

The Twentieth Century Politics of Neologisms and Toponyms in the Albanian Language

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Abstract—This study analyses the political reasons behind the introduction of neologisms and new toponyms by the two most powerful Albanian rulers during the twentieth centuries, Ahmet Zogu and Enver Hoxha. The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach which combines linguistic, political and historical analysis, with selected reference to anthropological and folkloristic research. The analysis is based on a thorough review of scientific literature and official documents and periodic publications related to new toponyms and new words in the twentieth century. Zogu imposed his will for the use of new words and toponyms in all official correspondence and publications. By the end of his rule, he requested the change of more than 50% of toponyms. Hoxha followed suit after Zogu, however, most of the neologisms introduced by them with a top-down approach did not survive their rule. The toponyms introduced by Zogu were rescinded after he fled Albania, whereas the toponyms introduced by Enver Hoxha are still officially in use, but common people use most of the old toponyms in their daily parlance. Language is almost like a living thing, that grows and changes organically by the interactions of millions of cells – the people that speak and write it.

Index Terms—neologisms, toponyms, the politics of language

I. INTRODUCTION

The Albanian language is very different from languages spoken in Albania's surrounding countries – Greece, Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Italy and Türkiye. According to Eqrem Çabej, the late Albanian etymologist, the Albanian language's roots can be found in ancient Illyrian tribes' languages, spoken in the lands where the modern Albanian language is currently spoken (Çabej, 1977). However, due to a very long history of domination from Romans, Byzantines, Slavic kingdoms and Ottoman Turks, there are many words in the Albanian lexicon borrowed from their languages. Many borrowed words and toponyms are still active in the Albanian language. However, since Albanian Independence in 1912, some old borrowed toponyms have been changed and new words have appeared (and disappeared) – due to changes in political currents. This political process of replacing old words and toponyms with new ones, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, started in the period after the First World War and intensified after the Second World War.

Two political strong men in Albania – Ahmet Zogu in the period between the two World Wars and Enver Hoxha after the Second World War – made enormous attempts at introducing new words and toponyms during their reign.

Zogu, made his first attempt since 1923, when he was a young Minister of Interior, requesting from prefectures under his jurisdiction to replace some old villages names with new names rooted in the Albanian language (Clayer, 2008). Although his first initiative failed, Zogu signalled early on a desire to break Albania from the past backwardness through political intervention from top to bottom (Lampe, 1989). Once Zogu became the President of Albania, he started a wide array of reforms aiming at centralizing and modernizing the country (Fischer, 1996). He fashioned himself as a modernizer in the mould of President Atatürk of Türkiye (Glenny, 2000). And after becoming The King of Albanians, Zogu followed the example of other contemporary kings in the Balkans, by adopting fierce nationalistic policy toward neighbouring countries (Castellan, 1992).

Returning to his old idea of changing toponyms, using administrative ways, Zogu created in 1927 special commissions under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior and the General Directorate of Education (Clayer, 2008). After a ten-year period of work by the commissions created by Zogu, in 1937 a law was passed by the Albanian Parliament that officially replaced some old toponyms with new Albanized ones, with fines imposed on persons that would use the old toponyms in official documents and correspondence (Çepani & Rushiti, 2012).

In addition to changing toponyms, Ahmet Zogu imposed his will for replacing old words (mainly of Turkish and Greek origin) with new words based on Albanian roots or borrowed from western languages. For the new words, he did not create special commissions. Instead, he relied heavily on the literary works of Albanian Renaissance writers and their linguistic and anthropologic contributions (Kulla, 2019; Çabej, 2014).

Indeed, as soon as becoming the Minister of Interior in 1923, Zogu ordered all the prefectures to use new words in their official verbal and written communications and documents, and requested the help of schools and churches to spread the use of new Albanian words (Clayer, 2007). Zogu even coined a new word construct himself after becoming King of Albanians: *Naltmadhnia e Tij, Mbreti* (a creative translation of the words His Highness, The King, into his native northern dialect).

Differently from Ahmet Zogu, Enver Hoxha, who ruled Albania after the Second World War, was driven by geopolitical alliances in imposing his will on changing toponyms and using new words. Zogu tried to use new toponyms and new words as one of the tools for breaking from the cultural influence of the long Ottoman rule and the interventions of neighbouring countries. Whereas Hoxha used toponyms and neologisms as tools for forging new geopolitical alliances or for breaking old ones. The first and the most glaring example is the name he chose in December 1950 for the old town of Kuçovë: “Qyteti Stalin” – Stalin Town (Kuvendi i Shqipërisë 1950). In doing so, Hoxha was following the example of many communist strong men, who for geopolitical reasons named some towns/cities after Stalin (the powerful communist dictator of former USSR at that time).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODS

This study adopts an interdisciplinary approach which combines linguistic, political and historical analysis, with selected reference to anthropological and folkloristic research. The analysis is based on a thorough review of scientific literature and official documents and periodic publications related to new toponyms and new words in the twentieth century.

The literature review was not limited only on publications related to the Albanian language, but also other languages in Eastern Europe. Ion Nicolae’s scientific paper “*Changes of Romanian place names during the communist era*” (Nicolae, 2001) was very helpful for a Romanian perspective of the same phenomenon analysed in this study. Similarly like in Albania, there are two periods of Romanian modern history during which place names have been changed on a wide scale. The first was in the decades following independence up to the Second World War. The second, when the replacement of traditional place names was most widespread, was during the communist period (1948-1989).

Cătălina Iliescu-Gheorghiu’s scientific paper “*Propaganda and cultural diplomacy through translation in communist Romania. A case in Point: Romanian review*” (Iliescu-Gheorghiu, 2019) was helpful with its analysis of special words used during Ceausescu’s rule in order to further the communist propaganda abroad. In the same vein, helpful was also Tom Dickins’ scientific paper “*The Political Slogan in Communist Czechoslovakia (1948-89)*” (Dickins, 2017), which highlights examples that illuminate the development of new words and slogans used by the Czechoslovak communist government for distributing the “new communist” narrative.

Books by Chirot (eds. 1989), Castellán (1992), Fischer (1996), Glenny (2000), Abrahams (2015) and Kulla (2019) were consulted for the contextual historical, linguistic and anthropologic background of neologisms and new toponyms that were introduced in the twentieth century in Albania.

Scientific papers from Clayer (2007, 2008) were consulted for their account of political developments that brought about changes in toponyms and words during the reign of Ahmet Zogu. The scientific paper by Çepani and Rushiti (2012) was consulted for its chronologic account of changes in toponyms in the first 100 years of the Albanian state. The scientific paper by Çabej (2014) was consulted for its account of ideologically driven neologisms introduced in the Albanian language during the twentieth century.

Full collections of the daily newspaper “Zëri i Popullit” (the official mouthpiece of the Party of Labour of Albania) for years 1957 and 1970 were analysed for neologisms influenced by the close geopolitical relations of Albania with former USSR and later with communist China.

Full collections of the daily newspaper “Rilindja Demokratike” (the official newspaper of the new opposition Democratic Party of Albania) for years 1991 and 1992 were consulted for a comparison between neologisms used during the communist regime and afterwards.

III. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Before Ahmet Zog became the Interior Minister of Albania (the most powerful post in the country at that time, even more powerful than the post of Prime Minister), Albanian Renaissance writers and thinkers had been working on creating and familiarizing new words of Albanian or western origin that would replace old words of Turkish origin in the Albanian language lexicon (Kulla, 2019). Some examples included *dritare* (window) derived from the root *drita* (light – implying an object that allows the light in), *rruga* (street), *bashki* (township), *prefekturë* (prefecture), *komunë* (commune), *kryetar bashkie* (mayor), *prefekt* (chief of prefecture), *kryetar komunë* (chief of commune), *kryeplak* (chief of the village), *gjykatws* (judge), *xhandar* (gendarme), etc. These words were intended to replace old words of Turkish origin like *penxhere*, *xhade*, *vilajet*, *sanxhak*, *m i d i r l u k*, *kaza*, *nahije*, *bejlerb e bimbash*, *kadi*, etc.

However, only after Zogu became the Minister of Interior in 1923, the use of the new Albanian words in circulations became mandatory in all official documents and correspondence (until then old words were intermittently used aside the new words). In addition, all Albanian publications of the time followed suit, although no official orders were issued for them (Fischer, 1996).

In additions to efforts for introducing new words, Zogu made his first attempt in 1923 to introduce new toponyms, requesting from prefectures under his jurisdiction to replace some old villages names with new names rooted in the Albanian language. However, the most contentious toponym was the one for the town of Gjirokastra (Clayer, 2008).

Gjirokastra was the biggest town in the south of the newly created Albanian state and it had a special historical and political significance, because it had served during the First World War as the capital of an autonomous statelet created

by Greek occupying forces with the help Greek-Albanians of the region known by Greeks as *Vorio Epir* (Northern Epir). According to the Greek-Latin etymologic interpretation the name *Gjirokastra* was derived by the Greek word *argyro* (silver-like) and the Latin word *kastro* (castle). On the other hand, Albanian activists tried to give an Albanian interpretation of the name *Gjirokastra*. In the first number of the local paper there in Albanian (March 27, 1920), its publisher Veli Harshova wrote that the real name of *Gjirokastra* is *Gjinokastra* and was derived by the Latin word *kastro* and the name of the former Albanian lord Gjin Shpata – thus *Gjino-kastra* = *the castle of Gjin* (Clayer, 2008).

Another interpretation for the name *Gjirokastra* was given by Teki Selenica, who cited old unverified legends which indicated that the ancient Queen Argjiro had built an old castle where today lies the current castle. Thus, *Gjirokastra* = the castle of Argjiro (Selenica, 1927).

However, Zog went with Harshova's interpretation, because it fitted with the Elbasani dialect (the official dialect at that time), in which the soft *r* in *Gji(r)okastra* turned into soft *n* and it was also different from the Greek version for the name of the town. From 1923 until 1939 (the year King Zog fled Albania), the name *Gjinokastra* was used instead of *Gjirokastra* in all official documents and correspondence, in school texts and in all publications.

In the highly sensitive region of Himara, where both Albanian and Greek languages were spoken, the commission created by Zogu for toponyms suggested that existing names of the villages should be slightly changed, to conform with the names of mountains or churches in the area. Only the name of *Dh ërmi* was completely changed into *Gjilek ë* after the name of one neighbourhood there called *GjinLek ë* named after an old family that had settled there from Kruja, after its occupation from the Ottomans in the 15th century (Clayer, 2008).

As mentioned above, using administrative ways, Zogu created in 1927 special commissions under the umbrella of the Ministry of Interior and the General Directorate of Education. After a ten-year period of work by the commissions created by Zogu, in 1937 a law was passed by the Albanian Parliament that officially replaced some old toponyms with new Albanized ones, with fines imposed on persons that would use the old toponyms in official documents and correspondence. That decision appeared in the the Official Book of Laws only on 26 August 1938 and requested that local governments changed the names of more than 50% of settlements in the country, including towns, neighbourhoods and villages (Çepani & Rushiti, 2012). However, with the occupation of Albania from Italy in April 1939, that decision was rescinded. During that occupation, only one toponym was changed – the town of Saranda was briefly called "*Porto Edda*" in honour of the eldest daughter of Benito Mussolini.

As mentioned above, differently from Ahmet Zogu, Enver Hoxha, who ruled Albania after the Second World War, was driven by geopolitical alliances in imposing his will on changing toponyms and using new words. Hoxha used toponyms and neologisms as tools for forging new geopolitical alliances or for breaking old ones. The first change of toponyms was that of December 1950 for the old town of Kuçova, which became "*Qyteti Stalin*" (Stalin Town) (Kuvendi i Shqip ëris ë 1950). Hoxha was following the example of many communist strong men, who for geopolitical reasons named some towns/cities after Stalin (the powerful communist dictator of former USSR at that time).

Six cities/towns were named after Stalin in former USSR and six more were named after him in countries under the soviet umbrella at that time. Thus, in former USSR, Caricin was named Stalingrad (1925-1961) and later Volgograd, Novo Kuznetsk was named Stalinsk (1932-1961), C'hinvall was named Staliniri (1934-1961), Novo Moskovsk was named Stalino (1924-1961), Doneck was called Stalino (1924-1961), and Dushanbe was named Stalinabad (1929-1961). In other countries, Eisenh üttenstadt (former East Germany) was named Stalinstadt (1953-1961), Braşov (Romania) was named Oraşul Stalin (1950-1960), Kuçova (Albania) was named Qyteti Stalin (1950-1990), Katowice (Poland) was named Stalino (1953-1956), Varna (Bulgaria) was named Stalin (1949-1956), and Dunaujv áros (Hungary) was named Szt álnv áros (1952-1961).

On December 21, 1951, celebrating the birthday of Stalin, Hoxha's government named the state construction company "*21 dhjetori*" (21 December) and the whole neighbourhood where its headquarters were located was named the same. Even to this day, although that name doesn't officially exist any longer, in everyday parlance people still call informally that neighbourhood "*21 dhjetori*" or short *21-shi* (the 21st).

After Enver Hoxha broke relations with former USSR in 1961, the work started for changing toponyms of Slavic origin, that work was finalized with the decisions of the Parliament in 1970 for changing the names of some villages in the districts of Durr ë, Tiran ë and Kor çë (Kuvendi i Shqip ëris ë 1970), in 1971 for changing the names of some villages in the districts of Durr ë, Librazhd, Pogradec, Tiran ë Shkod ër, Kor çë, and Fier (Kuvendi i Shqip ëris ë 1971), in 1972 for changing the names of some villages in the districts of Pogradec, Shkod ër, Vlor ë dhe Tepelen ë (Kuvendi i Shqip ëris ë 1972), in 1974 for changing the names of some villages in the districts of Gramsh, Dib ër, Lushnj ë Mirdit ë Pogradec, and Tiran ë (Kuvendi i Shqip ëris ë 1974), in 1975 for changing the names of some villages in the districts of Kor çë and Sarand ë (Kuvendi i Shqip ëris ë 1975). In addition to geopolitical reason, some changes in the toponyms were driven by religious reasons, since Albania was officially declared an atheist state in 1967.

Çepani and Rushiti (2012) provide an extensive list of the toponyms changed during those years by Hoxha. Here are some examples:

Alet - Kastriot (neighbourhood in Beratit); Ymer Pash ë - Vrioni (neighbourhood in Beratit); Alibejani - Aliaj (Lushnj ë); Frakulla Abdyl Bej - Frakulla e Vog ë (Fier.); Kurtagai - Kurtaj (Diber); Krajka - Krek ëza (Diber); Sepetova - Gropaj (Diiber); Zhuraj Ndroqi - Ndroqi (Durrës.); Shehaligaj - Shesh - Lugaj (Durrës); Irratha - Hamallaj (Durrës); Karavelije - Gurabardhi (Elbasan); Samotina - Bardhaj (Librazhd); Pobregu - Bregu (Puke); Mejdan - Sheshaj (Mirdite.);

Shaban Efendis - Shabanaj (Shkoder.); Milaxhi - Malas (Dukagjin); Arez - Arsti (Puke.); Budina - Verri (Vlore.); Munushtiri - Manastiri (Permetr.) etc.

The new toponyms introduced during Enver Hoxha's reign survived officially after the fall of communism, with exception of *Qyteti Stalin*, which was changed back to its old name *Kuçova* (Kuvendi i Shqipërisë 1991). However, due to centuries-old traditions, most of the old toponyms are in use in the everyday parlance of common people. The top-down changes have not been accepted by the wide populace.

The close relation of Enver Hoxha with former USSR until 1961 and later with Communist China brought about an influx of neologisms in the official Albanian language. Unlike the nationalist-romantic ideology of the Albanian Renaissance, the communist ideology was not the dominant ideology of elites, but was imported from a limited number of individuals who had worked or studied outside Albania. Thus, it failed to become naturally the dominant ideology of society, but was imposed on it by the Communist Party, which took over the reins of the state and ran it for half a century. Notably, the writings of Albanian scholars had the tendency to glorify the contribution of Enver Hoxha as the founder of language policy (Munishi, 2018).

In order to maintain power and strengthen it, the Communist Party imposed on the whole society the recognition and embrace of communist ideology. Also, in all the activity of Albanian society, in all fields of science, literature and art, communist ideology was imposed as their compass. Communist ideology exercised its influence and intervened in the Albanian language both in terms of theoretical and some practical issues. During the half-century of communist rule, words were borrowed (adapting the spelling and grammatical norms of the Albanian Language) and a series of new words were created that were in function of state propaganda or the definition of description of specific phenomena. These words were also reflected in the dictionaries of the Albanian language, especially in the Dictionary of today's Albanian language, of 1980.

In previous dictionaries, especially in 1954, a good deal of ideologically-driven words was missing. However, like all words that enter and act in language because of the influence of a particular ideology, whether it is the ideology of elites or imposed ideology, so the words borrowed and created during the communist rule failed to survive after the fall of the dictatorship of the proletariat. At the time, words and phrases were created where these words were part of the structure of the word, such as: agitprop, actionist (action spirit), face-side (fore-party), emulation (angle of emulation, table emulation), leaflet, organization-base, plan-task, city-hero, snow, etc. From the point of view of word form, most of the words created under the influence of communist ideology were compound words, because this very way of word forming is quite prolific in Albanian and with increasing tendencies and because through it are called complex notions and many new notions. These words found widespread use in languages as long as communist ideology survived. Then, with the fall of the dictatorship, their use began to fade and today they are almost no longer used, at least in daily parlance, or are used in conditional contexts.

An analysis of the full collection of the daily newspaper "Zëri i Popullit" (the official mouthpiece of the Party of Labour of Albania) for the year 1957 revealed that there were 63 words that were borrowed literally from USSR or were adopted with slight morphologic changes. Meanwhile, an analysis of the full collection of the daily newspaper "Zëri i Popullit" for the year 1970 revealed that there were 14 words that were translated literally from Communist China with slight morphologic adaptations. With the fall of Communism, the sweeping changes that were made in Albania included changes in the official and spoken language (Abrahams, 2015). An analysis of the full collection of the first year of the daily newspaper "Rilindja Demokratike" (the first opposition newspaper after 45 years of communist dictatorship) revealed that the previously imported words from former USSR and China were no longer in circulation in 1991.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study was narrowly focused on neologisms and new toponyms in the Albanian language in the twentieth century, driven by the politics of two strong men – Ahmet Zogu and Enver Hoxha. It did not cover the full scope of lexical, morphological and syntactical changes in the literary language due to ideological influences since the Albanian Renaissance. For an analysis of the influences of the nationalist-romantic ideology of the Albanian Renaissance see Çabej (2014). For an analysis of the influences of the communist ideology after The Second World War see Munishi (2018).

V. CONCLUSION

As the experience of other Eastern European countries have shown, most neologisms and toponyms forced for political reasons on the Albanian language have not survived. Two political strong men in Albania – Ahmet Zogu in the period between the two World Wars and Enver Hoxha after the Second World War – made enormous attempts at introducing new words and toponyms during their reign. However, most of the neologisms introduced by them with a top-down approach did not survive their rule. The toponyms introduced by Zogu were rescinded after he fled Albania, whereas the toponyms introduced by Enver Hoxha are still officially in use, but common people use most of the old toponyms in their daily parlance. Language is almost like a living thing, that grows and changes organically by the interactions of millions of cells – the people that speak and write it.

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