The Americanization of Albanians from the late XXth Century

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Abstract

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The late XXth century led to the collapse of the communist regime and the democratization of Albania, which would mean for the Albanians observing the prohibited countries and facing the strong desire to adapt to them. Consequently, Europe and the USA became the targets of Albanians immigrating for a better future. This new phase of Albanian history was filled with different phenomena, immigration becoming a mass; English and American culture as well.

Therefore, the article aims at bringing at the limelight the importance of English language studies in Albania in the late XXth century and early XXIst century as well as the Americanization of Albanians considering that the USA became the promised land of the Albanians later than the other nationalities. Immigrants and the future immigrants started being interested in English language learning. English was taught in the eighth form and high schools, then lately in the primary school as well.

Language learning is equalized to culture learning. Thus, the Albanians started making theirs even features of American culture, features either read in books and watched in movies or imported from the immigrants. Consequently, through a research and analysis of various articles, I will attempt to show data on this issue and analyse English language's importance and American culture in Albanians' lives.

At the end, the article draws conclusions about this concerning issue, the Americanization of Albanians. It summarizes the finding of the analysis revealing the role of English language and American culture and the way these features are adapted in Albania in the XXth century and onwards.

Keywords: *Albania, English language, importance, Americanization, adaptation, cultural features*

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Introduction

Albania, as all the world countries, has undergone through the hardships of its history. It has gone through various wars, various regimes and various social events. The political regimes are the ones which leave more traces in a country's history considering that it influences all the spheres of life. In the last century, Albania has experienced two different political regimes, a totalitarian one, communism and a democratic regime, democracy. The communist regime lasted longer for the Albanians and its collapse would mark the beginning of democracy and the breaking of the communist rules. The first perception of Albanians about the democratic regime was the free movement, which at that moment was equalized with immigration, then the experiencing of the prohibited „things" from the communist regime.

Therefore, these changes started with the first protests of the intellectuals to break the communist regime which were followed by the efforts of many Albanians to flee the country through the western embassies. „*Throughout 1990, thousands of Albanian citizens tried to flee the country through Western embassies. A multinational relief operation arranged for the safe evacuation of more than 5.000 Albanians, and 20.000 more sailed illegally to Italy in vessels seized at civilian ports.*"[1]

English Language Situation before 1990

It is of interest to consider the attitude of Albanians towards English language. The position of English language before and after the 1990's is totally different, regarding that before the 1990's, it was a language spoken by the imperialists, as it was masked by the party state leaders. According to oral history, „*English is the language of the imperialists who are attempting to destroy our People's Socialist Republic.*" This does not mean that none could speak English, for sure, there were people who had studied English and they worked either in diplomacy or as translators for the foreigners. For sure all

[1] http://www.countriesquest.com/europe/albania/history/beginnings_of_democracy.htm

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their work was dedicated to the party state and the government. As well, being isolated from the rest of the world, the American films, books and media were totally banned. Consequently, the Albanians had no contact with the American culture by that period.

English Language Situation after 1990 & Influencing Factors

The collapse of communism led to the opening of Albania towards Europe, which was not the only destination of the Albanians. America was the next, and the most required one. This is marked as the period of post-1990, which can be broken down into the 1991-1992 stream, which was wholly uncontrolled, when approximately 300.000 Albanians left the country; the 1992-1996 stream, when a similar number migrated, most illegally, despite the temporary improvement of the economy and better border controls; and the 1996-1997 stream, immediately after the collapse of various pyramid schemes, which wiped out the savings of hundreds of thousands of people. In the national unrest that followed, a combination of unemployment, poverty, and economic hardships led to the migration of around 70,000 people within a few months. Finally, since 1998, a gradual improvement in economic, political and social conditions and favourable immigration policies in two key receiving countries, Greece and Italy, have increased legal immigration and reduced illegal flows.[2] The period after 1998 was characterized by a - to some extent - legal immigration towards the USA considering that the Albanians were favourite to be elected by the Green Card Lottery increasing the number of Albanian immigrants in the USA as the number of Albanians accepted is higher compared to the other immigrants whose countries had a higher number of immigrants.[3] As it comes out from the Albanian waves of immigration the main reason for the Albanians was the economic one. Another one was education and then the desire for a better future.

[2] Barjaba Kosta, ***Albania: Looking Beyond the Borders***, August 2004.
[3] http//:www.a history of immigration laws, 7/2004, May 2005.

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This great tendency of the Albanians to immigrate to the USA led to another phenomenon, that of brain drain. According to some studies done in Albania and America the two processes have considerable numbers. The specter of brain drain looms large over Albanian immigration. In the period 1990-2003, approximately 45 percent of the professors and researchers at universities and institutions emigrated, as did more than 65 percent of the scholars who received PhDs in the West in the period 1980-1990. Thousands of university graduates left as well. The majority took along their family members. The reason for this migration is simple: a lack of employment opportunities at home. If the country's economic and social situation does not improve, Albania's brain drain will continue to be a concern, as Albanian legislation currently poses no obstacles to migration and pull factors look likely to continue to draw the educated.[4] It is also a drain of those who would otherwise likely become leaders and domestic investors, promoting Albania's stability and development. Brain drain is also considered as an appealing problem even for the other generations. Brain drain is a barrier to the realization of the right of society to be developed. Immigration of the Albanian intellectual elite is an undesirable phenomenon accompanying the economic transition and has negative impacts on the social-economic development of the country. It reduces the number of the researchers, engineers and pedagogues, the majority of whom have been specialized in the countries of Western Europe and the United States, and increases the lack of talented young and medium age researchers, whose emigration rates are very high.

Apart from the negative impact immigration had in terms of brain drain, still it needs to be stressed the fact that they are a financial aid for their relatives in Albania and simultaneously they bring part of the language and culture of the country they live in. By living in the USA, the Albanians have become naturalized and Americanized as well, especially, the Albanians who entered the USA via the Green Card Lottery. Only in 2003, 2.284 Albanians have been naturalized and in 2004 3.324 Albanians have been

[4] Barjaba Kosta, ***op. cit***.

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naturalized in the USA, all these in different states of America, which means that the number of Albanian immigrants naturalized in USA is growing day by day. Not only this but also they have been favoured more than the other groups of immigrants and in 2003 3.362 Albanians have become Legal Residents, in 2004 3.834 Albanian immigrants have become Legal Residents in USA, thus the number grows with the passing of the years.[5] Naturalization or assimilation involves learning English language. English language becomes normal to some point and, thus, these immigrants bring this language in their homeland, using it in many of the moments. Thus, immigrants become a source of language and culture bringing in their country.

The other characteristic of the democratic regime settled in Albania in the late XXth century led to the opening of Albanian relations to the other countries. America, aiming at showing its supremacy in the world, became „*the best friend of Albania*," as it was cited in many TV channels or in the news editions. Consequently, it is clearly realized the friendship of Albania to the USA. This friendship is visible in the bilateral agreements and cooperative relations, making the pro US sentiment widespread among Albanians. „*In 2003, Albania and the U.S. signed and ratified a number of agreements, including a treaty on the Prevention of Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the Promotion of Defense and Military Relations; the Adriatic Charter; and an Agreement regarding the non-surrender of persons to the International Criminal Court. The U.S. strongly supported Albania's NATO membership goal and continues to support Albanian integration into the EU. Working towards NATO membership, the U.S. and Albania signed a Supplementary Agreement to the Partnership for Peace Status of Forces Agreement, an important step in strengthening bilateral cooperation and enhancing security, peace, and stability in the region.*"[6] Albania did not become the focus of USA only about political issues, but economic and educational included. As such, „*since FY 1991, the U.S. has provided Albania with more than $550 million in*

[5] ***Ibidem***.

[6] ***Fullbright and English language fellows, 2012-2013***, Embassy of the United States of America, Public Affairs Office, March 19, 2012.

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assistance, not counting U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) food aid. The aid has served to facilitate Albania's transition from the most isolated and repressive communist state in Europe to a modern democracy with a market-oriented economy, and to support long-term development. In 2006, the U.S. gave over $24 million to Albania under the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) Act program. Albania was among the first countries selected to participate in the Threshold Program under the Millennium Challenge Account, winning a grant of $13.8 million. In September 2006, Albania began implementation of the program, which targets two critical stumbling blocks to development - corruption and rule of law."[7]

Additionally, native English speakers started coming from the USA to be engaged in Albanian schools. Teaching English as a foreign language has been the tendency in the last 30 years. This has given rise to many language centers in all Albania. Just taking the example of Elbasan, there are nearly 10 language centers. English language was introduced in all the cycles of education. In the late 5 years, English started to be taught in primary schools as well. The University of Elbasan firstly introduced English studies in 1994 with 20 students.[8] The number of students started to increase and each year from the last 5 years they accept 120 students per year. These figures show clearly that there is a high preference to study English language. But the number of students of English language is far too large considering that there are 13 public universities in Albania, all offering English studies and 38 private universities, where English for specific purposes is taught.[9] Furthermore, English language knowledge is becoming an important factor to graduate, meaning that students have to pass an internationally known test of English language before graduating a Master or Doctorate degree, in accordance to the Bologna Agreement embraced by the Albanian Education System.

Education and politics apart, English language entered Albania as in the other countries through technology. Until the democratic regime was

[7] ***Ibidem***.

[8] http://www.uniel.edu.al/index.php/rreth-nesh-shkencat-humane

[9] http://www.spainexchange.com/study-abroad/universities2-AL-en-cu.htm

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established, Albania was poor in terms of equipments. Families were hardly equipped with any TV or fridge, thus no opportunity of speaking about technology by that time. The beginning of democracy led to the introduction of technology. The introduction of technology made the Albanian vocabulary enriched with loan words, where the English ones were more dominant. For example words related to computers like: *maus-mouse, klikoj - click,* or even words used in academic fields like *implementoj - implement* or even words related to politics like *fërst leidi - first lady* etc.

Language learned, there is a tendency to practice it or listen to it spoken. The previous isolation and the desire to break with it, including watching foreign TV channels, as well as the desire to practice the language they learn, the Albanian English speakers commenced to watch various American films. Most of the times, the film acts or words are being transported in everyday life. Thus, just by observation, it is clearly realized that most of the greetings between young generations are words in English like *hi, what's up*, most of the online chat is filled with abbreviations in English language, to the extent that they are leaving aside their native language.

Not just that, but English as a global language is being implemented in many of the academic works. As such, foreign literature especially native one is always recommended to students or to researches, which reveals to them the necessity to study and implement English language. Maybe because of the repression the Albanians had during the communist period, by being banned to read foreign books, but after the collapse of communism, there was evident a will to read foreign books, as such, translation became a fruitful industry. Myself, I have experienced the translation job, which is not just beneficial but, as well, it bears commitment, considering that the culture of one country needs to be translated as well. But the fact that the Albanians are more open nowadays, does not bear that much of difficulty as they are aware of some of the features of the American culture.

Before the 1990's and for some years after that, the English culture was represented (from Albania's perspective) by its famous writers like

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Shakespeare and especially Byron who has also traveled and spoken of Albania and Albanians in his works.[10] Whereas after the 1990's when the Albanians started to be exposed to the American film, they started being aware of the situation. Moreover, teenagers started liking it, considering that they found it near to their desires. The degree of likeness was to that level that they even imitated or behaved like them. Gestures, words or even opinions read or watched in some American books or movies became part of the Albanian teenagers.

The good relations between Albania and the western countries, including America, led to their presence in Albania. Thus the USA has always had its own ambassador in Albania.[11] This has increased the employment opportunity to the people who spoke and understood English. Thus, many people were employed as interpreters or other positions.

Attitude of Albanians towards English

It looks strange that despite the difficult problems the Albanian society has faced up during these 22 years of democratization and opening towards the world, the attitude of Albanians towards English language has changed so much and the majority and especially the educated people demonstrate it clearly. The period after 1990 showed clearly the necessity to know a foreign language and English became the target. Such a tendency has been in progress each year, and there can be parents who evidently push their children since young age to study English. Thus, language centers during the last 15 years have been filled up and still work in full capacity and their number is growing as well. A child, who studies English and then progresses with it, is more apt to get a better education and in the future he/she is more apt to get a better job. The Bologna Agreement embraced by the Albanian educational system gives much importance to English

[10] Irena Pata Kapo, ***English language influence in the XXIst century Albania and English loans in Albanian language***, in ***Problems of Education in the XXIst Century***, Volume 33, 2011.

[11] ***Fullbright and English language fellows, 2012-2013***.

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language. The students cannot graduate if they do not take an international known English test. According to the Albanian common sense, if a child studies a foreign language, he/she learns one more culture and the tendency to as many foreign languages as possible has been in increasing figures. Apart from that, for most of the Albanian parents one language means one more culture for their children as such, it is important that they learn as many as possible and improve for their future. That will help them even improve in terms of mentality and move forward to a more open-minded society.

Conclusions

It needs to be emphasized, that the regime under which a country represents an important factor in shaping the history of the country as well as the lives of its people. Even minor features are influenced, including foreign languages' importance and attitude of its people. The same happened to Albania during and after communism and the situation of English language. Its situation changed drastically, from the language of an imperialist country which wanted to harm our pure people's republic, as it was claimed by communist leaders, into the language of politics, culture, education, technology to becoming a great means of survival as well as employment. People's awareness changed dramatically as well after the collapse of communism, including their attitude towards foreign languages and the foreign societies, English and American in this case. Certainly, the teenagers and youngsters are the first groups that are influenced more easily. The factors that led to these changes are immigration, technology, education, foreign presence and presence of native speakers. These factors have created new jobs related to English language, such as interpreters and teachers; as well it has increased the number of the language centers.

English language learning led to culture learning as well, considering that a language is learned with its culture. Consequently, the Albanians have faced the Americanization phenomenon, making the Albanians implement English words in their everyday talks. Apart from them, even technological words are implemented by people who are employed or have access to

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them. It needs to be considered the fact that the people who are firstly apt to get Americanized are the youth as they are more easily adapting to the new modernity, new ideologies and new trends, imitating even gestures of the US citizens.

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