



# Is Albanian losing its vowel length contrast? Evidence from children and adults

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Albanian comprises two major dialects

Background

- Tosk
- Gheg

Gheg is spoken in Kosovo, and northern and central Albania



The past decades have seen increased population movement in Albania

→ Dialect contact and mixing of individuals in urban centers

Elsie & Gross (2009)





Dialect contact in urban centers would have caused **attrition** of some traditional dialectal features, including **vowel length contrasts in Gheg** 

(Topalli, 2007; Moosmüller & Granser, 2006)

## **Vowel Length in Gheg**

indefinite nouns vs definite nouns

e.g. /veːz/ vs. /vez/ 'some eggs/the eggs'

• preceding liquid consonants and in final open syllables

e.g. /mi:/ vs. /mit/ 'mouse/myth').

(e.g. Beci, 1995; Gjinari et al, 2007; Shkurtaj, 2004; Çeliku, 1971; Murati, 1989)





1) Establish empirically whether contrastive length has been preserved in Gheg

- 2) Analyse whether there is any evidence for a loss of contrastive length via an apparent-time study
- 3) Compare the dialect spoken in the urban center of Tirana with the same dialect spoken in a remote village (only 15 km away from Tirana)





## **Speakers**

- Native speakers of Gheg
- 22 adults (38-74 years old, 20 women)
  - 14 living in Tirana, 8 living in village of Bërzhitë (15 km away from Tirana)
- 37 children (6-7 years old, 20 girls)
  - 20 living in Tirana, 17 living in Bërzhitë
- Recorded in primary schools in Albania (Speech Recorder, Draxler & Jänsch, 2004)
- The adults were parents or grand parents of the children





## <u>Task</u>

- Picture-naming task designed for 6-7 year olds (1st grade)
- 23 words featuring a stressed vowel of interest, 3 4 repetitions





*mollë* (apple)

#### raki (raki is a traditional drink)





## <u>Words</u>

<u>5</u>	Non-length	Length			
/i/	p <b>i</b> drink	m <b>i</b> mouse	zinxh <b>i</b> r <i>zipper</i>	rak <b>i</b> <i>raki</i>	
/y/	p <b>y</b> ll forest	s <b>y</b> eye	<b>y</b> ll star		
/u/	p <b>u</b> shkë <i>rifle</i>	b <b>u</b> kë <i>bread</i>	flam <b>u</b> r <i>flag</i>	g <b>u</b> r stone	<b>u</b> rë <i>bridge</i>
/e/	p <b>e</b> shk <i>fish</i>	v <b>e</b> zë <i>eggs</i>	karkal <b>e</b> c grasshopper		
/o/	p <b>o</b> shtë <i>under</i>	b <b>o</b> rë <i>snow</i>	d <b>o</b> rë <i>hand</i>	m <b>o</b> llë <i>apple</i>	
/a/	papag <b>a</b> ll <i>parrot</i>	dj <b>a</b> th <i>cheese</i>	k <b>a</b> l horse	zj <b>a</b> rr <i>fire</i>	





- Speech signal forced-aligned using WebMAUS (Schiel, 1999; Kisler et al., 2017)
- Database handled in EMU-SDMS (Winkelmann et al., 2017), including hand-correction of segment boundaries
- Statistical analyses with *lme4* and *lmerTest* packages in R (Bates et al., 2015; Kuznetsova et al., 2017; R Core Team, 2020)









Length significantly longer than non-length
 Children significantly longer than adults

(*F*[1, 21.9]=5.7, *p*<0.05) (*F*[1, 70.5]=12.9, *p*<0.001)





#### Results – 6 vowels



No effect of the vowel, but visually, some differences (e.g. /i/ vs. /u/)





## Model initially tested:

duration ~ (condition \* age\_group \* vowel) +
 (age\_group|word) +
 (condition+vowel|speaker)

Best model found:

duration ~ condition + age\_group + (age\_group | word) +
 (condition+vowel|speaker)









2) Length / non-length contrast maintained









#### No obvious difference between village and city child speakers









effect of lengthening condition (\*) and age group (\*\*\*)

but NO evidence that the difference betw. the two conditions is larger in the village than in the city





## Initial model

log(times\_rel) ~ condition \* Dial \* Group +
 (Group+Dial|Stem) + (condition|Vpn)

## Best fit log(times\_rel) ~ condition + Group + (Group + Dial | Stem) + (condition | Vpn)





## <u>Aim 1)</u>

Establish empirically whether contrastive length has been preserved in Gheg

ightarrow adult and child Gheg speakers **still produce** this contrast

## <u>Aim 2)</u>

Analyse whether there is any evidence for a loss of contrastive length via an apparent-time study
→ no evidence for a loss of contrastive length
(children still producing it)



## <u>Aim 3)</u>

Compare the dialect spoken in the urban center of Tirana with the same dialect spoken in a remote village

 $\rightarrow$  not significant: NO evidence that the difference between the two conditions is larger in the village than in the city





- Phonetic environment and word structure (limitation due to the task designed for 6-7 year olds)
- Slower speech rate in children, vowel normalization not possible (restricted contexts in prep)
- Comparison with Tosk (in process)
- Longitudinal analysis of children (if possible)





## Thank you!





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Variety \*\* \* \*\*\*

\*





Monophthongs



Variety \* p< 0.05





