

Reanalyzing the Historical Constructions of Albanian Prepositions

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Background: The Albanian language is traditionally divided between the two main dialects of Gheg to the geographic north and Tosk (Standard Albanian) to the geographic south. Previous linguistics analyses and etymological reconstructions have not considered the Malsia Madhe dialect of Albanian, a historically and geographically isolated region spread throughout northwestern Albania and southwestern Montenegro (Shkurtaj 1967, 1974, 1975). Malsia Madhe Albanian (Malsia) reveals many preservations of Proto-Albanian (4th-6th century CE) prepositional forms, which have undergone substantial changes in Modern Gheg and Tosk Albanian. This new data allows for a reanalysis of the historical formation of Modern Albanian prepositions.

Analysis: The Standard Albanian prefix /n-/ is derived from an early preposition /ën/ ‘in’ (see Schumacher and Matzinger 2013: 40). Only in the Malsia Madhe region has /en/ been preserved as a preposition *en* /en/ ‘in’ < Proto Indo-European **h₁en* ‘in’. In all other Albanian dialectal regions this has developed into a prefix /n-/ (see S. Demiraj 1971: 237-38), which underwent a morpho-phonological homorganic nasal assimilation change when attaching to a stem. The underlying nasal /n/ of the prefix assimilates to the place of articulation of the following stop (e.g. n + b > mb). Old Tosk and Gheg Albanian /ënbuf/ ‘to fill’ > Modern Tosk *mbush*, whereas in Malsia it is *bush*.

The Modern Tosk and Gheg preposition *në* ‘in’ is derived from Old Albanian (15th-16th CE) *ndë*. The Old Albanian preposition is derived from a Proto-Albanian form of **en-da*/**en-ta* (Orel 1998: 35, 284). Malsia appears to preserve the Proto form as *en tâ* /en tã:/ ‘inside of it, within’. Malsia does not just preserve the preposition *en* ‘in’ from Proto-Albanian, but also an older form of the demonstrative *tâ* /tã:/ ‘it’. The Modern Tosk equivalent *të* /tã/ is cited by Kortland (2010) as being derived from an earlier **tom*/**tãm* (Chronology can be posited as **tom* > *tã* > *të*).

The creation of the Modern Tosk preposition *nga* /ŋga/ ‘where, where from’ is described in Forston (2010: 455) as “... *nga* is shortened from **ën-ka* ‘where, from where’, with **ën* ‘in’ added to the old relative adverb *ka* ‘where, from where’ ...” In Malsia both *en* ‘in’, and the adverb *ka* ‘where’ are preserved. It is also well known that Gheg and Tosk differ in the phonological form of the preposition *mbas* ~ *pas* ‘after, behind’ (see Beci 2002: 21- 45 in Klein et. al. 2018: 1803). Tosk *mbas* is formed from the process of *en* + *pas*, whereas Malsia and some Gheg areas have preserved *pas* without the addition of the prefixal *en-*.

The reconstructed prepositional forms are not always clear. Tosk *mbi* ‘on, upon’ is reconstructed back to a Proto-Albanian **ambi*. (see Orel 1998: 250-51). Dialectal variants/Proto forms of Modern Tosk *nga*, *mbas* and *mbrapa* that are cited (*ka* ~ *nga*, *pas* ~ *mbas*, *prapa* ~ *mbrapa*), are reconstructed as **en* + PREP./ADV. Because the Malsia form of the preposition *pi* ‘over, above’ (Tosk *mbi*) is unknown, the Proto form is reconstructed as **ambi*, solely based on other IE cognates and a misunderstanding of internal developments within Albanian. The Modern Tosk preposition *mbi* can be reconstructed as **en* + *pi* rather than **ambi*. The Malsia dialectal variant of *pi* ‘over, above’ can also be found outside of Albanian. The Messapian language of the southeastern Italian peninsula (7th-2nd centuries BCE) contains many cognates with Modern Albanian. Matzinger (2019: 88-89) cites Messapian *pi-* with the meaning of ‘on, thereon’ comparable to Vedic Sanskrit *pi-* and Ancient Greek π . Malsia *pi* likely reveals another unknown cognate between Albanian and Messapian.

Conclusion: The Albanian language contains many prepositions whose etymologies have remained somewhat obscure. The Malsia Madhe Albanian dialect opens an avenue for cross comparison to the Old/Modern Tosk and Gheg dialects, revealing many interesting factors that warrant a reanalysis of the historical reconstructions and the Proto Albanian prepositional forms.

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