

USE OF ALBANIAN LANGUAGE IN INFORMATION BOARDS FOR CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE SITES: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

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ABSTRACT

In the previous decade, there were no information boards in the areas of cultural and natural heritage. Their absence brought confusion and often wrong orientation of the tourist or traveller. Placing guides and information boards in areas and objects of cultural and natural heritage are part of the projects of state institutions, as well as of non-profit organizations that operate in that field or in that area.

In the present days, the situation seems to have improved, but one issue that can easily be distinguished is the lack of responsibility towards the mother tongue and its incorrect use. Descriptions of cultural and natural heritage objects are often accompanied by vague information. The low level of description observed in the language used affects the transmission of poor information about the object, not properly highlighting its special values.

In all cases, the tables are drawn up by educated employees. In this article, we will analyse the facts that lead to this phenomenon and try to identify whether these employees lack knowledge of properly writing the Albanian language, or if there is a lack of editing service, if this activity is carried out hastily, therefore irresponsibly. In all cases, the institution is poorly presented both in the eyes of the Albanian and foreign public, causing a negative image in the eyes of tourists. Correcting the mistakes is not easy, as it requires a double investment. Spelling mistakes and as a result often wrong informative orientation, remain there, misread over the years by thousands of visitors, thus bringing a negative impact on our cultural tourism.

At cultural and natural heritage sites, orientation and information boards on the values of these areas have been installed, mainly in the last 10 years. Many of them are written with spelling mistakes, are poorly designed or provide incomplete information. Meanwhile, there is still a need to place information boards on Albanian cultural and natural heritage sites. Their absence still causes confusion and often wrong orientation of the tourist or traveller.

Keywords: spelling mistakes, signs, negative image, tourism, institutions

INTRODUCTION

The placement of guide and information boards in areas and objects of cultural and natural heritage are part of the projects of state institutions, as well as non-profit associations operating in this field or area. However, even if they are placed by non-profit organizations, they are approved by the institution that manages and administers the area. Thus, the National Agency of Protected Areas manages sites with natural heritage values, the Institute of Cultural Heritage manages cultural sites, and in some cases, they are also managed by the respective municipality.

Heritage sites contain a wide range of characteristics and a spectrum of values that make them unique, which brings the need to preserve them, to conserve them untouched by urban development, possibly climate change. They are important both for local communities and for the wider European community. The placement of the information

panels and the correct and complete description of their values is the responsibility of the administrative institutions of the sites.

A complete and accurate description of objects and places of cultural and natural heritage is their added value, it is good marketing and image in the eyes of tourists. An accurate description leads to a successful awareness of the public and local communities, who are the main guardians of these sites and protect them from possible damage.

If we really want to learn from our heritage, our first lesson should be the dignified presentation of its values.

METHODOLOGY

In natural heritage sites, 50 signs were studied, located in 8 national parks. 4 Managed Nature Reserves/Nature Parks, 1 Protected Landscape "Lake Pogradec".

In the cultural heritage sites, 50 signs located in 6 national archaeological parks, 20 cultural monuments, castles, churches were examined. They were examined both from the point of view of spelling errors and from the point of view of correct wording of sentences from the point of view of meaning,

This article focuses on the first three steps: 1. data collection, 2. error detection and description. 3. Error explanation and recommendations.

2. Theoretical basis

Common people have a different concept of standard language than linguists. For common people, it is sufficient to use a large vocabulary and formal language, this is the standard language. While for linguists, a text written without spelling mistakes and grammatically correct is a standard language text (Kurti. E, 2017a).

The first problem is that the standard of the Albanian language was established at the Albanian Spelling Congress in 1972 and, 61 years have passed since then.

"There are only changes in the language," says Saussure. The language has several varieties, which were created for different reasons, and the sum of these varieties is the standard language. Regarding the diversity of language varieties and their variability, we can again consider the statement of the linguistic structuralism Saussure: "Language is a system in which everything is preserved, everything changes" (Saussure 1997).

Language appears to us as an embedded and uniform system only if we look at it from afar, starting from abstraction (La lingua), otherwise, if we rely on the concrete realizations of language (La parole), we get a very diverse and variable picture, says Elida Kurti (Kurti 2017b).

"Language works - it gains meaning ... through opposition [and] identity is a function of difference" (Tompkins. J, 1988: 736).

According to Hudson (1996), for a language to be called a standard, it must go through 4 stages: Selection, Codification, Functional Cultivation and Acceptance.

In terms of writing, the language is associated with the educated classes who learn to write the language at school, according to Samara (2005).

Language researchers have different opinions about the number and type of functions, but the basic ones are communicative and cognitive.

But the language used shows the social status of a person, whether it gives him social prestige or not, says Bali (2006).

The standard language is followed as a model in the use of a language, it involves the meticulous application of all phonetic, grammatical, syntactic norms and rules that are mandatory to be followed by any official speaker.

Officials seem to find it difficult to distinguish between everyday spoken language and the written language standard.

4. Spelling check on the information boards

Of the 100 boards examined (50 in protected areas and another 50 in cultural areas), 32 had spelling errors, including 24 in protected areas and 8 in cultural areas.

1.1 The absence of the letter ë

The absence of the letter ë is often noticed in orientation and information panels at natural and cultural heritage sites. It can be placed anywhere in the title and in the first sentence, but below it is replaced by e. In the example below, the letter is missing from the title of the poster.

Fig. 1. Poster NAPA

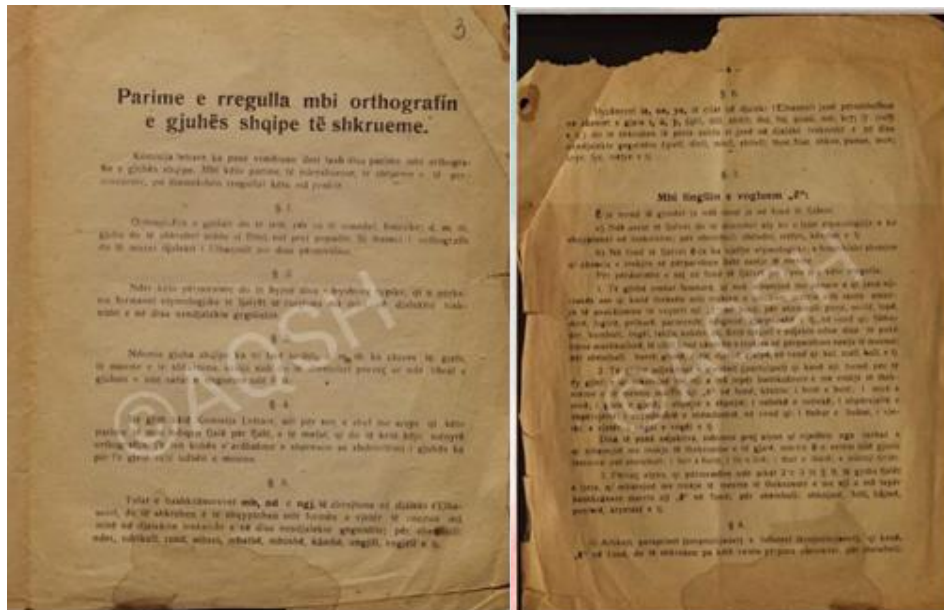


We find the absence of the letter "e" on the plaque of the building of the Faculty of History and Philology, it is missing in the decisions of the courts, sometimes and in the plural of words in our portals and media.

For years, the decrease in the use of the letter has been noticed, although its placement in the alphabet of the Albanian language is simultaneous with other letters. Various factors influence the "disappearance" of the letter with two small dots, but the main one remains technology and its tools. The keyboards of computers, phones and tablets do not contain the letter e.

In 1917, the Shkodra Literary Commission established some principles and rules for the spelling of the written Albanian language, in which the letter "ë" had a special meaning, as the following documents prove.

Figure 2: Magazine "Komisia Letrare e Shkodres", 1917



Source: Albanian Central Archive

4.2 Mirësevini (Welcome) instead of: mirë se vini (Welcome)

It seems that only a few people know that **Mirësevini** (Welcome) is not written together, but three words separately. In 6 information boards located in the Buna Velipojë River Protected Landscape, in 3 of them this word is written together, while in the other 3 it is written in sequence. The same problem is observed in the tables of cultural heritage sites,

Fig.3 Table in Buna Velipojë River Protected Landscape and Antigone Archaeological Park



The other case is written on the totem of the National Agency of Protected Areas: (Sëbashku) Together for nature, if necessary: (Së bashku) Together for Nature. This totem represents this institution in every activity and is located in the lobby of this institution.

Fig.4 Totem of NAPA



4.3 (Landscape) Peisazh or peizazh

Often in the information boards for tourists in the natural heritage sites, especially in the category of Protected Landscapes, (peisazh or peizazh) we find this word written sometimes with s and sometimes with z, although it is sufficient to check with the Albanian dictionary on the internet and you will find the correct spelling. In this case, what confuses the citizens are the different pronunciations, as it is pronounced with s and not with z, and in this example, it is not a matter of dialect, as it is possible to confuse ç with q.

Fig. 5 Table of Protected Landscapes: Buna-Velipoja River



There are cases when the node or the preposition is not placed at all, as in the 2 tables below of the Cultural Heritage Monument, Church of Saint Mary in the village of Spile in Gjirokastra, Monastery Spile-Monastery of Spile, and Church of Monastery of Saint Mary Spile-Church of the Monastery of Saint Mary in Spile. (Manastiri Spilesë-Manastiri i Spilesë, Kisha e Manastirit të Shën Mërisë Spilesë-Kisha e Manastirit të Shën Mërisë së Spilesë).

Fig. 6 Table, Spile, Gjirokastra



4.4 Toponyms

Another case is that of toponyms, as in the case of the National Park (now Nature Park) of Qafë-Shtamë. In the decision of the Council of Ministers, DCM no. 102, dated 15.01.1996, it is written *Qafë - Shtamë*, while in the new decision of the Council of Ministers no. 60, dated 26.1.2022, reads *Qafështamë Natural Park* (NAPA 2022), and there is no trace of consultation with any linguists for this change, neither on the official page of consultations with the public, nor in the documentation of the institution.

These changes are also noted in the following tables. The last two tables were created in the same year, before the new Decision of the Council of Ministers, (DCM) was approved. This shows the linguistic insecurity of our officials.



Fig.7 Tables in the Natural Park Qafë-Shtamë



Another difficulty is the use of foreign words such as Ranger for the Environmental Guard, established in the Protected Areas Law NR.81, year 2017. Politically, it was decided to use ranger because the nature security was established for the employees of the former Environmental Inspectorate, now part of the Territory Protection Inspectorate (MTE 2017).

Figure 8. NAPA uniforms



There are other cases, such as the inscription placed by the Catholic Church at the Nature Monument Rodoni Cape, which is written in an old language in the Gheg dialect, but this is done for stylistic reasons.

Fig. 9. Table at the Rodoni Cape



5. Rationale

Descriptions of cultural heritage objects are mostly written clearly and without errors.

Most of the errors are observed in natural heritage objects. This is due to the fact that the responsible institution National Agency of Protected Areas, NAPA, has been established for only 8 years.

The information boards in protected areas were installed in 2017, 2 years after the responsible institution was established, and this category of heritage was still unknown to the public. While the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, once the Institute of Cultural Monuments, was established in 1965.

6. Consequence, negative image

We still have a lack of information, orientation, and advisory signs in protected areas, whether natural or cultural. This problem has often been highlighted by the Albanian media.

"It was a very nice experience, but a big problem was the lack of signage, orientation and advice in areas that pose a risk due to the difficult terrain. Another problem was public transportation, the lack of signs for departure times. You could find out by asking people, but it was difficult because most of them didn't speak English," Australian tourist Jordan Stacey from Melbourne told Radio Free Europe.

But there are also instances when they are damaged by the community of the area: *"Given the fact that orientation to tourist sites is one of the images that is conveyed for our country, I would like to make a public appeal to the residents of the areas who, perhaps out of carelessness, perhaps out of the need to have these signs for their use, not to damage them, because they are very important for the orientation of tourists and visitors, to convey the best possible image for our country and for historical sites,"* said Ardis Duka, Director of the Regional Directorate of Cultural Heritage, Gjirokastër.

This issue is often brought up by the media. *"In the territory of the City of Shkodra, the lack of orientation signs for foreign tourists has become a worrying problem for them"*, emphasizes the local television Star Plus in Shkodra. Fakoje.al says: *"Residents and businessmen of the area complain that the poor road infrastructure and the lack of orientation signs are among the main reasons that prevent tourists from visiting the beach of Seman or Darzeza during the summer season"*.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have seen, some of the existing boards have spelling mistakes that create a negative image for our country. These mistakes show that the educational level of our officials leaves much to be desired in terms of spelling the national language. A positive image is very difficult to create, it takes years that is why this issue becomes important. Meanwhile, the production of information, orientation and tourist signs is an investment that is made every few years, and the correction of these signs has a high cost for our institutions.

Albania has fundamental problems related to tourism. The image let's call it an issue, in today's Albanian tourism can be a resource as well as an obstacle to development. However, considering that image is something that changes slowly and with difficulty, one should always be careful in creating policies and priorities in this regard.

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