folmet e Myzeqesë*, Bul. Univ., No.4, 1958, pp. 76-84, according to A. Desnickaja, p.185.

⁵ Ibid.

consequence of great influence of tosk speech, not only in nouns: *kalliri* (g. *kallini*), *trari* (g. *trani*), but also in participles with suffix-*r* (historically -*n*): *bredhur* (<*bredh*), *prishur* (<*prish*), *ardhur* (<*vij*) etc. In parallel, the author emphasizes also the use of unrhotacistic gheg forms: *dimën* (t. *dimër*), *e shkurtën* (t. *e shkurtër*), *gjilpana* (t. *gjilpëra*) etc.

The speech of Dumre region

The intertwined characteristics of this transitional region are gradually deteriorated towards the south to be entirely replaced by tosk dialectal elements. While respecting and evaluating, as ever, the introductions and results of Albanian dialectologists, Desnickaja continues to unfold and reason the features of integral regions of this transitional strip with characteristics of the speech of Dumre region, which borders with river Shkumbin in the north, region of Shpat in the east, Sulova in the southeast and with the region of Lushnje in the west. Referring to M. Çeliku,⁶ she qualifies the speech of this region as typical gheg, but subdued to great tosk influences. The same phonetic phenomena typical for gheg dialectal zone appear also in this speech, but, as pointed out by Desnickaja, "this typical semblance for south gheg dialectal zone is shattered by the occurrences entering from the tosk speech owing to permanent contacts of Dumre region with inhabitants of southern regions".⁷ Alongside borrowed words and forms, the author motives the infiltration of these phonetic features as a result of influence of foreign dialectal circle and not as an internal evolution of the sound system, exhibiting a state of

⁶ Mehmet Çeliku, *Vërejtje mbi të folmen e Dumresë*, Bul. Univ., Nr.3, 1963, p.234, according to Desnickaja, *Gjuha shqipe dhe...*, p.186.

⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

instability which is expressed in the presence of a great number of phonetic doublets and in the great variety of pronunciation.⁸

In vocalization domain, Desnickaja emphasizes the unsuitable position of vowel *ū*- in cases of derivation from monophthongization of old gheg diphthong (*ue<*uo*), which in Dumrea speech, especially in areas where natives have frequent contacts with tosk dialectic circle, appears as pronounced in tosk variant of the comprehensive Albanian diphthong (*ua<*uo*). While as far as the rhotacistic tosk forms are concerned, they appear in parallel with unrhotacistic gheg forms, such as: *dimri//dimni, emri//emni*. Also, some other nouns can be noticed that preserve the sonant *r* in the indefinite, whereas they form the definite form with the sonant consonant *n*, for example: *dimër, drapër-dimni, drapni*.⁹

In the morphology domain, intercrossing of dialectic features appears through participles, which have a great influence in the listing of dialectic differences. The type of participle with suffix *-m* joined with a vowel is seen in the speech of Dumrea (and other gheg speeches): *fillūm, hēm, shkūm, kalūm etc.* Also, the participles with zero suffix appear as characteristic of gheg dialect, especially in the structure of analytic forms: *kam kalū, kam kallzū, kam shkū etc.* Beside these, Desnickaja highlights also the presence of general participles of Albanian, which are formed from the base form in consonant with suffix *-un*: *hequn, mshtjellun etc.* This suffix, according to the author, can be joined with participles that are formed by means of suffix *-m* in the course of analogue movement with other collocations, which as a results forms the new suffix *-mun* : *kërkumun* (<*kërkoj*), *shkumun* (<*shkoj*). The forms with *-un* (and the respective forms with *-mun*), are exactly the ones which are subjected to the

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., p. 188.

powerful influence of rhotacistic tosk forms with the same suffix, replacing the gheg participle forms with forms of tosk type: *hapur* (<hap), *varur* (<var), *vdekur* (<vdes), *mushur* (<mbush), *çuditur* (<çuditem). Desnickaja brings attention to the forms of gheg vocalism by way of very interesting examples of “contamination of different dialectic features”¹⁰ (*u*): *kërkūr*, *fillūr*, preserved during the tosk rhotacism of suffix (comp. *kërkuar*, *filluar*).

The speech of Sulova region

The research conducted by Desnickaja continues its course towards Sulova region, which stretches out in the southeast of Dumrea and is divided from it by river Devoll. While the speech of Dumrea is typified as a gheg speech, the speech of Sulova region is defined as a tosk speech, which under the influence of coherent contacts with Elbasan manifests a host of attributed of gheg dialectic circle. Clearly, these features are expressed in the northern zone of this dialectic territory with a tendency of the gradual disappearance from the north to the south.¹¹

Divided in two dialectic areas, owing to typical and individual peculiarities as an outcome of material, spiritual and lingual relations with Elbasan (northern zone) and with Berat (southern zone), Sulova region shows “a state of instability in its core, precisely where the dialectic influences of north and south are intertwined, resulting with an apparent variety of speech”.¹² Particularities of tosk in Sulova speech that eluded contamination by gheg forms are: 1) the consecutive realization

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Qemal Haxhihasani, *Një vështrim mbi të folmen e krahinës së Sulovës*. Bul. Shk. Shoq., No.3, 1955, p.170, according to Desnickaja, p.189.

¹² Ibid.

of rhotacism (historically *-n->-r-*); 2) the lack of nasality of vowels; 3) the presence of group *-va* in the beginning of the word: *varr, vaj, vatër*.

The preservation of old diphthongs in Sulova type of speech is found as a characteristic tosk peculiarity. Therefore, opposite the old Albanian diphthong *uo*, which in this kind of speech appears in tosk variant *ua*: *grua, thua, mua* etc., Desnickaja places the participle forms of first conjugation verbs, in the northern region, where the diphthong *ua* is not pronounced but it is replaced with the vowel *ū*: *punūr* (<punoj), *kërkūr* (<kërkoj). According to the author, these forms are a typical produce of contamination of tosk dialectic features with gheg features, perhaps as a consequence of borrowing from transitional speeches of Dumrea and Shpat regions, neighbouring with Sulova region.¹³ Moreover, Desnickaja aligns other phonetic features influential to gheg realms, for example:

a) the groups *mb, nd* in northern part are reduced to *m* and *n* (feature of gheg dialectic type);

b) the phenomena of transition of *h-së* to *-f* : *shoh>shof, nxeh>nxef* etc. is noticed in the northern zone, as a result of intensive contacts with gheg dialectic circle;

c) the vowel *o*, the pronunciation of which is scrutinised as an intermediate stage in gradual development from the nasal vowel *ã* of gheg toward the tosk vowel *-ë* : *boj* (g.let. *bâj*, t. *bëj*), *asht* (g.let. *âsht*, t. *është*), *koma* (g.let. *kâmba*, t. *këmba*), *fëlloza* (g.let. *fëllânza*, t. *thëllëza*).¹⁴

Furthermore, as characteristic elements of gheg influence, due to contacts with Elbasan region, besides phonetic features in Sulova speech, Desnickaja puts into perspective the lexical alterations of the northern part, such as: *sqokë, sqilë, qete*,

¹³ Ibid., p. 190.

¹⁴ Ibid.

xham opposed to forms such as *klločkë*, *dhelpër*, *mace*, *poçe*, used in the southern part of this region.¹⁵

The characteristics of speeches of regions stretching along the flow of Shkumbin river

The panorama of speeches of transitional areas is supplemented with the distinctive features of speeches of regions that stretch along the flow of river Shkumbin: Shpat, Vërçë, Polis and Bërzhishte. Referring to Q.Haxhihasani's¹⁶ conclusions in research of the features of these speeches, Desnickaja emphasizes the presence of contaminated forms as a characteristic feature of Shpat, Polis, Vërçë and Bërzhishte speeches. Thus, the forms with *tosk* rhotacism are encountered in Bërzhishte region, but preserving the typical vocalism of *gheg*: *râra* (g.let. *râna*, t.rërë), *shullâr* (g.let. *shullâni*, t.*shullëri*). In Shpat and Vërçë, as well as in Sulova, prevail the participles of type *pamûr*, *kërkûr*, encountered also in the speech of Dumrea as characteristic examples of contamination of dialectic features, typical for transitional speeches. The intertwined characteristics in the speech of Polis are presented rather contrarily, which encounters the use of participles of type *punuam*, *luftuam*, where the *tosk* diphthong *ua* is followed by *gheg* suffix *-m*.¹⁷

Also, in order to accomplish the synopsis of development of distinctive dialectic features, Desnickaja, quoting M. Lambertzin,¹⁸ aligns mixed elements of the speech of Shpat region, as follows:

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 191.

¹⁶ Q. Haxhihasani, *Një vështrim mbi të folmen e krahinës së Sulovës*, p.147, according to Desnickaja, p. 191.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ M. Lambertz, *Albanische Märchen*, Akad. D. Wiss, in Wien, Abt.XII, Wien, 1922, p. 203, according to Desnickaja, p. 191.

- a) the presence of oscillations in pronunciation of tosk diphthong *ua* and gegë *û* in the word *grua*: *grua* / *gruja*;
- b) the assimilation *mb>m*, *nd>n*;
- c) the rhotacistic form *ere*, along forms *ene*, *ne*;
- d) the group *va-* in the beginning of the word.

In conclusion of analysis of transitional speeches, Agnia Desnickaja finds that “speeches of Shpat, Polis, Vërçë and Bërzhisht regions show same characteristic features of mixing dialectic peculiarities and transitional speeches of Myzeqe, Dumrea and Sulova”.¹⁹ The author, fully convinced, evidences that the gradual development of different dialectic peculiarities in speeches of the aforementioned realm is not something which is organically congenital, but it is historically developed as a result of continual contacts and mutual influence in concrete historic circumstances.²⁰

Conclusions

The zone of transitional speeches comprises of a number of speeches, which show an interlacement of the features of both dialectic types. By means of description and comparison, Agnia Desnickaja, has analysed the speeches of constituent regions of this dialectic descent while stressing out gheg or tosk dialectic base of each region, where the typical influential elements of one or another dialect cohabitate.

Hence, in analysing the individual dialectic features, Desnickaja point out that:

- a) Myzeqe region is characterized by tosk dialectic features in the south and by gheg dialectic in the north. The town of Lushnje marks the oasis of demonstration of influential features

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 192.

of tosk speech, alongside parallel gheg variants. The phenomena of dialectic intertwinement are: 1) the presence of tosk diphthong *ua* alongside gheg forms with *-u(ū)*; 2) the group *va-* alongside group *-vo-* in the beginning of the word; 3) the appearance and use of tosk rhotacistic forms in parallel with gheg unrhotacistic forms.

b) Dumrea region manifests its speech as typical gheg, but strongly influenced by tosk elements. Desnickaja views the presence of these features as the result of the foreign dialectic circle and not as an internal evolutionary phonetic peculiarity. In this speech, besides the instability of vowel *ū* and the presence of rhotacism parallel to unrhotacistic forms, contaminated participial forms can also be encountered, which have a decisive role in identifying various dialectic differences.

c) Sulova region is classified as a tosk speaking zone. This region's centre marks the crossing point of north-south dialectic influences showing the state of instability, which results with an apparent speech variety. Desnickaja evidences the gheg influence in this speech with the presence of phonetic and lexical elements.

d) In relation to features found in regions of Shpat, Polis, Vërçë and Bërzhishte, entirely supporting Albanian dialectologists' achievements, Desnickaja affirms the presence of contaminated forms putting these regions' speeches in parallel, according to influential dialectic features, with transitional speeches of Myzeqe, Dumrea and Sulova.

In analysing the characteristics of these speeches, Agnia Desnickaja manages to draw a synopsis of the research accomplishments of that era in the domain of historic dialectology, which emphasize the characteristic identifying features of this linguistic type, historically created in the border of two basic dialectic regions, which an important part of linguistic areal of today's Albanian.

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