

Linguistic evaluation of the albanian alternative to foreign words in standard albanian

KRISTINA JORGAQI (Tirana)

A standard language is a “product” of direct intervention of a society and various factors of a political, social, and cultural nature that cause the selection of one given dialect over another, undertaking a “purifying” activity of foreign words in place of an activity which favours language enrichment through exogenous means, reforms a writing system through the replacement of one alphabet with another etc. In this context the creation of standard Albanian makes no exception.

The standardization of Albanian was achieved due to a series of political and cultural events which characterised the Albanian world starting a century and a half ago. But it was formed as a real movement only after the establishment of the independent Albanian state (1912), especially during the state regime after World War II. It is worth mentioning, among other things, the role of the Albanian language that was recognized by the intellectual elite during the Albanian Renaissance, and their interests in its development during the national movement in the second half of the 20th century; the need for an official language that was deeply felt with the creation of the first national state; the conscious efforts, after 1944, that were made by the communist government in support of the literary Tosk dialect (BYRON 1976: 59–68), which constituted the foundation of standard Albanian (due to the qualities this variant contained as being more unified and homogenous than its Geg counterpart).

The language policy pursued by the post-war Albanian state consisted of the selection of standard norms during the mid sixties of the past century, as well as their codification through the seventies, presented in such works as *Spelling of the Albanian Language* (1973), *Spelling Dictionary of the Albanian Language* (1976), *Phonetics and Grammar of Contemporary Literary Albanian. Morphology* (1976), *Albanian Literary Language for All* (1977), *Dictionary of Contemporary Albanian Language* (1980).

Later on, during the 80s, the Albanian language entered a new stage of development, the so-called *modernization* (FERGUSON 1968: 27–35) or *cultivation* stage (NEUSTUPNÝ 1974: 37–48), during which period efforts were made for the further *elaboration* of its means and functions. In the framework of this elaboration, at the beginning of the eighties, an extensive undertaking was under way to replace many borrowings with Albanian words, chiefly of Italian and French origin. Since 1979, a permanent *Commission* was set up by the Prime Minister’s Office to organize the “work for the further purification and enrichment of the Albanian literary language”¹. In order to help address these issues and problems of language norms in general, a special publication, the journal *Gjuha jonë* (Our Language) (1980), was issued by the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania. Along side it, a new column “Fjala shqipe në vend të fjalës së huaj” (The Albanian word to be used in-

¹ The term *Albanian Literary Language* is used to mean *Standard Albanian*.

stead of the foreign equivalent), appeared in several newspapers. For some ten years in succession, hundreds of proposals were laid down for the substitution of the current *foreign words* in use.

The history of the Albanian language testifies to two organised movements, both of which aimed at “purifying and enriching” the language. They belonged to two utterly different chronological, social and cultural contexts. The first movement was conducted by the Albanian cultural elite during the national awakening period in the second half of the XIXth century. In the name of a national ideology, which viewed language as one of the primary symbols of a nation, efforts were made to write the Albanian language, i.e. to use it in the press, fiction, textbooks etc.; to write a pure Albanian, free from Turkish² and Greek³ loans, enriched with words coined by them and other words collected from the people. Many scholars have defined this movement as an activity of *puristic* character, i.e. a movement which aimed at throwing out of use most of the loan words, including also words of international use. In fact, it is more complex than that. It is sufficient to mention that in the second half of the 19th century, after more than four hundreds years of Turkish oppression, Turkish loans were widely spread both in spoken and written language. During the 18th century, until the beginning of 19th century, there flourished the so-called “literature of *bejtexhinj*”. Apart from the grammar structure and a few Albanian words, the rest of it was in Turkish. The *bejtexhinj* created their verses in a sort of “hybrid” Albanian. It is quite understandable then, why the writers of the Albanian Renaissance period, following different social and aesthetic principles, abandoned that type of literature and instead embraced a quite new attitude towards the mother tongue. Their intentional activity to use existing Albanian words in their works cannot be called a puristic movement; nor can their efforts to find out and collect as much from the folk lexical treasure as they could.

Nevertheless, we cannot deny the fact that numerous words, most of them of international use, were translated into Albanian following the word patterns of other languages. Thus, for *gjeologji* (Geology) **dhedituri** was coined, for *mizantropi* (Misanthropy) **njerimërzitje**, for *zoologji* (Zoology) **kafshëshkronjë**, for *mikroskop* (Microscope) **vogëlashikonjë** etc. In the above-mentioned cases we are dealing with a puristic activity, which was in fact limited to the works of a few authors. Naum VEQILHARXHI (1767–1846), Jani VRETO (1822–1900), P. N. LUARASI (1865–1911), P. K. NEGOVANI (1875–1905) and K. KRISTOFORIDHI (1827–1895) are the prominent representatives of the puristic movement in written Albanian during the second half of the 20th century; on the other hand, they are also authors of a series of words which even to this day are in broad use in standard Albanian, words such as *fletore* (Copy-book), *ndërgjegje* (Conscience), *përkrenare* (Helmet), *fushatë* (Campaign), *theks* (Stress, Accent), *zanore* (Vowel), *jetëdhënës* (Life-giving, invigorating) etc. Despite the authentic purism of the above-mentioned authors and the sporadic ap-

² The territories inhabited by Albanians were occupied by the Ottoman Turks since XVth century and remained under their occupation till 1912. This explains the great influence of Turkish on the Albanian vocabulary.

³ The impact of Greek (Middle and Modern) on the Albanian language, especially on the Tosk dialect, was strong and ongoing until the beginning of the past century.

pearance of such phenomenon in others, the attitude of Albanian Renaissance intellectuals toward the loan words can not be simply labelled puristic. Faik KONICA (1876–1942) and Fan NOLI (1882–1965), two outstanding representatives of the last period of the Albanian Renaissance, are two examples that demonstrate how the loan words were used to enrich Albanian. Konica in his magazine *Albania* (1896–1909) and Noli in his journalistic writings, used a great number of loans, most of which are to this day an integral part of modern Albanian vocabulary.

In general, the Albanian Renaissance writers understood that Albanian could be elaborated and cultivated like a culture language with all the attributes and functions of such a language only through what we would call today a *solution of compromise*; thus through various efforts to find an appropriate balance between the *authentic* and *foreign* for the enrichment of expressive means of Albanian.

The post-Renaissance period – from the establishment of the first independent Albanian state (1912) until the eighties – was not characterized by any organized movement, in the sense of a broad activity, well-oriented on the basis of a special language policy, concerning the attitude towards the so-called *foreign words* (Fremdwörter). During this period, the activity of some individuals like Mati LOGORECI (1867–1941) and Aleksandër XHUVANI (1880–1961) withstood in some way the problem of *foreign words*. Obviously, their objectives were no longer the Turkish words, a considerable part of which had spontaneously and naturally come out of use, simultaneously with the breakdown of Empire institutions and the Turkish way of living. Albania's political orientation turned to the West, therefore a great flux of loan words came into use, mainly from French and Italian.

At that time Aleksandër Xhuvani published linguistic columns, in which he introduced a number of indigenous words recommended to be used instead of loan words, which were considered unnecessary in Albanian. Only later, during 1940–1943, did Xhuvani develop his “planning” activity under the framework of a commission that the Institute of Albanian Studies set up to elaborate the Albanian terminology of different fields. His main representative work in this field remains “Për pastëtinë e gjuhës shqipe.” (For the purity of the Albanian language) (1956). The list of 300 loan words proposed to be replaced with Albanian words either selected from folk speech or created by him and by other distinguished authors, is the result of fifty years of work in this direction (Studime 1986). A considerable part of his proposals have already acquired a stable status in modern Albanian. It is worth mentioning that Xhuvani is the first Albanian linguist who advanced a series of theoretical principles, which, even though he did not follow them subsequently, generally served as a strong basis for the practical solutions he made. In his work for the “purification” of the language he remained a disciple of Albanian Renaissance linguistic ideals: language, a symbol of the nation. He was also a professional linguist and, as such, he regarded language, first and foremost, as a mean of communication, which needed to be improved by always preserving its character.

The first movement launched by the Renaissance intellectuals for the “purification” of Albanian from Turkish and Greek loans and their replacement by Albanian words or words from West-European languages, was conducted, as we mentioned above, at a time when the Albanian language was not yet highly cultivated, but aimed to become so. The second movement developed regularly and systematically during

the twentieth century for a period of more than a decade (1981–1992). It was carried out in the framework of a language based on clearly defined standard norms, with abundant vocabulary devices and typical functions for a modern language; therefore in the context of a language widely elaborated in literary works, in translations, in political and scientific literature. Constant efforts were made for more than a decade to “clean” the Albanian language of about 500 so-called *foreign words*, or unnecessary loans, mainly from Italian or French sources, as well as from Turkish and Greek, though in a limited number. The bulk of these are culture words widely used by the speakers of standard Albanian and only a few of them are colloquialisms.

What were the motives that inspired and gave rise to this movement? The theoretical platform that preceded the publication in the periodical *Our Language* of the lists of foreign words recommended to be replaced by Albanian words is inspired by a national and political ideology as demonstrated in this quote: “... the struggle for purifying the language ... aims at strengthening the national character of literary Albanian language and our socialist culture ...” (*Gjuha jonë* 1981/1). But the platform contained a number of scientific principles which, at least theoretically, solve a lot of issues that appear in such activity. The categories that would be replaced and the levels of loan words, the ways and sources through which this would occur etc. were determined ahead of time.

One aim of this study has been to identify and evaluate exactly some of the linguistic features that characterise the “products” of this activity in standard Albanian. We would also like to bring to light the relationship between the theoretical solutions (laid down in the platform) and the practical results (the concrete alternatives proposed by the linguists).

The planned interventions during the 1980’s to avoid the use of loan words have been of two forms: firstly, identifying and reactivating words from common Albanian; and, secondly, coining new words following Albanian or foreign word patterns.

For the bulk of *foreign words* (approximately two thirds of them), well-known Albanian equivalents are proposed as substitute alternatives. Part of these have long been used as synonyms with foreign words sharing the same denotation and connotation, such as: **asnjanës-neutral** (neutral), **bashkësi-komunitet** (Community), **braktis-abandonoj** (to abandon), **përçapje-demarsh** (effort, try), **përshtas-adaptoj** (to adapt), **ujëvarë-kaskadë** (waterfall), **fyej-ofendoj** (to hurt one’s feelings), **kushtoj-dedikoj** (to dedicate) etc. There are cases, anyway, when borrowings, such as *argjilë* (clay), *harabel* (sparrow), *persekutoj* (to persecute), *brazdë* (furrow, drill) etc., are not only known, but also used more actively than the Albanian equivalents proposed to replace them (respectively **deltinë**, **trumcak**, **përndjek**, **hulli**) etc. In most cases, the above mentioned Albanian equivalents could be proposed as synonyms with the borrowings, not only as alternatives that leave the latter completely out of use. The use of loan words simultaneously with the Albanian words is completely justified by the need of language for synonymous variation.

The proposed Albanian alternatives to replace the *foreign words*, in general have been words exactly of the same meaning as the latter. However, the Albanian language planners have, at times, selected native words with a general meaning. An example is the word *atribut* (attribute), which has been proposed to be replaced by **cilësi** (quality), **veti** (property), **tipar** (feature, trait), whereas it is well known that the

word *atribut* does not mean “any feature”, but “an essential feature”; to replace the word *aromë* (aroma, perfume), the Albanian word **erë** (smell, odor) has been recommended, but we all know that *aromë* is not “any kind of smell”, it is “good smell”; *ilaritet* (hilarity) does not simply mean “laughter”, but it is a kind of “deprecating, cynical laughter”; etc. In some cases Albanian alternatives are ambiguous words carrying a lot of meanings: *dekadencë* (decadence) has been recommended to be replaced by the Albanian word **rënie** (fall, drop), which means both “përmbysje” (turnover) and “tatëpjetë” (downhill); *itinerar* (itinerary) has been proposed to be replaced by **rrugëtim**, but it may not be clear enough whether it means “udhëtim” (journey, trip) or “path leading to some place”; the word *plazh* (beach) has been proposed to be replaced by the word **ranishte** (sand soil), but in everyday use it may not be obvious whether it means “any land surface covered by sand” (sand soil) or “place by the seaside, lake or river where you can sit and sunbathe” etc. These examples demonstrate that a key demand of the cultivated languages is not taken into consideration: the need for precise and minutely differentiated means of expression.

There are also cases when linguists have followed the practice of partial substitutions for borrowings that have penetrated with two or more meanings into Albanian. So they suggest an Albanian word only for one meaning, while for the other one they recommend continuing the use of the loan word. For example, the word **thirrje** is proposed to replace one of the meanings of the word *apel*: *apel* (1) (appeal, call), whereas *apel* (2) (rollcall) will continue to be used; the word **thelb** has been proposed to replace the word *esencë1* (gist, crux), but *esencë2* (essence) will still remain in use; the word **shoqëri** is proposed to be used instead of *kompani* (theatrical troupe; company), whereas *kompani* as a military term will continue to be used. Likewise, partial substitutions are suggested even in cases when we are not dealing with one word, but with a set of words of the same root; for example, **pajtoj** is advised to replace the word *abonoi* (to subscribe to), but the word *abonë* (season ticket) will still be in use; the word **i përmortshëm** can be used instead of the word *funebër* (funeral), but *funeral* “ceremony of burying a dead person” cannot go out of use; the word **mjedis** has long been used instead of *ambient* (environment), while the verb *ambientohem* (to adapt oneself to) is the only one used nowadays in Albanian.

While trying to “purify” the language, Albanian planners have been very careful in general to preserve the stylistic values the loan words have acquired. However, there are still cases when these values have been ignored. For example, a set of borrowings that are also terms in special fields have been proposed to be replaced by Albanian non-term words, sometimes even words of everyday speech. The word **sharrëz** has been proposed to replace *tetanoz* (tetanus), **helmoj** (to poison) to replace *intoksikoj* (to intoxicate), **shterpë** (dry, barren) for *steril* (sterile), **ndryshk** (to rust) for *oksidoj* (to oxidise) etc. In other cases, it has happened quite the contrary: borrowed colloquialisms are being replaced by Albanian bookish words. For instance, for the word *bordero* **listë pagash** (payroll) has been proposed to come in use, for *lavatriçe* **makinë larëse** (washing machine), for *dezhurn* (watch) **nëpunës shërbimi**, for *maternitet* (maternity) **shtëpi lindjeje** (maternity home) etc. Turkish borrowings in particular have been made targets by the linguists, even though they have already

acquired a stable position in spoken Albanian, especially in a number of phraseological expressions⁴.

In all the above cases, the choice of the Albanian equivalents has been made by violating the *rationality* criterion (RAY 1963) or *adaptability* criterion (HAUGEN 1966), which means that one of the basic demands of language planning was not taken into consideration, according to which conscious and organised linguistic interventions should contribute to a higher functional and stylistic differentiation in standard Albanian, and obviously should respect these differences where they do exist. So the problem is not “to ration” borrowed elements but “to rationalize” them, i.e. to make functional all differences between loan words and native words. This way, while levelling the stylistic differences in the name of “genetic purity”, the Albanian planners have in fact impoverished the great expressive possibilities the Albanian language possesses.

As an alternative to a number of *foreign words* (approximately one third of them), newly created Albanian words are proposed. This is done in the name of a functional criterion, since the loan words were considered unclear (LAFE 1985; KOSTALLARI 1990: 23, 25), whereas the Albanian counterparts as more motivated, with more transparent meanings.

More than half of these neologisms are translation loans, i.e. words coined from Albanian morphemes, but following foreign word patterns⁵. In fact, only half of these words provide a greater semantic transparency than the respective loan equivalents. This is because their meanings are a sum of meanings of the component parts of the word. Worth mentioning are some bookish words and terms such as **birësoj** (< bir) to replace the word *adoptoj* (to adopt), which moreover is often confounded in everyday speech with *adaptoj* (to adapt); the word **parësor** (< i, e parë) (of primary importance) and **dytësor** (< i, e dytë) (coming second) instead of *primar* (primary) and *sekondar* (secondary); the word **vendimor** (< vendim) “have the right to take or make decisions” has been recommended to avoid using *deliberativ* (deliberate); **vdekshmëri** (< vdekje) for *mortalitet* (mortality) etc.

It is quite different for some other neological translation loans, the clarity of which is ruined by their foreign structural pattern. Who would think that the word **stinë** (stinë + o) is suggested to be used instead of *stazhë* (to season); that the word **mesditës** (mes + ditë + s) has been proposed to be used for *meridian* (meridian); the word **ndërmjetës** (ndërmjet + ëz) carries the same meaning as *interval* (interval, break); or *ngrohës* (i ngrohtë + orë) should be used for *kaldajë* (boiler)? One who hears these words for the first time tends to give an explanation based on the component elements, i.e. tends “to amplify the motivated links with the word or the words that have generated them” (VEHBIU 1989: 119). Someone who does not know that the

⁴ In the volume *Për pastëtinë e gjuhës shqipe. Fjalor* (For the purity of the Albanian language. Dictionary). Tiranë 1998, where there have been collected all the materials of the column “The Albanian word to be used instead of foreign word” of the magazine *Our Language*, Turkish loans have not been included because of the new connotations they have already acquired in Albanian.

⁵ Neological translation loans are those newly created lexical units that appear as such synchronically, that is in the standard Albanian vocabulary of the eighties, a period during which many borrowings were evaluated.

neologism **përuroj** is proposed to replace the Italianism *inauguroj* (to inaugurate), would think that *përuroj* means “giving somebody the best wishes on a special occasion”, i.e. *uroj*. As it is obvious from the above cases, the key to understanding each neologism correctly does not lie in the meaning of the root of each word. The meaning of this word is not a sum of the composing elements, but an idiomatic meaning, being “served” as a ready-made one by the loan word, whose pattern has been calqued. The Albanian alternatives, compared to the foreign equivalents, do not contribute in any obvious way to improving the clarity of communication. For those people who already know and use the foreign word, the acknowledgement and the use of a new *significans* for an existing *significatum* is nothing but a burden and a strain on their memory. For those who, on the contrary, do not know these meanings, neither the use of a borrowed *significans*, nor the native one, plays any role regarding the clarity of communication. In these cases the use of one alternative or the other is evidence for selections motivated by extralinguistic criteria.

During the process of word formation according to foreign structural patterns many homonymic forms have been obtained. For instance, the word **ballëz** to replace *fasadë* (façade, front) and **ballëz** (runner of the sleigh); **ndërmjetëz** used instead of *interval* (interval) and **ndërmjetëz** (partition wall); **ditor** for *dezhurn* (watch) and the word **ditor-e** (daily); **ndërresë** used for *turn* (shift) and **ndërresa** (linen, underwear) etc. There are a few cases where homonymous pairs are the result of two similar translation patterns from two different borrowings, such as **ballinë** standing for *frontespice* (frontispiece) and **ballinë** standing for *fasadë* (façade, front), **përparësi** for *prioritet* (priority) and **përparësi** standing for *avantazh* (advantage) etc. These homonymous words generally are not used in the same contexts, so they do not lead to misunderstanding in speech. However, it is somewhat paradoxical to create homonymous pairs in a “planned” manner, when efforts are generally made to avoid the use of homonyms, which are the result of a spontaneous development in a language system.

There are also cases when a neologism has been created through translation to denote a certain concept, but later it has been used to denote another one. Thus, to substitute the word *korsi* (track), a new word **vrapore** (vrap+ore) was coined following the borrowed pattern. Meanwhile, the same word **vrapore** is proposed as a replacement for the loan-word *pistë* (lane). In our opinion, the neologism **vrapore** is incorrect and very ambiguous viewed not only as a unit of language (a running track where one runs, the lane of a swimming pool where one swims; the field track sportsmen run, cycle etc.), but also as a unit of speech. It is not taken into consideration what Valter TAULI asserts: “The greater the possibility for semantic confusion, the greater must be the difference in expression” (TAULI 1968: 31)

Neological alternatives have been not only translation loans, but also new creations made from Albanian means which follow the Albanian patterns as well, such as: **llojshmëri** for *asortiment* (assortment), **ndihmesë** for *kontribut* (contribution), **përzgjedh** for *seleksionoj* (to select), **pajtimtar** for *abonent* (subscriber), **besueshmëri** for *kredibilitet* (credibility) etc. In general, such new word formations are clear from the semantic point of view, with the exception of some cases where the new words have been coined from partially or completely unknown roots: from the word **mys**, **i mysët** has been created, instead of the word *konveks* (convex); from **veshtull**, **vesh-**

tulli has been formed to substitute *viskozitet* (viscosity); etc. The meaning of some other words become difficult to capture because of the ambiguous suffix they have, such as the suffix **-ore**, in words like **pellgore** used instead of *bazen* (basin) or **këmbësore** for *trotuar* (pavement) etc.

Words taken from folk speech are proposed as alternatives to replace borrowings in a few cases. They have been suggested sometimes because of their clear formal motivation, such as **fluturushë** (flutur+ushë) to replace the word *balonë* (balloon) or **emnak** (emën+ak) proposed instead of *adash* (name-sake); sometimes because of their semantic motivation, for example **strumbull** for the word *aks* (axle) or **pullë** for *buton* (button); and other times simply for the sake of using Albanian words, although the derivational process is not clear, like **i mermë** for *aromatik* (aromatic). All the borrowings that have been proposed to be replaced are already in broad use and well-known by Albanian speakers, whereas their corresponding Albanian equivalents are composed of almost unknown elements, an example being the words **strumbull**, **fluturushë**, or the word **pullë** having an extremely developed polysemy. Obviously in such cases, the need for indigenous linguistic forms has been overestimated, which is evidence of purism or linguistic nationalism, utterly unjustifiable for the present development phase of the Albanian language.

The 1990's mark a period of great changes for the Albanian language, especially in the lexical field. The political turnabouts, the opening up of Albania to the outside world, and, consequently, the free movement of the people (emigrants, tourists, students etc.), the great role played by the foreign television channels, the Internet, mobile phones, foreign language learning, English in particular, all boosted the contacts of Albanians and their language with different cultures and languages. Many foreign words, especially from English and Italian, flooded into Albanian and, as a result of this, areas such as politics, economics, finance, computer science etc. were greatly enriched. Alongside many necessary loans, numerous *foreign words* came to be used widely in the Albanian language. Many of the proposals made in the eighties by the linguists have already been abandoned; what is worse, even other Albanian words have no longer been used. The "purity" of Albanian strongly demanded during the eighties, now seems a sheer utopia, while the former language policy ceased functioning together with the old regime. Under the present conditions, the government has not yet adopted a new language policy, but intervention to defend Albanian, based on scientific considerations, is indispensable.

To conclude, planning activity to replace borrowings with Albanian words during the 1980's has been inspired mostly by extralinguistic motives, but has not been always based on scientific criteria. Moreover, we cannot speak with certainty about the destiny of the Albanian alternatives since there is no empirical study concerning their knowledge, distribution and usage.

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