

REVIEW

by a member of the scientific jury: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ekaterina Tarpomanova, Sofia
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for dissertation for obtaining the scientific and educational degree *doctor*

Author of the dissertation: Yllka Imeri, Department of General, Indo-European and Balkan
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Dissertation topic: The vocal system of the dialect of the Preshevo Valley

Yllka Imeri has a bachelor's and master's degree in Albanian from Hasan Prishtina University in Kosovo. At Sofia University she is a PhD student at the Department of General, Indo-European and Balkan Linguistics (Faculty of Slavic Studies) with research supervisor Assoc. Prof. Bilyana Mihaylova. Since 2017 she has been working as an assistant at the Fehmi Agani University of Djakovo (Kosovo). She also teaches at several other universities: Ukshin Hoti University of Prizren (Kosovo), Ulcinj Institute for Research and Development (Kosovo), and Isa Boletini University in Mitrovica, Kosovo. She also has experience as an Albanian language teacher. She has participated in many projects. She writes and publishes poetry. Her bilingualism (Albanian and Serbian) makes her suitable for contrastive research between Albanian and Serbian. After successful preliminary defense she appears in public defence with all the necessary scientific and administrative documents.

The topic of the dissertation is relevant, especially in terms of Albanian studies. The study and description of the vocal system in the Albanian dialect of the Presevo Valley is a specific issue that has not been studied in detail so far. The dissertation has mostly applied value.

The dissertation contains 208 pages, consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, appendix and bibliography.

The introductory part covers different aspects of the dissertation, starting with the object, the importance, the goals and the methodology of the research. The object is the system of vowels in the Presevo Valley. I would point out that the object of the study is really a good choice – the Presevo Valley is part of Serbia, but geographically it occupies a corner of Serbia, wedged between

Kosovo and Macedonia. The population in this border area is predominantly Albanian, yet interaction with the Serbian language is inevitable. It is logical to compare the language variety of the Presevo Valley with the standard Albanian, with the northeastern Gheg dialect, as well as with the Serbian. Yllka Imeri works within experimental phonetics and for the correct description of the vocal system of Albanian dialect in the Presevo Valley determines the following aspects in her work: determining the inventory of the studied dialectal variety, the functional side of phonemes illustrated with examples of minimal pairs, determining the acoustic side of phonemes, distribution by groups of native speakers, interactions and influences between groups of native speakers, comparison of the physical and acoustic properties of the studied vocal phonemes with those in standard Albanian, as well as the interaction with Serbian. As an importance of the research, the author emphasizes the lack of integral research on the vocal system of this dialectal variety, with which I completely agree. So far, there are several articles that address this issue, written decades ago.

The objectives of the dissertation are defined briefly, clearly and concretely – the complete and comprehensive description of the vocal system of speech in the Presevo Valley, which includes determining the inventory, system and functions of phonemes, realized through a computer program. Establishing trends in changes in the vocal system for intralinguistic and extralinguistic reasons is also a goal of the work.

The methodology of the work is not presented very systematically. The PhD student clarifies that the research is based on her own field research and several previous studies. However, the content of the term *quantitative-deductive method*, which she believes is fundamental to her work, remains unclear. For the collection of the material in the field, records of the respondents are used, from which transcripts are extracted. For the methods of field research, Yllka Imeri used the methods of Vaux and Cooper (there is no citation in the initial mentions of the two linguists). The reference to Umberto Eco's book *How to write a dissertation* does not seem very appropriate when presenting the methodology of a doctoral dissertation. Respondents who were enrolled were divided into groups according to age and education, which is important to consider as the influence of sociolinguistic factors is possible. In the methodology of studying the vocal phonemes themselves, the author formulates questions whose answers will help her in describing the vocal system of the dialect, but in my opinion she could make theoretical summaries of features she

describes (dialectal characteristics, phonetic changes, etc.). The characteristics of the formants in the acoustic analysis are briefly explained. The PhD student uses the Praat program for computer analysis. The transcription system used (based on the International Phonetic Alphabet - IPA) adequately reflects the characteristics of the Albanian language.

The introductory part continues with information about the two municipalities, which are located in the Presevo Valley and in which the study was conducted – Presevo and Bujanovac. This may seem like a departure from the narrowly scientific goal of research, but I think it is useful because it sets the sociolinguistic context of the dialectal variety that is the subject of the work. The data are geographical, historical, and partly socio-political.

Some subsections follow that are important for the dissertation from a substantive point of view, as they present the peculiarities of the Albanian dialects in view of their phonological features. These subparts can be defined as the theoretical basis of the study. The PhD student begins with a brief introductory description of the phonetic characteristics of the dialects of the Albanian language, considering the opposition of Gheg (Northern Albanian) and Tosk (Southern Albanian). He then dwells on the Gheg dialect and the grouping of its varieties. In modern Albanian dialectology, it is believed that Gheg is divided into two sub-dialects - northern and southern (separated by the Mat river), and Yllka Imeri adheres to this classification (although there are other points of view). Then logically comes the description of the main characteristics of the dialect in the Presevo Valley. The main features in the vocal system of this dialect are the presence of long vowels (which is the main feature of the Northern Albanian dialect), the correspondence of the Tosk diphthong *ue* as monophthong - *u*, in some villages there are nasal vowels, in some villages the Albanian vowel *y* is not present. The peculiarities in the vocal system of Presevo and Bujanovac are successively described, not according to the same model. The PhD student describes seven short vowels, seven long and two nasal. Special attention is paid to the length and nasality as phonological characteristics, as well as to the monophthongization of some diphthongs (*ue*, *ie*, *ye*).

In the next subsection, entitled "Dialect features in the Presevo Valley", attention is paid again to the characteristics of the vocals in Presevo and Bujanovac, this time in comparative terms. The features considered are well illustrated with examples and additionally compared to the standard language. Words with monophthongisation of diphthongs, as well as with the transition

of the vowel *y* to *i* are shown. As can be seen from the examples, the settlements in the Preševo Valley are not uniform in terms of the treatment of diphthongs and the vowel *y*, but the work does not specify the ranges of phenomena. Some oppositions between vowel phonemes are outlined (/i/ - /y/, /i/ - /u/, /i/ - /e/, /i/ - /a/).

After a more detailed description of the Gheg dialect and its internal structure, the Tosk dialect is presented with its subdialects, as well as the transitional dialects of the Albanian language, about which the opinions of linguists are quite diverse. The author cites different points of view about the scope and characteristics of the transitional dialects.

The dissertation continues with "General theoretical issues of phonetics", where Yllka Imeri talks about the object of this linguistic discipline, the types of phonetics, syllables, prosody, etc. Well-known and somewhat banal statements about phonetics are found here, and the least that can be said is that the place of this part, if it is necessary at all, is at the very beginning of the work.

The next part discusses the phonetic transcription and the approach of the author in describing the vowels in the dialect she studies. The general scheme of Albanian vowels is given according to the two main articulatory properties - the movements of the language in the horizontal and vertical planes.

I find the part on the evolution of the Albanian vocal system well developed, although it could also be drawn further into the structure of the dissertation. It examines the reflexes of Indo-European vowels in Albanian – in both dialects, presents diachronically the entire Albanian vocal system – short and long vowels, as well as hypotheses about the origin and development of phonemes /y/ and /ë/ (Albanian designations adopted). The vowel /ë/ is very correctly placed in a Balkan context.

The two main chapters in which the real part of the dissertation unfolds are devoted to the study of the vocal system in the dialect of Bujanovac and its surroundings (first chapter) and the speech of Presevo and its surroundings (second chapter). The chapters are built and systematized in the same way, focusing on each vowel, its characteristics and realizations, as well as basic phonological oppositions. The author then described in detail the analysis with the Praat program, presenting the data according to the informants, divided into groups by gender and age. Statistical analysis includes the lowest, highest and average values of the formants (F1, F2) and intensity

(dB). The data are presented in tables and graphs. At the end of both chapters there are brief summaries of the statistical information for each vowel.

The third chapter of the dissertation deals with the comparison of the dialect words from the Presevo Valley with the standard Albanian language. Vocabulary is compared and not enough attention is paid to phonetics and phonology, which puts the whole chapter off the topic of the dissertation. Attention is also paid to the peculiarities of the standard Albanian language. The chapter itself has interesting content, but the PhD student could extract data on the topic of the dissertation, which has not been done. Borrowings from foreign languages (Slavic, Turkish, English) could also be considered in terms of phonetic adaptation.

In the concluding part Yllka Imeri presents the results of her work, and on the basis of the research she comes to a summary of the characteristics of dialect in the Presevo Valley. An important conclusion is that this dialect does not differ significantly from the nearby Gheg dialect varieties, although it is used in another country and in a foreign language environment. One of the peculiarities due to the linguistic contact with Serbian is the transition $y > i$.

The contributions of the work are well defined by the author. Several spectrograms of vowel phonemes are given in the appendix. The bibliography contains 65 scientific sources. The abstract corresponds to the content of the dissertation.

My overall impression of Yllka Imeri's dissertation is positive, although there are some serious shortcomings. The contribution of the dissertation consists mainly in the independent data collection in the field and their computer processing. This type of information about the vocal system of a dialect is clear and unambiguous. It is important to note that a study of the dialect of the Presevo Valley, based on experimental phonetics, is being conducted for the first time. Among the shortcomings I must pay attention to the poor structure and organization of the text – I have already mentioned a few of my observations for parts that look out of place. The internal organization of some parts is also chaotic, but on the other hand there are very well-structured parts. Another disadvantage of the dissertation is the predominance of the descriptive approach over the analytical one. Much more analysis can certainly be derived from the information in the text than is available. In several places in the text there are excerpts that are suitable for a textbook or introductory course in the discipline, but not for a doctoral dissertation. However, the qualities of the dissertation outweigh the shortcomings.

Yllka Imeri has three publications on the topic of the dissertation and several additional publications outside it.

Based on what has been said so far, I support the awarding of the educational and scientific degree *doctor* to Yllka Imeri.

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