

# An Albanian Look at the Jers

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## 1 Introduction

- Longstanding hypothesis of Slavic substratum connecting southern Montenegrin dialects with Macedonian (Popovič 1958, Koneski 1983/2001, Greenberg 2000).
  - Evidence: shared grammatical innovations between southern Montenegrin and western Macedonian, loanwords, documentary historical evidence, etc.
  - Extent and nature of Slavic substratum not precisely known. Albanian is dominant language in this region; precise historical projection of linguistic extent of Albanian and Slavic is difficult.
- Border between E and W South Slavic would have run through this substratum.
  - Isoglosses between E and W South Slavic fan out across Macedonia.
  - Interesting transitional dialects can be expected.
    - \* And found! Gora in far southern Kosovo (and parts of Albania).
- Goal of this paper:
  - to argue that the shift of  $\text{ə} > \text{o}$  in the Albanian dialect of Opoja (a unique sound change in Albanian) reflects a Slavic substratum in which at least the back jer  $> /o/$ .
  - to suggest that the Slavic substratum underlying Opoja Albanian may have merged *both* jers to  $/o/$ , which would be a novel pattern in Slavic.
- Road map:
  1. Present background information on Gora and Opoja region.
  2. Establish that  $\text{ə} > \text{o}$  in Opoja.
  3. Review evidence for Slavic substrate effect.
  4. Suggest that Opoja substrate may have been a one-jer dialect.

## 2 Background Information

- Gora: Slavic-speaking area located in far SW tip of Kosovo and extending into Albania.
  - community comprised of Slavic-speaking Muslims; Islamization seems to have taken place from mid-18th to mid-to-late 19th century (Mladenović 2001: 55, Lutovac 1955: 270-271).
  - the dialect of Gora (sometimes referred to as Gorani or *našinski*) is sharply distinct from both the neighboring Serbian Prizren-Morava dialects and the nearby northern dialects of Macedonian, while sharing some similarities with both.
    - \* This has resulted in a complex history of classification (Lutovac 1955: 282, Friedman 2002-3: 164, Asenova 2004).
- Opoja: Albanian-speaking area located just north of Gora.
  - forms a historical and cultural unit with Gora; Opoja and Gora are located in high, mountainous terrain, sharply divided from the lowlands to the north but not separated from each other by any natural dividing point (Lutovac 1955: 234, Mladenović 2001: 40).
  - traditionally good relationship between inhabitants of Opoja and Gora, which is emphatically not the case for Gorans and other neighboring Albanian speakers.<sup>1</sup> (Lutovac 1955: 278-280).
- Evidence for Slavic substrate in Opoja will be discussed more in section 4.

## 3 ə > o in Opoja

- Opoja has /o/ in a range of morphological environments where it is not attested elsewhere in Albanian. In some cases, /o/ in Opoja clearly corresponds to /ə/ elsewhere in Albanian. In other cases, more detailed argumentation is necessary.

### 3.1 Clear instances where /ə/ > /o/

- Opoja has an alternating /o/ corresponding to standard Albanian /u/ in nouns ending in -ull, -ur, -urr. Geographically, Opoja is in a region where alternating /ə/ predominates in these nouns, making an intermediate stage of /ə/ quite likely. The various realizations of these nouns are illustrated below:

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<sup>1</sup>A document from the French Ministry of War in 1916 states: “The [region] of Gora is exclusively inhabited by Muslims who only speak Serbian and live in constant hostility with Albanians” (Mladenović 2001: 33).

1. \*u > \*ə > o with alternations (Opoja) (Pajaziti 2005: 121)

| Nom.Sg.Indef. | Nom.Pl.Indef. |         |
|---------------|---------------|---------|
| vetoll        | vetlla        | eyebrow |
| kumoll        | kumlla        | plum    |
| grumoll       | grumlla       | pile    |

2. \*u preserved without alternations (Kastrati) (Shkurtaj 1967: 40):  
 – this is the most widespread pattern in Albanian and characterizes the literary language.

| Nom.Sg.Indef. | Nom.Sg.Def. |         |
|---------------|-------------|---------|
| vetull        | vetulla     | eyebrow |
| kumull        | kumulla     | plum    |
| hekur         | hekuri      | iron    |

3. \*u preserved with alternations (Puka) (Topalli 1974: 293)

| Nom.Sg.Indef. | Nom.Sg.Def. |         |
|---------------|-------------|---------|
| vetull        | vetlla      | eyebrow |
| kumull        | kumlla      | plum    |
| hekur         | hekri       | iron    |

4. \*u > ə with alternations (Hasi) (Gosturani 1975: 221)

| Nom.Sg.Indef. | Nom.Pl.Def. |         |
|---------------|-------------|---------|
| vetëll        | vetlla      | eyebrow |
| kumëll        | kumlla      | plum    |
| hekër         | hekra       | iron    |

- Parallels in declension of feminine nouns (Pajaziti 2005: 129)<sup>2</sup>:

|             | Opoja     |         | Standard Albanian |         |
|-------------|-----------|---------|-------------------|---------|
|             | Sg.Indef. | Sg.Def. | Sg.Indef.         | Sg.Def. |
| Nom         | motor     | motra   | motër             | motra   |
| Acc         | motor     | motron  | motër             | motrën  |
| Gen/Dat/Abl | motros    | motros  | motre             | motrës  |

### 3.2 Other instances of /o/ in Opoja

- In a range of other instances, Opoja has /o/ where it is not otherwise found in Albanian. The presence of /o/ may be explained either as a morphological innovation or from \*/ə/.
1. 3sg present in a group of consonant-stem verbs, e.g. *hap-on* “open-3sg”, *hyp-on* “jump-3sg”, *kap-on* “seize-3sg”, *korr-on* “harvest-3sg”, *prek-on* “open-3sg”, where other Albanian dialects more typically have no overt 3sg ending in these verbs (Pajaziti 2005: 159)

<sup>2</sup>Note that the standard Albanian indefinite genitive/dative/ablative ending -e also corresponds to -os in Opoja; this is due to independent morphological developments.

- can be explained as a purely morphological change, i.e. the generalization of the productive 3sg present marker *-on* from other verb classes.
- 1pl present in the same group of consonant-stem verbs, e.g. *korr-om* “harvest-1pl”, *pjek-om* “bake-1pl” (Pajaziti 2005: 160)
    - couple be morphology; also it is not unheard of for Albanian dialects in Kosovo to generalize /ə/ in the present tense plural endings of consonant-stem verbs (ADGJSH[329-333])
  - 1sg, 2sg, 2pl, 3pl present mediopassive endings (also apparently an option for 1pl mediopassive endings, although {na} is preferred) (Pajaziti 2005: 161):

|     | Desinence<br>in<br>Standard<br>Albanian | Desinence<br>in Opoja | lah- “wash<br>oneself” | gzoh- “be<br>pleased” | vish- “dress<br>oneself” |
|-----|---|-----------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1sg | -em                                     | -om                   | lah-om                 | gzoh-om               | vish-om                  |
| 2sg | -esh                                    | -osh                  | lah-osh                | gzoh-osh              | vish-osh                 |
| 3sg | -et                                     | -et                   | lah-et                 | gzoh-et               | vish-et                  |
| 1pl | -emi                                    | -na                   | lah-na                 | gzoh-na               | vish-na                  |
| 2pl | -eni                                    | -oni                  | lah-oni                | gzoh-oni              | vish-oni                 |
| 3pl | -en                                     | -on                   | lah-on                 | gzoh-on               | vish-on                  |

- some rare and geographically sporadic dialects innovate /ə/ throughout the present tense mediopassive paradigm (ADGJSH[327]). These dialects are spoken nowhere close to Opoja, but their existence suggests that this is at least plausible as an independent innovation.<sup>3</sup>
- 1sg and 1pl imperfect endings. *-shom* is the 1pl ending for consonant-stem verbs (contrasted to 1sg *-shna*): *lidh-shna* “bind, tie-1sg.impf” but *lidh-shom* “bind, tie-1pl.impf”. However, *-shom* is the 1sg ending for vowel-stem verbs (contrasted to 1pl *-shim*, which is more similar to the rest of Albanian): *di+shom* “know-1sg.impf” contrasted to *di+shim* “know-1pl.impf” (Pajaziti 2005: 162)
    - appears to be an independent morphological innovation in Opoja.
  - 1pl, 2pl, and 3pl aorist endings. In consonant-stem verbs, these appear simply as *-om*, *-ot*, and *-on* respectively: *mat-om*, *mat-ot*, *mat-on* “measure-1pl, 2pl, 3pl.aor”. These correspond directly to the aorist endings

<sup>3</sup>A partial parallel exists in Anadrini, where the 1pl mediopassive ending *\*-emi* > *-um* and *-mi* (Pajaziti 2008: 199). The dual tendencies for *ə* > *u* / *\_m* and for unstressed /ə/ to drop in Anadrini makes an intermediate stage of *\*əmi* possible (Pajaziti 2008: 65). In any case, Opoja replaces the 1pl ending *\*-emi* with the morphologically distinct ending *-na*, making this parallel of indirect relevance.

-əm, -ət, and -ən elsewhere in much of Albanian, and Pajaziti explicitly states that these reflexes are found only in Opoja. This can be observed as well in vowel stems: *punu+om*, *punu+ot*, *punu+on* “work-1pl, 2pl, 3pl. aor” (Pajaziti 2005: 164). These are not reflexes of the old diphthong \*uo, but rather innovations (Pajaziti 2005: 52).

- there is a direct parallel between the Opoja consonant-stem endings with /o/ and the endings with /ə/ found elsewhere in Albanian, and the vowel-stem endings can then be explained as a generalization of this pattern.
6. Participles. Overtly marked participles are formed either with -om or -ot. The ending -om is preferred. The ending -ot is limited to a smaller class of verbs, and appears to be an innovation limited to Opoja, although -t is found in some other dialects of Kosovo at least sporadically (Pajaziti 2008: 173). The ending -om is derived from the Geg participial ending \*-un (Pajaziti 2005: 171).
- Evidence from nearby Anadrini supports an intermediate stage of \*-un > \*-ən / \* -əm (Pajaziti 2008: 68, 173-174).

## 4 Evidence for Slavic substrate effect

### 4.1 Presence of substrate

- Toponyms, etc.; Opoja < Slavic Opolje; several villages in the region have Slavic toponymy.
- Cultural ties to Gora discussed above.
- Lutovac argues for a historical scenario involving a population upheaval in the early 16th century:
  - a wealthy landowner resident in Opoja, Kukli-Beg, owned 117 houses in Prizren and property elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire, but, crucially, had only meager possessions in Gora (Lutovac 1955: 259).
  - hypothesis (supported by toponyms and documentary evidence): the presence of Kukli-Beg resulted in the largely Slavic population partially converting to Islam and partially migrating, leaving unoccupied areas into which Albanians emigrated, with eventual language shift being the result (Lutovac 1955: 262-263).
- 1591 demographic information: “in the nahija of Opoja there were 369 Muslim heads of households and bachelors [i.e., with names that bear no indication of language - AD] and 78 Christian heads of households and bachelors, the majority of whom have Albanian anthroponyms” (Pulaha 1984: 21-22).

- No reason exists to think that the Islamization of the Albanian community was complete by then.
- Demographic and cultural information supporting this hypothesis:
  - see section 2
  - self-reported background of inhabitants: Lutovac finds that “of 72 lineages and 1032 households, 37 lineages and 578 houses are “immigrants” (doseljenici) and 36 lineages and 455 households are of unknown background.” Of the immigrant lineages, 18 claim descent from Albania, 9 from Hasi/Podrimlje, and 5 from Luma (Lutovac 1955: 277).
    - \* Sharp contrast with Gora, where newer lineages are comparatively less frequent, comprising in only 358 of the 2200 households currently present (Mladenović 2001: 42-43).
  - erosion of *fis* in Opoja (Lutovac 1955: 277):
    - \* the lineages of ‘unknown’ background are not aware of the concept of *fis*, (the Albanian system of tribal organization known in Kosovo and northern Albania).
    - \* *fis* is generally lost in Opoja, and late 19th-century accounts describe the inhabitants of Opoja as conserving many Serbian customs.

## 4.2 Effect of substrate

- Opoja is located precisely on the isogloss dividing Slavic dialects in which the reflexes of strong jers are /o, e/ (as in Gora, and the main body of Macedonian dialects) from dialects where both strong jers yield /ə/, such as the Prizren-Morava dialects of Serbian and northern dialects of Macedonian (Mladenović 2001, Ivić 1955/2001, Vidoeski 2005).
- Cultural and linguistic ties with Gora combined with market and political ties to Prizren make it extremely likely that speakers were exposed to both patterns around the period of language shift.
- Shift of /ə/ > /o/ is completely unique to Opoja dialect of Albanian.
- Jer reflexes in Slavic substrate are likely to lie behind the /ə/ > /o/ shift.

## 5 A one-ger dialect?

- A remaining question: what were the ger reflexes in the Slavic substrate of Opoja anyway?
  1. the jers > /ə/ like Prizren, but close contact with Gora resulted in awareness of Gora reflexes.

- unlikely; this version doesn't line up well with historical and documentary facts. An awareness of Gora reflexes does not provide strong motivation for their spread, particularly if ties with Gora were weakening in the language-shift period.
- 2. the jers share the Gora reflexes, but ties to Prizren resulted in an awareness of Prizren reflexes.
  - this possibility is significantly more likely than (1).
- 3. both jers > /o/ - i.e., jers merge like in Prizren, but with Gora-like reflexes.
  - this possibility is novel, and difficult to conclusively distinguish from (2). However, it has some advantages.
  - does not exclude a possible (but early) intermediate stage where jers merge to [ə] or [i] before rounding.
- Basic plausibility of the one-jer hypothesis:
  - one-jer dialects in southern Montenegro where both jers > /æ/ (> [ea], [e]); loanword evidence that suggests this pattern spread into northern Albania (Popovič 1958).
    - \* articulatory path from [i] to [ɔ] (i.e., what is being proposed for Opoja) is no harder to account for than path from [u] to [æ] (i.e., what occurs in Montenegro).
  - Macedonian peripheral dialects (Drimkol-Golo Brdo and Reka) have [â] from \*ə (in this case from \*o, ĭ, ě) (Vidoeski 2005).
- Advantages of the one-jer hypothesis:
  - explains why alternating vowel in Opoja is /o/
    - \* otherwise, /ə/ > /e/ would probably be the more expected outcome in Albanian.
  - would mean that /ə/ > /o/ is direct effect of Slavic (morpho)phonology applying to Albanian; this is simpler than an account that requires a story about why /e/ failed to be transmitted.

## 6 Conclusions

- /ə/ > /o/ in Opoja is effect of Slavic substrate; likely from a heretofore unattested type of one-jer dialect of Slavic.
- careful attention to non-Slavic evidence can push the boundaries of what we know about the history of Slavic.
- finding is of theoretical consequence for language contact; by 16th centuries, jer reflexes in Slavic had almost certainly been lexicalized / morphophonologized.

## 7 References

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