

# LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY. THE CASE OF ALBANIAN

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## Abstract

This research deals with relation between language and identity, focusing in the case of Albanian language. Various studies have point out that the any language is part of our identity, but how can help us the language to express our social identity and gender identity? Which are the means that uses the language in each case? How can preserve this connection in time of globalization? The globalization can helps or complicates the process of identification of our linguistic identity?

Which is the role of school in this case? The process of writing can help us to express the linguistic, social and gender identity?

In the international area are made studies in this field such as: J. Gumperz (*Language and Social Identity*, 1983), P. Kroskrity (*Language, History and Identity*, 1993), J. Edwards (*Language and identity*, 2009), J. Sanderland (*Language and gender*, 2008) etc., but for the Albanology these concepts are new and is a new point of view.

Language in general and Albanian language in this case, over the centuries has created and reserved some elements that prove a strong connection between language and identity, starting from anonymous creations, proverbs etc. We will try to discover these hidden elements in folk literature, new literature in our conversations etc. and will try to analyze their linguistic role.

The methodology that can be used relates to identification of these elements across contrastive analysis.

The conclusions will have not only linguistic interest, but they also can serve for other studies, in sociological field, gender studies etc.

**Keywords:** *Albanian language, identity, social identity, gender identity*

## Introduction

Language is the most important element of our existence, is an instrument that helps to create a communication with others, but also, support us to identify themselves as different from them. Whenever we use the language, we give others significant dates, about us, who we are, which is our social stratum. With this significant means we try to transmit our values, our traditions and identity, so every speech act is a sign of the linguistic identity. For this reason language<sup>1</sup> and identity<sup>2</sup> are seeing as two elements strongly related with each-other, and language today, besides of communicative, informative, metalinguistic and phatic functions etc., is also known a new function that relates to linguistic identity.<sup>3</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century got a development a *social identity theory*, which gradually came to be associated with interdisciplinary areas, such as sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics etc. According to some researchers that deal with language-identity relations: „Linguists are interested in determining the extent to which a given language or variety serves as a badge of identity for a particular ethnic group, and how that group’s variety of a language differs from varieties of the same language used by other speakers” (R.L.Trask & P. Stockwell, 2007:86).

But how can we express through language different parts of our identity, without referring directly to this means, and how can express our identity through Albanian language, will try to explain below.

### 1. The language and the identity. Albanian case.

Why do see a connection between the language and the identity and how can be expressed by the changes with social point? One of the explanations is connected with the following logic.

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<sup>1</sup> **Language** 1. System of articulated sounds, words, forms, rules for formation of new words and their connections in sentences; is the most important means of the communication between the persons; such system is historically created and developed, as one of the basic features of nationally or a nation”. Academy of Science of Albania, *Albanian Vocabulary* (2006), Tirana, pp. 362.

<sup>2</sup> **Identity** 1. sameness 2. being special from others and the same with itself, being itself. *Ibidem.* pp. 399.

<sup>3</sup> R. L. Trask & P. Stockwell: “For several decades now, sociolinguists have realized that providing each speaker with an individual and group identity is one of the most important functions of language. An appreciation of this identifying function of language is crucial in understanding many types of social and linguistic behavior” (2007:112-113).

“They gained the ability to notice the correlations and interpret them as indexical relations because of metapragmatic activities that called attention to the correlations and imbued them with meaning, in contexts such as moving into jobs where speaking “correctly” was required, travelling on holiday and returning with stories about other people’s reactions to their speech, or seeing newspaper articles that described the oddities of the local “dialect”. (B. Johnstone Locating language in identity in *Language and identities*, edited by C. Lomas & D. Watt, Edinburg University Press, 2010: 34). All contacts, formal or informal, even in Albanian, like in every other language, can identify us not only linguistically (the code that we use can help for this identification), but in a social, ethnic or religious way.

Here we shouldn’t leave without mentioning a fact that Albanian isn’t a language spoken only inside of Albanian territory, but even in Kosovo, Montenegro, Italy etc. In some of these places Albanian isn’t know just in a standard variant, but as “*arbëresh*” (Italy, Zara, Greece). That’s why the residents are identified as “*arbëresh of Italy*”, “*arbesh of Zara*”, “*arberësh of Greece*”. The linguist Francesco Altimari writes: “the culture ‘arberësh’, as a minority culture has its forms of expression and its characteristics: is a living culture that develops a clear coupling function for as much as it gives the participants in the community a define identity by reacting the risk of destruction that comes from outside”.<sup>4</sup>

### 1.1. The language and the gender identity

Gender differences *female-male* have become a study subject to many sociologist, focusing especially on the role according to separate gender, but especially after the second half of the XX century, studies with sociolinguistic and ethnolinguistic character have focused even the linguistic differences between the *female* and *male* gender.

In the world, especially in America,<sup>5</sup> we have seen language and gender identity studies since 1973 when R. Lakoff published for the first time “Language and woman’s place”. In Albanian

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<sup>4</sup> F. Altimari, (2002). About Arbëresh of Italy-A general overview, *Literary and linguistic surveys of Arbëresh*, Prishtina, pp. 48.

<sup>5</sup> J. Sanderland, (2008). *Language and gender*. (2nd edn), London: Routledge.

P. Ecker. & S. Ginet-McConnell, (2013). *Language and gender* (2nd edn), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

A. Goddard & L. Mean, (2009). *Language and gender*, London: Routledge.

these studies are related with Gj. Shkurta (Sociolinguistic: 1999, 2003), who had as precursors notable names like, E. Çabej<sup>6</sup>, J. Rrota.<sup>7</sup>

Albanian, like the other languages, has developed the gender differences by using pronouns “ai/ajo” or the polite way “zoti/zonja”. The dichotomy “djalë-vajzë” begins in Albanian language since when we choose the children’s names: *Bora, Rozafa, Gent, Arben* ect. This social gender difference has found its own linguistic display through phrases “men’s job” or “women’s job”. While from the linguistic view, the differences start from some elements with phonetic and phonological character and go to syntactic constructions. An important research in relation to these elements has been done by linguist Robin Lakoff.<sup>8</sup>

But in relation to the linguistic differences between these two genres the scholar J. Edward writes: “The most general observation is the one I have just mentioned: women’s speech tends to be more conservative, more ‘standard’ and more ‘polite’ than men’s speech. “ (2009: 134).

From our observations, it results that a good part of the linguistic features in women’s speech, indentified by R. Lakoff, adapt with Albanian language as well. So women, in their speech are keener to using diminutive suffixes, mostly in an affection way for example: *zogth, djalkë;çupkë* etc.; they have a lot of the superlative forms of the adverbs and adjectives like: *shumë e bukur, mjaft e zgjuar, tepër ngadalë* etc.

As a features of speaking of the female gender in Albania, it can be easily distinguished the use of many linguistic structures that contain wishes or curses. They are more disposed in believing in phenomenon such as, bad augur, which is proved by the frequent use of expressions such as “*mos e paftë syri i keq*”.

Women in their communication use more gestures. Linguistic differences in men and women’s speech is also seen in syntax: the way they form sentences, using in their communication over-segmentation means e.g. the accent of words, but usually the word is followed by emotional emphasis, the melody line of the intonation is different etc., in pronunciation of the phonemes.<sup>9</sup>

Albanian language, women’s speech differs even from dialects. A well recognized name of Albania’s culture, F.Konica writes amongst everything else that “the pronunciation of women in

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<sup>6</sup> E. Çabej, (1978). *Linguistics’ studies* (IV), Prishtina.

<sup>7</sup> J. Rrota, (2006). *Written language or grammatical remarks*, Shkodra: Botimet Françeskane.

<sup>8</sup> R. Lakoff, (1973). Language and woman’s place, *Language in Society* (2), pp. 45–79.

(1975). *Language and Woman’s Place*, New York: Harper & Row.

(1990). *Talking Power*, New York: Basic Books.

(2004). *Language and Woman’s Place: Text and Commentaries*, New York: Oxford: University Press.

<sup>9</sup> According to Gj. Shkurta “in city of Tirana and in many parts of the South, the pronunciation of phoneme /r/ as a vibrant /r/ is denser in female than in man speech” (2009:117).

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South Albania differs from men's and this difference is mainly because women drag out the terminal sounds of the words (compare: *botën/botënë, ardhur/ardhurë*).<sup>10</sup>

Quite interesting are folk compounds in the forms of the compositions that are made for the gender difference, like: *gojëkuti- gojëbiblil; gojënerpërkë- gojëgjarpër*; or *faqehënë, faqeportokalle, faqemollë, faqetrëndafil, faqeshegë* etc., usually for the female gender.

There have been efforts to see the gender difference even in the psycholinguistic by trying to bring to light the differences between the male and female brain development, but these studies belong to another span of study.

## **1.2. Literature as an expressive and conservative of identity.**

An important role in the preservation and in the transmission of our identity is played by literature written in our tongue language, but even in cases when it is translated in other languages. Starting by Albanian folk literature and then with well-known traditional and contemporaries Albanian writers like I.Kadare, D.Agolli, Dh.Shuteriqi, D.Çuli, T.Laco etc. Their works have been translated in different languages and in this way they have made the Albanian culture and identity famous all over the world. Their duty is to love and appreciate their language because it is an irreplaceable support for the linguistic process of our epoch and the future.<sup>11</sup> Languages differ from the phraseology, from the word syntax etc. Names like *Zana, Besa, Besnik, Besar, Vesa, Petrit, Shpend, Agron, Teuta*; places: *Flag Place, Rozafa Castle, Voskopoja* and many others identify the language and the Albanian identity. The characters' speech (pronunciation, cadences, rhythm, nasal or no nasal sounds etc.) help the reader to classify the character according to the geographical descent, their social status etc.

## **1. The role of school**

Beside family school is the education and the forming place of a person. In the globalization time, school remains the best place and means of conserving the identity in general and in particular the linguistic identity. Certainly the main role is played by the Standard Albanian, but also its varieties: the Tosk, the Gheg and the Arberësh dialect. It is important not just the language, but also the scholastic curricula, teaching texts, the blend of ethnic and interethnic elements in bilingual cases etc.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> F. Konica, (2007). *Linguistics' thoughts*. Tirana, pp. 288.

<sup>11</sup> Gj. Shkurtaj, (2009). Folk and national character of the Albanian literature, *The weight of Albanian word*, Tirana: Ufo Press, pp. 6.

<sup>12</sup> See: T. Osmani -T. Topalli - M. Priku. (2008). Important contributions by native - language education- part of Albania - Montenegro integration, in *University of Shkodra a development motor of Northern Albania and subject reference of integration of Adriatic area*, Shkodra.; M. Priku. (2011). Aspects of the cultural and linguistic

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So, Arbërisht is learned in primary schools in Cozenca, Sicily etc. according to the international laws for the education rights in the minority language. In the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Magna Carta signature in Bologna, the famous Italian writer, linguist and philosopher Umberto Eco said that university is the first point in creating the future European identity, a point that surely starts from the education in primary schools.

## Conclusions and recommendations

- Language is part of our identity and here we mean our native language because nowadays people are becoming bilingual and multilingual.
- More detailed studies should be done for the Albanian language concerning the variation and the mass of use of *Standard / Nonstandard* between females and males, such as done for English or another language.
- Of course literature has an irreplaceable mission in protecting the identity, but also in spreading it.
- A important role, as we seen, have school, therefore in the curricula should be left more space to the connections between languages and culture, language and identity and gender etc.

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