

TOPONYMS OF ALBANIA AS PERSONAL NAMES AMONG KOSOVO ALBANIANS

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Toponyms of Albania as personal names among Kosovo Albanians

Abstract: This paper aims at analyzing the trend among Kosovo Albanians to create given names using toponyms of Albania in various social and political circumstances.

The research is conducted from a sociolinguistic perspective.

During the years of non-communication between Albania and Yugoslavia, Albanians in Kosovo have expressed their Albanian identity by naming their children using names of towns, provinces, islands and rivers from Albania.

Data taken from birth registrars' offices through the years show the Kosovar Albanians' point of view towards the state of Albania. It reflects the symbolic role that Albania had/has for Albanians beyond its geographical borders.

Keywords: given names, identity, sociolinguistics, toponyms.

This paper aims at analyzing the trend among Kosovo Albanians to give names to children using toponyms of Albania in various social and political circumstances. The research is conducted from the sociolinguistic perspective.

During the years of severance of relations between Albania and Yugoslavia, Albanians in Yugoslavia, most of whom were inhabitants of Kosovo, have expressed their Albanian identity, inter alia, also by naming their children using town names of Albania (Vlora, Elbasan, Berat, Milot, Saranda), province names (Mirdita, Mat), river names (Drin, Drilon, Vjosa, Shkumbin, Erzen), island names (Sazan), the names of the two seas (Adriatic and Jon), and a mountain name (Tomor). The trend of giving such names reflects also the social context of Kosovo Albanians. In Albania¹ such names have not been given at all, with few exceptions. For example, the name Tomor also has a religious connotation for Bektashi community and can be found among people who were born before 1945.

The research includes a sample of 31,475 names from voters list of the municipality of Kaçanik/Kosovo and a list of 2,122 pupils of the elementary school "Ismail Qemali", born after 1999. The data are analyzed within social circumstances of change of sociopolitical status in order to show the trend of change.

The study aims at giving answers to these questions:

¹ During communist times in Albania, starting from 1975, in order to register a newborn at the civil state office, the parents were given a dictionary/catalogue containing 6,000 Albanian and Illyrian names from which they should choose.

- What were the social contexts in which the toponyms of Albania started to be used for naming the children in Kosovo?
- To what extent did these names reflect the social changes in general in the last five-six decades?
- How much did these names evolve in line with the change of social contexts?

Context and data

Until the beginning of the first decade of last century, Albanians were part of four different vilayets (provinces) of the Ottoman Empire, but have not managed to create a joint state after the Ottomans left (Malcolm 1998: 259, Schmitt 2012a: 168). The declaration of independence of Albania was made with dubious borders (Schmitt 2012b: 139) that were projected in March 1913, when a commission of officers of six states of the Great Powers was established in order to determine those borders (Malcolm 1998: 268), which were set in August 1913, making Serbia the great winner of the First Balkan War (Hall 2002: 102) and leaving approximately half of Albanians outside the recently founded state.

Most Albanians became part of a state which was to be created later, first as the Kingdom of Serbs Croats and Slovenes and later as Yugoslavia². After World War II, a socio-political system of socialism was established on both sides of the border, and in 1948 the relations between Yugoslavia and Albania became tense, leading to total severance of relations, which made Albanians on both sides of the border unable to communicate with each other.

The accounts of Malcolm (1998) and Schmitt (2012b) are the two most reliable international studies in relation to the situation of Albanians in former Yugoslavia. Never did Kosovo have the status of a republic within the federative state of Yugoslavia. Ismajli (1998 and 2002) offers a more comprehensive background regarding the status of the Albanian language in former Yugoslavia in different social contexts within this state. He emphasizes that while the state of Yugoslavia tries to create a special identity among Kosovo Albanians, using the name *Šiptari* instead of the name *Albanci* in order to make a distinction between Albanians of Yugoslavia and those of Albania, Kosovo Albanians fight in the process of language planning for a unified official language and a unified Albanian identity, crowned with the decision for a unified Albanian at *Konsulta Gjuhësore* (Language Conference) of 1968.

This general awareness is also reflected in the change of trend of giving names to children.

An improved status for Albanians and their national awareness rising, as noticed by Ismajli (1998: 156), appears during the sixties. The status of the Albanian language in Kosovo after this period is divided into three phases (Rugova 2012: 164): the first phase which goes up to nineties, following the fall of communism in Albania, and in which the Albanian language in Kosovo is a second-class language but with a notable awareness among its users for its cultivation; the second phase which lasts until the end of the war in Kosovo, when Kosovo and Albania continue to be separated; and the third phase when free contact is established between Albanians in former Yugoslavia, which are now part of four different states: Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia³. Units that used to be

² After World War II, Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia.

³ Kosovo has declared its independence in 2008 and has so far been recognized by 96 states, but

symbolic concepts at this point become concrete. Names such as Milot, Berat, Valbonë, Mat, Sarandë are not symbols of Albania anymore; instead, they are concrete places that can be seen and considered or not considered beautiful.

Bekteshi (2002), Goçi (2006), and Caka and Caka (2010) report on the trend of giving names to children in Kosovo.

Bekteshi (2002) has followed the trend of changes of personal names among Albanians in Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania, and in Preshevo Valley in 1950–1995, doing a research of a register of 4,000 names taken from school registers. Goçi (2006) deals with individual identity but his conclusions are based on induction. Caka and Caka (2010) expand temporal space (1912–2008) and offer a register of 1,5 million names of people in Kosovo, and then give a list of the 100 most used names in different phases. We have used the results of Bekteshi and Caka and Caka for this research.

Table 1. Change of personal names in Kosovo according to Bekteshi (2002: 197)

Year	Albania		Kosovo	
	Albanian	Foreign	Albanian	Foreign
1950	31	69	-	100
1955	40	60	4	96
1960	38	62	13	87
1965	35	65	15	85
1970	39	61	35	64
1975	30	70	56	44
1980	31	69	74	26
1985	29	71	94	6
1990	18	82	96	4
1995	16	84	98	2
Total	30,7	69,3	48,4	51,6

Bekteshi offers data showing the commencement of usage of names with meanings in Albanian during the sixties, with a rapid expansion later on, while in 1995 only 2% of Albanian pupils have names that are not “Albanian”: either with no meaning in Albanian or not Illyrian.

Table 2. Names of people based on toponyms, according to Caka’s notes (2010)

Female names		Male names	
1969–1988	1989 – 2007	1969–1988	1989 – 2007
1.Valbona 1,59	10. Arta 0,81	46. Labinot 0,44	22. Drilon 0,63
8. Vlora 1,1	22. Vlora 0,62	56. Shkelzen 0,36	27. Labinot 0,56
35. Arta 0,49	29. Saranda 0,56	61. Berat 0,34	70. Berat 0,33
79. Saranda 0,27	69. Valbona 0,3		
	82. Vjosa 0,26		
	85. Aulona 0,25		

is not a UN member.

Caka and Caka offer data showing that Valbonë was the most common name during 1969–1988, while around 1,6% of the Albanian girls were baptized with this northern Albanian river name. Until 1969, during three previous phases, the most common name was Fatime.

Among names of places for names of people, during 1989–2007, the most common one is Arta, a town in Greece, in a territory that used to be inhabited by an Albanian population. However, the name is not only a toponym; it has a meaning in Albanian and has to do with the word *gold*.

In a more comprehensive register of names, changes of gender of names may also be noticed: Milot (town in Albania) and Milote (feminine name deriving from the name Milot), Labinot (name of a mountain close to Elbasan) and Labinote (feminine name deriving from Labinot), Sazan (island close to Valona) and Sazana (a name turned into feminine form). The role of these names is symbolic⁴.

Our research conducted upon a register taken from voters list of the municipality of Kaçanik in Kosovo includes 31,475 names out of which 328 are names derived from toponyms of Albania. Ten of those are names derived from toponyms of Kosovo: Mirushe (river), Sharr (mountain), Korab (mountain), Pashtrik (mountain), Dukagjin (province). The list shows that 1,03 % of given names were obtained from toponyms.

Table 3. List of names from toponyms in the voters list

Female names	Male names
Valbona (Valbonë) 103	Labinot 20
Vlora 64	Berat 18
Arta 29	Shkelzen 15
Saranda 16	Drilon 10
Vjosa 2	Shkodran 9
Labinote 2	Drin 8
	Elbasan 7
	Shkumbin 5
	Dibrin 4
	Butrint 4
	Erzen 3
	Milot 2
	Sazan 1
	Tomor 1

Table 4. The list of names from toponyms in the list of pupils born after 1999

Female names	Male names
Arta 9	Drin 10
Vjosa 1	Labinot 2
Saranda 1	Berat 1
Vlora 1	

⁴ As an illustration, the name Berat is a Slavic toponym; Saranda is Greek, whereas the name Valbona is Latin.

In the list of 2,122 pupils born after 1999, there still are names of places, names of rivers, but no names such as Valbonë, Vlorë, Berat, Milot (a small and a rather unappealing town alongside Pristina-Tirana highway).

While the percentage of names derived from toponyms continues to be similar as before, a change of trend is rather obvious and there is a noticeable decline in usage of names of towns. The name Arta, as mentioned above, is not merely a toponym; it has a meaning in Albanian similar to Goldie in English and Zlata in Serbian.

Drin is the name of a river that flows into the Adriatic Sea in Albania and has its spring in Kosovo.

Conclusions

The data show that names of people in Kosovo have been following the social status of Albanians in former Yugoslavia even after the dissolution of this state. According to this data, the social context of awareness for a joint nation with Albania, a state with no physical contact with Yugoslavia and Kosovo within it, has made Kosovo Albanians express their identity and symbolic connection with Albania through the usage of names of places in Albania for names of children. This also coincides with the creation of an awareness to give priority to Albanian names before religious ones, which were traditional in this country.

However, after the establishment of physical contact between the two countries (Kosovo and Albania) after 1999, there was no further need for a symbolic connection between the two states and when there is no further need for protection of identity from others such names cease to be used almost entirely. This also has to do with the fact that some places after which Kosovo children are named are not very attractive places, which also proves that their attractiveness as given names was part of a symbolic connection with what the people conceived as their motherland.

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