

THE SPEECH OF THE ALBANIANS OF MANDRTSA (Bullgari)

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Abstrakti

This paper addresses the Albanian spoken variety of the Albanians of Mandritsa, a village located in southern Bulgaria, which represents a unique case of the preservation of the Albanian language outside the Albanian ethnic territory. Drawing on historical, linguistic, and dialectological sources, the study aims to analyze the origin, development, and main phonetic, lexical, and grammatical characteristics of this speech variety. Special attention is given to the influence of surrounding languages, particularly Bulgarian, Greek, and Turkish, as well as to the role of historical and social factors in the preservation or erosion of this linguistic heritage. The paper highlights the importance of documenting and studying this variety as an integral part of Albanian linguistic heritage and as evidence of interlinguistic contact in the Balkans.

Keywords: Mandrica, Albanian outside the borders, Albanian dialectology, linguistic contact, linguistic heritage.

The main purpose of this paper is to present and comprehensively analyze the Albanian spoken variety of the Albanians of Mandritsa in Bulgaria, situating it within the broader context of Albanian dialectology and the history of Albanian migrations in the Balkans.

The paper aims to:

- to examine the historical origins of the Albanian community of Mandritsa and the circumstances of its formation;
- to identify the main phonetic, morphological, and lexical features of the Mandritsa speech variety;
- to make evident the influences of other Balkan languages on this speech variety;

- to analyze the social, cultural, and historical factors that have influenced the preservation or weakening of the use of Albanian in Mandritsa;
- to emphasize the importance of preserving and documenting this speech variety as part of the Albanian linguistic heritage.

Research method

The study has been conducted using an interdisciplinary methodology that combines historical, linguistic, and sociolinguistic approaches. The main methods employed are:

- The bibliographic analysis method, which involves reviewing existing scholarly studies on Mandritsa and its speech variety, such as the works of Dhimitër Shuteriqi, Mahir Domi, Ludmilla Stankov, and other contemporary authors;
- The descriptive and analytical method, used to analyze the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical features of the Mandritsa speech variety based on documented materials;
- The comparative method, through which the Mandritsa speech is compared with standard Albanian and other Tosk dialects, with the aim of identifying archaic features and borrowings;
- The sociolinguistic approach, which assists in analyzing the role of social factors—such as migration, education, bilingualism, and cultural integration—in the use and preservation of the Albanian language within the Mandritsa community;
- The field research method in Mandritsa, which helps to observe firsthand how linguistic, cultural, and historical aspects have developed in recent years.

The combination of these methods allows for a comprehensive and balanced treatment of the topic, providing a clear overview of the linguistic and cultural significance of the Albanian speech variety of Mandritsa.

Introduction

Mandritsa (Bulgarian name: Mandritsa) is a historic village in southeastern Bulgaria, known as the only Albanian village in the country where a distinctive form of the Albanian language is still preserved and spoken (Gjinari, Shkurtaj, 2003:392). Mandritsa is impressively situated on the right bank of the Byala River (Lumi i bardhe), in the eastern part of the Rhodope Mountains, right at the border with Greece (Hristova Georgieva, 2015:25). This speech variety represents a unique dialectological case in the Balkans, demonstrating the preservation of Albanian language and culture outside the territory of Albania and Kosovo for centuries.

1. Historical Origin of Mandritsa and the Albanian Speech

Mandritsa was founded in 1636, according to an inscription in the village church, by several Orthodox Albanian shepherds who lived under the administration of the Ottoman Empire and supplied the army with dairy products.

The initial settlers came from the Korçë region and later from the Souli area (Epirus), and until the early years of the 20th century, Albanian was spoken in the village as the primary language. This deep historical period contributed to the formation of a unique linguistic context in which the Albanian language was preserved despite numerous Slavic and Greek influences in the area.

2. Characteristics of the Mandritsa Speech Variety

2.1 The Albanian-Mandritsa Dialect

The Albanian speech in Mandritsa contains elements linking it to Tosk, but it has also developed distinct forms due to socio-geographic isolation and contact with other languages. The phonetic and lexical structure of this variety shows remnants of archaic elements of classical Albanian, alongside borrowings from Bulgarian and other surrounding languages.

The studies of Dhimitër Shuteriqi and Mahir Domi, as well as updated work by Ludmilla Stankov, provide dialectological and psycholexical material documenting the vocabulary, phraseology, and grammatical structures of Mandritsa.

2.2 Vocabulary and Phraseology

In a detailed dictionary of the Mandritsa speech compiled by Dhimitër Shuteriqi, a large repertoire of words has been documented, including names of plants, animals, tools, human body parts, days and months, as well as everyday expressions used in communication.

This dictionary also records numerous lexical borrowings from Bulgarian, Greek, and Turkish that have been integrated into the Mandritsa Albanian speech, reflecting historical cultural and linguistic contacts beyond national borders.

3. Historical and Social Influence on Language Preservation

From the 19th century until today, Mandritsa has experienced significant demographic changes, including mass emigration to Greece and depopulation, especially following the Balkan wars and shifts in state borders.

Nevertheless, the remaining inhabitants have preserved their Albanian language as part of the community's identity. Until the early years of the 20th century, only Albanian was used in Mandritsa, while with the introduction of education in the Bulgarian language (1913–14), the official presence of the host country's language also began.

4. The Mandritsa Speech Today and Prospects for Preservation

Examining how people use language in different social contexts provides valuable insight into how language functions, social relationships within a community, and the ways in which individuals express aspects of their social identity through language (Holmes, 2015:36).

In recent decades, efforts to preserve this speech variety have included dialectological studies, dictionary and monograph publications such as *The Albanian Speech in the Village of Mandritsa*, as well as intercultural collaborations between Albanian and Bulgarian scholars.

Nevertheless, low population numbers and the integration of villagers into broader society increase the risk of this unique speech disappearing if sustainable measures for documentation and language transmission to younger generations are not implemented.

Case Study

1. Lexical Analysis

nimit / nimët

Vjen nga “një mijë” (one thousand)

Typical Features of Archaic Albanian:

një mijë → nimijë → nimit

This is not Bulgarian, but a phonetic and lexical reduction within Albanian itself..

Albanian Words with Internal Historical Development

tëkminde

Related to the Albanian verb “të kem / kam (to have/have)”

Meaning: *u bënë, u arritën, janë bërë bashkë*

Structure:

të- (particle)

këm / kim / kin (older form of *kam*)

-nde (pjesëz përfundimtare narrative)

Typical oral use, non-standard but Albanian.

zënim

From the Albanian verb “zë” (me zënë (to catch))

Meaning: *të mbledhura, të fituara, të zëna (gathered, earned, caught)*

The nominal form *zënim* is archaic; today we would say:

të ardhurat / fitimi (earnings/winnings)

Albanian words, today outside standard usage.

tristo

From *treqind*

Shortened, colloquial form:

treqind → trëqint → tristo (three hundred)

Typical phenomenon of speech economy in dialects.

gashki

One of the most interesting words in conversation

May be related to:

gashkë / gash (send i vogël, copë, njësi (a small thing, a piece or unit)

or a Slavic borrowing adapted into the Albanian system

Important:

The word takes the Albanian plural -i

It functions within Albanian syntax

Even when it is a borrowing, the word has been Albanianized and is thus part of the speech variety's lexicon.

kocanski

Local regional designation

Used as a label for the speech variety, not as a separate language

A typical phenomenon in peripheral Albanian speech varieties

studentka

Borrowing for *studente* (student)

Suffix **-ka** (femërore (feminine))

The word functions fully within Albanian discourse

profesora / po-profesora

From profesor (professor)

po- as an intensifier (*më shumë, më të fortë* (more, stronger))

Balkan conversational structure

vlogovite

From vlog (anglisht (english))

With a local plural suffix

Indicates integration of modern vocabulary

sërdski

Popular term for Serbian

Dialectal phonetic change

Clear semantic function

naemstva

Meaning: *qira / qëndrime me pagesë (rent)*

Mixed administrative word

Non-standard in Albanian, but functional in context

majsterski

From *mjeshtëri* (master)

Meaning: *mjeshtëror, profesionist (master, professional)*

A borrowing adapted to the local system

kërpiç / kërpich (qerpiç (tulle))

Important ethnolexical word

Related to traditional construction

Key term of material culture

kamëk (gur (rock))

Basic construction term

Used in the description of the foundation

Пепер (Peper)

Can be connected to: the Slavic root *peper* = “piper” (melmesë (spice))

Linguistic Conclusion

The speech variety is the archaic Albanian of Mandritsa. Its lexicon is primarily Albanian, with archaic forms and integrated borrowings, as is typical in any Balkan dialect.

2. Phonetic Analysis

Alphabet and Pronunciation

All the words are in Cyrillic and follow Slavic phonetics.

Approximate pronunciation (IPA / latin):

Пепер → /'pɛ.pɛr/

Пепера → /'pɛ.pɛ.ra/

Киджек → /'kɪdʒɛk/

Пирогар → /pɪ'ɾɔ.gar/

Phonetic Features:

An open syllable structure predominates

The stress is dynamic, usually on:

the first syllable (*Пепер, Пепера, Киджек*),

or on the second syllable (*Пирогар*).

The phonemes /d͡z/ in *Киджек* are typical of Slavic and are absent in the standard Albanian phonetic system. There are no pronounced vowel reductions.

3. Morphological Analysis

Analysis based on words:

Пепер

Simple noun, morphologically uninflected

Single root (peper).

Gender: masculine

Number: singular

Пепера

Morphological variant of “Пепер”

Suffix -a:

it can function as a familiar, expressive, or differentiating form.

Feminine noun, which in Albanian we use as *melmesë*.

Number: singular

Киджек

Simple noun, but phonetically marked.

Ending -ек:

typical of hypocoristic/diminutive forms in Slavic.

Gender: masculine

Morphological function: personal name

Пирогар

Derived noun:

Root: пирог (“byrek/pie”)

Suffix: -ap (used to form agent/professional nouns)

Structure: root + suffix

Gender: masculine

Morphologically motivated.

4. Syntactic Analysis

The syntactic structure was not properly ordered, as they are not fully proficient in Albanian.

The units are listed as a list of nouns.

They do not form complete sentences.

Missing:

verb,

syntactic relations (subject–predicate).

Syntactic function (possible depending on context):

They can function as:

call (vocative),

character names,

implied subjects in oral discourse,

or an identifying list.

Contextual example:

Пенер, Пенера, Киджек, Пурозар — cume dojdoa.

(Here, the nouns take on the function of the subject.)

Summary

Aspect *Evaluation*

Phonetic *Typically Slavic, clear pronunciation, dynamic stress*

Morphological *Nouns, some simple, some derived*

Syntactic *Nominal units outside the sentence, serving a referential functionl*

5. Conclusion

The speech of the Albanians of Mandritsa constitutes a valuable element of Albanian linguistic and cultural heritage outside the national borders. Through philological studies, dictionaries, and other documentation, it is possible to preserve and study this dialect as a living testimony of the linguistic history of the Balkans. Furthermore, the preservation and promotion of this speech variety form part of the cultural identity and the endangered linguistic heritage.

6. Final Observations

In this study, linguistic units extracted from oral discourse were analyzed, specifically the nominal forms *Пенер*, *Пенера*, *Кидџек*, *Пупозар*, which belong to the Slavic linguistic system and appear outside the norms of standard Albanian. The multi-faceted analysis showed that these units function primarily as nouns, serving an identifying and stylistic role, rather than as lexemes with general semantic content.

From a lexical perspective, it was observed that the units examined are not part of the active Albanian lexicon but represent foreign onomastic elements, some of which are semantically motivated (e.g., *Пупозар*), while others remain lexically neutral or expressive. This demonstrates the presence of language interweaving and cross-linguistic influences in oral communication.

Phonetic analysis revealed features typical of Slavic phonetics, such as the use of phonemes absent in standard Albanian and dynamic stress, which reinforces the linguistic identity of these units and clearly distinguishes them from the Albanian phonetic system.

Morphologically, it was found that the units are mostly simple nouns, with the exception of derived forms formed through characteristic Slavic suffixes, which serve to create nicknames, professional designations, or hypocoristic forms. This indicates a functional morphological structure, though foreign to the normative Albanian system.

From a syntactic perspective, the units do not form complete sentences but appear as lists of nouns, which in the context of oral discourse can assume different syntactic functions, such as implied subjects, calls (vocatives), or identifying elements within the discourse.

In conclusion, the analysis demonstrates that the material examined provides a significant example of the use of non-Albanian elements in oral communication, reflecting the interaction between languages, the flexibility of conversational discourse, and the importance of context for linguistic interpretation. This study contributes to the understanding of cross-linguistic phenomena and the functioning of onomastic units in everyday speech.

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