

## Important Developments Regarding Historical Phonetics (The Contribute of Professor Kolec Topalli in the Typology of Accent in the Albanian Language)

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### Abstract

K. Topalli is at present one of the most prominent figures of Albanian linguistics, specifically regarding the historical grammar and phonetics of the Albanian language. He has dedicated to these two disciplines a series of valuable studies and articles and the creation and publication of resumptive works such as “Historical phonetics of the Albanian language”(2007) and “Historical grammar of the Albanian language” (2011). It can be said that Prof. Topalli, by continuing the work of the well-known E. Çabej in “Historical phonetics of the Albanian language” and other studies published during the flow of years by BUSHT and “Philological studies”, by also taking into consideration the studies of other colleges who have studied the Albanian phonetics such as A. Dodi, B. Beci, L. Borici etc, has approached the Albanian accent with relevant new information, by giving therefore an even more clear presentation of the Albanian accent’s values and linguistic typology. K. Topalli investigates and analyses almost the whole lexicon of the Albanian language, by examining the dialect introductions and the written language under the perspective of framing the regularities and the typology of the Albanian accent, and even the values and the pragmatics of this phenomenon in the panel of historical transformation of Albanian phonetics.

**KEYWORDS:** Accent in the Albanian language, historical phonetics of Albanian language, historical frame of investigation on accent, the lexicon of Albanian language, regularities and the typology of the Albanian accent.

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The Albanian linguistics has delineated its tradition in all its disciplines through many representatives and researchers who are considered to be central columns in its study. Among the researchers we can name Kristoforidh, Xhuvani, Camaj, Domi, Riza, Demiraj, Bokshi, Ashta, etc. up to the great Çabej, and amid these scholars there is also present our estimated academic Prof. dr. Kolec Topalli. Hi has worked and dedicated this work to two major disciplines which are: historical phonetics and historical grammar, by crowning his study with the two majestic works: “*Historical phonetics of the Albanian language*” and “*Historical grammar of the Albanian language*”.

In the midst of important monographs, which have been dedicated to some of the peculiar phenomena of the historical phonetics of the Albanian language, it deserves to be mentioned the monograph “*The accent of the Albanian language*”, published by the Publishing House Enciklopedike, Tirana 1995, with 530 pages.

Professor Kolec Topalli will begin his research in the point where the investigations of Prof. E. Çabej, which were in the field of historical phonetics of the Albanian language, were left. He will not limit himself only in this issue, but he will also take into consideration and support other papers and researches of his linguistic colleges, in relation with the accent of the Albanian language, with relevant new information, by giving to us an even more comprehensible representation of the values and linguistic typology of the accent in the Albanian language.

The monograph has been written in a way that apart from the Preface even the Table of Abbreviations is has included an introduction section where the writer gives a presentation of the accent in European languages, which is product of the analysis of his research on Albanologs, Balkanologs and Indoeuropeans. On the other side the book poses a very broad field of study, in relation with the analysis of the accent in the:

- *Phonetic plane (differences between the accented and unaccented vowels),*
- *Morphologic and Word-formation plane, because the accent is tightly related with the formation of words and grammatical contractions;*
- *Syntactic plane, the accent is a characteristic of a word, which has a relative independence; therefore it can be discussed on a sentence accent of a syntactic accent.*

For that reason the linguist will analyze in the first chapter the features of the accentuation of words in the Albanian language, its dynamic accent. Through examples he will reach the following conclusions:

1. In primeval phases of the Indo-European languages the accent was movable inside the word. Even though in some special case the word: dhëndërr; dhëndurrë (with a rudimentary characteristic) is presented in the language *with a fixed accent during the inflection.*
2. The Albanian language in relation with the accent belongs to the group of languages which have a *penultimate accent* and this feature is present only in the morphologic aspect, because the accent does not accentuate flections. The Albanian language has positioned the *accent in the last syllable*, by creating oksiton words with a trochaic rhythm; by following the nature of the Albanian language and the prominent morphologic character of the accent of the Albanian language, because it has been created historically and it present many difficulties regarding its research.
3. The Albanian language has had the *accent in the first syllable* (nistor) and this fact can be verified by the different linguistic material of the past which we still have in the present, on primeval phases of the development of the Albanian language. Specific inclinations of the accent have had important values for long periods of time, but this does not mean they are unchangeable. These changes have a typologic character; they are intrinsic processes of development, which are carried out in long periods of time. The accent in the first syllable in many words was present in Ilirian language; therefore the Albanian language has inherited this kind of accent.

The problem of dating the presence of the accent in the first syllable is difficult to be resolved. Finding and placing the chronology of this peculiarity is very important also for understanding some intrinsic development which have taken place in later times among the dialects of the Albanian language, but without relating to this phenomenon.

The antiquity of this peculiarity of the Albanian language does not allow us to explain the changes with dialectic character, through the usage of the accent in the first syllable, which can be noticed in the place of the accent in some word groups such as the contractions of the Geg pronouns: aj, at(ë), in contrast to the Toks ones: ai, atë,<sup>1</sup> etc.

The passage from the previous phase, the accent in the first syllable, to the phase of the accent in the last syllable of the word is very difficult to be determined, because we are dealing with different periods of the language's development. Besides, the typological changes of the word's accent are carried out in long periods of time. The author analyzes the problem by supporting his study on the creation of *borrowing relations*. Moreover Prof. Sh. Demiraj also gives his support in the problem of the accentuation of vowels in the Albanian language, which has terminated during the contacts of the Albanian language with the Slavic language.<sup>2</sup>

In the second chapter the linguist analyses the specter of accentuated vowels, which create a very tight relation with the dynamic accent. Taking into consideration the fact that our present language has an inclination to flatten the quantitative differences of the vowels, for the study of this phenomenon we have to go back to an earlier phase of the Albanian language, which is well-preserved among dialects, first by the Geg dialect, then in some margins of the Tosk dialect (especially in the Labërisht dialect and in the Çamërisht dialect) but also in the language of the Albanian diasporas. The comparison done with written materials that date back in primeval period can give a fuller notion of this language phenomenon, which coincides historically with the period before the Turkish invasion in our *Medieval* period. Regarding the ways of explaining the changes in the quantity of vowels Prof. Topalli supports the Balkanist and Indoeuropeanist thesis with relevant arguments such as our Albanolog Çabej, though the method of comparing borrowings or by leaning on old Albanian authors and more precisely on the :<sup>3</sup>

- merging of few vowels when a sound has dropped or when a group of sounds after the accentuated vowel;*
- when the long vowels are sequential to the same vowels during the Indo-European period;*
- *the first intervention in the rules regarding quantity comes from the action which farther consonants have on accentuated vowels;*
- the second intervention comes from the interaction of vowels.* The author treats examples of the borrowings from Latin and examples from authors of ancient literature by analyzing the way how these paths are realized, and the process of transformation of the long vowels in middle or short vowels.

<sup>1</sup> Topalli, K. 1995. The accent in the Albanian language. Tirana, SHBE. P. 59

<sup>2</sup> Demiraj, Sh. Historical monograph.

<sup>3</sup> Çabej, E. 1967. Studies regarding etymology.

After making a complete analysis of this phenomenon, the researcher treats in full detail and investigating this process in all the parts of speech.

- *Nominative, adjectival, pronominal and numerical systems;*
- *Verbal system and other parts of speech;*

He reaches different conclusions for each part of speech, through the comparison of examples, through the exploitation of the linguistic material offered by other old authors and simultaneously through the forms of dialects, especially of those belonging to the Geg dialect where the problems of quantity of vowels are more dominant.

In the third chapter the Albanolog will treat the evolution of in unstressed vowels. The vowels which have found themselves outside the accent of the word have had a different treatment compared to accentuated vowels. Their major trait in the Albanian language for this unstressed vowel is shriveling or total elimination. Even for this case the author follows the same method of investigation for the material, by taking into consideration as a basis the work of Buzuku which might be seen as an independent problem, in relation with unstressed vowels in the beginning of a word in this work and the researcher stresses:

*...the presence of this sound in the text of Buzuk does not have an etiological value, and rather than connected with the ancient 'accent in the first syllable' it must be more tightly connected with the difficulty which is raised in the pronunciation of some specific groups of consonants.*

Therefore, this phenomenon is a display of syntactic phonetics, a phenomenon which a broader extension, up to generalizations such as: *tue bam me ditunë en engjëllit.* (XIX). Moreover the author in a later phase analyses the unstressed vowels in the body of the word and notices that difference in sound are dependent from three factors:

- *The composition of words, which determines the distance of vowels in relation with the accent, the vowels which are nearer to the accent are shriveled in a higher degree compared to the ones in the beginning of the word;*
- *From the character of the consonants near the vowel sounds: guttural consonants and labial consonants have influences on the preservation of the vowel -u- and in the transformation of vowels -o- in the last ones;*
- *From the character of vowels: the vowel -u- is presented more preserved: after this vowel comes the vowel -a- which has a larger opening than other vowels;*

The author pays a great deal of care to the phenomenon of vowel shriveling of the unstressed vowel in the -ë- sound, to the process of metathesis in the field of borrowings, and also to special words in dialect, especially in the Geg dialect. The conclusions of the researcher for this issue is that not in all the cases the changes of unstressed vowels should be necessarily searched in a specific phonetic phenomenon, because in the majority of cases similar changes can be unconditional (spontaneous), such as the case of

the passage of the vowel –ë- in –e- of the Geg dialect.<sup>4</sup> In the same way it was done for the other vowels. Throughout an analysis of the –ë- and –e- the author relates with the older phases of their development and the distinction among these two pair of vowels are very small and it is found in the special evolution which words with two syllables accentuated have followed, in these words the vowel in the first syllable has been preserved unchanged, ex.:

*Compare: mallëkoj < Latin Maledicere;*

*ngadhënjej < Italian Guadagnare;*

As connecting points amidst these two pair of vowels there can be also mentioned the changing in dialectic character of –ë- in –e-: pëlqej, gërmoj, ndërshkoj me gjarpën, orben, pjepën, etc. whereas the case of unstressed vowels at the end of the word presents a strong interest for the historical phonetics and also for the historical morphology. The collection and the exploitation of the material are analyzed through the source of the ending –ë- in the nominative, adjectival, pronominal systems etc. such as in the cases of vowels, their quantity etc. Throughout foreign and national authors' theses regarding the phenomenon treated and for the inherited endings, the researcher does not limit himself in giving his own judgments, by always leaning on his own source of Albanian language: Buzuku, Budi, Bogdani etc.

In the *second* part of his monograph Prof. Topalli will treat the concept of the *accent of the sentence*. In each chapter the linguist will specify the phenomenon in phonetics (in the vocalic and consonantal system with specific processes of the change and dropping of the phonemes), in the grammatical system through the action of SAND'HIT, and also the features of word-formation through compounding of SAND'HIT.

The investigation and analysis of all these issues in the second chapter is related with the particular denomination "*sand'hi*" that means "*connection, unification*", which is a term of the Sanskrit language used in the Indian grammar. After completing a preface of the phonetic phenomena in sand'hi the author will focus especially on the phenomena related with phonetics, but also with syntax, something which is nominated *syntactic phonetics*.

This has to do with the changes of words in the discourse, related with the boundaries of words or morphemes, in the beginning or at the end of their phonetic character, but the major cause is the syntactic character. However the changes of words, which are observed in the everyday speech, are not always represented in the written language. As a consequence, the written language, by aiming the inculcation of the norm, acts as an inhibitor in the inclination of word changing in the spoken language.

The author takes into consideration the graphics of other old authors (especially of Budi) who generally follow an orthography based of syntactic phonetics, by writing words in different groups by following the rhythm of the sentence, for instance:

*Exhakoni mbet ejthase, unë mirë e di ediecmësonj me gjithë zemërë.*

<sup>4</sup> Topalli, K. 1995. The accent in the Albanian language. Tirana, SHBE. P.179

*The field which has attracted the attention of researchers since ancient times is therefore the phenomenon of sand'hi, where the changes of words in it can be external when they come from the clash of two words with one another; and internal when the changes happen intrinsically in the words during the union of morphemes.*<sup>5</sup>

This is a very broad phenomenon: it happens in the vocal system during the shifting of accent in the quantitative change of vowels (in spoken ones were the length of vowels has been preserved); it happens also in the elimination of vowels (especially the cases of -ë-elimination when is has a milder pronunciation) where the researcher studies the cases, particularly among *serving words* (*prepositions, conjunctions, numerals, adverbs etc*) but also the cases of other vowels: *e, a, i, o*. All of the issues mentioned are seen under the phenomenon of elision which is quite spread in the spoken language and with which the Albanian language has the peculiarity of joining words with one-another. In the orthography of the present language, for the sake of preserving the norm, this phenomenon is reflected only in a few cases (m'i, t'i, m'u, t'u, t'et, s'ëmës); however the spoken language applies it to a broader extent.

A phenomenon which is observed rarely than elision is *afereza* (the dropping of the vowel in the beginning of the word), and *sinkopa* (the dropping of the vowel in the body of the word). A special place is occupied by anapitik vowels, which avoid the difficulties created in the speech process from the union of two or three consonants which belong to different words or morphemes. Similar vowels which have this function are:

The /ë/ and /i/ and in more rare cases the /e/ and /a/

In the nominal and verbal system we have for example: *krushqit-krushqish* (but there are also exceptions) from Buzuku we have: *eni e ecnjëmi ndë dritët te Tinëzot (XXXI a)* etc. In the phenomenon of sand'hi in the consonantal system the major role is played by the dynamic accent of the sentence, which, by connecting words with one-another, has caused important changes in the boundaries of phonetic sentences (extrinsic sand'hi) and in the boundaries of morphemes in a singular word (intrinsic sand'hi). Apart from the mentioned concepts there is also a phenomenon related with the dynamic accent and the dropping of syllables which is nominated *syllabic dissimilation* or *haplology*. Even punctuation in a sentence or in a singular word creates two phonetically equal or similar syllables, one of which when found in unstressed position is dropped. Prof. Topalli analyzes through concrete examples the action of this phenomenon, by explaining the cases of the article which is places in frontal position in names belonging to the genitive case or in adjectives; in the process of word-formation, he analyzes the reduction of some compound words during the creation of grammatical contractions, when the phonetic composition of the contraction has been the same or similar to the last syllable of the word (*for instance vendi i mbërritjes- vend mbërritjeje- vend mbërritje*). Additionally, the same function of anapitik vowels is played by consonants which eliminate the hiatus (process when two vowels which are near one another are dropped due to the difficulty of pronunciation and this problem can be eliminated by the interference of a consonantal

<sup>5</sup> Topalli, K. 1995. The accent in the Albanian language. Tirana, SHBE. P. 287

sound). These consonantal sounds are: *-j- -v- -h-* which act in the nominal system, in the process of word-formation or in grammatical contractions and not only among names but also in the class of pronouns and in this point the author realizes the cases of usage with a dialectic character. In the verbal system, the most typical case of the usage of this phenomenon is in the imperative mood with a short *enclitic* contraction: *ruaje, laji*, etc. The same function is played by other consonants *-v-* and *-h-*. Finally the researcher will analyze the manner of analytical process of sand'hi in the whole grammatical system: in all the parts of speech and especially in word-formation. What is eventually emphasized by the author that is specifically related with the sand'hi is with new manner of word-formation which is *compounding*. This manner of forming new words has a popular characteristic and is one of the oldest in the Albanian language. In this method there are included many ancient words which have been formed many years ago, and this fact is proved by their accent, placed in the beginning of the word. This manner of word-formation has included all the parts of discourse, but it has proved to be productive in some specific categories of words, such as in undetermined pronouns, especially in words which cannot be inflected such as with adverbs, conjunctions, particles etc. In the category of nouns this has extended in the field of onomatopoeias: in toponimi and antroponimi. Nevertheless, in many lexico-grammatical categories such as in adjectives, this manner of word-formation has not developed independently from other manners of word-formation, by transforming this process in a very productive one in the Albanian language. In the theoretical researcher plane, this type of word-formation represents the entrenchment of therefore other fields: morphology, syntax and etymology. In this paper it can be said that we were able to fulfill what it was aimed in relation with the work of this linguist, researcher of the Albanian language, his contribute in the field of historical phonetics and grammatical phonetics. Therefore he deserves a place of honor in the field of Albanological studies, by denoting the highest level of discoveries made up to present days in these two disciplines.

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