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The Potentiality of Pluricentrism

Albanian Case Studies and Beyond

Edited by
Lumnije Jusufi

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Lumnije Jusufi

Instead of a Preface: Opportunities and Limits of Pluricentrism

Lumnije Jusufi (Berlin)

This volume is a result of the conference on “Pluricentric Albanian” held at the Humboldt University Berlin on 12 and 13 January 2017. In preparing the manuscript it became clear that some of the conference contributors would be unable to revise their papers for the volume. Considering the value of their work not only for the study of pluricentric Albanian but other South Slavic languages as well, it seemed shortsighted not to at least allude to them here. Thus it was decided to reprint the English language conference proceedings¹ here (appended with a new German language version) and include the conference program as an appendix. That said, where gaps appear, opportunities arise and other colleagues who could not participate in the conference stepped up to present their take on the idea of pluricentrism in Southeastern Europe: Anila Çepani, Adelina Çerpja, Vjosa Hamiti, Sara Marenčić, Shkumbin Munishi, Pandeli Pani, Mimoza Priku, and Mimoza Puto among them. In this process a new focus on the Albanian language and linguistics emerged.

Considering the nature of pluricentric theories and the specific political situation Albanian speakers find themselves in, examining the Albanian language as a pluricentric language has proven difficult. Pluricentrism as a theory and methodological approach was first used in an examination of German, and then of other larger European languages like English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. With this in mind, a whole volume on a small language like Albanian might appear overambitious. Nonetheless, we consider the approach valuable and effective and want to demonstrate that pluricentrism is not a matter of size. On the contrary, it opens up new avenues for small languages especially in a globalized and increasingly polarized world where actors with separatist tendencies are finding ever more resonance.

The pluricentric character or development of a language addresses the language system² on the one hand and society and politics³ on the other. In the Albanian case, a pluricentric approach to the language system is not the problem since it describes different developments of a language with reference to a state. It focuses on two aspects: one, the distribution of distinct linguistic varieties, be they phonetic, lexical, morphological or syntactical, in the written and spoken languages, and, two, the different conditions for the use of standard language, substandard forms and dialects within one state. Thus, linguistics is looking for pluricentric elements in a language system and speaking habits within states. The socio-political

1 Hemming, Andreas (2017): Pluricentric Albanian. In: Südosteuropa-Mitteilungen, 57/2. 93–96.

2 Ammon, Ulrich (1995): Die deutsche Sprache in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz. Das Problem der nationalen Varietäten. Berlin, New York.

3 Muhr, Rudolf (2012): Linguistic Dominance and Non-dominance in Pluricentric Languages. A Typology. In: Muhr, Rudolf (ed.): Non-Dominant Varieties of Pluricentric Languages. Getting the Picture. In Memory of Michael Clyne. Frankfurt a.M. et al. 23–48.

dimension of pluricentrism, on the other hand, makes its application of the contemporary pluricentric principles more difficult. Although a linguistic methodology, it has a political base. It is an important tool for the development of language and education policies within a state and abroad. On the international level, it structures the language policies of states with common roof languages. Inherent to this political dimension of pluricentric is a tendency for pluricentric theories to emphasize concepts like nation, which are often seen as equivalent to a state. A variety is thus the language that is spoken in a state and serves as its official language. According to current theories, the pluricentric status of a language is based on national sovereignty which, in turn, promotes the standardization of this variety. Since state and nation are used synonymously in this model, a pluricentric variety is at the same time a national variety. Smaller languages and more recent pluricentric developments in many languages are not covered by this model, since the founding of a state does not simultaneously mean the formation of an independent nation, as the example of Kosovo shows.⁴ Current pluricentric models thus preclude the examination of Albanian as a pluricentric language because Albanian speakers in the Western Balkans define themselves as one nation distributed across several states.

This brings us to the ideological problems that studies of Albanian pluricentrism are confronted with. As Albanian speakers in the Western Balkans are distributed across several different countries, Standard Albanian is seen as the core of a national identity and as a symbol for the national unity that they aspire to. The study of Albanian as a pluricentric language is therefore seen as an attack on national unity. This perspective has its roots in the nationalist movements of the 18th century, but it ignores today's political situation after the disintegration of the Yugoslavian state and status of the Albanian language outside the Albanian state, where it enjoys the status of official language in the Republic of Kosovo and is recognized as having official status on a regional level in the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Montenegro. It is furthermore recognized as a minority language in both Serbia and Greece. To see Albanian as a monocentric language with the historical center of Tirana after the political restructuring of Southeastern Europe in the early 1990s is a nationalist fantasy, as the empirical studies in this volume will show. With these latter issues in mind, we would like to emphasize that the intention of the present volume is a purely academic look at the different (pluricentric) developments that Standard Albanian has recently experienced free of any political agenda or provocation. The fact is, states make languages – or influence them at the very least – sometimes deliberately, sometimes not. Thus, they invariably become the object of linguist study.⁵

Seen in terms of the language system, Albanian indeed exhibits pluricentric tendencies and developments. As shown in this volume, what is important for a language are not national

4 Gëzim Krasniqi will look at the idea of a pluricentric nation with regard to the developments in Kosovo since 2008 in: *Nationalism(s) and Power Struggles in Kosovo. The Rise of a Polycentric Nation*. Basingstoke (planned for 2019).

5 For more on this see: Jusufi, Lumnije (2018): *Pluricentric Developments of Albanian between National Unity and Linguistic Heterogeneity*. In: Muhr, Rudolf, Meisnitzer, Benjamin (eds.): *Pluricentric Languages and Non-Dominant Varieties Worldwide. New Pluricentric Languages – Old Problems Pluricentric*. Frankfurt a.M. et al. 135–146.

interdependencies but the experiences of states and state language policies over longer periods of time, like the situations in Albania and Yugoslavia, which both had significant and very different influences on the development of Standard Albanian. Many factors come into play, like the process of nation-building or how language standardization or religion are dealt with. In Albania, this development was characterized by significant language purism (especially regarding Turkisms⁶), the treatment of the dialects⁷, the profound manner in which the new standard was disseminated through alphabetization campaigns and a comprehensive education policy, and the influence of Italian⁸. In Kosovo, other factors play a role, like a more pronounced religiosity, a lower educational standard (thus a weak standard and stronger non-standard varieties)⁹ and the significant impact of other languages (Turkish in the natural development of historical language contact, Slavic as the neighboring and official state language, German as the language of a considerable diaspora and returnee population¹⁰, and English as the language of the international administration¹¹). These influences play an important role in Kosovo and in other Albanian-speaking areas in former Yugoslavia, especially with a view to the development of technical languages, e.g. in religion, technology, and administration.¹²

Criteria like state and nation are further problematic elements in pluricentric theory. They make it difficult for varieties that have formed in specific regions within a state as a result of historical developments or regional identity to justify their existence beside the legitimized standard language. Broadening the concept of pluricentrism to include such varieties would simultaneously contribute to preserving such linguistic phenomena and reducing tendencies to language separation. Peripheral and border regions present a further problem in contemporary pluricentrism, the methodology being a product of the politics and the educational institutions of the center, that is, the state capital. That said, these peripheral regions are increasingly being addressed by border studies with strong pluricentric perspectives.

What are the benefits of a pluricentric approach? On the one hand, it counters the tendency to split languages spoken in more than one state and thus protects the unity of a language despite state divisions. On the other hand, it also recognizes the diversity of a standard language within a state. Admitting to this fact makes it possible, for example, for several states with the same language to cooperate in organizing and financing cultural and language

6 See Jusufi, Lumniye, Pani, Pandeli (2016): Dem Purismus zum Trotz: Das Überleben der Turzismen im Albanischen. In: *Mediterranean Language Review*, 23. 127–161.

7 See the chapter by Mimoza Puto and Pandeli Pani in this volume.

8 See Mai, Nicola (2002): Jugend und italienische Medien. In: Kaser, Karl, Pichler, Robert, Schwandner-Sievers, Stephanie (eds.): *Die weite Welt und das Dorf*. Wien et al. 39–62.

9 In Yugoslavia, the same efforts to alphabetize adults and to introduce a compulsory schooling were made, but these measures did not take hold among the rural Albanian population as they did in Albania. See Ströhle, Isabel (2016): *Aus den Ruinen der alten erschaffen wir die neue Welt! Herrschaftspraxis und Loyalitäten in Kosovo (1944–1974)*. München.

10 See Jusufi, Lumniye (2018): *Der Einfluss des Deutschen auf albanische Technik- und Handwerksprachen*. In: Forschungszentrum DiMOS (ed.): *Deutsch-Albanische Sprach- und Kulturkontakte in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Regensburg [in print].

11 See the chapters by Anila Çepani/Adelina Çerpja and Linda Mëniku in this volume.

12 See Jusufi, Lumniye (2015): Handwerk und Fachsprache(n) der Maurer aus der Region von Dibra. In: *Südost-Forschungen* 74. 130–173.

institutions abroad. At home, the state is able to freely shape its language and education policies without interference. Pluricentrism can help raise the educational level of the masses as it increases the value put on what would otherwise be perceived as a regional variety, raising them to the status of standard language. The standard thus becomes accessible to a great part of the population and not purely a domain of language specialists, as is often the case with Albanian, for example. The language itself can be better maintained, surveyed and controlled, for example in state and educational institutions and the media. For Standard Albanian, the pluricentrism could be a way out of the deadlocked Gheg-Tosk debates. Language is more than a product of history or historic injustices (the main argument in the Gheg-Tosk debate in Albania) and it is becoming ever more important in the economic and mobility contexts of an increasingly globalized world.

Taking this critical approach to pluricentric theories as point of departure, the present volume has been divided into three larger units. In the first part we examine the roots of Albanian pluricentrism, in the second we discuss pluricentric developments in selected social and political spheres, and in the third part we look at the limits of pluricentric theories in reference to three Albanian and ex-Yugoslavian case studies.

The first section opens with chapters by Mimoza Puto/Pandeli Pani and Shkumbin Munishi on the causes for the development of Albanian Pluricentrism. Puto and Pani discuss language politics in communist Albania, which could not be more self-contradictory. Trapped between nationalist propaganda and isolationist policy, the Albanian Standard emerged under the exclusion of many Albanian speakers abroad, who could not or, in the case of Albanian exiles during the time of the People's Republic of Albania like Martin Camaj, would not participate. Shkumbin Munishi analyzes the key role of the non-standard varieties spoken in the two state capitals – Tirana and Prishtina – for the pluricentric development of Albanian between Albania and Kosovo and concludes that these prestigious varieties have been important catalysts for an emerging Albanian pluricentrism.

In the second part, the main focus of this volume, various aspects of Albanian are examined for their pluricentric elements, which are sometimes more, sometimes less obvious. The backdrop for this section is the question of how state structures influence language development. The chapter by Rexhep Ismajli (the conference's keynote paper) provides an overview of the historical varieties of Albanian, including the modern ones, in pluricentric terms. Pandeli Pani uses rich linguistic material for a profound analysis of the pluricentric developments of Albanian between Kosovo and Albania. Giovanni Belluscio follows with a close, phonetic examination of the spoken language to argue that Albanian is more or less predestined for pluricentric developments. As there exist to date no codices for spoken Standard Albanian¹³, Belluscio's study is groundbreaking.

The following three chapters deal with various state institutions that transport the standard language and not only reveal often unconscious language policies, but also the pluricentric developments between Albanian in Albania and in Kosovo. At the same time, the clumsiness of the two governments in the face of rapid developments becomes clear. Linda Mëniku

13 A dictionary specifying the pronunciation of Standard Albanian does not exist. Many grammar and textbooks thus suggest that pronunciation follows the spelling, but this runs contrary to phonetic evidence and has been eclipsed by international research of the last 20 years.

traces the pluricentric developments in the language of the state administrations in Albania and Kosovo, Vjosa Hamiti compares the use of language in the respective parliaments. Lindita Sejdiu-Rugova, finally, looks at the treatment of language in schools in Kosovo, as it is spoken in the classroom and printed in the textbooks. The combination of all three essays shows a strong pluricentrism that the protagonists in the administrative and parliamentary spheres are aware of. Here some unconventional measures are already in place (e.g. with plenary protocols or in adopting EU legal terminology) to deal with this diversity. It is difficult to say whether these steps lead in the right direction. On the one hand, states sharing small languages especially need to act together regarding their foreign (cultural) politics (like EU accession or in reacting to globalization processes); on the other hand, these projects show all too clearly that they are not undertaken in the practical service of a unified language but in service of national unity.

In their chapter on Albanian computer terminology, which has found its place in Albania and Kosovo much easier than other technical languages, but developed pluricentric features at the same time, Anila Çepani and Adelina Çerpja suggest a degree of top-down standardization. Considering the globalized nature of computer technology, pluricentrism here tends to be counterproductive. Finally, Lumnije Jusufi shifts the focus from systematic-linguistic pluricentrism to socio-linguistic pluricentrism. In her case study based in the Albanian-Macedonian border region of Dibra, she applies borderland studies methodologies. This contribution goes beyond the volume's focus on Albania and Kosovo, verifying that at least in this border region, pluricentrism is as strong between Albania and Macedonia as it is in other areas examined in this section.

In the third and last part on the limits of pluricentrism, three case studies from Albania and former Yugoslavia illustrate the problems that linguistic concepts like language, standard and non-standard varieties, but also the restrictions of pluricentric theories as a whole face. Mimoza Priku's chapter takes a look at the only literary variety of Albanian – *Literary Shkodranisht*. She shows that this variety does in fact have a pluricentric character, at least when concepts like state and nation are disregarded. The pluricentric concept for *Literary Shkodranisht* could thus be a way out of the Tosk-Gheg debate within Albania. Priku's chapter allows for making a direct comparison with Marija Mandić and Bojan Belić's chapter on Bunjevac and the challenges of the concepts of language and pluricentrism, even if the authors do not operate directly with the concept of pluricentrism. But for Bunjevac, pluricentrism would also be a good alternative so as to avoid any further division among the Serbo-Croatian successor languages, if the speaker group concerned, following Muhr's criterion, accept it. Sara Marenčić's chapter, finally, attempts a precise critical analysis of pluricentric theories and tests them on the Serbo-Croatian successor languages. In the case of Croatian, she shows that based on Ammon's model¹⁴, the differences in the language system alone do not suffice to make it possible to speak of a pluricentric language. Again, in this case Rudolf Muhr's¹⁵ criterion that pluricentric developments require social acceptance is more appropriate.

14 Ammon 1995.

15 Muhr 2012.

This brings us to the core conclusion of both the conference and this volume: Pluricentrism as discussed here is meant to point out differences in Standard Albanian because of state divisions, foremost between Albania and Kosovo and peripherally between Albania and Macedonia. However, in case studies we learn about the difficulties and possibilities of the pluricentric idea for the Albanian language and beyond. That said, this volume should not be misunderstood as suggesting that Albanian is about to disintegrate like Serbo-Croatian did in the 1990s. Such a disintegration is always political in nature; although a majority of Albanian speakers in the Western Balkans take a good deal of pleasure in curious linguistic anecdotes (like the confusion during a media event in 2014, when Edi Rama failed to understand Hashim Thaçi because the latter used a term unfamiliar in Albania¹⁶), they do not have a political dimension. On the contrary, Vjosa Hamiti and Linda Mëniku show in their chapters that the political sphere is working towards more unity and the elimination of pluricentric differences that the studies assembled here have pointed out. Anila Çepani and Adelina Çerpja as well as Shkumbin Munishi also demonstrate that a unified and strong standard should be aspired to in fields like non-standard varieties and processes of globalization so that a small language like Albanian remains functional. This volume is intended as a stimulus for dealing with rigid language concepts and processes of destandardization.

The study of Albanian pluricentrism is still in its infancy. This is what the volume wants to point out. But neither the publication nor the preceding conference in January 2017 were able to explore completely the comprehensive depth and breadth of this new field of study. They have been a mere first step in establishing this young field¹⁷ and are an open invitation to other scholars to develop the presented arguments further. Southeastern Europe, which is linguistically polarized not only in Albania and Kosovo, would profit from new, politically less controversial concepts than standard languages. A modified pluricentrism could be one of them.

16 See Jusufi 2018.

17 The few published studies to date include: Pani, Pandeli (2006): Some Differences between Varieties of Albanian with Special Reference to Kosovo. In: *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 178. 55–73; Prifti, Elton (2009): Gjurmime variacionale mbi shqipen standarde një shekull pas Kongresit të Alfabetit. In: Demiraj, Bardhyl (ed.): *Der Kongress von Manastir. Herausforderung zwischen Tradition und Neuerung in der albanischen Schriftkultur*. Hamburg. 114–129. Voß, Christian, Jusufi, Lumnije (2013): Plurizentrik im Albanischen sowie im Serbokroatischen und seinen Nachfolgesprachen. In: Müller, Daniel, Wingender, Monika (eds.): *Typen slavischer Standardsprachen. Theoretische, methodische und empirische Zugänge*. Wiesbaden. 177–196; Jusufi 2018.