

Bilingual Areas within the Territory of the Republic of Albania

Dr. Migena Balla

University "Ismael Qemali" Vlore, Albania

Abstract

Due to historical, territorial, cultural and social relationships with other countries of the Balkans, various linguistic "islands" have been formed within the Albanian land, which are typically, although not exclusively, to be found in border regions. In these communities, not only do we find bilingualism, but also diglossia resulting in the emergence of some linguistic phenomena such as code-switching, code-mixing, borrowings, etc. These linguistic islands have different geographical expansion ranging from an entire region, a particular village, to a specific neighbourhood, perhaps. The present paper will attempt to make an accurate overview of these zones, which will mainly be focused on issues that have to do with their locations, linguistic contacts with the Albanian language, number of bilingual speakers, etc.

Keywords: linguistic "islands", bilingualism, diglossia, bilingual speakers

Introduction

The most prominent sociolinguistic researches on languages in contact have been made by reputed authors of the sociolinguistics domain at present, such as Weinreich and Ferguson, who have also provided a broad theoretical framework about this phenomenon¹.

In Albanian sociolinguistics, studies on different diglossic and bilingual situations have been sporadic and subject of particular communities in certain geographical areas of Albania.² As a lecturer of this discipline, I was constantly perplexed by the idea of conducting a thorough study of all the issues related to the Albanian language being in contact and coexisting with other languages. Of course, before reaching the finishing line of this study, a lot of hard and time-consuming work is to be required. Initially, we will try to have a clear picture of the location of bilingual areas in the territory of the Albanian Republic, the languages spoken, besides the Albanian language, and, in accordance to our capacities, we will collect data concerning the number of bilingual speakers.

Albania lawfully³ acknowledges 9 national minorities: Greek, Macedonian, Vlach / Aromanian, Romany, Egyptian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Serbian and the most recent one, (acknowledged in 2017) Bulgarian minority. The difference is that pursuant to the old law the Greek, Macedonian and the Serbian-Montenegrin minorities were acknowledged as ethnic minorities, while Vlachs and Romanians as ethno-linguistic minorities, Bosnian and Egyptian minorities as communities, whereas Bulgarians were considered Macedonians.

Among these national minorities, to be mentioned, are those resulting from the border relations Albania has with its neighbouring countries such as, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. These communities are primarily localized in areas around the state borders. There are also those minorities such as, Aromanians, Bosnians, Bulgarians, Romanians and Egyptians that have migrated for various political and economic reasons.

¹ Shkurtaç Gjovalin, *Sociolinguistika*, Tiranë, 2003, p. 169.

² Shkurtaç Gjovalin, *Sociolinguistika*, Tiranë, 2009, p. 14.

³ Pursuant to the Albanian law's definition, a national minority is a group of Albanian citizens residing in the territory of the Republic of Albania. They have early and lasting relation with the Albanian state. They exhibit distinctive cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or traditional characteristics and are ready to express, maintain, and develop together their distinct cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious or traditional identities. The government says the amendments to the law were based on the request of national minority representatives and in accordance with the criteria of the Framework Convention Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities. <http://www.kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/projekt-ligj/projektligje-te-mir...>

The Greek minority is one of the two national minorities that have lawfully been acknowledged since 1921. This is mostly settled in the South of Albania. For instance, in Gjirokastra, this minority group has spread in almost all of the city's neighbourhoods such as *Palorto, Varosh, 11 Janari, Pazari i Vjetër, 18 Shtatori, Dunavat, Cfaq* etc., as well as in some of the surrounding villages such as *Labovë e Kryqit, Zagorie, Nokovë, Gjat* etc. The following figures give accurate data about the distribution of this minority in Southern Albania: Saranda (35 villages), Finiq (56 villages), Dropull (41 villages) Delvinë (16 villages), Përmet (about 3 villages), Himara (7 villages), Vlora (about 2 villages) etc.

In these areas the population uses the Greek language as their mother tongue and Albanian as a second language. In most of these regions Greek is taught in school. The Greek language is also used in the state institutions or road signs, but the official documents issued from these institutions are drafted in formal Albanian language. Even though these people are generally inquisitive and knowledge lovers and learn Albanian at school, their version of the Albanian language is usually spoken with a typical Greek accent.

The second, national minority that was lawfully acknowledged in 1921 is the Montenegrin minority. It is a small community of a few thousands of inhabitants which is mainly settled in the village of Vrakë in the municipality of Malësi e Madhe, but also outspread in the city of Shkodra. Alongside the Albanian language, this community uses the Montenegrin language as well. The Montenegrin language is used within the family environment, whereas Albanian is also used in social relationships, in the neighbourhoods or elsewhere, even in official situations. They constitute an Orthodox community.

Until recently, the Serbian community was included in this national minority. Later on, they were legally acknowledged as a separate minority group. Even this community lives mainly in the cities of Shkodra, Koplik (Gruemirë, Omaraj, Gril, Boriç i Madh, Boriç i vogël, Kamicë, Shtoj i vjetër, Shtoj i ri, Dobraq, Golem, Mushan, Bushatetç), Lezhë, Durrës, Fier (Libofshë, Hamil) etc. Within this community, the Albanian language is in contact with Serbian. Serbian is used in family settings, whereas Albanian is used in all other social and official environments.

The Vlach / Aromanian minority has been acknowledged as an ethno-linguistic minority in Albania. This community has spread all over the country, mainly in central and southern Albania. In addition to Albanian, the language they use is Aromanian, which is considered as a colloquial dialect of the Balkan Latin. They use this language in their family lodgings or in the typical activities that aim at the preservation and promotion of their language and traditions. Albanian is spoken in every other social and official context. When they speak Albanian, Aromanian youngsters are not at the least influenced by the Aromanian language. Moreover, some only have an understanding of Aromanian without being able to speak the language of their predecessors. The Aromanian minority is found in the municipality of Libohovë (Qender Libohovë, Zagoria, in the villages of Suhe, Stegopol, Nderan, Sheper); in the city of Përmet, in the municipality of Gjirokastrë, in the territory of Administrative Units such as Cepo, Lunxhëri and Odrie; mainly in the villages of Palokastër, Labovë, Zhapës etc.; in Elbasan, Vlorë (Bestrovë, Mekat, Bunavi, Beshisht, Skroftinë, Cerkovinë), Selenice etc.

The Romanies constitute a minority that is spread almost all over Albania. Genetic, linguistic and historical facts show that Romanies originally emigrated around the 11th century from what is today northern and north-western India and eastern Pakistan. Apart from their mother tongue, the Roma language, the Romanies in Albania speak Albanian, too, although they are told by the accent or grammar used. There are also many Romany groups that move frequently from one Albanian area to another, who do not speak Albanian. They only speak in the Roma language. With respect to their lifestyle, most Romanies do not even attend elementary education. Consequently, even though they might speak Albanian, they do not know how to read and write in Albanian. The areas where Romanies are mostly located are Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Peqin, Rogozhine, Fier, Korce, Pogradec, Berat, Ura Vajgurore, Kuçova, Lushnja, Vlora, Shkodra, Lezha, Fushë-Kruja etc.

The Balkan- Egyptian minority and the Romany community have been treated equally. The former was often considered a Romany-Egyptian minority. Yet this equal treatment may leave room to possible discussions given the fact that they differ from each other. Despite sharing the same historical origin, before their roots be reformed, they have culturally and linguistically changed. Marriages between these groups seem to have been limited.

Egyptians have a sense of identity completely distinct from the Romanies and vice versa. Likewise, in addition to Albanian, Egyptians speak their own language. They also learn Albanian at school¹. The areas where Egyptians are mostly located

¹ According to 2011 census data, 93% of Egyptian children attend primary school, but this does not apply to Roma children, where 55% of them do not attend school at all.

include Tirana, Durrës, Elbasan, Peqin, Rrogozhine, Fier, Korçe, Përmet, Pogradec, Berat, Ura Vajgurore, Kuçova, Lushnja, Vlore, Shkodra, Lezha, Fushë-Kruja etc.

The Macedonian minority is located in the border areas, precisely on the south-eastern edge of the Albanian territory bordering Macedonia and Greece, in the Prespa' s area, in the northeast of the city of Korça, as well as in some other villages in the district of Dibra. Their number in Albania ranges from 2,000 to 5,000 people.

The bank line along the Prespa Lake and the Albanian border is 35 km long. The 9 minority villages of the Prespa area are situated along this line. They are, Pusteci (Liçenasi), Lajthiza, Zaroshka, Cerja, Shulini, Gollombopi, Gorica e Vogël, Bezmishti and Gorica e Madhe. From the With respect to the administrative division of the area, these 9 minority villages constitute a district. It is known as the Municipality of Pustec. This community uses the Macedonian language within the family environment and in official settings. Alongside the Albanian language they learn their own language at school. Official documents are produced in standard Albanian.

The Bulgarian minority is the last minority that was added to the list of minority groups in Albania, in 2017. Up till now it was known as a Macedonian minority, or even as Bulgarian-Macedonian, at times. The acknowledgement of this minority has brought about different reactions¹ that made it impossible for us to have accurate information on whether certain communities are Macedonian or Bulgarian. It is said that in Albania, Bulgarians live mainly in the regions of Bilisht, Korça, Golloborda, Prespa e Vogël and their number amounts to thirty- thousand people.

Furthermore, the Goran minority lives in the municipality of Kukës, too. It is actually a region in the former districts of Shishtavec and that of Zapode with about 5000 inhabitants. Their mother tongue is the Gorani language, which is very similar to the Bulgarian and Macedonian languages. The territory where the Gorani community is now settled, is situated down at the border of three states Albania-Kosovo-Macedonia. There are 9 villages in Albania. The number of the entire population in the territory of Gora goes to 24,000. The villages where the Bulgarian language is spoken are: Borje, Oreshka, Cërnavë, Shishtavec, Orgjost, Pakisht, Kosharisht, Zapod, Oçikël. This community uses the Albanian language in the social and official settings. Those who live in the areas that were previously known as a Macedonian minority have learned Macedonian as well as Albanian in school. Others use only the spoken Bulgarian language in the variant inherited throughout different generations.

The Bosnian minority in Albania is a small community that is found only in the municipality of Durrës. Most of them settled on the suburbs of the city of Shijak in a place called Koxha and Borak hills, namely in three villages: Koxha, Salamone and Borake. Bosnians found a special welcome from the locals and developed good relationships with them getting more integrated into each other's cultures. Nowadays it is a community that has been able to preserve its language and customs. Bosnian language is used in family environments, while knowing and using the Albanian language really well.

To sum up, within the Albanian territory, the Albanian language is in contact with 9 other languages: Greek, Aromanian, Montenegrin, Bosnian, Roma, Egyptian, Macedonian, Bulgarian and Serbian. Five of them are Slavic languages.

The difficulties to collect accurate data on the location, identity, origin, and above all, statistics about these communities were bigger than we had expected. However, as cited above, this paper is just an introduction to the great project that we have undertaken.

References

- [1] Framework Convention Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities
- [2] Shkurtaj Gjovalin, Sociolinguistika, Tiranë, 2003, p. 169.
- [3] Shkurtaj Gjovalin, Sociolinguistika, Tiranë, 2009, p. 14.

¹ *Macedonian Alliance for European Integration, which protects the interests of the "Macedonian people in Albania", protested against the inclusion of Bulgarians in this bill and according to it this action violates international law, constitutes genocide against the Macedonian people and a crime against humanity.*