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German Grammatical Influence on Steinmetz's Description of Northern Gheg Albanian

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Abstract

This study examines the possible influence of the German grammatical model on Karl Steinmetz's description of Northern Gheg Albanian in his *Albanische Grammatik (Nordalbanische Mundart)*, published in Sarajevo in 1913. Rather than providing a general account of the morphological categories presented in the grammar, the article investigates how Steinmetz classifies and organises Albanian grammatical structures for a German-speaking readership. The analysis focuses on three closely related areas: the treatment of the article, the organisation of the case system, and the classification of selected personal-pronoun forms. A descriptive-comparative approach is adopted, combining evidence from Steinmetz's grammar with Albanian grammatical and dialectological descriptions, as well as relevant accounts of the German case system. Particular attention is devoted to the absence of the ablative as an independent case category and to forms such as *mejet*, *tejet*, *nesh*, and *jush*, which Steinmetz classifies under the genitive despite their functions being more closely associated with the Albanian ablative. The comparison suggests that the possible influence of German grammatical categories on Steinmetz's description of Albanian is most apparent at the level of grammatical classification and analytical organisation rather than in the linguistic forms themselves. At the same time, the study avoids interpreting every divergence from later or standard descriptions of Albanian as evidence of German influence, since Steinmetz's classificatory choices may also reflect Northern Gheg dialectal usage, contemporary grammatical conventions, and the practical and pedagogical purposes of his grammar. The findings demonstrate that Steinmetz's work is significant not only as a historical record of Northern Gheg Albanian but also as a case study in the methodological challenges involved in describing one language through grammatical categories inherited from another linguistic tradition.

Keywords: Karl Steinmetz; Northern Gheg; German grammatical model; Albanian grammar; case system.

1. Introduction

The beginning of the twentieth century constituted an important period in the documentation and study of Albanian and its regional varieties. Among the German-speaking authors who contributed to this field was Karl Steinmetz, whose *Albanische Grammatik (Nordalbanische Mundart)* was published in Sarajevo in 1913. Although relatively concise and primarily practical in orientation, the grammar covers a broad range of morphological categories and devotes considerable attention to the verbal system (Steinmetz, 1913). Steinmetz occupies an unusual position in the history of Albanian grammatical studies, since linguistics was not his professional field. Jup Kastrati draws attention to this circumstance and raises the possibility that Steinmetz may have received assistance from an Albanian with substantial linguistic knowledge, given the precision with which certain grammatical phenomena are described (Kastrati, 1980). Whatever the precise circumstances surrounding its compilation, the grammar remains significant both for the Northern Gheg material it records and for the manner in which that material is classified and presented to a German-speaking readership.

It is this latter aspect that is of particular importance to the present study. Steinmetz frequently presents Albanian forms alongside their German equivalents. While this comparative practice undoubtedly serves a practical and pedagogical purpose, it also raises a broader methodological question: what happens when the grammatical categories of the two languages do not correspond directly? Albanian and German differ, for example, in the morphological expression of definiteness and in the organisation of their respective case systems. Such structural differences make it necessary to distinguish carefully between the Albanian linguistic forms recorded by Steinmetz and the grammatical categories through which he describes and classifies them. The purpose of this article, therefore, is not to reassess the morphology presented in Steinmetz's grammar in its entirety. Its scope is deliberately narrower: it examines whether, and to what extent, a German grammatical framework may have influenced his classification of selected structures of Northern Gheg Albanian. The analysis focuses on three interconnected areas: the treatment of the article, the organisation of the nominal case system, and the classification of selected personal-pronoun forms. These areas are particularly relevant because they reveal points at which the grammatical systems of German and Albanian do not correspond directly and therefore provide a useful basis for examining the categories employed by Steinmetz. The concept of "influence" is used cautiously throughout the study. Similarity to German grammatical organisation does not, in itself, demonstrate that Steinmetz consciously transferred German grammatical categories to his description of Albanian. His classificatory choices must also be considered in light of contemporary grammatical traditions, the practical and pedagogical aims of his grammar, and the characteristics of the Northern Gheg dialectal material available to him. The objective, therefore, is not to interpret every divergence from later or standard descriptions of Albanian as evidence of German influence, but rather to

identify those instances in which comparison with German grammatical categories may contribute to explaining Steinmetz's descriptive and classificatory choices.

Against this background, the study addresses two closely related research questions. First, to what extent does Steinmetz's classification of selected Northern Gheg structures correspond to grammatical categories familiar from the German grammatical tradition? Second, where such correspondences occur, to what extent can they be interpreted as reflecting a German descriptive framework, rather than features of Northern Gheg itself or the broader grammatical conventions of the period? By framing the inquiry in these terms, the study seeks to assess the possible role of German grammatical categories in Steinmetz's analysis without presupposing their influence and while preserving the distinction between linguistic structure and grammatical description.

2. Conceptual Framework and Methodology

The primary source for this study is Karl Steinmetz's *Albanische Grammatik (Nordalbanische Mundart)* (1913). The work is approached from two distinct but complementary perspectives: first, as a historical record of Northern Gheg linguistic forms and, second, as an example of Albanian being described and classified by a German-speaking author. Maintaining a distinction between these two perspectives is methodologically important, since the authenticity of a dialectal form and the grammatical category or label assigned to that form constitute separate analytical questions. The study adopts a descriptive and comparative qualitative approach. Selected passages from Steinmetz's grammar are first examined within their original grammatical and descriptive context. They are subsequently compared with accounts of Albanian morphology presented in *Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe I* (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2002). Where dialect-specific forms or structures are involved, reference is also made to the dialectological work of Jorgji Gjinari and Gjovalin Shkurtaj. This comparative procedure makes it possible to distinguish genuine Northern Gheg features from classificatory choices and, consequently, to avoid interpreting every divergence from present-day Standard Albanian as an inconsistency or analytical deficiency in Steinmetz's grammar. A second level of comparison concerns the German grammatical system. This dimension is particularly relevant to the analysis of grammatical case. The historical development of the German case system is considered with reference to Schmidt (1996), with particular attention to the disappearance of several earlier Indo-European cases and the subsequent redistribution of some of their grammatical functions among the cases that survived. This historical perspective provides a basis for assessing whether particular aspects of Steinmetz's classification of Albanian may reflect categories familiar from the German grammatical tradition. Accordingly, three possible explanations are considered whenever Steinmetz's classifications diverge from those found in modern descriptions of Albanian. First, a particular form or construction may reflect authentic Northern Gheg usage. Second, its classification may derive from the grammatical terminology and analytical

conventions of the period in which Steinmetz was writing. Third, the classification may reveal an analogy with, or possible influence from, categories familiar from German grammar. These explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive and may, in individual cases, operate simultaneously. The purpose of the comparative analysis is therefore to assess which explanation, or combination of explanations, is most plausible in each case, without presupposing German influence. The study is qualitative rather than quantitative in design. It focuses on a limited number of representative examples selected because they make the relationship between linguistic form and grammatical classification particularly visible. The analysis is therefore concerned not with the frequency with which individual categories or forms occur in Steinmetz's grammar, but with the principles according to which he organises, classifies, and interprets the Albanian linguistic material he records. In this way, the methodology seeks to distinguish as clearly as possible between the linguistic characteristics of Northern Gheg and the descriptive framework through which those characteristics are presented.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1. German–Albanian Grammatical Equivalence: The Problem of the Article

Steinmetz writes for readers who approach Albanian through German, and German therefore functions not only as the language of explanation and translation but also as an important point of grammatical reference. His treatment of the article provides a useful first example of the descriptive difficulties that may arise when the grammatical categories of one language are used to explain the structures of another. Steinmetz describes the Albanian markers *a*, *i*, *u*, and plural *t* as articles and notes that they are attached to the end of the word (Steinmetz, 1913). The use of the term *Artikel* immediately provides the German-speaking reader with a familiar grammatical category. At the same time, however, this terminological correspondence may obscure an important structural difference between the two languages. German typically expresses definiteness through a free-standing article preceding the noun, whereas in Albanian definiteness is morphologically marked on the noun itself. Modern Albanian grammar accordingly analyses the postposed definite element as part of the morphological formation of the definite form of the noun (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2002).

The significant point, therefore, is not whether Steinmetz correctly distinguishes between definite and indefinite forms, but rather how he establishes a correspondence between two grammatical systems that express a comparable function through structurally different mechanisms. Describing both phenomena by means of the term “article” facilitates the German-speaking reader's understanding of Albanian, but the shared terminology should not be taken to imply structural identity between the two systems.

This terminological choice should not, however, be attributed automatically or exclusively to Steinmetz's German linguistic background. Albanian grammatical

writing itself was not uniform in its treatment and classification of the article. Dodë Koleci's *Gramatika ia folmarmia shqyptare* (1901), for example, included the article among the parts of speech (Kastrati, 1980). Francesco Rossi had earlier adopted a different approach, excluding the article from the principal parts of speech and discussing separately the means by which Albanian expresses the grammatical function commonly associated with the article (Rossi, 1866). Steinmetz's terminology must therefore also be situated within the broader grammatical traditions and classificatory practices of his period.

The treatment of the article is consequently better understood as an illustration of a broader descriptive and methodological problem than as direct evidence of German grammatical influence. It demonstrates how Steinmetz employs familiar grammatical terminology to render Albanian structures accessible to his intended readership, while at the same time revealing the limitations of establishing direct correspondences between categories belonging to structurally different languages. Whether this descriptive framework produces more substantial consequences for the classification of Albanian forms becomes particularly apparent in Steinmetz's treatment of the grammatical case system.

3.2. The Four-Case Framework and the Missing Albanian Ablative

The case system provides a more revealing point of comparison. Steinmetz organises nominal declension around four cases—the nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative—without recognising the Albanian ablative as an independent case category (Steinmetz, 1913). This classificatory choice becomes particularly significant when his system is considered alongside the structure of German grammar.

Modern German distinguishes four morphological cases: nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative. It has no independent ablative. From a historical perspective, Germanic lost several cases inherited from Indo-European, with some of their functions subsequently being absorbed or redistributed among the surviving cases, particularly the dative (Schmidt, 1996). Albanian, by contrast, preserves the ablative as a distinct grammatical case within its nominal system.

The correspondence between Steinmetz's case inventory and the German four-case system is therefore noteworthy. In his presentation of Albanian nominal declension, the genitive and dative are closely associated, while the ablative is not assigned an independent position within the paradigm. What is significant here is not merely the number of cases recognised, but the classificatory architecture through which the Albanian material is organised. Steinmetz presents the declensional system through categories that would have been immediately familiar to a German-speaking readership.

This correspondence does not, however, imply that the Northern Gheg forms recorded by Steinmetz are inaccurate or artificial. Some of the forms appearing in his paradigms reflect genuine dialectal developments. Gjinari and Shkurtaj, for example, discuss case forms and endings characteristic of north-western Gheg that are relevant to the linguistic material documented by Steinmetz (Gjinari & Shkurtaj, 2000). It is

therefore necessary to distinguish between the linguistic evidence itself and the grammatical framework within which that evidence is classified. The absence of an independent ablative category in Steinmetz's description should not be equated with the absence of forms or functions that may correspond to the Albanian ablative.

This distinction is central to the argument of the present study. Steinmetz may accurately record authentic Northern Gheg material while simultaneously organising that material within a classificatory system that does not reproduce the Albanian case inventory in its entirety. If German influence is present, it would therefore appear primarily at the metalinguistic and classificatory level. In other words, the possible influence concerns the architecture of the grammatical paradigm rather than the authenticity of the linguistic forms that Steinmetz observed and documented.

Even at this level, however, the evidence requires caution. Steinmetz does not explicitly state that he deliberately adapted the Albanian declensional system to the German four-case model. Moreover, his grammar was conceived primarily as a practical work rather than as an extensive theoretical analysis of Albanian morphology, and considerations of pedagogical accessibility and descriptive economy may also have contributed to the simplification of the case system. The four-case organisation should therefore be interpreted as evidence consistent with a possible German descriptive framework, rather than as proof of a conscious attempt to reshape Albanian grammar according to German categories. The question becomes more concrete when individual forms that would ordinarily be associated with the Albanian ablative are examined within Steinmetz's classificatory system.

3.3. The Genitive–Ablative Problem in the Personal Pronoun System

The treatment of personal pronouns provides an opportunity to test this interpretation more closely. Steinmetz classifies the forms *mejet*, *tejet*, *nesh*, and *jush* under the genitive. The forms themselves are not problematic; what is significant is the grammatical category to which they are assigned. Within the Albanian case system, their functions are more closely associated with the ablative than with an independent genitive of the personal pronoun. This example makes the distinction between linguistic form and grammatical classification particularly clear. Steinmetz records authentic Albanian forms but assigns them to a category that does not fully correspond to their function within the Albanian grammatical system. The classificatory difficulty already observed in his treatment of nominal declension thus reappears in another part of the grammar: the ablative is not recognised as an independent case, while forms associated with ablative functions are incorporated into another case category. The recurrence of this pattern lends greater relevance to the comparison with German. An isolated omission might reasonably be attributed to abbreviation, simplification, or inconsistency. When a similar organisational principle appears across different parts of the grammar, however, it becomes legitimate to consider whether the four-case framework familiar from German may have influenced Steinmetz's analysis. Such an interpretation remains a hypothesis rather than evidence of a consciously adopted method, but it gains support from the internal organisation and consistency of certain

classificatory choices within the grammar.

At the same time, Steinmetz does not apply case distinctions in an entirely uniform manner. His treatment of the interrogative pronoun *kush* is particularly instructive in this respect. He distinguishes between genitive and dative functions even where the same form, *kuj?*, may correspond to both “whose?” and “to whom?”. This suggests that Steinmetz was capable of distinguishing grammatical function from morphological identity and that formal coincidence did not necessarily lead him to collapse distinct grammatical functions into a single category. The example of *kush* is important precisely because it complicates any straightforward interpretation based on German influence. Steinmetz’s classificatory system cannot be explained as a mechanical transfer of German grammatical categories onto Albanian. Rather, his descriptive choices appear to result from the interaction of several factors: the practical and pedagogical character of the grammar, the grammatical conventions available at the beginning of the twentieth century, the characteristics of the Northern Gheg material itself, and, in certain instances, analytical categories familiar from the German grammatical tradition.

The treatment of personal pronouns therefore provides one of the clearest illustrations of the argument developed in this study. The possible influence of German is visible not because the Albanian forms themselves acquire German characteristics, but because their position within Steinmetz’s grammatical description may have been shaped by a classificatory framework that does not fully correspond to the Albanian case system. The distinction between linguistic material and its metalinguistic classification is therefore essential: what may reflect German influence is not the Albanian language recorded by Steinmetz, but the analytical framework through which that language is organised and presented.

4. Conclusion

Steinmetz’s *Albanische Grammatik (Nordalbanische Mundart)* is valuable not only for the Northern Gheg material it preserves, but also for the way in which that material is interpreted, classified, and organised. A close examination of the treatment of the article, the case system, and selected personal-pronoun forms demonstrates that the relationship between the Albanian linguistic material recorded by Steinmetz and the grammatical categories through which he describes it is not always straightforward. The case system provides the strongest evidence for this interpretative tension. Steinmetz organises Albanian nominal declension around four cases—the nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative—while the Albanian ablative is not assigned an independent position within the paradigm. His classification of the forms *mejet*, *tejet*, *nesh*, and *jush* under the genitive makes this discrepancy particularly visible, since their grammatical functions are more closely associated with the Albanian ablative. At the same time, Steinmetz’s treatment of forms such as *kuj?* demonstrates that his classifications were not governed by a single rigid principle and that he was capable of distinguishing grammatical function from morphological identity. The structure

of the grammar therefore cannot be explained solely as the mechanical transfer of German grammatical categories onto Albanian. The evidence instead supports a more nuanced conclusion. German appears to have functioned primarily as a descriptive and metalinguistic framework through which Steinmetz organised and presented Albanian to his intended readership. Its possible influence is most visible in the selection, organisation, and naming of grammatical categories rather than in the Northern Gheg forms themselves. This distinction is methodologically important because it allows the linguistic value of Steinmetz's documentation to be assessed separately from the analytical framework within which the recorded material was classified. Authentic dialectal evidence and the grammatical categories used to interpret that evidence should therefore be treated as related but analytically distinct dimensions of his work.

Viewed from this perspective, Steinmetz's grammar also illustrates a broader problem in the history of linguistic description: grammatical categories developed within one linguistic tradition cannot always be applied to another language without modification, simplification, or a degree of structural mismatch. The description of one language through the conceptual categories of another may facilitate accessibility for the intended reader, but it may also obscure distinctions that are structurally significant in the language being described.

Future research could develop this question through a systematic comparison between Steinmetz's grammar and the works of other German-speaking Albanologists of the same period. Applying the same analytical criteria—particularly the treatment of the article, the organisation of the case system, and the classification of forms lacking direct grammatical equivalents in German—would make it possible to determine more precisely whether the four-case framework identified in Steinmetz represents an individual descriptive choice, reflects broader contemporary grammatical conventions, or forms part of a more general tendency within German-speaking Albanological scholarship. Such a comparative approach would also contribute to a broader understanding of how the grammatical traditions of major European languages shaped the early scholarly description of Albanian and its dialects.

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