

Albanian Literary Committee (Komisia) And Orthographic Rules For A Unified Albanian Language

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Abstract

The Renaissance era brought great breakthroughs to the culture of Albanians, especially in the delivery of Albanian language, which was testimony of the Albanian community, and served as a tie that would unite all Albanians, regardless of their place and religion. The Congress of Monastery (1908), in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which was an important historical assembly for the creation of a single Albanian alphabet, was followed by another historic event of national value. The so called Literary Komisia (Committee) of Shkodra (1916-1917), indeed would become first scientific institution of the country, and thus, this article reflects the continuous work and contribution carried and given by the Albanian scholars and patriots for a unified and single Albanian language. Seen from this perspective, the article will analyze and discuss two main issues, which were part of the focus of this society: one refers to the choice of Elbasanishte as "*a bridge between dialects*", as Luigj Gurakuqi says, and the other refers to solution of spelling issues through the drafting of orthography rules. In short, it was the Literary Komisia of Shkodra which operated in Shkodra from 1916 to 1917, that led to the process of linguistic convergence, and paved the way for a series of important events for the future of the Albanian language, but also for the Albanian people wherever they live.

Keywords: Literary Komisia of Shkodra, unified literary language, dialect, phonetic principle, orthography.

Article

The Albanian Literary Committee in Shkodra is a genuine scientific institution. It had as its own objective, statute, regulations, members and correspondent members. Therefore, the beginnings of the scientific institutions for language, literature, text, etc., started here. This very important event of our culture, until recently, has been left forgotten, mainly for some of its representatives, as well as about some of the issues that were discussed, even the published articles don't hold a fair attitude. As an event of historical and national importance, the ALC had at its foundations its work for the Albanian language. So it stands in the first line for its effort, hard work by prominent initiators and activists for a common purpose. The scientific and cultural activity cannot be understood without including the struggle and efforts made by the patriots to solve the national issue of the Albanian language, culture, nationwide education from

different societies, such as: The Society of Printing Albanian letters (1879), the Congress of the Monastery (1908), the Congress of Elbasan (1909). The ALC met for some of the historical-social conditions of that time. The attendees who participated in that event were distinguished for their political, linguistic, educational, national activities.

It extended its activity throughout Albania, by giving it a nationwide character, by having correspondents from other cities in the country: S. Peci, A. Xhuvani, H. Ali Korca, although most of the members of the committee were from Shkodra, the presence and unitary attitudes of the participants led to a fairer solution of the problems that were discussed. So, by relying on the ALC records stored in the State Archive (meetings of 1.9.1916 to 22.5.1918), we calculate that in the ALC meetings participated around 15 members and two foreign albanologists: M. Lamberti (Austrian) and R. Nahtigali (Slovenian).

Among the problems and issues that were to be solved by the ALC was the solution of the issue of the common Albanian language, so the decisions of this Committee are of a national importance for the crystallization of Albanian language. It would codify the main results of the language convergence of the National Renaissance. If we go back in time, we can say that during the sixteenth to eighteenth century, the efforts of the authors of the North Catholic Cultural Circle would lead the path to the premises of the later idea of a common Albanian literary language related to a language that, on one hand, crossed the sub dialectal boundaries of the special spoken languages and this was done consciously, as it is stated clearly by one of the members, Pjetër Bogdani, to be worked by the "literary" audience of the time.

The works of the old authors did not only spread to the northern part of the country but were also recognized in the south of the country. These are evidenced by the documents for the publication of their works. Also, the idea for a common literary language was also noticed in the Arbëresh community in Italy, which had its roots in the 18th century through the literary texts. These texts represented an Albanian over dialectal literary Albanian language, mixed with elements of northern, southern and Arbëresh language which were cleansed by the dialectical and Italian influences, with the features of a concise written communication. And these efforts continue even further with the help of De Rada, Zef Jubani, Sami Frashëri, Kostandin Kristoforidhi etc., in the years (1827-1895). That is why we say that the Shkodra's Literary Committee codified the main results of the linguistic convergence of the National Renaissance. It would be an organization that would act in an independent way, but in the record of the 7th of December 1917, the its new statute it was stated:

"The Albanian Literature Committee in Shkodra, which until now had its own office, it is giving a great support to the General Directorate of Education In the matters of the Albanian language (orthography, terminology of the grammar in the written language) and literature, has as its main aim and purpose to act as a counseling body to the General Directorate of

Education and when it is needed even to the corporate command (State Archives).

One of the main and most important tasks of ALC was the drafting of the Albanian orthographic rules, a work of responsibility, but also of extraordinary value for the advancement of our language, the unification of its writing in schools and in every institution. So, for the first time in the history of Albanian linguistics, an orthographic code would be drawn up, which was considered as the "starting point for the normalization of common written Albanian language." To reach a common decision it was not so easy in fact. The participants in the multiple debates managed to solve some of the issues related to orthography. They wanted to achieve the main goal: a unified orthography.

Referring to the ALC records, at these respective meetings, especially at the one of date 13.11.1916, it was decided to draft "An orthography which would be mutual for the both dialects". But what would be the principles on which the orthography of the Albanian language would be based? The ALC established the phonetic principle as the basic principle, by determining that "The orthography of a language would be the phonetics, meaning that the language would be written as it is spoken today by the people and as the basis of orthography would be taken the Elbasan dialect with a few changes.

Rajko Nahtigal, one of the Slovenian representatives of the ALC, professor of Slavic philology at the University of Graz emphasized in his work that:

... the dialect in question is understood by all and due to its central geographical position it has maintained its originality. Elbasan's merchants are well understood by all of the men who come to the Elbasan's market, be they from (Tosk) the south side of Shkumbin or (Gheg) from the north of Shkumbin in Elbasan

The acceptance for the settling of the phonetic principle and the Elbasan's spoken language was among basics of orthographic rules which had to deal with some major differences of sound between the two literary dialects which they wanted to draw it nearer to the Elbasan's tosk

(north) dialect, which belonged to the type of southern part (gheg).

So, they asked for a more rational solution to implement the differences between these dialects, ... some typical changes would be implemented, which belong to the etymological forms of the better saved words in the tosk (south) dialect and in some sub gheg dialects.

Referring to the "Rules on the Orthography of the Albanian written Language", second edition, Shkodër, October 1917, in the relevant preface we cite that:

"Judging on these researches, the Literature Committee wants to improve some points. The rules of orthography, especially in regard to the two forms it has chosen, the ones who are mostly liked by phonetics of the dialect which has been taken for granted."

So, the members of the ALC provided a number of reasonable and valuable solutions. What were these rules for a unified Albanian, on which would be written all the official acts, documents and all of the schools' texts.

- The group of consonants mb, nd, and ngj (rule nr 5) would be written in their full form, "... they would be written and pronounced in their oldest and well known saved form in the tosk dialect and in some sub gheg dialects for example: honor, godmother, order "

Likewise, the diphthongs -ie, -ue, -ye, would be written in their full form, rather than saying them apart, as in many gheg dialect spoken form.

Rule 6 - The diphthongs -ie, -ue, - ye, - which in the Elbasan's dialect are mentioned only one long - i, -u, -j example (qill, dill, shtill, thu, ftu, punu, kry, ly, etc) would be written as they are in the tosk dialect and in some sub gheg dialect like: (sky, sun, flour, cover, invite, me, finish, confess, etc.).

A great importance was given by the ALC to the vowel -ë- (rule 7 on the small sound "ë"). In the gheg dialect, this vowel sounded weak or wasn't heard at all. In this variant of this rules, we can notice a more complete specification in the writing form of the vowel "-ë" being it in the middle or at the end of the word. For example, health, confess, sing (in the middle of the word). Some rules were also created for -ë at the end of the word: - the

words having pre-emphatic emphasis will finally take -ë at the end of the word: apple, cow, door, valley, winding, etc.

But in the names of Shkodra, plum, gadget, cabbage, grain, etc., will not be written with an -ë. The vowel -ë will also be written in some kind of adjectives, such as: gentle, good, long, pauper, worthless as well as in the adjectives of feminine gender.

The ALC also set up the orthographic rule for the writing of vowel -ë at the end of some male, female and neutral names, arguing that these names differ in length as stressed vowels, such as in: boy, horse, forehead, grain. Also in some feminine adjectives due to the length of the stressed vowel, such as: free, dry, and some other adjectives.

For the same reasons that were quoted above, these words would be written with an -ë: go, thanks, do, workers, leaders etc.

Although some of the orthographic issues were not completely resolved, these rules marked a step forward in this area.

The ALC also provided some solutions to some of the orthographic issues concerning the emphasis and length of vowels. Emphasis would be placed on long vowels, in homonymous words such as "bari-bari" (grass-shepherd), and the vowel length would be marked only in language editions. The nasal sound would be marked with nasal accent (^) in cases when the nasal -a sound in gheg accent corresponded to one -ë sound. For example, thing, voice, is, etc. Also, in the words which as a stressed vowel like: *pê* (*pêni- përi*)(thread) ; *frê* (*frêni- frëri*)(bridle); *hi* (*hîni- hini*) (ash) *sÿ* (*syni-syri* (eye)) when in gheg dialect it comes out with an -n- axis and in tosk dialect it takes an -r- (rotation).

All these rules served as the basis for the orthography of the Albanian language, which were approved by the Congress of Lushnja in 1920 and by the Government of Tirana in 1923. They received approval on 29 January 1917 after many discussions for a period of 5 months. They were published as a brochure after a few days entitled "Principles and Rules on the orthography of the written Language." It consists of 9 sections and a list of words where the ALC determines that they

should be written with the groups of consonants -mb and nd-. A new version where two more sections were written was analyzed in August 1917 and was published as a brochure and in the "Post of Albania" newspaper. Apart from the problem of the elaboration of a common orthography for the two basic Albanian dialects, the ALC was also faced with the problem of choosing the dialectal basis for the common literary language and which would be the standard written literary language that would be made compulsory in schools and the state administration.

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