

Keywords: Indo-European; Albanian; Malsia Madhe Albanian; Tosk Albanian; Phonological sound change; Homorganic nasal assimilation; Epenthesis; Nasal vowel unpacking; Nasal-plosive clusters

Background: The Malsia Madhe dialect of Albanian, which encompasses the area of northwestern Albania and southwestern Montenegro, has remained a historically isolated dialect. Within the Indo-European language family, the Albanian language has long been an enigma. Indo-Europeanists who have studied the language have not fully accounted for the missing lexical data from the Malsia Madhe dialect. The Albanian dialects have undergone substantial sound changes, whereas Malsia Madhe Albanian exhibits fewer modifications. The linguistic sound change of homorganic nasal assimilation in the Albanian dialects outside of Malsia Madhe, provides evidence for the preservation of ancient features in Malsia Madhe Albanian (MMA). This historically isolated and unexplored dialect of Albanian provides sound data that firmly ties it closer to Proto-Albanian (PALb), a better preservation of the Proto Indo-European (PIE) plosives, and an expansion of Albanian historical studies with connections that were previously unknown.

Analysis: The dialect of MMA, which is specific to the Gheg Albanian region, is an unknown variant within Indo-European (IE) studies. This region contains the most secluded variant of the Albanian language, which has been overlooked. The comparison of the MMA dialect to the standard Tosk Albanian (Tosk) dialect, encapsulates how the MMA dialect has better preserved the plosives of PALb and retains similar features with other IE languages, most notably Latin, Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, and Hittite. One specific sound change that illustrates this distinction is a phonological nasal homorganic assimilation change between the plosives in Tosk, which has three variations. Homorganic nasal assimilation occurs when a nasal sound such as the labial nasal [m] assimilates to another plosive at the same place of articulation [b, p], forming the nasal cluster *mb* or *mp*. This also occurs with the historical formation of the clusters *np*, and *nk*, which assimilate to [mb] and [ŋg]. These undergo the chronological changes of *np* > *mp* > *mb* and *nk* > *ŋk* > *ŋg*. The three most common types of assimilation patterns that have arisen in modern Tosk are when the bilabial plosives /p, b, m/ assimilate to [mb]. The second is the alveolars /t, d, n/ > [nd], and third the velars /k, g/ > [ŋg].

Data: Previous reconstructed Proto Albanian forms surface in many cases as living attested words in modern MMA. PALb **en-prama* ‘in the evening’, is the exact equivalent to MMA *en prama* ‘in the evening’. MMA preserved the word initial voiceless labial plosive [p] from PALb. Tosk in contrast exhibits a word initial nasal plosive cluster [mb] in *mbrëma*, through homorganic nasal assimilation. In the next example, the voiced alveolar plosive [d] in PALb **daja* ‘to divide’ yields MMA *daja*, which further assimilates to *ndaj* in Tosk with the nasal-plosive cluster [nd].

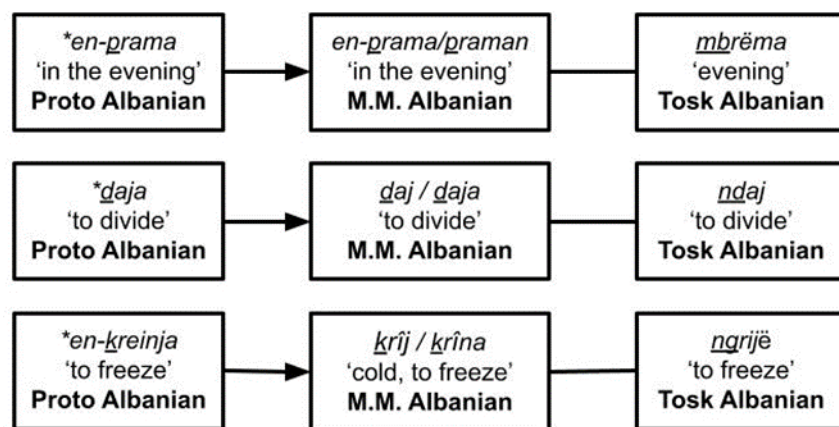


Figure 1: Proto Albanian to Malsia Madhe Albanian and Tosk

The creation of the nasal-plosive clusters in Tosk also occurs through epenthesis and nasal vowel unpacking. PIE **men* ‘remain, stay’ yields the MMA reflex of *met* [me:t] ‘remain, stuck’ with preservation of the single labial nasal [m]. The same word initial labial [m] is evident in the cognates of Latin *maneo*, Greek *meno*, and Sanskrit *man* ‘delay’. The Tosk form of *mbet* has an initial nasal-plosive cluster [mb]. In this case an epenthetic voiced labial [b] has arisen in Tosk.

The MMA reflexive pronoun *tât* [t̥t̥:t] ‘yours’ surfaces in Tosk as *tëndë* [təndə]. In this case the earlier nasal vowel [̃:] has unpacked or separated into a vowel and a nasal consonant of the same place of articulation as the consonant it precedes: [̃:] > [ən]/_t = [ənd]. See Paradis and Prunet (2000) for the phonological process of nasal vowel unpacking

When comparing MMA to PIE and other ancient IE languages, it is evident that MMA has preserved the oldest forms in Albanian unchanged from PIE, see Table 2 below. PIE **b^her* derives MMA *ba(j)* through the single loss of aspiration from **b^h*, whereas in Tosk it undergoes a further assimilation change in *mbaj* with the word initial nasal-plosive cluster [mb]. MMA retains the same plosive forms such as the voiced labial plosive [b] in *bush* ‘to fill’, similar to Proto Greek **βυσ-ν-έω* in contrast to Tosk Alb. *mbush*.

Proto Indo-European and Ancient Indo-European languages	Malsia Madhe Albanian	Tosk Albanian
PIE <i>*b^her</i> ‘carry, bring’ Sanskrit <i>bharati</i>	<i>ba(j)</i> [bɔ:] ‘carry’	<i>mbaj</i> [mbaj] ‘carry, hold’
PIE <i>*dā(i)-</i> ‘split, cut’ > Illyrian <i>dāe-tor</i> ‘slicer, divider’ > PAlb <i>*daja</i> ‘divide’, Sanskrit <i>dāti</i> ‘cut’, Ancient Greek <i>δαίωμα</i> ‘distribute’	<i>da(j)</i> ‘split, cut, divide’	<i>ndaj</i> ‘split, cut, divide’
Proto Greek - <i>*βυσ-ν-έω</i> > Ancient Greek - <i>βυvéω</i> ‘to fill’	<i>bush</i> ‘to fill’	<i>mbush</i> ‘to fill’
Ancient Greek <i>krustainomai</i> ‘am congealed with cold, freeze’, Tocharian B - <i>krosce</i>	<i>krî</i> [krî:] ‘cold, to freeze’	<i>ngrirë</i> [ŋgrirə] ‘to freeze’

Table 1: The preservation of PIE plosives in Malsia Madhe Albanian

Implications: This changes previous Historical Linguistics work in the Albanian language. The *Albanian Etymological Dictionary* states that “Tosk dialects preserve groups *mb*, *ngj*, and *nd* which assimilated to *m*, *nj*, and *n* in Gheg.” (Orel: 1998: xv). In Demiraj (2013: 280), it states that groups *mb*, *nd*, *ng* evolved to *m*, *n*, and *ŋ* in the northern speaking areas. This past analysis is no longer adequate to explain the new attested forms of the living MMA dialect, which exhibits plosives the same plosives preserved from PIE.

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(Additional Malsia Madhe Albanian data has been collected from native speakers)