




Lexicon interchanges between Albanian and Balkans/Southeast European languages in the field of plants

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Abstract

The object of this study is to explore the interactions and interchanges between languages in the Balkans and Southeast Europe through the examination of one particular field; namely, plants. As in other fields, the Albanian language has borrowed from other languages, as well as has given to other languages. Being mainly a pastoral country through history, the Albanian language has mainly borrowed plant names, except for the names of native species. In this study, based on original works in etymology and botany, a thorough analysis is conducted in order to reveal that some words related to plants, borrowed especially from ancient Greek and Latin, have entered the Albanian lexicon and are used throughout the country. On the other hand, some words related to plants, borrowed mainly from Turkish, Slavic and Italian languages, have local use in dialects and sub-dialects. The causes of these phenomena are explained. Original Albanian words related to native species are used mainly in the old Romanian language. This study of plant-related words serves to explain broader lexicographic exchanges between Balkan's languages and other Mediterranean languages, like between Turkish and Southeast Europe languages or Italian and Balkans languages.

Keywords: plants; word borrowing; Albanian; Slavic; Turkish; Latin; ancient Greek

1. Introduction

Among the fundamental sources upon which a language feeds in, its lexicon is the most important. And among sources that enrich the lexicon word borrowings play a significant role. The latter have played a significant role in the Albanian lexicon, with borrowings from neighboring languages and the languages of the invading empires throughout history. In the more recent times, with the rapid technological developments and the globalization that has swept the world, new words are borrowed from the most popular languages. In the very early times, the Albanian language borrowed heavily from ancient Greek and Latin. In a later period, it borrowed from Middle Greek, and Slavic (old Serbian and Bulgarian) and Turkish. In the last century the Albanian language has borrowed words mainly from Italian and English. On the other side, neighboring languages have also borrowed words from Albanian; in some fields more and some less, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly. In

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this study, the focus is on one particular field, namely plant names. The interactions in this field between Albanian and other languages throughout history are analyzed in depth.

1.1. Literature Review

A thorough literature review was conducted but no study focusing only on plant names etymology was found about the interactions between the Albanian language and the languages of the Balkans and Southeast Europe. However, this topic has been part of wider etymologic studies from Albanian and foreign Albanologists. Thus, in *Studime për etimologjinë dhe fjalëformimin shqip* (Jokl, 2011), in *Fjalori etimologjik i gjuhës shqipe* (Meyer, 2007), in 6 volumes of *Studime etimologjike në fushë të shqipes* (Çabej, 1976-2014), *Studime mbi leksikon dhe mbi formimin e fjalëve në gjuhën shqipe III* (1989), in *Fjalori i Gazullit* (Gazulli, 2005), in *Fjalor dialektor* (Tase, 2006), in *Fjalori i Gjuhës Shqipe* (1954), in *Fjalor etimologjik i gjuhës shqipe* (Topalli, 2017), as well as in *Fjalori i Gjuhës Shqipe* (2006), there can be found etymologic information that was used in this study to analyze why, how, when and where the Albanian language has interacted with neighboring languages in the field of plant names. In order to provide a wider analysis (not necessarily focused narrowly on etymology), dendrologic and botanic information from the seminal monograph *Drurët dhe shkurret e Shqipërisë* (Mitrushi, 1955), *Dendroflora e Shqipërisë* (Mitrushi, 1966).

2. Methodology

A multilayer comparative detecting approach was used to identify and rank plant names/words borrowed from other languages. First etymologic dictionaries/monographs were analyzed and then the results of this layer of the analysis were compared with the dendrologic and botanic information found in the *Dendroflora e Shqipërisë* (Mitrushi, 1966). Combining these two kinds of sources of information, provided the possibility of a comprehensive etymological/botanical analysis.

3. Analysis and Results

In the lexicon of a language almost always there can be found a mixture of original and borrowed words. The borrowed words enter into the lexicon in different periods, depending on the political, cultural and economic relations between peoples. In different fields of life, the ratio of original and borrowed words is different. After an analysis of all published etymologic and dendrologic/botanic studies, it can be concluded that borrowings in Albanian language from Balkans and Mediterranean languages in the field of plant names are more common than in other fields; original Albanian names/words do not dominate. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact that for a long time in history, the territory of Albania was inhabited by pastoral people, confined to their mountainous terrain. Therefore, the original plant lexicon was limited. Thus, the necessity to borrow from other languages, in order to create a modern plant lexicon in Albanian.

3.1. Original plant words can be used by all Albanians or can have only local use. The word *dru* (wood), for example, is used with the same meaning wherever Albanian is used as mother tongue. It can even be found in the slang of old wood Bulgarian craftsmen as *dru-nu* or *dru-na* (Çabej, III/334). Another example is *mjedër* (red raspberry), which is used by all Albanians, but in different dialectological forms. These different forms are a strong indicator of the Albanian origin of the word (Çabej, V/354). Original Albanian plant names can be found in all dialects and sub-dialects in Albania: the word *bresë* (chicory) (Jokl, 31); *bargjan* (field horsetail) (Çabej, II/164 and Papparisto, Qosja, Demiri, 1961:27); *bishtajë* (legumes), used widely in the northern half of Albania; *ajdës* (Scottish laburnum) (Mitrushi, 1966:54), used only in the Mat region, *barojë* (grass land) (Fjalor i “Bashkimit”,

2018:35), which has very local uses nowadays. All these dialect words, albeit with limited local use, are included in the main dictionaries of the Albanian language.

3.2. Borrowed words/names related to plants can be of: a) general use; b) regional/dialectological use; c) literary use.

3.2.1. Borrowed words/names of general use

These borrowed words/names related to plants are used everywhere in the territory inhabited by Albanian speaking people, despite minor dialectological changes in parts of the territory. These kinds of words/names are borrowed mainly from Latin, as is the case of *fik* (fig) (Çabej, IV/186), or from ancient Greek, as is the case of *lakër* (cabbage), *qersh* (cherry) etc. These borrowings can be explained by the vicinity of the hegemonic Hellenic and Roman cultures in ancient times. However, some of the borrowings from the ancient Greek are characterized from meaning shifts in thousands of years. On the other side, borrowings from Middle and New Greek have mainly local/dialectological use.

3.2.2. Local/dialectological word borrowings

In the field of plants, most local/dialectological word borrowings have come from Middle and New Greek, Slavic, Turkish, and Italian. However, a few plant words/names borrowed from these languages may have national use.

- *Borrowings from Middle and New Greek:* These borrowings can be found mainly in Southern Albania in plant names like *cukunidhë* (common nettle), *dhiozmë* (peppermint), *marule* (lettuce), *glikanzë* (anise), *paparunë* (common poppy) etc. Meanwhile words borrowed from Greek are much more common in the wider lexicon of the Albanian language.

- *Borrowings from Slavic languages:* At the helm of its power (1025 A.D.), the Byzantine Empire controlled the territory from Danube to Lake Van in Asia Minor. However, since then its territories were gradually occupied by Bulgarian and Serbian invaders. Its latifundial system was being disintegrated after the huge influx of Slavic people. Eventually, two kingdoms (Bulgarian and Serbian) were established in the Balkans, with their own autonomous Orthodox Churches and with their own Slavonic liturgies, which reigned for centuries in all the Balkans, except Greece (Castellan, 27-31). These major events were important not only politically and militarily, but also culturally and linguistically. The linguistic influence of Slavic languages has been stronger in the regions where Albanians and Slavic people have lived side by side in the past.

- *Borrowings from Old Serbian:* The influence of Old Serbian in the plant lexicon is stronger in the dialects of Northeastern Albania and Kosovo, which are located closer to Serbia of today. Some of the Serbian borrowed words have transferred from Albanian to other languages of the Balkans, as is the case of *bagrem* (black locust), which from Albanian was transferred to old Romanian (Çabej, 1976:130), or *boronicë* (cranberry), which has the suffix *-icë* (used in Serbian to form diminutive nouns), or *bozhurë* (peony), which can be found in Slavonic, Bulgarian, Rumanian and even in Hungarian (Meyer, 2007:82), or *çetinë* (black pine) and *gëmushë* (bush) (Gazulli, 2005:147) etc.

- *Borrowings from Slavic-Macedonian:* The plant words/names borrowed from Slavic-Macedonian are used mainly in the Eastern Albania due to the territorial vicinity. After entering the Albanian Lexicon, they were adopted by some other language, mainly old Rumanian. Some examples are *aguliçe* (pink, yellow-eyed flowers) (Çabej, 1976:17-18), *cërmëdell* (smoke tree) (Çabej, 1987:27), *drënjë* (cornelian cherry dogwood) etc.

▪ *Borrowings from Bulgarian and Slavonic*: Many plant words/names (but also many other words) borrowed in Albanian from Bulgarian and Slavonic have entered directly or indirectly the lexicon of other languages, like Greek and old Rumanian. For example, the word *gorricë* (wild pear), has entered the Albanian lexicon from Bulgarian and then has passed onto old Rumanian and Greek (Meyer, 2007:174). In general, borrowing from Bulgarian are used in Southeastern and Middle Albania, as is the case of the word *gombel* (sage) etj. In some cases, it is difficult to determine whether the word is borrowed from Bulgarian or from Slavonic, as is the case of *arrë* (walnut), *kapinë* (blackberry), *kopër* (dill), etc. However, it should be noted that Bulgarian, Serbian, Slavonic and Slavic-Macedonian are all southern Slavic languages that share many same or very similar words between them. In some Slavic villages within Albania, they use some words that are half Albanian and half Bulgarian, as is the case in Steblevë, where is in use the word *goro-lule* (adonida), which a half translation of the Bulgarian word *goro-cvetje* (Çabej, 1996: IV/276).

▪ *Borrowings from Italian*: Plant names/words borrowed from Italian are used mainly in Northwestern Albania (especially in Shkodra City) and less in Middle Albania. Examples include *burdullak* (common purslane) (Helbig, 2019:65), *elbarozë* (cranesbill), *gresë* (wild grape), *broke* (it. brocco) etc. In some cases, in the Shkodra sub-dialect, there are literal translations from Italian, as is the case of the Italian word *pomodoro* (tomato), which is literally translated into *mollatarta* (from Italian, golden apples).

▪ *Huazimet nga turqishtja*: The Turkish language, as the *lingua franca* of all the territories under the mighty Ottoman Empire, had deep influences in all the Southeastern European languages and even in Russian. However, its influence can be felt more strongly in the Balkans regions with Muslim majorities, like Albania, Kosovo, Northwestern Macedonia, Bosnia and Sandzak. Turkish words can be widely found in all walks of life in these regions, but more so in urban and suburban areas. As such, the use of Turkish words in agriculture has been less widespread. Most plant names borrowed from the old Turkish language are used wherever live people the speak Albanian, but in some cases are used only locally. The former includes names like *bajame* (almond), *jargavan* (lily), *jasemin* (jasmin flower), *bamje* (okra), *karafil* (clove), *engjinar* (artichoke), *hashash*, (hashish). *majdanoz* (parsley) etc., whereas the latter include *badër* (asphodels), *çinar* (plane tree), *karpuz* (watermelon), *bostan* (vegetable orchard) etc. Most of these words are widely used in languages of Southeast Europe and even in Russian (*çinar*, *buxhak*, *karpuz*, *karafil*, *jasemin* etc.), or in all Europe (*lilac*). In the Albanian language there are even cases of literal translations from Turkish, as is the case of the flower *dorëzonjë* (honeysuckle), which is a literal translation from Turkish of the flower name *hanim eli*.

3.3. Literary borrowings

In the field of plants, there are very few borrowings that are used as literary words in books only in Albanian. They are borrowings mainly from Latin or Italian, as is the case of *cedër* (cider) or *cinamon* (cinnamon).

3.4. In the field of plants, the Albanian language has words/names with double etymologic roots, as is the case of *bizele* (green peas), that is borrowed partly from Italian (*pisello*), and partly from Turkish (*bezelye*) or *domate* (tomato) which is partly from Greek and partly from Turkish. A special case is the word *fasule* (beans), which has some minor dialectal variations across Albanian territories and has multiple etymologic roots. Initially it was borrowed from Latin and then reentered from Venetian, Greek and Turkish. This word seems to include all linguistic influences in Albanian, except from Slavic languages (Çabej, 1996:IV/148-49). Other plant names/words that have reentered in the Albanian lexicon in different eras from different languages are *trumzë* (garden thyme), which was

initially borrowed from ancient Greek and then reentered the Albanian lexicon from modern Greek (Çabej, 2006:VII/136), or *shqopë* (heath), which was initially borrowed from Latin and then reentered the Albanian lexicon from modern Italian (Çabej, 2006:VII/75-76), or *gjeshtër/gjineshtër* (brooms), which was initially borrowed from Latin (Pedersen, 1895:128) and then reentered the Albanian lexicon from old Italian (Çabej, 1996:IV/323).

3.5 Borrowings of other languages from Albanian

As stressed above Albania used to be a mainly pastoral country. Therefore, traces of the Albanian lexicon in other languages can be found in the field of animal husbandry and pastoral life. However, there are some cases when Albanian words were adopted by other languages, mainly old Rumanian. This has to do with the fact that nomad tribes of Rumanian origin have roamed the Balkans throughout history with their animal herds and have interacted with Albanian herdsmen. The word *barishte* (pasture) is one clear example of old Rumanian borrowing a pastoral word from Albanian.

4. Conclusions

This study was focused on the interactions and interchanges between languages in the Balkans and Southeast Europe through the examination of one particular field – plants. As in other fields, the Albanian language has borrowed from other languages, as well as has given to other languages. Being mainly a pastoral country through history, the Albanian language has mainly borrowed plant names, except for the names of native species. In this study, based on original works in etymology and botany, a thorough analysis was conducted in order to reveal that some words related to plants, borrowed especially from ancient Greek and Latin, have entered the Albanian lexicon and are used throughout the country. On the other hand, some other words related to plants, borrowed mainly from Turkish, Slavic and Italian languages, have local use in dialects and sub-dialects. The causes of these phenomena can be found in the change of control over the Albanian territory by different foreign powers throughout history. Original Albanian words related to native species are used mainly in the old Romanian language. This study of plant-related words serves to explain broader lexicographic exchanges between

Balkan's languages and other Mediterranean languages, like between Turkish and Southeast Europe languages or Italian and Balkans languages.

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