

## Linguistic variation within the Northwestern Gheg Albanian dialect

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**Abstract.** In previous literature and linguistics analysis, the Northwestern Gheg Albanian dialect is classified as one zone that encompasses the area of northwestern Albania and southwestern Montenegro (B. Demiraj 1997: 40, Gjinari 1989: 54-8, Mëniku 2008: vii., Shkurtaj 2016: 26). The area is assumed to form a single subdialect; however, evidence from various levels of linguistic analysis discussed in this paper challenges this assumption. The area of Malsia Madhe in northwestern Albania and southwestern Montenegro exhibits different phonological, syntactic, and lexical patterns than the area of Shkodër. The southernmost point of this Gheg subdialect is Lezhë, which also has its own set of distinct idiosyncratic differences. This analysis provides an overview of the main differences between the areas of Malsia Madhe, Shkodër, and Lezhë, all typically grouped in the northwestern Gheg subdialect. This includes an evaluation of phonological, grammatical, semantic, and lexical differences between the three principal areas of Northwestern Gheg. Finally, it also offers a diachronic view of how this subdialect contributes to and challenges the history of the Albanian language's development from Proto-Albanian and Proto-Indo-European.

**Keywords.** Albanian dialectology; Northwestern Gheg Albanian; Gheg Albanian; Malsia Madhe; Shkodër; Lezhë; Tosk Albanian; Proto-Albanian; phonology; syntax; semantics; lexicon; etymological reconstructions; diachrony

**1. Introduction.** The Albanian language is divided into two main dialect groups; the Gheg and the Tosk dialects. Gheg is spoken in northern Albania, southern Montenegro, Kosovo, southern Serbia, western Macedonia, and Croatia (Arbanasi). The Tosk dialects are spoken in southern Albania, southwestern Macedonia, Greece, and southern Italy, including Sicily (see Figure 1). Our area of investigation is the Gheg subdialect known as Northwestern Gheg. This area can be further subdivided between the regions of Malsia Madhe, Shkodër, Lezhë, and Ulqin (see Figure 2). M. Lambertz also considered the areas on the periphery of the Northwestern Albanian subdialect, namely Nikaj-Mërtur, Krasniqë, Has, Berishë, Iballë, Qerret, and all the Albanian speaking areas of Montenegro as part of this distinct dialect group (Gjinari 1989: 55). Along with Shkodër, Lezhë, Malsia Madhe, and Ulqin, Shkurtaj (2016: 26) considers Kraja and Tivari in Montenegro (north of Ulqin) to be part of this subdialect.

Malsia Madhe is a geographically and historically isolated mountainous region. Beginning in the period of Communism (from 1946), the official partition of Malsia Madhe between Albania and Montenegro that began during the Conference of London (1912-1913) was enforced, isolating the Malsia Madhe region in Montenegro from that of Albania. Shkodër is south of Malsia Madhe and has the largest city in the Northwestern Gheg dialect zone also known as Shkodër, located next to Lake Shkodër. The area of Ulqin in Montenegro shows

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affinities with both Malsia and the dialect of Shkodër (see Gjinari 1989: 139, 143, Shkurtaj 2016: 245-46). The southernmost part of this subdialect is Lezhë, which exhibits linguistic variation unlike the other Northwestern Ghëg areas. In what follows, we discuss the similarities and differences between the principal areas of Northwestern Ghëg (Malsia Madhe, Shkodër, Lezhë) and provide a diachronic account of them.



Figure 1. Albanian dialects and sub-dialects

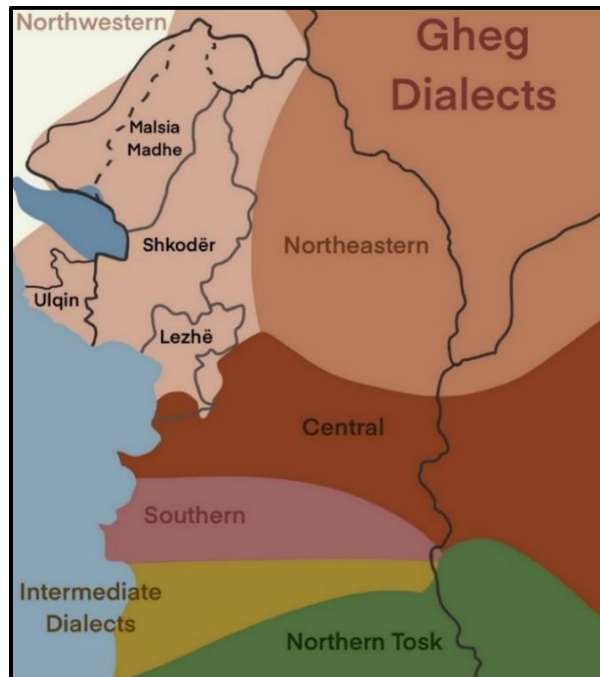


Figure 2. Northwestern Ghëg dialectal subgroupings

## 2. Phonological differences

2.1. HOMORGANIC NASALS AND STOPS. In terms of the phonological differences, the areas of Malsia Madhe, Shkodër, and Lezhë exhibit variation within the categories of stops and nasals in word-initial position. Word-initial stops in Malsia Madhe Albanian (Malsia) usually correspond to nasals in Shkodër and in Lezhë. This variation occurs within the categories of labials, alveolars and velars (see 1-6).

- (1) Malsia *pshjtjell* [pʃtjɛʃ] ~ Shkodër/Lezhë *mshtjell* [mʃtjɛʃ] ‘to cover, wrap’
- (2) Malsia *bush* [bu:ʃ] ~ Shkodër/Lezhë *mush* [mu:ʃ] ‘to fill’
- (3) Malsia *terrnoj* [tɛrnoj] ~ Shkodër/Lezhë *nrroj* [nroj] ‘I change, switch, turn’
- (4) Malsia *da* [dɔ:] ~ Shkodër/Lezhë [dɔ:], [ndɔ:] ‘to split, cut, divide’
- (5) Malsia *kul* [kuʎ] ~ Shkodër/Lezhë [ŋul], [kul], [ŋgul] ‘to thrust, put on point’
- (6) Malsia *grah* [grah] ~ Shkodër/Lezhë [grah] ‘to drive, ride’

Evidence shows that Malsia has preserved word-initial stops from Proto-Albanian. The nasals in Shkodër and in Lezhë originate from reduced nasal-stop clusters that are present in Standard Tosk Albanian (mb > m, nd > n, ŋg > ŋ). These clusters formed in the period of Old Albanian from the Proto-Albanian preposition \*en ‘in’ < Proto-Indo-European \*h<sub>1</sub>en ‘in’. The Proto-Albanian preposition *en* was later reanalyzed as a prefix /n/ that attaches to verbs, adverbs, and prepositions. The word-initial unstressed vowel dropped (*en* > *n-*), and the prefix underwent homorganic nasal assimilation. Thus, forms such as Standard Tosk *mbusha* ‘I filled’ developed from \**en-busa*. The word-initial stop forms in Malsia are also attested in ancient Indo-European languages such as Greek and Hittite.<sup>1</sup> Malsia never underwent this change due to the preservation of Proto-Albanian \**en* ‘in’ as a preposition. Cliticization of the prefix /n/ to verb and noun stems has become quite productive in Standard Albanian.<sup>2</sup>

The Old Gheg verb *pshjtjell* [pʃtjɛʃ] ‘to cover, wrap’ is found in the texts of the writer Buzuku (1555) and surfaces in Shkodër and Lezhë as *mshtjell* [mʃtjɛʃ], with a word-initial labial nasal [m] (see 1). The Gheg form used in Shkodër and in Lezhë is a reduction from *mbështjell* [mbəʃtjɛʃ].<sup>3</sup> The Standard Tosk Albanian greeting *mirëmbrëma* ‘good afternoon/evening’ is stated as *mirprâma* in Malsia, while in the Gheg of Shkodër and Lezhë it is more commonly heard as *mirmrâma*.<sup>4</sup> A German explorer in 1497 by the name of Arnold von Harff recorded various Gheg Albanian terms in his expedition through the coastal cities of Ulqin (in present-day Montenegro) and Durrës in Albania. It is here that he records the greeting for ‘good evening’ as <myreprama> with a voiceless labial stop /p/ (see Elsie 2003: 31-2).

<sup>1</sup> For example: Malsia *paj* ‘hold, keep’ ~ Hittite *paḫš-* ‘to protect’; Malsia *busha* ‘to fill’ ~ Ancient Greek βυνέω /buneo:/ ‘to stuff’; Malsia *terrno* ‘switch, change, turn’ ~ Ancient Greek τόρνος /tornos/ ‘that which is turned’; Malsia/Gheg *da* ‘to cut, separate, divide’ ~ Homeric Greek δαιπρός ‘carver (of meat)’, Ancient Greek δαίωμα ‘divider’ ~ Illyrian *daetor*; Malsia *kul* ‘to thrust’ ~ Hittite *gulš-* /kʷls/ ‘to carve’; Malsia *ge* ‘leisure, time’ ~ Latvian *gads* ‘year’.

<sup>2</sup> For this morphological process in Standard Albanian see S. Demiraj (1971: 237-38).

<sup>3</sup> Old Gheg *pshjtjell* ‘to cover, wrap’ consists of the root *shtjell* ‘to wind up, collect’ cognate with Greek στέλλω ‘to put in order, make ready’, and a prefixal element *p-* (see Beekes 2016: 1397-98, Mallory and Adams 2006: 295, B. Demiraj 1997: 376).

<sup>4</sup> The Gheg nasal vowels are orthographically written with ^ above the vowel (*â* [ɔ̃:]).

The variants with word-initial stops in Shkodër and in Lezhë were commonly used in the past and are still present in a few terms. Fishta, a Gheg author and priest, in his work *Mrizi i Zânave* used both forms of *terrnoi* and *ndrroi* for ‘to change’ as well as *psimet* and *msimet* for ‘teachings’ (Fishta 2019 [1941]: 58, 79). Beci (2002: 21-45) cites the adverb *pas* ‘after, behind’ with a word-initial /p/, which is present in Shkodër, Lezhë, and Malsia, in contrast to Modern Tosk *mbas*. Interestingly, in the word-final environment, [p] is consistently found in the term *hup* ‘to lose, be lost, get lost’ in Malsia, Shkodër, Lezhë, and even in Ulqin.<sup>5</sup> The Standard Tosk equivalent is *humb* with a word-final nasal-stop cluster. Schumacher and Matzinger (2013: 978) state that *humb* represents a present stem with a nasal infix, while *hup* is from a root aorist. Some of the etymological reconstructions position an initial cluster \*sk as a regular sound change to account for the reflex of the voiceless glottal fricative /h/. Meyer (Wb. 154) cited in Orel (1998: 152) connects *humb* with *hup*, and Barić (ARST 36-37) connects *hup* with Latin *sūpō* ‘to upset, to overturn’. S. Demiraj (2013: 86) compares the Greek reflex \*s > h in a few Albanian examples. His analysis includes \*selkō > heq/helq, comparable to Greek *helkō* and Latin *sulcus*. S. Demiraj also notes that \*s > h may be an ancient feature of Albanian that occurs less frequently than in Greek.<sup>6</sup> Hamp (1965: 128) rather suggests a nasal present from the base \*hwp, Proto-Albanian \*humpo.

Finally, Shkurtaj (2016) indicates that variation has arisen in the Albanian political sector of Malsia Madhe (not including Malsia Madhe in Montenegro). The variation is most noticeable in lexical terms that differ between stops and nasals. In the older generation “brezin e vjetër” we find terms with stops, whereas in the younger generation “brezin e ri” there are nasals. For instance, Shkurtaj (2016: 238) cites *opâk* ‘traditional Albanian shoe’ with a word-final voiceless velar stop /k/ in the older generations and *opâŋ* with a word-final velar nasal /ŋ/ in the younger generations. This social variation is less prominent on the Montenegrin political side of the border in both the older and younger generations.

2.2. FRICATIVE MANNER ASSIMILATION. A second phonological process that is uncovered when comparing Malsia lexical terms to Standard Albanian is fricative manner assimilation. In 7-10, corresponding to the Malsia cluster *psh* is *fsh* in the Standard and all other varieties of Albanian. The Malsia cluster *psh* seems to be the older form as the same sequence of voiceless labial stop /p/ and a sibilant (in IE mostly the alveolar /s/) is found in other IE cognates. By positing this change (*psh* > *fsh*), the etymologies of the Albanian terms can be reanalyzed, beginning with the examples below.

- (7) Malsia *pshe* [pʃɛ] ~ Standard Albanian *fshë* [fʃɛ] ‘hide, conceal’  
(Cf. Homeric Greek *πτῶς* (ptōks) ‘hare’, \*‘shy/hiding one’)
- (8) Malsia *pshî* [pʃi:] ~ Standard Albanian *fshij* [fʃij] ‘sweep, clean’  
(Mallory and Adams (2006: 376) connect Tosk *fshij* with Ancient Greek *psáō* ‘to rub’)

<sup>5</sup> See Fishta (1958: 101, 156) for *hupë* and the participial *hupun*. In Shkurtaj (2016: 245), the term *hup* occurs in a text from Anës së Malit in Ulqin with the meaning ‘get lost’.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, Messapian *hipa* appears to be derived from \*supo, showing \*s > h (see Matzinger 2019: 88). Cf. Gheg Albanian *hip* ‘I climb’ (Standard Albanian *hyp*).

Malsia *pshe* in 7, shows evidence of a development from Homeric Greek *πτῶξ* (*ptōks*) ‘cower, hide’.<sup>7</sup> Malsia *pshî* in 8, provides further evidence for a cognate with Ancient Greek *psáō*, as both forms begin with a word-initial *p-* in contrast to *f-* elsewhere. This connection was first noted by Mallory and Adams (2006: 376), where they connect Tosk *fshij* with Ancient Greek *psáō* ‘to rub’. Standard Tosk *fshikë* [fʃikə] ‘bladder, blister’ (9) is cited in Orel (1998: 104) as a borrowing from Latin *vēsīca* ‘bladder’. *Pshikë* is also cited as a variant but not dialectally specified.

- (9) Malsia *pshik* [pʃik] ~ Standard Albanian *fshikë* [fʃikə] ‘bladder, blister’  
(Cf. Ancient Greek *φύσκη* [p<sup>h</sup>yskē] ‘large intestine, blister’)

A word-initial devoicing of [v] > [f] is plausible as a change, whereas a possible analysis of fortition [v] > [p] is less likely. [v] > [p] is less common typologically and it would add unnecessary complexities by positing a two-step change in place of articulation and voicing. The regularity of *psh* > *fsh* cannot be ignored and older IE cognates with an initial /p/ or /ps/ justifies the direction of the change. A possible origin of Malsia *pshik* ‘bladder’ may be Ancient Greek *φύσκη* [p<sup>h</sup>yskē] ‘large intestine, blister’.<sup>8</sup>

A final example in 10, summarizes the need for further study in the variation found in Northwestern Gheg and its contribution to etymological reanalyses.

- (10) Malsia *rrapsh* ~ Standard Albanian *rrafsh* ‘plane, flat surface’

Meyer (*Wb.* 360) cites *rrafsh* as an analogically restored variant of *rrafshoj* ‘to flatten’ based on a borrowing from Slavic *\*orvьnъ* [orvǔnǔ] ‘even’ (cf. Bulgarian *raven*, Serbo-Croatian *ravan*, in Orel 1998: 376-377). The variant *rrapsh* is not cited in any etymological dictionaries, showing that they are not aware and unable to consider a change of *psh* > *fsh*. This etymology accounts for the fricative change of *v* > *f*, but not for [p] in *rrapsh*. The term is seen in the Malsia place name of Rrapsha Hoti and related to *rrap* ‘plane tree’ from Proto-Albanian *\*rapa* a denominative of *rrjep* ‘flay, whip’ (in Orel 378). Interestingly, *rrap* may refer to a plane tree’s broad leaves. The same meaning is found in the English source of ‘plane’ in ‘plane tree’, ultimately from Latin *plānus* meaning ‘flat, level’. Considering the example in 9, and the other examples of *psh* > *fsh*, an etymology for *rrafshoj* as a borrowing from Slavic seems implausible.

2.3. PALATAL STOPS AND CLUSTERS. A third phonological difference is observed in the velar-palatal clusters /kj/ and /gj/ still preserved in Malsia and in Shkodër. The origin of the clusters is described as originating from the Proto-Albanian clusters *\*kl* and *\*gl* that are also present in Arvanitika Albanian, a Tosk subdialect spoken in Greece (see Klein et. al. 2018: 1807), in Çamërishta, spoken in northwestern Greece (Gjinari 1989: 57), and in the Arbëreshë dialects of southern Italy (Shkurtaj 2016: 25). The palatal /j/ in the Northwestern Gheg clusters /kj/ and /gj/, has been proposed to have emerged from a jotation of the lateral consonant /l/ (Gjinari 1989). However, we hypothesize in §2.3.1, that the Northwestern Gheg clusters may be derived from an earlier *\*kɹ* and *\*gɹ*.

<sup>7</sup> With *pt* > *p*, *ks* > *sh*; possibly from the consonantism of *ptōks* (note *ks* > *sh* in *leks* > *llesh* Albanian male name).

<sup>8</sup> Ancient Greek *φύσκη* (*physkē*) ‘large intestine, blister’ may be connected to *φῦσα* ‘breath, bellows’ whose origin is unknown. The medial -σ- is of uncertain origin, but the first part is likely to be onomatopoeic.

In *Grueja Shqyptare* (1918), Bishop Vinçenc Prennushi from Shkodër, used forms with velar-palatal clusters such as *kjáj* ‘to cry weep’ and *ndigiue* ‘to listen’. The clusters /kj/ and /gj/ are also found in the poems of *Lahuta Malcis* (1937) written by Gjergj Fishta who was from Fishtë, near Lezhë. Examples include <giûhe> /gjũ:ha/ ‘tongue, language’ and <kjáj> /kjɔ:j/ ‘to cry, weep’ (Fishta 1958: 105, 179). When analyzing the variants in Lezhë, we see that Fishta used the velar-palatal clusters (*kj*, *gi*), whereas in Modern Lezhë we observe two different outcomes. One shows a shift to the Standard Tosk palatal stops /c/ and /j/, so that in Lezhë words such as *kjaj* ‘to cry, weep’ and *kjoft* ‘may it be’ emerge as [cɔ:j] and [coft], indicative of influence from Standard Albanian. The second interesting shift in Lezhë finds its origins in central and northeastern Gheg. The variants in the same lexical terms at times also surface with the voiced and voiceless alveopalatal fricatives /z/ and /ç/. Thus, *kjaj* and *kjoft* emerge as [çɔ:j] and [çoft] and *giûha* ‘the tongue’ emerges as [zũ:ha].

A noteworthy finding that we can observe is that the direction of variation is moving from south to north forming a dialect continuum (see Fig. 2). Lezhë is geographically closer to the heart of the Standard variety and to other Gheg subdialects compared to Shkodër and Malsia Madhe, which might explain the variation present in the area. However, these processes have largely taken place in the past century, leaving traces of older clusters. If pressures from Standard Albanian persist, this variation may continue north, not just into Shkodër, but also into Malsia Madhe.

2.3.1. THE CASE FOR THE COALESCENCE OF CLUSTERS IN MODERN ALBANIAN. A second argument we make here has to do with the origin of the Modern Albanian palatal stops /c/ and /j/. The process shows evidence of a coalescence with the manner of articulation of the velar stops /k/ and /g/ and the place of articulation of a palatal consonant /j/ or /ç/. First, we cite the exact dialectal differences of the clusters and the problems that scholars have had in identifying their exact phonetic qualities. Second, we provide evidence from the different dialects that makes possible a new reconstruction for the velar-palatal clusters.

To date there has been inconclusive research into the exact formation of the Standard Tosk palatal stops /c/ and /j/. The dialectal variations cited below also include the Old Gheg, Old Tosk, and Arvanitika clusters.

- (11) ‘to cry, weep’<sup>9</sup>  
Old Gheg/Tosk *klanj* ~ Malsia/Shkodër *kjaj* /kjɔ:j/ ~ Standard *qaj* /caj/
- (12) ‘may you be’(optative)  
Arvanitika *klofshe* ~ Malsia/Shkodër *kjosh* /kjɔʃ/ ~ Standard *qofshë* /cofʃə/
- (13) ‘the tongue, language’  
Old Gheg/Tosk *gluha* ~ Malsia/Shkodër *giûha* /gjũ:ha/ ~ Standard Tosk *gjuha* /juha/
- (14) ‘the knee’  
Arvanitika *glju* ~ Malsia/Shkodër *giûni* /gjũ:ni/ ~ Standard Albanian *gjuri* /juri/

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<sup>9</sup> Examples (11) and (13) are from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Old Gheg and Old Tosk writers Buzuku and Matrënga (see Shkurtaj 2016: 25). The Arvanitika examples in (12) and (14) are in Tsitsipis (2006: 9, 22, 36, 43). He also cites Arvanitika terms that have undergone further palatalization in clusters; *gljúha* ‘tongue, language’, *i gljátë* ‘high (tall)’, *kljárë* ‘cry, weep’. In some cases, it is not palatalized such as in *klófshe* ‘may you be’ (2006: 36).

The exact phonetic quality of the Arvanitika clusters *kl* and *gl* assumed to be preserved from Proto-Albanian are also unknown. Moreover, there is disagreement on the exact pronunciations of <l> and <ll> in Albanian in general (see Klein et. al. 2018: 1806). Häbler (1965) and Gjinari and Shkurtaj (2003: 373-374) cite the Arvanitika dialect of Salamina (an island east-southeast of Athens), where there is a preservation of the three-way distinction of laterals /l/, /ɫ/ and /ʎ/. In the codification of the Arbëreshë poems of Jeronim De Rada (1814-1903), the scholar Francesco Altimari used the phoneme /ɫ/ for the grapheme <l> in *lule* ‘flower’ (see Morozova and Rusakov 2015: 443). This is similar to the situation in Malsia with the palatal lateral approximant /ɫ/ in contrast to Standard Albanian /l/ (e.g. Malsia *lir* [lir] ‘free’ ~ Tosk/Gheg *lirë* [lirə], Malsia *lule* [luɫɛ] ‘flower’ ~ Tosk/Gheg *lule* [lulɛ]).

The shift in Malsia to the palatal approximant /j/ is evident in the clusters *kj* and *gj*. Recent shifts from the clusters *pl* > *pj*, *bl* > *bj*, and *fl* > *fj* are also found in Dukagjin and in Malsia Madhe (Zojzi Rr. 1962 cited in Gjinari 1989: 88). The Old Gheg writers Buzuku and Budi wrote *fluturon* ‘(s)he, it flies’, while the Tosk writer Variboba wrote *ffuturon* with an initial *ff*- (Schumacher and Matzinger 2013: 439-40). Gjinari (1989) states that the joticization is likely from a palatal <l>. While the shift from a Proto-Albanian \*ɫ to a Modern Albanian /j/ is cited as a possibility in Klein et. al. (2018: 1742). This shift does appear to have also occurred in most Albanian dialects before a velar, but not when preceding a velar, where it would coalesce in Standard Tosk to a palatal stop. Proto-Indo-European \**ul̥kʷos* > Proto-Albanian \**ulka-* > Standard Albanian *ujk* ‘wolf’ (Schumacher and Matzinger 2013: 229). Evidence for the coalescence of a stop and palatal approximant is evident in the Central Gheg subdialect of western Macedonia, where Albanian *tjetër* [tjetər] ‘other’ > *qetër* [cətər], and *djathë* [dʝəθə] ‘cheese’ > *gjathë* [ʝəθə] (Mëniku 2008: viii.).

Within Albanian there is already a process of coalescence of stops and palatal approximants (tj > c, dj > j). For Standard Tosk to have arrived at the palatal stops /c/ and /j/, would have required a stop and palatal consonant /j/ or /ɫ/. A velar stop and an alveolar or interdental liquid /l/ coalescing to a palatal stop is phonetically less likely. It is possible that the original Albanian clusters were \**kɫ* and \**gɫ*, which would coalesce in Standard Tosk and also account for the shift to the yod in Northwestern Gheg. Schumacher and Matzinger (2013: 245) cite the change of \**l* > *j* /\_i# in words such as Standard Albanian *popuj* ‘the people’. They also cite \**l* + \**i* > *ɫ* > *j* in *mijë* from Vulgar Latin *milīa* ‘thousand’. Yet, how do we account for the changes of \**kl* > /kj/ and \**gl* > /gj/ without positing \**kɫ* and \**gɫ*? The most phonetically plausible sequence of changes to account for the variation in all dialects is given in 15 below. The palatal lateral approximant \**ɫ* loses its palatal feature and yields a lateral approximant /l/ in Arvanitika and Arbëreshë /kl/ and /gl/. In Northwestern Gheg, the palatal lateral approximant \**ɫ* loses its lateral feature yielding a palatal approximant /j/ in the clusters /kj/ and /gj/. And Standard Tosk underwent a coalescence of the palatal lateral approximant \**ɫ* and the velar stops /k/ and /g/, resulting in the palatal stops /c/ and /j/.

- (15) \**kɫ*, \**gɫ* > Arvanitika (Tosk) /kl, gl/  
 Arbëreshë (Tosk) /kl, gl/  
 Northwestern Gheg /kj, gj/  
 Standard Tosk /c, j/

These significant variations within the phonology of Northwestern Gheg highlight the need for further research and could thus have an impact on our view of the diachrony of the Albanian language as a whole. This effect of the different systems of laterals may stretch even beyond the Albanian language's borders. As Hamp (2002: 249) points out, the West South Slavic's rich system of lateral distinctions and alternations may be due to contact with Albanian.

2.4. THE NORTHWESTERN GHEG ALBANIAN VELARIZED /ɮ/. Northwestern Gheg Albanian introduces a rare change that can be viewed in both its Modern and Ancient Indo-European context. In the same environment where the Standard Gheg and Tosk dialects use the voiced interdental fricative <dh> /ð/, areas of Northwestern Gheg instead show a velarized lateral approximant <ll> /ɮ/ (also known as “dark l”). The use of /ɮ/ is heard to some extent throughout all of Northwestern Gheg. When comparing specific terms to Proto-Indo-European it is clear that the Northwestern Gheg (NW Gheg) forms in 16-17 are innovations.

(16) PIE \**deh*<sub>3</sub> ‘give’ > NW Gheg *lla* /ɮa:/, Standard Albanian *dha* /ða/ ‘s/he gave’

(17) PIE \**dekmt* ‘ten’ > NW Gheg *llet* /ɮe:t/, Standard Albanian *dhjetë* /ðjetə/ ‘id.’

Standard Albanian /ð/ is not a direct development of PIE \**d* in the word-initial position, but only when preceded by a vowel. Jokl (1963) indicates that Standard Albanian /ða/ (16) likely formed in this way due to the augment *e* that preceded it. Likewise, Meyer-Lübke (*Idg. Anz.* II 184) cited in Orel (1998: 84), states that the irregular /ð/ in /ðjetə/ (17) as explainable in the numerals 11-19, where \**d* is preceded by a vowel (e.g. *një-mbë-dhjetë* ‘eleven’ literally “one above ten”).

It is still not clear if the velarized lateral approximant /ɮ/ is a modern innovation. In the southern Tosk variant of Gjirokastër for example, the opposite change of /ɮ/ > /ð/ is evident (*llamba* > *dhamba*, *mbyll* > *mbydh*, in S. Demiraj 2013: 304). It is difficult to motivate a linguistic reason behind the change, although the variation of /ɮ/ ~ /ð/ in both directions could be a form of hypercorrection. Some forms such as Malsia *llez* ‘to ignite, light, turn on’ also calls into question the exact direction of the change. The corresponding Standard Albanian forms are *ndez* and *dhez* /ðez/. Pedersen (1900: 338) states that *dhez* ‘to set on fire, burn’ and the variant *ndez* with an initial nasal prefix /n/ are from Albanian *djeg*. Albanian *djeg* ‘to burn’ is from PIE \**dheg*<sup>h</sup>- ‘to burn’. The term also exists in Malsia and in Northwestern Gheg. Yet, Malsia *llez* has varying meanings of ‘to ignite, light up, to turn on’, while *djeg* is only ‘to burn’. A possibility is that *llez* is a denominal verb derived from an Indo-European \**léwk* ‘light’ (cf. Gaulish *leux* ‘light’ and Latin *lūx* ‘light’). In this case the Standard *dh* in *dhez* may be a hypercorrection from an original *llez*.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the Ancient Mediterranean, the change of *d* > *l* is well documented, even if poorly understood. The Greek name *Odyseus* surfaces in Latin as *Ulixes*. This has been claimed to have been brought to the Italian peninsula through Illyrian intermediacy (Palmer 1988: 40-41). In another case, we find Messapian *da* ‘earth’ cognate with Modern Albanian *dhe* /ðe/ ‘earth, land, soil’, and the corresponding Northwestern Gheg *lle* /ɮe:/. Here the variation between an ancient /d/ and the modern /ð/ and /ɮ/ is ever present. This variation goes as far back as Pre-Greek. Beekes (2014: 20) notes the variation of δ /ð/ ~ λ /l/ in the plant name δάφνη ~ λάφνη

<sup>10</sup> \**léwk* > \**les* > *llez*. PIE \**l* > Alb. *l*, PIE \**éw* > Proto-Alb. \**ē* > Alb. *e*; (see B. Demiraj 1997: 46, 52 for the regular sound change laws invoked here).



‘laurel’, the personal name *Ὀδυσσεύς* ~ *Ὀλυσσεύς* ‘Odysseus’, the Mycenaean for ‘labyrinth’ <da-pu<sub>2</sub>-ri-to-jo> (genitive) ~ *λαβύρινθος* and among other words. The use of the velarized lateral approximant /ɫ/ in Northwestern Gheg remains unclear, yet it is an important part of the history of Albanian within its modern and ancient Mediterranean context.

**3. Grammatical and syntactic differences.** There are quite a few grammatical and syntactic differences within Northwestern Gheg Albanian. There is again a divide between Malsia and Shkodër/Lezhë. For instance, in Malsia (18) the third person singular present indicative active form of ‘be’ (*â* ‘is’) is used in perfect forms rather than the auxiliary verb *ka* ‘has’ that is seen in Shkodër/Lezhë (19), and in Standard Tosk (20).

(18) *Si â kê/ken*  
 How **is** been  
 ‘How has s/he, it been / How was s/he, it?’

(19) *Si ka ken/qen*  
 How **has** been  
 ‘How has s/he, it been / How was s/he, it?’

(20) *Si ka qenë*  
 How **has** been  
 ‘How has s/he, it been / How was s/he, it?’

In the second person, Malsia uses the singular form *je* ‘are’ (21) in place of *ke* ‘have’ seen in Shkodër/Lezhë (22).

(21) *Si je kê/ken*  
 How **are** been  
 ‘How have you been / How were you?’

(22) *Si ke ken/qen*  
 How **have** been  
 ‘How have you been / How were you?’

The Malsia phrase is similar to the rarer constructions found in Northeastern Gheg, where the completed past forms surface with *jam* ‘am’ rather than *kam* ‘have’ (e.g. *jam shkue* ‘I went’ rather than *kam shkue*, see Gjinari 1989: 253).<sup>11</sup>

Lexical differences are covered in the next section, but some verbs that cannot be nominalized yield different syntactic constructions. In Malsia, it is more common to hear the form of the verb *dvet* ‘ask’, rather than the Standard *pyetë* ‘ask’. The etymologies of the terms are obscure. Orel (2000: 17) considers the *-ye-* in *pyes* ‘I ask’ to be totally unexplained, but also cites the possibility of a derivation from PIE *\*pūta*. In Old Albanian, *pyetë* is found alongside the form *pevét* (used by Bogdani), while the Old Tosk writer Variboba used the variant *pieiti* /*piejti*/ (see Schumacher and Matzinger 2013: 757-59). Fishta (1958: 166) from Lezhë, used the form *pvete* with a word-initial /pv/. The question that remains is if the /v/ in *pvete* and /y/ in *pyetë* are

<sup>11</sup> Brian D. Joseph (p.c. February 2023) points out that the use of ‘be’ with *kê/ken* is similar to Italian, cf. *è stato* ‘it has been/it was’. As well as *kam shkue*, cf. Italian *è andato* ‘I have gone/I went’.

irregular changes that are derived from one etymological source, or if the /v/ is the result of contact with another dialect such as Malsia *dvet*. The origin of the variation is unknown but may have resulted from the preposition *të* ‘to, at’ being incorporated to the reflexive stem *vet* (Malsia *vet* ‘me’), giving *\*tvet* from which *dvet* by voicing assimilation.<sup>12</sup>

Malsia cannot nominalize certain verbs. This is evident for example in *tesh* ‘to touch’, the equivalent of *nesh* in Shkodër and in Lezhë. *Nesh* takes the nominal suffix *-je* to create the deverbal noun *neshje* ‘a coming together’ (*\*tesh-je* is not possible in Malsia). This same non-nominalization is evident in *dvet* across Northwestern Gheg (*\*dvet-je*). However, *pyetë* ‘ask’ can be nominalized as *pyetje* (23). There is not a clear division in Shkodër and Lezhë regarding which form is more commonly used. Although there might be a stylistic difference in that *dvet* is the colloquial form and it is not used in education and government. In 24, both *dvet* and *pyetë* can be used with a corresponding infinitive *me* (also see Joseph 1983: 90-91 for *pyetë*). *Dvet* cannot be used as a participle unlike *pyetë* (*pyetun* ‘having been asked’, *\*dvetun*).

(23) *Me ta bā i pyetje*  
to WEAK.PRO. do/make a question  
‘To ask you a question’

(24) a. *me dvet*      b. *me pyetë*  
to ask              to ask  
‘to ask’            ‘to ask’

In Standard Albanian new verbs have been created with the addition of specific morphemes, whereas at times in Northwestern Gheg the same processes have not taken place. Take for example the Northwestern Gheg verb *vjerr* ‘hang’ and the Standard equivalent *var*. In the Standard *varet*, in the nonactive voice, shows semantic extension to the meaning ‘to depend’ in addition to the meaning ‘hangable’. This same extension did not occur in Northwestern Gheg where *vjerr* means only ‘to hang’, whereas nonactive *vjerret* in the same formation would only yield the meaning of ‘hangable’.

**4. Lexical and semantic differences.** The regions of Malsia Madhe, Shkodër, and Lezhë exhibit interesting lexical and semantic differences. Going from Malsia Madhe south to Shkodër and Lezhë, one encounters differences in the greeting ‘good morning’. In Malsia it is *natja mir* ‘good morning’. This is similar to Shkodër *nadja mirë*, where the only difference is the voicing of the alveolar stop /d/ in *nadja* ‘morning’. This is also a quite radical difference from the other Albanian dialects where the Standard for ‘morning’ is *mengjes* and the term for ‘night’ is *nata*. The argument of Joseph that *nate* ‘morning’ derives from *nata* ‘night’ is the most compelling.<sup>13</sup> In Lezhë it is more common to hear the forms *mirë mëngjesi* and the clipped form of *mirë mjesi*.

<sup>12</sup> Mëniku (2008: xxii.) correctly cites that the reflexive pronoun *vet* replaces the first person singular *un(ë)* ‘I’ in some subdialects: *Vet nuk po vi me ju* ‘I/myself am not coming with you’.

<sup>13</sup> Brian D. Joseph (p.c. October 2022) argues that the Albanian term *nata* ‘night’ may have been the base form used for the creation of the Northwestern Gheg term *nate* ‘morning’. The theory falls in line with the agricultural and farming lifestyle of the northwestern Ghegs, where most farmers awake in the early hours of the morning when it is still dark. *Nata* ‘night’ is semantically associated with the dark hours of the night, whereas the early morning hours are also dark. As soon as the first light is seen it is typically referred to as *diten* ‘daytime’. It may be relevant that the Hittite cognate, *nekuz* (genitive), means ‘evening’, i.e. a transition period between day and night, and not simply ‘night’.

In all areas of Northwestern Gheg, it is also common to hear the morning greeting of *si ke njeh* (*njef*) ‘how do you know/feel yourself’. A strong lexical divide is also present between Malsia and other Gheg and Tosk varieties, as indicated by the items in 25–29. Malsia shows more terms that have interesting equivalents in Ancient Greek, whereas in the other Gheg and Tosk varieties these surface as Latin borrowings.

- (25) a. Malsia *mulin* ‘sand’  
 Cf. Ancient Greek *μολύνω* [molýnɔ:] ‘to defile, pollute, stain’  
 b. Gheg *rǎñë*/Tosk *rërë* ‘sand’ < Latin *arēna* (S. Demiraj 2006: 102)
- (26) a. Malsia *perk* ‘feather’<sup>14</sup>  
 Cf. Ancient Greek *πέρκος* [pérkos] ‘kind of eagle’  
 b. Gheg/Tosk *penë/pendë* ‘< Latin *pinna* ‘feather’ (Orel 1998: 315)
- (27) a. Malsia *erz* ‘dignity’  
 b. Gheg/Tosk *dinjitet* < Latin *dignitātem*
- (28) a. Malsia *klina* ‘underwear, undergarment, panties’  
 Cf. Ancient Greek *κλίνη* [klí:nɛ:] ‘layer, bed, litter’  
 b. Gheg/Tosk *brekë* < the second member of Germanic *\*þiu(h)-brók* (via Gothic)<sup>15</sup>
- (29) a. Malsia *kore/korja* ‘ghost, spirit, phantom’  
 Cf. Ancient Greek *Korai* ‘sculptures of female figures during the Archaic Greek period. *Korai* also functioned as offerings to the gods or the dead (Neer 2010: 53).  
 b. Gheg/Tosk *fantazmë* ‘ghost’ < Latin *phantasma* ‘image, phantom’ (ultimately from Greek)

There are also terms that only surface in Malsia Madhe and which show evidence of possible direct lineages from Proto-Indo-European through regular sound change laws. These include Malsia *lugz/lugza* ‘upper stomach, to feel nauseous’ < PIE *\*slug* ‘swallow’ (\*sl > l, \*u > u, \*g > g),<sup>16</sup> Malsia *ubel* ‘well’ (n.) < Proto-Albanian *\*upela* < PIE *\*h<sub>1</sub>upo-* ‘under’ (see Orel 1998: 482), and Malsia *paj* ‘to hold, keep’ < PIE *\*peh<sub>2</sub>-* ‘protect’ (cf. Hittite *paḫ(ḫa)š-* ‘to protect’, Ancient Greek *Πάν* ‘pastoral deity’ possibly from *\*peh<sub>2</sub>us-*).

Previously unknown forms in Malsia and Northwestern Gheg allow us to posit new etymologies. Standard Albanian *lëvore* ‘tree bark, peel, skin’, also has a dialectal variant *lëforë* ‘rind, peel, scale of fish’. The form that surfaces in Malsia is *lbogur*. No concrete etymology exists for the Albanian term. The Malsia form *lbogur* shows loss of the pretonic vowel, thus, surfacing with the initial cluster *lb-*. The Standard form has a *-v-*, which may have lenited intervocalically from *-b-* due to preservation of the pretonic vowel. The variants and the hypothesized changes allow us to posit the Albanian term as a derivation of IE *\*lep-* ‘to peel’ (*\*lep* > *\*leb-ogur* > Malsia *lbogur*; *\*lep* > *\*leb-ore* > Tosk *lëvore*).

<sup>14</sup> The term also surfaces in the family name *Perkaj* of the Luhari tribe in Malsia Madhe.

<sup>15</sup> This may be parallel to Standard Albanian *tirk* ‘trousers’ < Germanic *\*þiu(h)-brók* (cf. Romanian *tureac* in Jokl 1929). The second element in *\*þiu(h)-brók* may have yielded Standard Albanian *brekë* ‘underwear, panties’.

<sup>16</sup> Cognates may include Old Irish *slucim* ‘to swallow’, Welsh *llyncu*, and Greek *λύζω* ‘to hiccup’ < IE *\*sluk/g* ‘swallow’ (from Beekes 2016: 876).

All of the Northwestern Gheg areas have preserved distinctive Gheg lexical terms that do not occur in Standard Tosk, such as *drÿn* ‘to shut, close’, *midis* ‘middle’ (Malsia *mjedi/mjedis*), *rrêj* ‘to lie, deceive’, *tâmel* ‘milk’, and *tlyn* ‘butter’ (see Gjinari 1989: 47). In Northwestern Gheg, the term *trua/true* ‘to curse’ is used (Çobani 2012: 58-9), where in Standard Albanian *mallkoj* is regularly used. The term *pak* ‘small, a little bit’ from Latin *paucus* is used alongside the terms *fije* ‘a little bit’ and *grimë* ‘a small amount, crumb, a bit’, from Proto-Albanian \**grima* (see Orel 1998: 124). In Malsia *râk* ‘housework’ can also be heard rather than *punët e shpisë* in the other areas.

Albanian scholars during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries began creating Albanian terms with native elements to replace certain borrowings. Naum Veqilharxhi coined *fletore* ‘book, notebook’ (*flet* ‘speaks’ + *ore*) to replace *libër* ‘book’ from Latin. Sami Frashëri created *gjithëmësime* (*gjithë* ‘all’ + *mësime* ‘learning’) for ‘university’ rather than *universitet* (see S. Demiraj 2013: 351). The Albanian term *dritare* ‘window’ (derived from *dritë* ‘light’ and the suffix *-are*) is now used instead of *penxhere* ‘window’ from Turkish *pencere* (see Klein et. al. 2018: 1793). Gheg in general and Northwestern Gheg in particular, likewise have their own set of innovations/creations that are specific to the area (30-32).

- (30) a. Northwestern Gheg *kallxim* ‘advertisement’<sup>17</sup>  
 b. Standard Albanian *reklamë* < French *réclamer* ‘commercial, advertisement’ (via Turkish)
- (31) a. Northwestern Gheg *mollatare/mallatare* ‘tomato’ (*molla* ‘apple + *-tare*)<sup>18</sup>  
 b. Standard Albanian *domate* < Greek *τομάτα* ‘tomato’
- (32) a. Northwestern Gheg *shitore* ‘shop’ (n.) (*shit* ‘to sell’ + *-ore*)  
 b. Standard Albanian *dyqan* < Turkish *dükkân*.

Müller et. al (2016: 3128) cites Albanian *barnatore* ‘drugstore, pharmacy’ < *barna* ‘medicinal plants’. The term *barnatore* is mostly heard in a few Gheg-speaking areas and preserved in Northwestern Gheg, whereas in other areas the modern borrowing of *farmacis* is more prevalent.

4.1. SEMANTIC DIFFERENCES. A few semantic differences appear to be attributed to different layers of borrowing and lexical differentiation. Take for example Malsia *shmâkt*, the adjective for ‘left’, which also semantically extends to the meaning of ‘to push away to the left’. In Standard Gheg and Tosk, the term surfaces as *shmanq* with a final nasal-stop cluster and the narrowed meaning ‘to push away’, compared to the meaning it has in Malsia. The adjective for ‘left’ in Gheg and Tosk is *majtë*, which appears to be a borrowing from a variety of Romance \**manctus* based on Latin *mancus* (cf. Italian *manca* ‘left hand’) (see Orel 1998: 242). The borrowing *majtë* for the adjective ‘left’, may have contributed to the narrowing of *shmanq* to

<sup>17</sup> *Kallxim* is derived from the verb *kallxo* ‘to show’ and the suffix *-im*. It is used in the specific context: *E kam pa i kallxim* ‘I saw an ad’. This suffix is productive and can be used to designate the action denoted by the verb (English VERB + *-ing*), the result of an action (*fitim* ‘gain’ from *fituar* ‘gained’), a place suggested by the action of the verb (*burim* ‘source’, *buruar* ‘sprung up’); this last is the type of *-im* seen in *kallxim* ‘advertisement’ from *kallxo* ‘to show’ (see Newmark et.al. 1982: 170).

<sup>18</sup> The suffixes *-ar*, *-tar*, *-or*, and *-tor* are used to form common nouns designating persons classified according to their activity of work, a characteristic feature, a place of residence, or birthplace (Newmark et. al. 1982: 164).

‘push away’ due to lexical competition. The Malsia form *shmâkt* consists of a prefix *sh-*, root *mâk*, and an adjectival suffix *-t*, also evident in the Albanian adjective *djath-të* ‘right’. The prefix *sh-*, which also has an allomorph *ç-*, has undergone semantic bleaching and has been reanalyzed as a single root with *mâk* in Malsia. *ç-* is also found as a variant of *sh-* in the Old Gheg Albanian writings (see Schumacher and Matzinger 2013: 188).<sup>19</sup> In *La Dottrina Cristiana* from 1592 (Albanian: *E Mbsuame e Krështerë*), the Tosk writer Luka Matrënga used the term <xtæmæ´ncætæ> [ʃtəmənketə] ‘of the left’, which shows that in Old Tosk the term was used for the adjectival meaning ‘left’.<sup>20</sup> Following regular dialectal correspondences between Malsia and Standard Tosk, Malsia *shmâkt* with a nasal vowel would be expected to surface in Tosk as *\*shmënkë* (a medial oral vowel and nasal consonant before the stop, *mënk* ~ *mâk*). Old Tosk preserved a regular form with the same meaning as Modern Malsia *shmâkt*. The same PIE form *\*mh<sub>2</sub>n-ko-* that yields Latin *mancus* would regularly yield Malsia (*sh*)*mâk(t)*. This appears to be a case where Albanian preserves a term from PIE in Malsia and additionally borrows the Latin reflex from the same PIE root in Modern Tosk and Gheg, namely *majtë*.<sup>21</sup>

Another difference lies in the form of ‘to throw’ which is generally *hedh* in Albanian (from PIE *\*skéud*) but *qit* in Malsia. The Gheg varieties of Shkodër and Lezhë use *qit* for ‘to dispose’. In the Albanian bible texts (1810-1830) of the south Gheg subdialect of Elbasan written in the Todhri alphabet, the term *qitna* with the meaning ‘throw/get us’ surfaces in the prayer in 33, cited in Elsie (2016: 71, 136).<sup>22</sup> The term *tret* ‘to throw away/to get rid of’ is also heard and a distinct term used in this variety of Gheg.

(33) *qitna*                      *née*    *prej*    *dúrësh*      *të*    *kundërstárit*  
 throw/get away    us    from    the hands    of    the enemy  
 ‘Wrest us out of the hand of the adversary’

Some differences in meaning between dialects with the same forms do not seem to be semantically related like the *qit* example suggests. Malsia *zhyt* ‘to dirty’ is used as the verb ‘to dive’ elsewhere in Albanian. In this case it is not obvious if or how this semantically shifted. Similarly, *dergo* the verb ‘to suck’ in Malsia is used as the verb ‘to send’ elsewhere in Albanian. These may be accidental homophones with different etymological sources. Malsia *dergo* ‘to suck’ may be a derivation of PIE *\*d<sup>h</sup>eh<sub>1</sub>(y)-* ‘to suckle’, or Albanian *dergj* ‘to lie down, to lie sick’.<sup>23</sup> The etymology of Standard Albanian *dërgoj* ‘to send’ is unclear, although some

<sup>19</sup> S. Demiraj (1967: 238) cites the productivity of the prefix *sh-* and the allomorphs (*ç*, *zh*, *xh*).

<sup>20</sup> Line 11-13, p. 9 <crahhæt tæ´ díáthætæ é tæ´ xtæmæ´ncætæ> /krahət tə diaθətə e tə ʃtəmənketə/ ‘of the right and left shoulder’ (<https://titus.uni-frankfurt.de/texte/etcs/alban/matranga/matrat.htm>).

<sup>21</sup> The same situation arises with Albanian *ngushtë* ‘tight, narrow’ from Latin *angustus*, and Albanian *angësht* from the same PIE root *\*h<sub>2</sub>enǵh-*.

<sup>22</sup> The Orthodox cleric Gregory of Durrës (also known as Gregory of Voskopoja) appointed archbishop of Durrës in 1768, made Bible translations in an alphabet he himself invented. The Elbasan Gospel Manuscript, formerly known as *Anonimi i Elbasanit* contains 61 pages of Bible translations in the southern Gheg dialect of Elbasan. The Todhri script is attributed to Dhaskal Todhri whose full name was Theodor Haxhifilipi (1730-1805) (see Elsie 2016: 4-5).

<sup>23</sup> PIE *\*d<sup>h</sup>eh<sub>1</sub>(y)-* > *deg* + *o* with an epenthetic *-r-* (cf. Latvian *dēju* ‘suck’, Sanskrit *dháyati* ‘sucks, suckles’ in Mallory and Adams 2006: 256, also see Orel 1998: 288 for an epenthetic *-r-* in *ndryshkull* ‘kind of large, scented plant’). A second possibility is from Albanian *dergj* < Proto-Albanian *\*dergja* (cf. Lithuanian *dìrginti* ‘to move’, *dìrgti* ‘to lose energy’).

hypotheses position it as a Latin borrowing (Orel 1998: 63). In Gheg and in Northwestern Gheg it is also common to hear the Albanian term *çu/çua/çue* ‘to send, get, wake up’.

**5. Conclusion.** We show here that a great deal of dialectal variation exists within an area that is generally labeled (in most Albanian handbooks/etymological dictionaries) as simply Northwestern Gheg. This variation is evident at most levels of linguistic analysis, which raises questions about their existing classifications. Shkodër and Lezhë share more grammatical and lexical features with one another than they do with Malsia. These differences can be traced to the historical and geographic isolation of Malsia. Our study highlights the importance of distinguishing between the varieties of Northwestern Gheg that are typically grouped together, and the implications this might have on future Albanian dialectological studies, comparative historical analyses, and Albanian’s place within the Indo-European family.

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