

TOPONYMY AS MACROSTRUCTURE AND MICROSTRUCTURE (STUDY ON THE TOPONYMY OF THE HIMARA DISTRICT)

HELENA GRILLO (MUKLI)

Language and Literature Department, Faculty of Education
“Aleksander Moisiu” University, Durrës, Albania

Abstract: This paper is a research into toponymy and anthroponymy in Himara, a province where very controversial linguistic problems exist. One can notice these issues even in onomastics, a field in which the linguistic clash between Albanian and Greek is salient. This study discusses the current state of toponyms in the context of the materials collected in the field, aiming at providing a concrete contribution to this domain. By reviewing today’s toponyms, the analysis will consider the factors that have led to the creation of the most frequent paradigms of geographical toponymic derivatives. In addition to historical and religious factors that influenced the coinage of early names, there are natural factors, such as the geographical position and geological configuration of the settlements, the presence of water flows, and others, as well as the patronymic background.

Keywords: onomastics, toponyms, macrostructure, microstructure, classification.

Introduction

General information about the Himara district

Himara lies along the Ionian coast of Albania (the natives call it *the Coast*), occupying the northwest part, from the southern part of the Llogara mountain up to the mountain of Qeparo in the southeast, making up a straight line of 22 km. The eastern border consists of the ridge of Cika and the mountain of Qeparo. The width of the Himara district from east to west is from 5 km in Palase to 8 km in the village of Qeparo. This district is also part of the Albanian Riviera, which starts from Uji i Ftohte in Vlore and ends in Kep of Stili in Saranda.

The geographical position of the Himara district has changed historically. During the 15th century Himarë included all the southwestern parts of Albania, Himara of today, the Lower Coast (Borsh– Nivicë–Bubar), Lumi of Vlore, Lower and Upper Kurvelesh, Tepelene and the current cities of Sarande and Delvine, an average of 50 villages. At the end of the 18th century and beginning of the 19th century, the borders of Himara started to shrink gradually, until the current borders with ten villages: Palase, Dhermi, Gjileke (once included in Dhermi), Vuno, Lias (ex Vuno), Himarë, Pilur, Kudhes, Qeparo and Qeparo –Fushë (ex Qeparo) (see Kabo 2004). With the last territorial and administrative changes, another restructuring of

the district will take place; there are proposals for its widening with some more villages, Lumi and Vlore.

The area – Dhërmi

Dhërmi/Drimades is one of the villages of the area of Himarë (the official, Albanian name), or Himarë/Himara (the local, Greek name). The area stretches about 25 kilometres along the southern Albanian coast and is known as *Bregu i Detit*, meaning the coastal area. Himarë/Himara administratively belongs to Vlorë Prefecture¹ and presents an important part of the Ionian seashore situated between the cities of Vlorë (the capital of the prefecture) and Saranda. The area lies 42 kilometres away from the northern city of Vlorë and about the same from the southern city of Saranda. The Albanian-Greek border is 60 kilometres south. The Thunderbolt Mountains or *Malet e Vetëtimë*, also called the Acroceraunian Mountains, enclose the area on its northern and northeastern side. The area opens up on its southwestern side with Mountain Çika and descends towards the Ionian coast and the Greek Islands of Othonas and Corfu in the distance.

Besides the social and geographical area, Himarë/Himara is also the name of a small town, appointed as a regional municipality in 2000.²

Languages

Language is one of the important characteristics upon which the local people of Dhërmi/Drimades claim their distinct locality. In their day-to-day conversations, locals of Dhërmi/Drimades, Palasa and Himarë/Himara mainly use a local Greek dialect³ and partly a southern Albanian (Tosk) dialect, while the locals of Ilias, Vuno, Qeparo, Kudhës and Pilur mainly speak the southern Albanian (Tosk) dialect. In spite

¹ The Republic of Albania is divided in twelve prefectures or regions, which are territorial and administrative units usually comprising several communes and municipalities “with geographical, traditional, economic and social links and common interests. The borders of a region correspond to the borders of the comprising communes and municipalities, while the centre of the region is established in one of the municipalities. The territory, name and centre of the region are established by law” (see Albanian Association of Municipalities 2001: 5 and 17).

² Between the years 1992 (since the first local elections after the demise of communism) until 2000, the Himarë/Himara area administratively belonged to a commune. According to the law concerning the local government system (Law no. 7275 – The Law on the Functions and the Organisation of Local Governments) a commune is territorial administrative unity of rural areas with exceptional urban areas (see Albanian Association of Municipalities 2001: 18). Although the Himarë/Himara area does not conjoin the urban areas, which is one of the leading conditions for it to be approved as a municipality, the leading local administrators succeeded in obtaining this status for the region in 2000. One of the main arguments for attaining this status was that Himarë/Himara is a potential tourist area. With this change, Himarë/Himara became administratively more independent in economic processes, urban planning and partly in decollectivization.

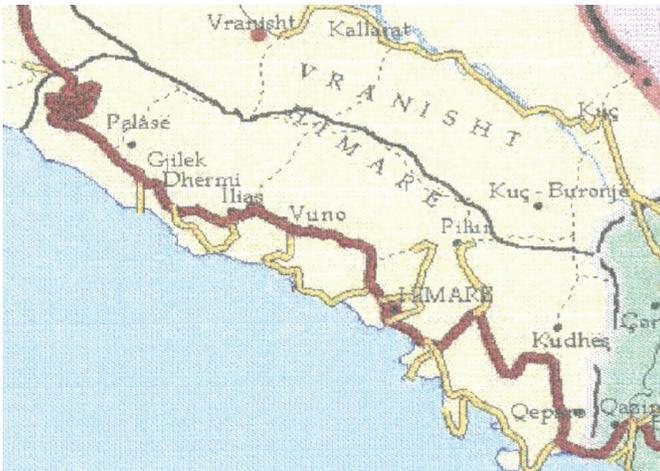
³ The local people of Dhërmi/Drimades refer to their local dialect or idiom as dialect or sometimes language. The scholars (Sotiri 2001, Hatzhiantoniou 2002) who studied the dialect

of a short distance between the villages that are subjected to language diglossia,⁴ the accents of the dialects are different.

Toponymy

Toponyms and anthroponyms are proper nouns and they originate from common nouns. This phenomenon is universal for all the languages of the world (Shkurtaj 2001: 14). The matter of designation of places of living is a civil right of those who live in certain areas, whether these places are small villages or cities (see Baliu 2006).

The toponymy of the district analysed in this paper has often been an object of discussions between linguists, politicians and historians. For the collection of the toponyms, the author exploited archived historical documents, which will help analyse the linguistic development of the names over the years through their evolution and their collection from third-generation natives in order to ensure the flow of the documentation. This district is bilingual (Albanian and Greek) and this makes the language interpretation more difficult. Albanian and Greek come into contact in three of the villages of the district, Dhermi, Palasë and Himarë.



of the Himarë/Himara area refer to it as being a dialect. I will follow the same categorisation throughout my analysis.

⁴ According to linguistic theories, different dialects and modes of speaking co-exist in many societies, often named language *registers*, *styles* or *codes*. Contemporary linguistic scholars argue that differences between particular dialects should be understood in terms of the social differences at large. Ferguson (1959) introduces the term *diglossia*, which is defined as the situation when two varieties of a language are spoken by the members of the same community. Ferguson explains that diglossia is “associated with a division of social life into sets of institutions or activities (domains) in which [...] one of the languages [...] is expected or appropriate or obligatory” (see Grillo 1996: 327). He differentiates between H(igh) language, which can be used in education, and L(ow) language, which is used in family conversations. Ferguson notes that the two languages are interrelated.

It should be emphasised that the object of this study is not the historical point of view of the ethnic determination of the toponyms, as there are various discussions on the ethnic determinations of the inhabitants. In most cases, the necessary data for the scientific view is missing. This study aims to prove the toponymic documentation of the district of Himarë as evidence for a macro and microstructure classification based on seven villages, where there are two languages spoken, Albanian and Greek.

When transliterating the Albanian terms, I was guided by the pronunciation as it appears in the Albanian-English-Albanian Dictionary (Hysa 2004). The letters that do not appear in the English alphabet are pronounced as follows:

ç	ch	as in <i>cherry</i>	ll	ll	as in <i>all</i>	th	th	as in <i>the</i>
dh	dh	as in <i>this</i>	nj	ny		x	g	as in <i>jail</i> (soft <i>j</i>)
ë	æ	as in <i>girl</i>	q	ch	as in <i>cherry</i>	xh	g	as in <i>ginger</i>
gj	j	as in <i>jaw</i>	rr	r	(sharp <i>r</i>)	y	i	as in <i>this</i>
l	L	as in <i>like</i>	sh	sh	as in <i>shoe</i>	zh	zh	as in <i>measure</i>

Note on kinship abbreviations

I have adopted the following conventions:

B = <i>brother</i>	M = <i>mother</i>
D = <i>daughter</i>	S = <i>son</i>
F = <i>father</i>	W = <i>wife</i>
H = <i>husband</i>	Z = <i>sister</i>

The name of Himarë comes up as *Kemarai* in the third century BC, *Chimera* at Plini in the first century AD, *Himairai* in the sixth century at the Prokop of Cezare, *Chimara* on a certificate of 1198 of the Byzantine emperor Aleks III and *Himara* in a Turkish registry of 1431.

The Albanian linguist S. Mansaku sees *Himara* as an ethnic name, explaining the preservation of the vowel *a* with the shift in emphasis on the *të* and the silent vowel *i* with its dropping, which would create the consonant group *hm*, very hard to put into a syllable in Albanian (Pouqueville 1826–1827: 467, 165). These explanations are related to the nomocracy of historical phonetics and the evolution of the Albanian language.

With the help of many scholars, current knowledge has made it possible to notice the Illyrian-Albanian thread in onomastics (Çabej 1979; Lefe 1974: 137–138; Mansaku 1982: 103–104). At the same time, one should not forget that in the Albanian regions there are toponyms which are not mentioned in documents and descriptions.

R. Ushaku (1987: 8) thinks that “when we relate to the microtoponyms written later on, or that come from the verbal expressions, the chances of intrusion from an earlier source is limited, but the chances of synchronic lexical semantic interpretation are higher and based on the geomorphologic, topographic, economic, social and particular ethnological data”.

In the following, the main evidence for the classification of Himara toponyms is presented (according to the heads of families, terrain configuration, land composition or type, botanic culture, geographical position and forms).

Linguistic analyses

From the linguistic point of view, the toponymy of the district is underpinned by word-forming processes and the lexis presents various types of such processes in the Albanian language in general. Albanian is very rich in word-building mechanisms. Six can be noted:

- Origin: prefixes, suffixes, pre-suffixes, without additions.
- Syllables
- Composition
- Combination
- Conversion
- Mixed methods: combination and prefixation, composition and suffixation, syllables and pre- suffixation, syllables and combination.

From the study of the most frequent toponymic materials, it is salient that the most numerous items are formations with: origin, combination and composition.

Seen as a sociolinguistic and historical macrostructure, Himarë toponymy reveals two structural paradigms:

(1) Linguistic exchanges – borrowings (from Greek, Slavic and French) and native, autochthonous words:

Armisidha – salty place in Himarë, close to the sea, comes from Greek language η αμύρα ‘saltiness’;

Aspropetra – white stone in Himarë, close to the sea. It is a Greek toponym, consisting of two words: άσπρος ‘white’ (I, e) and η πέτρα ‘stone’;

Blerës – pasture, near the hill of Skutarai. Albanian formation: *blerës* ‘greenness, green’;

Bebec – place in the mountain, Albanian toponym; *bebec* ‘a kind of white dog’ (used in Laberi);

Jal-I – place in Vuno, the beach of Vuno. From Greek το γυαλι ‘glass’. It is called this way because the water is very clean;

Kastrofiladhë – place in the mountain, Greek for ‘castle warden’: η σωματοφυλακμ ‘warden’;

Kastanea – place with a lot of chestnuts, Greek as η καστανέα;

Kondakuvi – place in the entrance of Vuno. Greek composition made up of two words: *kondakuvi* ‘near the deaf’ and *κουτα* near, η *κουφή*;

Majadhimekushte – ‘the point of Dhimkushte’ (in the genitive), Albanian;

Mavromat – place in the mountain; Greek Μαυρος ‘black’ το μάτι ‘eye’, *mavromat* ‘black eye’;

Megalihora – place in the valley, pasture. Μεγαλο ‘big’, η χώρα ‘place’, *megalihora* ‘big place’;

Mjegullosh – mal mountain in the village of Vuno, Albanian. A mountain that always stands in the fog;

Përroi i Millokopisë, Lidhit, Karidhon – place with fruit;

Bardhec, -i (see Baliu 2006): this toponym is also found in Kosovo – *Kroni Bardhecit (Zhuja-Dardanë), Roga Bardhecit (Zhuja-Dardanë)*. This microtoponym is put together with the homogenous onomastic history of this old anthroponym, which is found in the written form, in some linguistic forms, since the 15th century, but the lexical form belongs to the old autochthonous foundation of the Albanian language.

Vale – big pasture, summer pasture (from French);

Zamar – a place in Himarë; it comes from Slavic and means ‘on the other side of the sea’.

(2) Motivation is another kind of onomastic basis. In the designation of some places an important role was played by the Greek Church, which resisted across time.

Shën Ajonikolla – the church;

Shën Pjetër – water fountain;

Shën Spiridhon – place in the fields;

Shën Koll – place in the field, the church is called the same;

Shën Mëri – the church;

The church of Kllogjri (kallogjer ‘people who stay close to the holy places’). This microtoponym is also found in Kosovo, according to Baliu (2006): *Kallugjericë, -a: Reka Kallugjericës (Hajkobillë, Dardanë)*. The word comes from Greek *καλογερος*, which in Albanian (Greek *o* = Albanian *u*) gave *kallugjer* and *kllogjën*, but in the rare cases of spoken dialects it evolved in the word *gllogjën*, in this case *Glllogjan*.

Piluri – snow gate: mountain gate, path, small passage;

Stihora – place in Himarë. Something must have happened in this place: *η χώρα ‘vend’*;

Gur – a fountain in Himarë, in the middle of the stones;

Ndërmaja – place between the mountain;

Shkemb i kuq – cliff (gully) of the crows (where the crows drink water);

Hon of Arapes – black place (black person);

Shkoza – the cattle according to the tribe names.

As microstructure (in general depth in linguistics), these toponyms include a wider historical and linguistic area. In the general aspect of toponyms we find both Greek and Albanian cultures and language.

The proof of the classification of current toponymy

Nowadays, toponymy is constructed based on other paradigms such as natural factors (geographical position, geological construction of the district, presence of the water flows, patronymic heritage). The toponymic analysis of the Himarë district is based on the results of newer studies published by Cambridge (Kristal 1987: 114), which describe these types of toponymic and geographical derivatives:

– **The nature characteristics as the hills, rivers and the costal line:** *Qafa e Arminxorres, Qafa e Lagjinjës, Maja e zogut, Bitri, Mali i Gjnikës, Mali i Cipthit, Mali i Kalbaqit, Gryka e Trapit, Gryka e Armixores, Gryka e Nacit, Gryka e përrallit.*

– **Particular places (castles, military trenches etc.):** *Pusi i Vanovës* (renamed *Rezervuar i Vanovës*), *Pusi i mollës, Pusi i Vumloit, Pusi i lëmenjve, Përroi i Tramatraqit* (*tramatraq* ‘military headquarters’), *Përroi i Millokopisë, Lidhit.*

– **Religious composition (e.g., the church):** *Shën Ajonikolla – kisha; Shën Pjetër* – a place where people get water; *Shën Spiridhon* – place in the field; *Shën Koll* – place in the field, the church has the same name; *Shën Mëri* – church.

– **Famous local personalities (chiefs, politicians, leaders, memorials or known events of a battle):** *Lugina e Celos.*

– **Other names of places (known cities or cities where people come from):** *Andrehora* – the place of Andrea in Himarë, comes from Greek η χώρα ‘birthplace’ (*Andrehora* ‘birthplace of Andrea’).

From the linguistic point of view, toponyms in this category are based on adjectives: *shkëmb i kuq* (‘the red cliff’), *Mali i Bardhë* (‘the white mountain’): oronyms consisting of a noun + adjective showing colour are not only numerous, but also widely used north to south throughout Albania (Shkurtaj 2001: 72). The practical needs made use simple names, which are fairly new to the diacronik axis.

There are microtoponyms (forgotten street names) that are disappearing: *Moskona krorëza* – the road that connects Pilur with Vuno. Names of village centres are more permanent, as well as names of neighbourhoods: *i Bunajt, Shesh i Cipsit, Maja e zogut; Pusi i Vanovës, Pusi i Kroit, i Lëmenjve, i Vumloit, Pusi i Mollës, Mali i Gjnikës, Mali i Cipthit, Mali i Kalbaqit, Mali i Bardhë, Pirëza, Kalbaq* (dark part of the hills without stones and plants).

Microtoponyms are created from:

– **Proper names related to common nouns:** *Rrapi i Kroit, Përroi i Mollës* (‘springs in winter’), *Përroi i Dardhës, Buza e Plepit, Thanë e egër, Shpella e Bufit.*

– **Names referring to tribe heritage (proper names related to patronyms):** *Lisi i Gjodedas, Lisi i Mërkuret, Lisat e Pilurit, Lisat e Qafëzeros, Lisat e Mucet, Lisat e Qafës së Hoxhës, Stani i Mërkuret, Zabet, Balet, Gërdhuqe, Dhramet, Goricat e Rucet.*

– **Proper names of places where beehives are kept:** *Buna.*

Social and demographic development and the development and movements of the language have their impact on toponymy. Classification of topographical paradigms change and often their study not only belongs to the science of linguistics, but also to multidisciplinary disciplines. Nowadays, the controversy over toponymy (mostly regarding the spelling of topographical forms in official documents of Albanian immigrants in Greece) keeps generating linguistic and media debates. Far from political discussions about the Greek or Albanian ethnic definition of these citizens, as linguists we rely on the rules of grammar of the Albanian language, in which foreign nouns are written in the form of their original language. Studying the data about the classification of toponymy in Himarë not only documents the topographical collection phase, but

brings a contribution to the history of the Albanian language and sociolinguistic studies on bilingual areas.

Appendix 1



The villages of Himarë/Himara municipality: Palasa, Dhërmi/Drimades, Ilias, Vuno, Qeparo, Kithës and Pilur.

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