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Research article

## A Socio-Technical Inquiry into the Albanian Language

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### Abstract

The article aims to analyze some of the main features of the Albanian language which became popular on the Russian Web during the period of the 2000's, when the Internet had already become a relevant means of communication and it was necessary to transmit a maximum of information using a minimum of time. It was online communication that spawned the trend of mass language distortion to minimize the intellectual expenses required for writing. This was the main reason why the Albanian words and expressions was widely recognized by Internet users. In the article authors trace the history of the Albanian language and draw the causal relationship between the Albanian language and the specifics of the era which spawned it. This is considered not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a peculiar sign of the time and one of the direction in which the regular Russian language started to change and adapt. As a result of the study of Albanian as a linguistic phenomenon, the authors conducted a linguistic analysis of Albanian words and expressions, which revealed such features of word formation as: frequent use of double letters, replacement of a sound with a corresponding one, transliteration of foreign words, acronyms of set expressions, merged spelling of phrases, reverse transliteration. Situations will be pointed out in which well-established Albanian are used. It will be addressed that the distortion of the literary language occurs in other countries as well (in such online languages as English LOLspeak and German Vong-Sprache). After reviewing the examples of literary works in Albanian, the article will conclude by arguing that they can be attributed to an entertaining genre, which is clearly relevant due to people's attempts to move away from the established linguistic structure and rules of the literary language.

**Keywords:** Albanian; Slang; Pandokaff; Language; Internet; Spelling

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Научная статья

## Социально-техническое исследование ольбанского языка

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### Аннотация

Предмет изучения научной статьи – феномен ольбанского языка периода 2000-х гг., времени, когда Интернет стал актуальным средством общения и возникла потребность передавать максимальную информацию за минимальное время. Именно интернет-коммуникация породила тенденцию к массовому искажению языка для минимизации интеллектуальных затрат на обдумывание текста сообщения и экономии времени, что стало важнейшей причиной, благодаря которой ольбанские слова и выражения получили широкое признание среди пользователей сети Интернет. В статье авторы проследили историю возникновения ольбанского языка, выявили причинно-следственную связь между самим ольбанским языком и особенностями эпохи, породившей этот язык, который рассматривается в статье не только как лингвистическое явление, но и как интересная примета времени и одно из направлений изменения русского языка. В результате исследования ольбанского как языкового феномена авторами был предложен лингвистический анализ ольбанских слов и выражений, который позволил выявить такие особенности образования слов как: частое использование удвоения букв, замена звука на парный, транслитерация иностранных слов, аббревиатуры устоявшихся выражений, слитное написание выражений, обратная транслитерация и др. В статье представлены ситуации, в которых используются устоявшиеся ольбанские выражения. Искажение литературного языка происходит и в других странах (в таких онлайн-языках, как английский LOLspeak и немецкий Vong-Sprache). Рассмотрев примеры литературных произведений на ольбанском языке, авторы пришли к выводу о том, что их можно отнести к развлекательному жанру, который пользуется популярностью из-за попыток людей отойти от чёткой языковой структуры и правил литературного языка.

**Ключевые слова:** Ольбанский; Сленг; Язык падонкафф; Язык; Интернет; Орфография

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## INTRODUCTION

Change within Russian language is caused not only by general changes in life conditions, but it is also a manifestation of the protest against a “top-down power” over language in terms of a “reference” language of soviet broadcasters and writers. Mass media are another source of change, introducing fashionable and new words to draw attention of the audience.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the development of information technologies undoubtedly has a major influence on the life and worldview of modern society with processes of social transformation leading to changes in Russian language as well.

Communication on the Web requires an expedited exchange of information. In order to save time, it is common for people to not pay adequate attention to grammar and spelling rules, actively using slang and offensive language. As a result, the so-called Albanian language spread at the beginning of the 2000’s in Russian net communication. One of the most characteristic signs of this language is that the spelling of words is practically correct phonetically, but consciously distorted orthographically.

As a predecessor of Albanian one might rightfully consider the Padonkaff language. However, the main difference between them is that Padonkaff. is based on the “how we hear, so we write” rule, and among the speakers is shown a staggering level of illiteracy. Meanwhile in Albanian the incorrect spelling of words is used deliberately in order to attach a “peculiar” meaning to the message conveyed.

Russian orthography is quite difficult and has undergone many changes throughout the ages, so it achieved its stabilization only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Vasily Trediakovsky (1748/1948) suggested a phonetic principle of spelling in 1748, whereas Mikhail Lomonosov (1788) suggested a morphological one in 1755 and only in 1885 the first set of “Russian spelling” rules was published by Yakov Grot (1885). In 1917-18 a reform of Russian language was implemented which simplified the spelling and the rule book. These rules are still in force with only some changes introduced in 1956 (*Rules of Russian spelling and punctuation*, 1956).

Perhaps surprisingly, the history of the creative distortion of the Russian language in relation to the Albanian language started long before the appearance of Albanian in the Web and the appearance of the Internet itself.

Janko Lavrin (1916), who visited Albania in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, writes: “The Albanian alphabet was still terribly disordered: Catholics used Latin, Orthodox Christians – Greek, and Muslims – Turkish letters.”

Albanian has a Indo-European character in its lexical and grammar elements and a number of similarities in phonology and grammar with South-Slavic languages such as Serbian, Macedonian, and Bulgarian. The Russian world had an important influence in Albanian culture, especially in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when scientific and technical knowledge, as well as the relative terminology was introduced in the country with the arrival of specialists and qualified personnel from the Soviet Union.

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was especially rich in linguistic experiments, in which sometimes the phonetic conventions of the language could be replaced by the author's. Thus, in 1916, the futurist Ilya Zdanovich (Ilyazd) wrote the play “Yanko, Krul Albansky” which is written in a mixture of zaumi and spelling distortions of the Russian



language: “пачиму ни смучайтись помнити шта вот изык албанский...” [distorted: “don’t be embarrassed to remember that this is the Albanian language...”] (Zdanovich, 1918/2001). In this sentence, only the words *remember*, *this* and *Albanian* are correctly spelled. In other words, the word phonetics is transmitted by absolutely incorrect literal means. At the end of the 20th century, the distorted language of the network was called Albanian, but the name itself suffered – Albanian became “Olbanian.”

## BIRTH OF THE “OLBANIAN” LANGUAGE

Nowadays there are some hypotheses regarding the origin of the “Olbanian” language. Perhaps it is that many Russian users began to write with deliberate errors in different parts of the Web, but it is difficult to establish what prompted the great prevalence and popularity of this Internet language. According to one of the hypotheses, it is believed that distorted language appeared in Runet (Russian Internet) at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among the sites that appeared in the 1990s were humorous ones where freedom of expression was encouraged. This manifested itself in ridiculing everything while seeming serious, using obscene language and the distortion of all rules. The sites were created by groups of enthusiasts with Internet access, and with growing popularity other users began to send their texts to them (that were called *creatiff*, derived from *creative*). In an appropriate ironic vein, the authors called themselves *padonok* [*bastard*, written with a mistake]. As one of the creators of one of the earliest such sites recalls, “before we came with fuck.ru, no one used foul language on the [Russian] Internet” (Krongauz, 2013). There the “Anti-literacy manifesto” was published, authored by the virtual girl Mary Shelley, invented in 1997 by writer Alexei Andreev. The manifesto called for the rejection of spell checks. In all its words the letters were changed as much as possible but so that it was still possible to guess the sound of the word: “ ‘Биз грамотической ашипки я русской речи ни люблю!,’ писал наш лудший паэт Аликсандыр Сиргеич Пушкин. Эти слава мы бирем дивизом на наш флак в барьбе с засилием биздушнай кампьютырной правилности каторую нам навязывают гацкие робаты-акуппанты!!!!” [roughly translated: “‘I do not like Russian speech without a grammatical mistake!’ wrote our best poet Aleksandr Sergeech Pushkin. We take these words as divisive on our flag in the fight against the dominance of soulless computer correctness, which is imposed on us by nasty occupant robots !!!!”] (Shelley, 1999/ n.d.). At the time when it was written, the manifesto sounded funnier than it does now, since today the question of the negative impact on the language of texts created by AI is the subject of scientific discussion (Thomas, 2022). Dmitry Belinsky (with the nickname “Linxy”) was a designer at fuck.ru and one of the first to constantly and deliberately distort the words in his posts. In honor to its progenitor Linxy the new language was at first named “L-yazyg” (L-language) and, after its spread, has become known as Padonkaff language [roughly: language of bastards]. The main argument for the hypothesis that Olbanian originated here is the fact that the Padonkaff language acquired its mass character and widespread use precisely on the udaff.com site as the successor of fuck.ru.



When the Olbanian language was formed in the 2000's, there were no strict rules enforcing content blocking for the use of obscene language, the spread of pornography, etc. However, the users understood that not all words and formulations were appropriate. With the introduction of internal measures to curb obscene language, "euphemisms" began to appear which replaced unacceptable words by more neutral ones (Mahmutai, 2019). The other root of the Olbanian language refers to the later period of the development of the Internet and to the resource of online diaries. There is also a hypothesis which claims that the name Olbanian may derive from the curious situation on the LG (Live Journal) site in 2004. A user under the nickname of "scottishtiger" was outraged by a text written in Russian and started to ask angrily why someone wrote in that language on the American site livejournal.com.

scottishtiger: "I cannot read that text," "I knew I should have been a translator, after all."

In response, the user "maxxximus" called the "unknown" language Albanian:

maxxximus: "This is Albanian, i am only guessing what the (...) they are talking about..."

The next day scottishtiger responded:

scottishtiger: "Because? It's LIVEJOURNAL. An American website. Not an Albanian (...) site. Plus, being an American means that the rest of the world should have to cater to me. But that's just mypointofview." (Krongauz, 2013)

The Russian-speaking community of LJ organized a flash mob, called "Albanian Lessons" during which scottishtiger received several thousand comments in which he was asked to apologize and write a post in his journal (in Russian), stating that he had already learned Albanian, and so scottishtiger did (Lipatov, 2013).

It should be noted that there were loads of search queries related to the meaning of Olbanian words and Internet memes formed from them. The first chance meeting with Olbanian spelling of words caused shock and protest in people. And if a naive user like scottishtiger immediately resented this, it provided a great opportunity for trolling and exercise in Olbanian:

Wrote my first post (...) today. The post was devoted to the "incorrectness" of the language of some authors, purely from my point of view. This meant the use of some words that I honestly considered wrong, i.e. written with errors. I honestly ASKED to explain to other users why the authors use this.

As a result, I was poured with slops and labeled, ranging from illiteracy and much more. lol. But that's not the point. There was only one person who explained to me the concept of "Olbanian" language. By the way, thanks to him for mentioning this linguistic phenomenon. (Xpath, 2021)

Aleksandr Berdicevskis (2013) studying texts from the website udaff.com (one of the main successors of the tradition after fack.ru) discovers that the frequency of use of the Olbanian language rapidly dropped after 2001. That year, almost every word was written wrong. Then a sharp drop began in 2002, and continued in gradual decline. By 2011, the frequency reaches almost zero (Berdicevskis, 2013, p. 196). If udaff.com was



the site where the Albanian language was created and users made up spellings as they went along, the picture is different for the subsequent use of Albanian for instance in Web blogs. In 2008 researchers mentioned that on average, the ratio of online requests containing correctly and incorrectly spelled expressions popular in the Albanian language is 1 to 7 (Snigirev & Snigireva, 2008). According to the results of the analysis of Web blogs, the peak of popularity falls on 2006 (Berdicevskis, 2013).

Table 1 shows the current popularity (in 2022) of some slang word and expressions in the Internet. Today, some Albanian words and expressions have remained in the active vocabulary of Internet users, but mixed with English expressions and new memes and linguistic jokes.

Table 1 Popularity of slang words on the web

Correct grammar	English translation	Number of searches on the Internet	Albanian word or phrase	Number of searches on the Internet
Привет медведь Privet medved'	Hi, bear	138 000	Привед медвед Preved, medved	5 000
Здравствуйте Zdravstvujte	Hello	2 000 000	Дратути Dratuti	17 000
До свидания Do svidaniya	Goodbye	386 000	Дотвидания Dotvidaniya	3 000
-	-	-	kek	902 000
Ой, всё Оу, vs'o	Oh, whatever	1 000 000	Ойвсё Oyvvs'o	4 000
Автор жжёт Avtor zhzhjet	The author writes well	384 000	Аффтор жжот Afftar zhzhjet	7 000
-	Laughing out loud/LOL	1 000 000	LOL	2 000 000
Предсказывать Predskazyvat'	To predict	911 000	Ванговать Vangovat'	24 000

The wave of literary creativity in Albanian came at the heyday of the Padonkaff language, during the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This linguistic phenomenon has gone beyond Internet communication and turned into a tool for creating lyrical and prose works.

One of the most famous authors who turned to the Albanian language is the poet Alexander Noskov, who writes under the pseudonym Chen Kim. His work “Leftolstoy” (Rus. “Lev Tolstoy”; Eng. “Leo Tolstoy”) deserves special attention. In addition to the peculiar spelling rules that sharply distinguish Padonkaff language from the background





of Russian, the writer, like Zdanevich, deliberately avoids any punctuation marks, except for the dot. In addition, proper names in the text do not begin with a capital letter and are distorted along with other common nouns, there is no punctuation within sentences. In addition, the first word of each line does not begin with a capital letter, as established by the rules of Russian language. And it is perhaps in this disruption of the usual norms that lies the most emotional appeal of Albanian language. According to Olga Zverlina (2016):

Albanian gives amazing creative freedom! It was like a tongue, moving strictly along the rails of the rules all the time, suddenly jumped off the running board of its locomotive – and began jumping, frolicking, picking flowers and catching butterflies. Absolutely not serious, but easy and joyful (...).

### **DISTORTIONS OF THE LANGUAGE ON THE INTERNET**

Distortions of the language are not an exclusive peculiarity of the digital era. Playing with language, bending it and subverting its rules, is common among writers and innovators. Also, when there is a large community of people that doesn't master the official language of an area, it often happens that these people end up in creating their own versions of the language. For example, "Ebonics" (from "ebony" (black) and "phonics" (sound)) is a distorted version of the English language. Many more examples can be found in the style of using European languages from those communities that share an African root, as in an expression like: 'The Brotha be lookin good; that's what got the Sista nose open!' (Kifano & Smith, 2005).

But whether these forms are an unintended result due to events such as immigration or colonization, what is peculiar in Internet communications is the birth of intentional language distortions. For some scholars, language changing in the network is a subject of concern (O'Connor, 2005). They argue that massive communication on the Internet contributes to simplifying and impoverishing the language, and that the use of abbreviations, slang, etc., is a danger to the richness of expression. Even taking into account these issues, the phenomenon of language distortion that we are considering is situated on a different level of complexity. Here, the violation of the language norms happens deliberately, by a group of people that, in fact, masters the original language. At the same time, even violation has its own regularity. The linguistic rule is not distorted arbitrarily, but by virtue of what we can call an "anti rule," which presupposes an understanding of the original norm. Languages distortions usually cause a sharp reaction from representatives of traditional culture: "Albanian is like a powerful powder charge laid under the foundations of the grammar and spelling of the Russian literary language, to which this 'verbal scum' causes damage that is difficult to repair and severe wounds to its speech richness" (Lipatov, 2013, p. 71).

Needless to say the phenomenon of the distortion of the standard language happens in the majority of linguistic communities (Bridle, 2022). One of the most famous example is the English internet language named "LOLspeak,"<sup>1</sup> also known as Kitty Pidgin, used online since 2006, that includes morphological reanalysis, atypical sentence structure, and

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<sup>1</sup> LOL is the popular acronym for 'laughing out loud.'



lexical playfulness (Gawne & Vaughan, 2011). A widespread image, to which the popularization of language is traced, is a picture of a cat with the caption “I Can Has Cheezburger?” which gave rise to a variety of new distorted phrases. Calka (2011) describes “LOLspeak” as such: “the closest approximation would be to imagine English put through an automatic translator into another language and then translated back and spelled phonetically.” Kirsi Kauppinen (2016) claims, that “LOLspeak” inherited the most well-known, deliberate misspelling of the English language, i.e. the distortion of the definite article “the” into “teh” in videogames.

It is typical for this language to over-use the weak verbs’ past tense suffix “-ed” and to bend English grammar in other ways. (Gawne & Vaughan, 2011; Kauppinen, 2016). Born as a language of memes, it became quite popular in Internet communication. This is the answer given to the common question by uninitiated people about what this strange language is: “Izz lolspeek. Lolspeek5 izz allaways opshunal tho” (Eng. “It’s Lolspeak. Lolspeak is always optional though”). The less popular variant of Internet-English, “Chanspeak” (a language born on 4chan, a website with over 7 million users created in 2003), also contained misspellings and its main features include shortening, simplifying and cutting down words (Fiorentini, 2013). However, the oldest language of such kind on the Web, known since the ’80s, is probably “Leet” (also known as “1337”, “Eleet” or “Leetspeak”; the name is derived from the word “elite”). Its main feature is the use of numbers and other symbols instead of similar-looking letters. 1337 is actually Leet spelling for the word “leet” (Fiorentini, 2019, p. 91).

A similar case can be found in the German speaking Internet community. It is the “Vong-Sprache” that appeared in the 2010s. The term “Vong” refers to the prepositional phrase “Vong... her” (a distortion of the preposition “von ... her” or “where ... from”). In 2017, a popular phrase became “I bims”, which stands for “Ich bin's” or “this is me” (Turysheva, 2018). Shcherbakova (2017) points out that Vong-Sprache is characterized by writing nouns in lowercase letters, in place of the uppercase letters prescribed by the German grammar, and also in the widespread replacement of the consonant “n” with “m”. The words are still written according to their original phonetics, but there is a tendency to ringing or deafening. For example, the diphthong “ie”, in which the “e” is not pronounced, but emphasizes the elongation of the vowel that precedes it, is truncated into just “i”.

## LINGUISTIC SPECIFICS OF ALBANIAN WORDS

Even though the spelling variant of one or the other Albanian phrase depends ultimately on the user’s taste, the language still retains some of the established principles of words-formation. Let us take a closer look:

1. *Double letters.* This redoubling aims to get rid of complicated combinations of consonants in the words. As a rule, one consonant is taken as a basis and generated in transcription by its devoicing or the fusion of the other sounds. For example: the transcription of the word “author” (Russian transliteration: “avtor”) is [a:fta:r], the letter “v” transforms into the [f] sound. That’s why the Albanian equivalent of this word is “afftar”. Another example: “affiget” (Rus. “ofiget”, [afi:get’]; Eng. “my gosh/it’s





nuts”). The double “f” becomes here the [f] sound). We can also examine the word “atstskiy”<sup>2</sup>, shaped from the Russian word “adskiy” (Eng. “hellish”). The combination of letters “ds” makes the sound [ts], so the transcription is [’atskij]. The same tendency can be seen in such words as “atststoy” (Rus. “otstoy”; Eng. “sludge”). Here the combination “ts” makes the sound [ts]. The same happens in the word “napidetstski” (Rus. “ne podetski”; Eng. “not childish, really”). In the word “peretstsa” (Rus. “peret’sa”; Eng. “to trudge”) is the combination “t’sa” that makes the sound [ts]. Last, in the word “zash’sh’itat” (Rus. “zaschitat”; Eng. “to count/to deduct”), the combination “sch” makes the sound [sh’].

However, it is worth mentioning that this occurrence is not always about doubling the letter whose sound is formed in transcription according to the Russian language’s spelling rules. The letters in the word “zhossko” are redoubled according to another principle. The transcription for the Russian word “zhestko” (Eng. “harsh”) is [’zhostka]. Although the combination of letters “st” make two different sounds, [s] and [t], only the letter [s] is doubled. Such a modification is explained by the same difficulty in combining letters that one finds in the original Russian word, and the consequent desire to avoid this difficulty in writing and especially in speech. This is the case in the sentence: “zotsenite noviy atstskiy saitets” (Rus. “Zatsenite novyj adskij sajt”; Eng. “Check out the new hellish website”), and in: “afftar peshy ischo” (Rus. “avtor, pishi esh’o”; Eng. “author, write more”).

2. *Replacement of a sound with a paired one.* In Russian language there are some paired sounds for both vowels and consonants. It is customary to divide sounds into strong and faint ones (in the case of vowels we distinguish between stressed and unstressed sounds, in the case of consonants between voiced and deaf). Speaking about vowels, it is noteworthy that when in the strong position (stressed) the pronunciation is determined by the letter that occasions it. For example, in the Rus. “vody” (Eng. “waters”), the pronunciation is [’vody<sup>3</sup>], because the vowel “o” determines the [o] sound. But when the vowel finds itself in the weak position, the sound is replaced by a paired one. As it is the case for the Rus. “voda” (Eng. “water”), pronounced [va’da], so that the vowel “o” results here in the sound [a].

As for the consonants, a weak position is the one in which deaf consonants stand before voiced ones (as in the Rus. “sdacha” (Eng. “change (money)”), pronounced [’zdacha]), or when voiced consonants stand before deaf ones (as in the Rus. “leopard”, pronounced [l’ia’part], resulting in a deafening). In Albanian language this rule works in the reverse way. In weak positions both vowels and consonants acquire the features of strong sounds. The most striking example is the very name of the language itself: Albanian (“Olbankskey”). The phonetic transcription of Russian word “albanskiy” is [albank’sij]. The letter “l” is unstressed, but in Padonkaff language there is a deliberate

<sup>2</sup> There is no sound “ц” in English language, so it is customary to designate it as “ts” symbol (as it reads in the word “tsar”). In the word “atstskiy” there is a double “ts”. Hereinafter this symbol is used in transcriptions as well.

<sup>3</sup> There is no correspondence for the sound “ы” in the English language, so it is customary to designate it with “y” symbol (as it reads in the surname “Bykov”). Hereinafter this symbol is used in transcriptions as well.



replacement of weak sound [i] with the strong one [e]. We can mention here several examples: “atstskey” (Rus. “adskiy”, [ˈatskʲij]; Eng. “hellish, infernal”), where the weak sound [i] is replaced with the strong [e]; “dnivnig” (Rus. “dnevnik”, [dnʲivˈnik]; Eng. “diary”), the weak sound [k] is replaced with the strong [g]; “zaycheg” (Rus. “zaychik”, [ˈzajchʲick]; Eng. “tiny bunny”), the weak sound [k] is replaced with strong [g]; “zokhavat”<sup>4</sup> (Rus. “zakhavat”, [zaˈhavatʲ]; Eng. “to eat”), the weak sound [a] is replaced with the strong [o]; “zafro” (Rus. “zavtra”, [ˈzaftra]; Eng. “tomorrow”), the weak sound [a] is replaced with the strong [o]; “ketaitsy” (Rus. “kitaitsy”, [kʲiˈtajtsy]; Eng. “Chinese”), the weak sound [i] is replaced with strong [e]. Then, if we move to short sentences, we see the same happening in: “Uchi Olbanskey” (Rus. “Uchi Olbankiy”; Eng. “Learn “Albanian”), “Zokhavaite svai kamenty, ketaitsy” (Rus. “zakhavaite svoi kommenty, kitaitsy”; Eng. “eat (delete) your comments, Chinese”).

3. *Transliteration of foreign words.* It is not a secret that the creation of Padonkaff language was dictated by a surge in virtual communication through the spread of social networks. Albanian, like most languages, is replete with borrowed words, even more than the usual, having developed in the already linguistically multifaceted environment of the Internet. The fascination for foreign words defined transliteration as one of the most common features of Albanian phrase-formation. Transliteration, in contrast to borrowing, is a far simpler process. It does not take any special effort for the speaker except to reassemble the same word with corresponding letters from a different alphabet. For example, the phrase “v gazwagen!” (“to delete/to destroy”) originates from the German word “Gaswagen”; “v memories!” (“add to favorites”), from the English “memories”; “v gazwagen ego kommenty” means “Delete his comments!”; “affiget’ kinu v memories” is translatable as “My Gosh, I add it to favorites!”

4. *Acronyms.* Acronyms are an efficient method of abbreviation in writing, formed by shortening two or more words highlighting only their first letters. They are often found in everyday life and the Albanian language is no exception. Some, as FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) or NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration), are so well known that they’re rarely mentioned in their full form. In Albanian we find, for example, that the phrase “podpisyvayus' pod kazhdym slovom” (Eng. “I agree with every word”) is so frequent that is normally used in acronymic form to save time when typing: “PPKS.” The same happens in all phrases consisting of modified Albanian words and phrases borrowed from English: “APVS” (Rus. “A pachimu vi spgashivaete”; Eng. “Why do you ask?”); “IMKHO (ИМХО)”, a transliteration of the English “IMHO” (“In My Humble Opinion”); “ROFL (РОФЛ)”, meaning “rolling on the floor laughing”; “faku”, for FAQ (“Frequently Asked Questions”). As example of acronyms used in full sentences, we can mention: “APVS, vi antisemit?” (Eng. “Why do you ask? Are you an anti-Semite?”), and “Ftopku afftora IMKHO” (Rus. “v topku avtora, IMKHO”; Eng. “IMHO, the author is good for nothing”).

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<sup>4</sup> The [kh] symbol commonly represents the voiceless velar fricative [x]. It is similar to the English sound [h], but they are not the same, so it is customary to transliterate this sound as [kh], not [h]. However, in the transcription it will be designated as [h], since there is no symbol “kh” in the English transcription.



5. *Merged spelling of phrases.* In the vast majority of orthographies it would be considered an error if one does not insert spaces between different words, phrases and expressions. But in a subversive language like Olbanian this rule is also turned upside down. The motivation for this type of distortion is not entirely clear, presumably it is done in order to strengthen the emotional flow of a person originally wanted to express. Examples of this phenomenon can be found in constructions such as: “niachyom” (Eng. “about nothing”), “niponil” (Eng. “I didn’t understand that”), “rzhunimagu” (Eng. “I laugh a lot”). Initially, these blocks looked like: “ni o chyom”, “ne ponyal,” and “rzhun, ne mogu.” However, their forms probably retained a feeling of serosity and formality considered inadequate for communication over social networks. As a consequence, they started to be expressed as a single linguistic block. When used in full sentences, they look like this: “Afftar, vypej yadu, kament niach’yom” (Rus. “Avtor, vypej yadu, kommentarij ni o chyom”; Eng. “Author, drink poison, your comment is about nothing”); “Kortinki v khukhle rzhunimagu” (Rus. “Kartinki v Google ochen’ smeshnye”; Eng. “The pictures in Google are really funny”).

6. *Reversed transliteration.* This is another highly unusual feature that became specific in the word formation of Olbanian language. A person who for the first time sees phrases formed by this scheme might even think that their interlocutor forgot to switch the keyboard layout. Of course, that user has no understanding of Padonkaff language and why such words appear as a meaningless bunch of letters. However, if we understand this feature, we can learn to track the patterns of the Olbanian word formation. Let us examine several examples: “З. ЫЛ.” (“Z. Y.”) stands for “P. S.” (“postcriprum”) written on the Russian keyboard layout; “GGW” stands for “ПППЦ” (“PPTS”, Rus. “pipets”; Eng. “bloody hell/screwed”) written on the English keyboard layout. “ЛЫТДЫБР” (“lytdybr”; Eng. “diary”) is the Russian word “dnevnik” written using the English keyboard layout and transliterated into Russian, just as in “ГХБДТН” (“ghbdtn”, Rus. “privet”; Eng. “Hi”). Complete phrases will look like those: “Z.Y. Afftor, lytdybr zachot” (Eng. “P.S. hey, author, your diary is cool”); “Ghbdtn, tusafsh’eg” (Eng. “Hi, partymaker”).

7. *Transformation of verbs with reflexive suffixes.* According to Russian language rules, reflexive verbs have the suffix “-ся /-sya” (a shorten form of “sebya”, “myself”). Verbs such as “vytirat’sya” (Eng. “wipe oneself”), “umyvatsya” (Eng. “wash your face”), “odevat’sya” (Eng. “put your clothes on”) are just some examples. There is a specific transformation tendency of these verbs in Olbanian language. The suffix “-sya” turns to “-so”. Therefore Olbanian analogues of the above-mentioned verbs in Past tense will look like “vytiralso”, “umyvalso”, “odevalso.” Infinitive forms are subject to change as well, but suffix and other parts of the morpheme are modified, for example by doubling the letters of the suffix. That’s exactly the case in “smeyatstso” (Eng. “to laugh”), and “rugatstso” (Eng. “to swear”). Reflective sentence construction remains unchanged: “Smiyalso vsem ofisom” (Rus. “Smeyalis’ vsem ofisom”; Eng. “The whole office laughed”); “Kartinki ne gruzyatstso” (Rus. “Kartinki ne gruzyatsya”; Eng. “Pictures are not loading”).

8. *Word formation and emotional expression.* For sharing emotions and feelings, the human being has many methods at its disposal: facial expressions, gestures,



voice tone modulations, etc. However, in messenger boards and chat it is impossible to convey the emotional palette in its full extension. Is precisely to make up for this shortcoming that a language born and spread mostly in a written and digital form values the emotional component of a message. Therefore Albanian is rich of interjections: “bugoga” (“bugaga”, “bugogi”, “bukake”), Eng. “bwa-ha-ha”, an expression of animalistic, crass laughter; “gy”, an expression of surprise; “ggg” (“gy-gy-gy”), that means “approving chuckling”; “y” (“yyy”<sup>5</sup>, “khy”) is a laughter with a smirk; “dyk” (“dyk”, “dek”, “dak”) indicates that speaker is fully confidence of its rightness; “y”yoy!” is an exclamation used in a moment of clarity (an analogue of expressions such as “Got it!”, or “Eureka!”); “Bugogy, fupazor!” (Rus. “Ha-ha-ha, fu, pozor!”; Eng. “Ha-ha-ha, ew, this is a shame!”); “Dyk, on dyrchatyj!” (Rus. “Tak on zhe dyrchatyj!”; Eng. “It is clear that he is homosexual!”).

9. *Misspelling of foreign words.* Almost all of the Albanian words are misspelled deliberately and this, as we have already seen, is a key feature of the language. However, not only the original Russian words, but also foreign words are subjected to distortion. For instance, “tru”<sup>7</sup> (Rus. “pravda”) is formed from the English word “true”. The transmission of the word with letters of another language, unlike transliteration, is inaccurate because the word has the letter “ъ” (’’) at the end. One of the reasons for this letter’s appearance is the absence of the sound “e” at the end of the word “true.” The word “khukhl” formed from English “Google”, is quite interesting too. The Russian transliteration is “gugl”, but sometimes the letter “g” stands for the sound [h] (as in: “lyokgij”, [l’ohkij]; Eng. “easy/lightweight”; “Bog”, [boh]; Eng. “God”). In the Albanian method of misspelling, the letter “g” is replaced with “h”: “Chuvag, ty ni khunderstandish” (Rus. “Chuvak, ty ne ponimayesh”; Eng. “Man, you do not understand”), “Khukhl’ vynis mnu moskh” (Rus. “Gugl vynes mne mozg”; Eng. “Google blew my mind”).

10. *Tendency to force the use of “й”<sup>8</sup> and “ъ”.* The two letters “й” and “ъ” are rarely used in general, and never used at the beginning of words, but Albanian demands an inversion of this custom. The letter “й” (“j”) is actively used in order to intentionally misspell words starting with the letter “я”, which results in the combination of two sounds: [ja], and [ja] (their transliteration is the same), when it comes at the beginning of a word, after a vowel or after the letters “й” and “ъ”. These Albanian words take a following forms: “йа”<sup>9</sup> (“ja”; Eng. “I/me”), “йад” (“jad”; Eng. “poison”, “vypej jadu”, “drink some poison”), “йух” (“juh”, Rus. “jug”; Eng. “south”), etc. Speaking about the letter “ъ”, it is important to remember the Russian spelling rule which was in place during the pre-revolutionary period. At that time “ъ” was written at the end of every word ending

<sup>5</sup> In Russian this phrase looks like “быбы,” the vowel is very prolonged.

<sup>6</sup> “Dyrchatyj” is a derogatory term for an homosexual person, born from the word “dyrka” (Eng. “a hole”).

<sup>7</sup> “ъ” in Russian is not a sound but a sign, used to separate a consonant and a vowel (example: “podezd”, [pod’ezd]; Eng. “entrance”). Hereinafter “ъ” is designated with [’].

<sup>8</sup> “й” is a sign for a combination of two sounds: [j+ short “i”]. In transliteration and transcription it is customary to designate it with “j”.

<sup>9</sup> It is impossible to show the difference between Russian “я” and “йа” because both their correct and distorted variant is designated as [j’a] in transcription and “ja” in transliteration.



with a consonant. Since there is no equivalent to this in Latin lettering, this would amount to: “kakъ”, “telefonъ”, “Sankt”-Peterburgъ” (Eng. respectively for “how”, “phone”, and “St. Petersburg”). In Albanian it happens in the same way: “plakalъ”, “rydalъ” (Eng. “cried”, “wept”). This, however, is not to say that “padonkaff” speakers try to return to the spelling traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia. This way of word formation is only a parody that uses the comical and out-of-place character of outdated rules to attract the attention of the network audience: “Yaplakalъ” (Rus. “Ya plakal”; Eng. “I was crying”), “On zhosko rydalъ” (Rus. “On gor’ko rydal”; Eng. “He was bawling his eyes out”).

11. *Associative method in forming the names of the months.* It is worth mentioning that some of the months have been given names based on the Albanian speakers’ attitude and associations to that particular period of the year. For instance, “bukhar” (Rus. “yanvar”; Eng. “January”) is formed from the verb “bukhat” (Eng. “to drink”), because New Year is celebrated in Russia during January and the festival is accompanied with large quantities of alcohol; “morozen” (Rus. “fevral”; Eng. “February”) is formed from the verb “morozit” (Eng. “to freeze”); “mard” (a misspell of Rus. “mart”; Eng. “March”); “aperel” (another misspell, of Rus. “aprel”; Eng. “April”). As we can see, these words are formed in ways already familiar to us, by the replacement of a sound with the pairing one and by the addition of another letter.

## SEMANTIC MEANING OF ALBANIAN WORDS AND PHRASES

Patterns in the formation of linguistic units, one of the most important aspects of a research, were analyzed in detail, and the main points were covered above. But equally important is the lexical side of a language, which is responsible for the meaning and the subjective content of expressions and concepts. If it was initially assumed that the author independently distorts words when writing, then later a number of standard patterns accumulated, which are quite popular and easy to use. Speaking about Padonkaff, it is noteworthy that its main purpose, as a language born out and for internet communication, is to fully express users’ emotions and feelings, and that is why the main lexical criterion for every Albanian word is the particular emotion that one wants to convey. Depending on the mood and feelings of the speaker, few categories of the semantic meaning of Albanian words could be highlighted.

1. *Approval of a statement or of a particular user.* As a rule, Albanian speakers prefer the use of uncommon phrases when expressing their approval. The usual expressions “Good job!”, “Well done!”, “Very well!”, or even their misspelled versions are deliberately avoided. Most often they prefer borrowings or phrases built on vivid associations.

The highest degree of approval is “respect”: “respect”, “rispekt”, “rispegd” (Rus. “uvazheniye”; Eng. “respect”); “peretstsa” (Rus. “peret’sya”; Eng. “to enjoy”, “to admire”); “plyus adyn”, “+1” (Rus. “plyus odin”; Eng. “plus one”) expresses that the speaker is joining an already formed circle of approval (as in the case of a “like” button); “Afftar, peshy ischo!” (Rus. “Avtor, pishi yeshcho!”; Eng. “Author, write more!”) is a positive assessment of a post, an acknowledgement of author’s abilities and an invite to do more; “nra”, “nraitsa” (Rus. “nraivitsya”) just means to like something; “kriatiff” (Rus.





“kreativ”; Eng. “creativity”) is an acknowledgement of the author’s ingenuity. Also, there is “Eta pyat” (Rus. “Eto ,pyat”; Eng. “It is a ,five”) where 5 is the highest mark in the Russian education system, so this expression means the same as the Eng. “10 out of 10.” “Ftemu” (Rus. “v temy”; Eng. “on topic”) indicates that the author’s statement is relevant, and deserves approval; also “Affiget’, dayte dve (AD2)” (Rus. “Ofiget’, dayte dve”; Eng. “OMG, give me two of them”). “Vesch’!” (Rus. “veshch”; Eng. “It is a good thing!”) is used in the Russian language to mark that a product is of high quality; “zhosko” (Rus. “zhostko”; Eng. “harsh”), means “impressive”; “zhiznenna” (Rus. “zhiznenno”; Eng. “relatable”) designates something that is close to a real state of things and deserves approval; “zachotnyj” (Rus. “zachyotnyj”; Eng. “outstanding”) is simply “excellent”, or “valid.”

A specific type of endorsement is to indicate that something is funny: “rzhunimagu” (Rus. “Rzhu, ne mogu”; Eng. “very funny”); “rofl” (from Eng. “Rolling On The Floor Laughing”); “plakal’”, “rydal’” (Rus. “plakal”, “rydal”; Eng. “I was crying from laughter”); “patstalom”, “patstulom” (Rus. “pod stolom”, “pod stulom”; Eng. “under the table”, “under the chair”) also means that out of laughter I fell to the floor, under the table; and, lastly, there is also the simple “lol” (from Eng. “Laughing Out Loud”).

2. *Criticism of an author and its work.* In Padonkaff language there are a lot of negative statements characterized by extreme sharpness, that can provoke arguments to start and even to escalate into serious conflicts between users.

For example, “Afftar, vypey yadu!” (Rus. “Avtor, vypey yadu!”; Eng. “Author, drink the poison!”) is self-explanatory; “bayanist” (Eng. “accordionist”) where “bayan” (Eng. “accordion”<sup>10</sup>) is a statement or a joke that lost its relevance because of overuse. “Nub” (from Eng. “newbie”; Rus. “novichok”) is a mockery pointing to the inexperience of someone. “Ubey sibya ap steny”, “ubey sibya cherepashkoy”, “ubey sibya ap bochku” (Rus. “ubey sebya ob steny”, “ubey sebya cherepashkoy”, “ubey sebya ob bochku”; Eng. “kill yourself on the wall”, “kill yourself with a turtle”, “kill yourself on a barrel”) are expressions of particular rancor. “F Babruysk, zhyvotnoye” (Rus. “V Bobruysk, zhyvotnoye”; Eng. “Go to Bobruysk<sup>11</sup>, animal”) is aimed to point out the author’s low intellectual abilities; “fluderast” (from Eng. “flood”; Rus. “zapolnit”) is the name given to someone who writes a lot of comments that repeat each other. “Ktulku s’yel tvoy moskh” (Rus. “Ktulku s’yel tvoy mozg”; Eng. “Cthulhu ate your brain”) ; “Ftopku!” (Rus. “v topku!”; Eng. “throw it in the stove!”) means “to eliminate”; “atststoy” or “atstoy” (Rus. “otstoy”; Eng. “sludge”) means that something is not funny, and hopelessly bad; “niach’om” (Rus. “ni o chom”; Eng. “nothing”) stands for “good for nothing”; “nizachot” (Rus. “ne zachot”; Eng. “fail”) has the same meaning as “niach’om” or “nismishno” (Rus. “ne smeshno”; Eng. “not funny”).

3. *Referencing somebody else.* In order to add creativity and draw the attention of other users, Albanian speakers often address their interlocutors not by their proper names or usernames, but by nicknames which could also be really offensive:

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<sup>10</sup> Bayan is a Russian traditional musical instrument similar to the accordion. The translation as “accordion” is used in order to facilitate the understanding.

<sup>11</sup> Bobruysk, the city in Belarus.



“afftar” (Rus. “avtor”; Eng. “author”) is a neutral one, it just means the author of the post or the comment, where “ventilyator” is the same as Eng. “fan.”

The ambiguity of the translation gives Albanian speakers an opportunity to choose deliberately wrong words as a mockery: “Jiday” (Eng. “Jedi”, Rus. “Jedi”) is used to be dismissive of Jews and police officers; “divais” (Eng. “device”) is in Russian a derogatory term used to insult a female person, and has the meaning as “tool/device”; “krosavcheg” (Rus. “krasavchik”; Eng. “handsome/pretty boy”) is sometimes used in an ironic sense; “odmen” (Eng. “admin”) is the administrator. “Petushneg” (Eng. “college student”) is used in Russian to mock persons indicating their extremely low intellectual abilities, originating from PTU (“professional'no-tekhnicheskoe uchilishche”) a vocational school for students who, according to a common stereotype, are not characterized by deep knowledge and wide erudition. “Tusafshcheg” (Rus. “tusofsh'ik”; Eng. “partymaker”) is a person who often spends time at parties and get-togethers; “Uchasneg” (Rus. “uchastnik”; Eng. “participant”) is a member of the Internet community; “ftykatel” (Rus. “vtykatel”; Eng. “forum reader”, is a reader of an online forum who “sticks” around and is spending a lot of time with it. And then there is “chuvag” (Rus. “chuvak”; Eng. “dude”).

4. *Surprise or misunderstanding.* As in any other language, surprise and misunderstanding occur unexpectedly, so people cannot find the right words and replace them with specific interjections. The same phenomenon is found in Albanian: “V rot mne nogi” (Eng. literally, “legs in my mouth”) which means: “I’m shocked”; “gee!”, (Eng. “omg”) is the translation for the acronym that stands for “oh my god”; “itit” is an old Russian expression of surprise, similar to “goddamn”; “yyp” (Eng. “Umm...”) is a interjection used in a moment of confusion.

## CONCLUSION

Initially, when an accessible Internet connection was something new, people visited websites and created accounts in social networks due to curiosity and desire to express themselves through comments, posts, or reviews. This is, in general, still the reason why we used Internet today. In this context, is interesting that most people used to prefer the Padonkaff language rather than traditional Russian. The spread of this style of writing and speech can also be explained by a fashion trend of the 2000s. The ease, simplicity in the expressions, the underlying sarcasm, and the rapid global spread certainly make Albanian phrases very popular.

The Padonkaff language, which became widely spoken in Runet at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is a sociocultural and linguistic phenomenon. Similarly, the Albanian language also did not go without a trace. Although few people use this language on a regular basis today, some words and expressions remain popular. Indeed, because slang words began to go beyond the Internet, these appear in spoken language, media, youth films and talk shows (Mahmutay, 2019). There are also books that depict this phenomenon. For example, in Victor Pelevin's novel "The Helmet of Horror" (2005), written in the form of an Internet chat, one of the characters speaks exclusively in the Albanian language.



The specificity of communication in the network has defined some features of the use of language as abbreviations or common typos. Nevertheless, there are distortions of language that deserve special consideration. English LOLspeak, German Vong-Sprache, Russian Albanian have their own developed system of rules, or anti-rules. It is worth mentioning that among the three listed items, Albanian was the first to appear. As early as the late 1990s, it was found that the most popular Albanian words could be already collected and categorized. So, in this work was proposed a classification of words and expressions of Albanian language, relative to the emotional and semantic component: approval of the statement or the user himself; respect, as extreme form of approval; appreciation of humor; criticism, harsh condemnation of the author and his work; appeals; surprise or misunderstanding.

The study also revealed linguistic features of word formation in Albanian language: doubling of letters, substitution of sound with its pair, transliteration of foreign words; abbreviations of well-established expressions, uniform writing of expressions, reverse transliteration, transformation of verbs with reflexive suffixes; formation of words by way of expression of emotions; intentional misspelling of foreign words; tendencies to introduce the letters “й” and “ь”, otherwise avoided.

We may have thought the Albanian language to be just a joke, sometimes even a distasteful one, the consequences of the widely discussed illiteracy of people who “changed books for the Internet,” but closer analysis has revealed that its structure is more complex than it might appear at first glance. In fact, only if we consider Albanian as well as other languages born directly from the Web, as a necessary form of expression related to their context of emergence, we will appreciate its expressive richness. As a variant and deformation of ordinary language, it not only meets the needs of Internet communication (speed, simplicity, effectiveness), but also constitutes a parody of it. So, like all distortions, it has a subversive potential, which is to challenge ordinary structures, exhibiting a disfigured and in some ways grotesque version of them.

Therefore, Albanian is not just a degraded way of writing online, or the sectarian and exclusive language of a community, but manages to be assessable in terms of a vehicle for creativity. A kind of creativity that is only made possible by those forms of interaction that have developed on the Internet. So, the Albanian also constitutes a privileged way to access the mechanisms, expressive and linguistic, internal to the wider Russian sphere of the Web.

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