Dialect in the City: Asymmetrical retention of traditional features of Gheg Albanian

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This study explores how the phonological system of the Gheg dialect spoken in and around Tirana, the capital of Albania, has been affected in heterogenous and homogeneous communities as a result of language and urban planning policies during and post communism. Albanian is a lesser-studied language of the Indo-European family comprising two major dialects, Tosk and Gheg [1]. In 1972, a primarily Tosk-based standard variety (henceforth: the Standard) was introduced for use in education, writing, public speaking, and the media [2]. In addition, due to national policies of interregional allocation of the labor force in the context of industrial decentralization [3], major cities like Tirana experienced an influx of internal migrants from all around the country. Consequently, the Gheg dialect of the locally-born residents in Tirana was relegated to oral use in the private sphere and came to be in intense contact with Tosk and other varieties of the internal migrants. By contrast, nearby rural areas were virtually unaffected by internal migrations and speakers were exposed to the Standard mainly through education and the media. The issue to be considered here is the extent to which there is now divergence between city (Tirana) Gheg and rural Gheg as a consequence of intense pressure from the Standard and Tosk on the former, but not the latter [4].

To address this question, we selected two distinguishing features of Gheg: 1) morpho-phonological vocalic length contrasts present in Gheg, but not in Tosk/Standard [5], as in Example 1; 2) monophthongization in contexts where Tosk/Standard have phonological oppositions between diphthongs and monophthongs [6], as in Example 2. Two groups of Gheg speaking adults participated in this study: 14 city Gheg speakers living in Tirana and 8 rural Gheg speakers living in the nearby village of Bërzhitë. They took part in a picture-naming task and produced 32 words 4 times. These include for the length condition 19 and 6 words that are distinguished by long and short vowels respectively in Gheg but not in Tosk/Standard; and 7 words that are monophthongal in Gheg but which are diphthongal in Tosk/Standard. Vowel duration was measured after hand-correction of the segment boundaries, then log-transformed and analyzed with a linear mixed effects model [7]. In order to test for monophthongization, two separate generalized additive mixed models (GAMMs) were fitted to the trajectories of F1 and F2 (11 measurement points, unnormalized formant frequencies; see Statistics 2) [8].

The results for length (Figure 1) show a clear and significant distinction in duration between short and long vowels, but no effect of speaker group (Statistics 1), meaning that city Gheg and rural Gheg speakers preserved length contrasts. The results for monophthongization suggest a greater degree of diphthongisation for city Gheg than for rural Gheg speakers (Figure 2). It is possible that daily interactions with speakers of Tosk and the Standard have led city Gheg to change, while exposure to the Standard only in the media and education has not caused rural Gheg to change. In city Gheg, the existing length contrast has not been lost, while a new contrast between mono- and diphthongs has been acquired; this makes the current phonological system of city Gheg more complex than that of rural Gheg, and of Tosk/Standard. Whether the length contrast will eventually be lost is an open question, but this challenges the idea that old features are lost before new ones are acquired, as hypothesized by [9].

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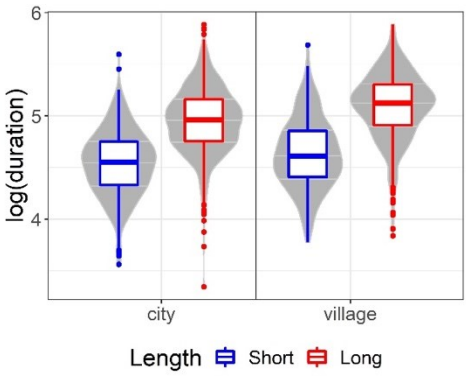
Example (1)

Orthographic form	Spoken Tosk/Standard	Gheg
miu 'the mouse'	[miu]	[miu]
një mi 'a mouse'	[mi]	[mi:]
lidh 'tie' (imperative)	[lið]	[lið]
(ti) lidh '(you) tie' (indicative)	[lið]	[li:ð]

Example (2)

Orthographic form	Spoken Tosk/Standard	Gheg
thua 'claw'	[θua]	[θu]
hu 'picket'	[hu]	[hu]



Statistics 1

Length*Group:	$F(1, 30.92)=0.31$, $p>.05$
Length:	$F(1, 27.47)=26.19$, $p<.001$
Group:	$F(1, 22.52)=3.56$, $p>.05$

Best model found (in R syntax):

```
lmer(log(duration) ~ Length +
    (Group|Word) + (Length|Speaker))
```

Figure 1. Duration of Short and Long vowels

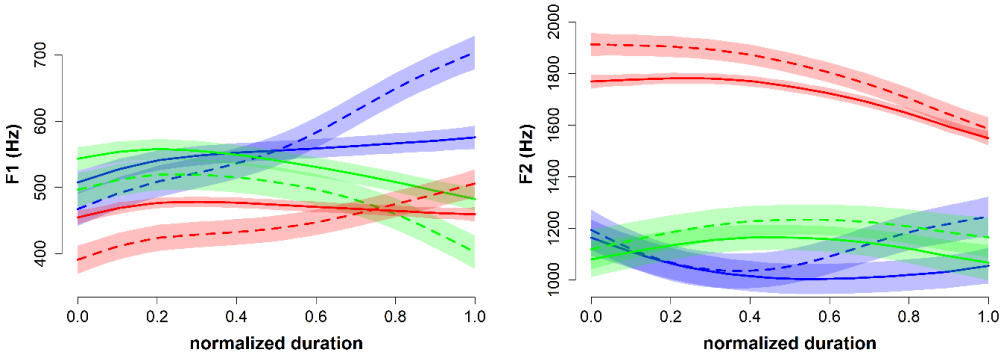


Figure 2. Estimated F1 and F2 trajectories for Tosk/Standard diphthongs /ye/, /ue/ and /ua/ in city (dashed) and village (solid) speakers

Statistics 2

Best model found (in R syntax):

```
bam(Fx ~ s(time_pts, k=11) + Group_Diph + s(time_pts, by=Group_Diph) + s(time_pts,
    Speaker, bs="fs", m=1) + s(time_pts, Word, bs="fs", m=1))
```