"Netlect" in Albanian: The Social Network Variety

Rrahman Paçarizi

University of Pristina,
Kosovo

Abstract

Instant messaging, texting, or even Computer Mediated Communication are the terms used to refer to communication in social networks. These terms are not the most appropriate ones because the technology and platforms of this way of communication have evolved rapidly. Since this communication is widespread, there is a need to have a much more standardized communication in terms of the language variety used for it. Having in mind various principles of socio cognitive approach in terminology, the study aimed to build a new appropriate term in this regard. Having in mind all the circumstances and the scale of standardization of this way of communication, I think that the best term that fits it is "Netlect". This is done in order to include, using the same word, the name of the platform where this communication is being developed (net) and the paradigm for linguistic variety (lect), as in socio+lect, dia+lect etc. The case of Albanian and other languages goes in favour of this term because we are talking about "a language variety that never existed before", as Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore stated earlier in 1991.

Keywords: Netlect, Instant Messaging, Computer Mediated Communication, Language Variety, Texting, Vernacular, Slang, Terminology

1. Introduction: Why Netlect?

In his book titled "Txting the gr8 db8", David Crystal refers to what I had named the "language of messenger." Thus, this relates to the language based on instant communication through online internet platforms. The paper was published in 2008, which was the same time David Crystal had issued the first edition of the book where this form of communication was named "texting." While in his book titled "The Language of Internet", published in 2001, David Crystal dealt with texting on only two or three pages on "Glossary of Netspeak and Textspeak (2004)." He dealt with this issue again in a more detailed aspect, by just including some of the most common abbreviations used in online communication. Having in mind that this form of communication, being already a global communication, has evolved so fast, it can be hardly followed by scientific books. However, these books based on their nature are not as dynamic as technological developments. Linguists are used to follow and describe linguistic phenomena with their slow pace and, therefore, linguistic disciplines until now have felt comfortable in their slowness. This is caused by their pace of development of languages, especially based on the fact that their changes are imposed as slow pursuit.

However, since 2008, when David Crystal published his first book, certainly a very brave one on texting, or on the language of texting and instant communication language, a lot of things changed. With this book, he has surpassed even "The vocabulary of netspeak and textspeak", published only four years earlier. This was after the communication has evolved following the pace of technological developments. While messenger on MSN was fashionable in 2004, Facebook was

launched as a site for posting personal pictures, and it has experienced a remarkable development with speed. It has its own messenger, separately from MSN's messenger, which has offered less complementary features. Viber, on the other hand, created conditions for an extra development of language of the Internet. The global platform provided an opportunity almost equal to all languages. Subsequently, this of course entails leaving the highest prestige to English, not only as a language through which they were providing these products, but also as lingua franca.

In 2008, I named this form of communication as the "spoken language in written form" or "written vernacular." I believe that it continues to be so. Moreover, the change that this communication has undergone in these eight years consists of a high degree of standardization. This might turn out to be a variety of nationwide communication, which would result to a rival in the standard variety that aims at this spread. After then, it was established in a Kosovo vernacular, having all the capabilities of the spread, while the prestige belongs to the spoken vernacular of Pristina.

Consequently, the rate of the spread tends to reveal the social belonging through a linguistic "set-like", which also reveals the differences in the language as a tool for social group control. This leads this form of communication towards a level of a linguistic formation. While having a certain age, this linguistic formation has felt the need to contain certain rules. First of all, this can be in terms of graphic reflection of sounds of words. This tendency, being more social than linguistic in its essence, unintentionally has achieved a certain degree of grammaticality. Having all these features, this linguistic formation is a kind of sociolect. However, due to the extremely large spread (as the communication exceeds the borders of a city, even if that city has metropolitan tendencies), I named it net-lect, by using "net" for the network as a ground for assembling of that formation and "lect" as a paradigm for the linguistic variety, as it is the case with the words dialect, sociolect etc. Based on a socio-cognitive approach (Temmerman, 1997, 2000, 2001), the term gives a clear idea of linguistic formation with all the features, by not lying solely on the features of social belonging or differences.

Much earlier, the discourse used for instant messaging was named Interactive Written Discourse (IWD) by Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittemore (1991:26). IWD is a term coined by a designation of writing that is "a hybrid register that resembles speech and writing, yet is neither" (1991:10). Yet, the register we have tapped into is "a language variety that never existed before" (ibid.). So, it fully corresponds with what I called "spoken Language in written form", which has now emerged into a new linguistic formation or unit called "netlect", which essentially differs from social varieties, because this form of communication doesn't belong to specific social groups (as sociolects do) or specific geographical backgrounds (as dialects do).

What Crystal called "virtual communication" is such that, in fact, it is only by the way of its realization because the function is all the same. People in the past communicated in great distances. Nevertheless, without the possibility of instant communication, they had to wait for a long time for a response. For this reason, this type of communication continues to be a spoken language in written form. In its very beginning, online communication was seen more as a fun way to meet new people. Presently, this communication has replaced almost entirely the telephone communication, especially now when platforms providing instant written communication and which also have components of the voice communication, such as the phone are available. The world was initially concerned that instant messaging would destroy language. In his book titled "Texting db8 the gr8", Crystal (2008: 7) says: Some even think that texting was destroying language as a whole. "Written messages are destroying our language" was the title of an article in Washington in 2007, where the author says: "I knew this would happen. From the moment when a friend of mine sent me a message: "I've got 2 go, talk to U later," I knew that the end is near". However, Crystal, based on research and experimental results, does not agree with the point of view that assumes that the use of acronyms and jargon, such as those in the language of SMS, will lead to lower levels of literacy and wrong spelling among children.

Shkumbin Munishi, in his paper titled "The Albanian Language in the Internet" argues that "In chat rooms, in forms of communication through instant messaging in messenger and in the other forms of communication mediated by computer, Albanian emerges in all its geographical variants, but also in the form of social codes; some of which may be referred to special registers, such as

communication with the messenger." This leads to the justification for the netlect as a specific code, towards the launching of a netlect as a specific and variety of Albanian language, which is not a dialect as we used to define it. However, due to the lack of isoglosses, it has no geographical component and is not a genuine sociolect. In addition, it is used more by different social groups for the purpose of inclusion rather than differentiation.

2. Style

Was Crystal right, or was he too liberal in his views towards online language? If one communicates with the new age, up to 25 years or even older, that are badly addicted to the internet or social networks, you can see a high degree of grammaticality and the use of almost all paralinguistic and linguistic tools during communication. Pausality, verbal, and nonverbal gap fillers in communication have been simplified to "hmmm", the feeling of doubt that in ordinary communication is expressed on a lifting arm raised eyebrows and other gestures. Here, they are expressed by "aha", while amazement and disbelief with "ahaa". Compliance is expressed with "OK". Hence, we will say to our interlocutor that we understand him/her by writing "op" (po-yes). Abbreviations are not a matter of fashion, but of the linguistic economy: Thank you is "flm (faleminderit)." Even though "m" does not give the idea of "nder/honor", "s'ka përse/you are welcome" as a response is written as "sps". Furthermore, "Ç'kemi" is a kind of a code to start the conversation as quasi-communication, while the real question that follows is "c(q)a ka 3" - wazzup, "tung (tungjatjeta)/ hello", "ntm"/good night, "ishmi"-CU etc. These questions are used to indicate the end of the conversation. Without these elements, the communication is considered incomplete. On the other hand, the etiquette and ethics are unfulfilled. These are the basic elements where one cannot see elements of social differentiations.

In an effort to follow the dynamics of fast communication, instant communication seems to be holophrastic. Here, a single phrase serves to establish the basic idea.

The same situation regarding the style is present in English and other Languages as well. Furthermore, I think that Albanian followed the path established in English, especially regarding abbreviations, gap-filler word and the use of "emoji" to substitute the gesture and mimics.

3. Phonetics

The differences appear in graphic realization of speech sounds, which are inclined towards extreme labialization of vowel "a". Osht, o- asht (is), jom -jam (I am), u kon - u kan (he/she was), koma - kamba (foot), dhomi -dhambi (teeth) etc. show only a few cases of this reflection. If someone writes "kam qenë (I have been)", he is not part of netlect. Therefore, youngsters will warn you. If one writes, in Standard Albanian, "kam qenë" or "kam ngrënë (I eat)" or even "kam hangër/ (mos common dialectic form)", in the attitude of netlect users, he/she is "bal" (redneck). The "right" form is "kom honger", which fully reflects the spoken form of labialization a>o. Netlect users understand when one writes "lol", "brb", "cu" etc. Certainly everyone knows what "td (ILY)" means, or "tdsh (ILYVM)" whose synonym is "t lovi". This, therefore, entails the combination of the English word "love" with the short form of pronoun "ty, të/ you". It is an erroneous perception that Kosovo's netlect is the reflection of the Slang of Pristina. Slang of Pristina continues its life even within the netlect for the same purpose as a spoken language. Therefore, it results to social differentiation.

Intonation and other elements are expressed through the extension of vowels and sometimes consonants "forttttt miiiiiir" (veryyyy goooood), "t'duuuuuuu (I loooove youuu)", "ikkkk" (gooooo)!

4. Grammaticality

That such communication is the netlect indeed has been proved by the high level of grammaticality. Its users make "mistakes" as much as speakers of a vernacular do. The netlect of Pristina is similar to the vernacular of Pristina. Nouns take the same inflectional suffixes as in spoken vernacular and even in slang: itaqi / i, e itaqit / itaqit / itaqin / pi, itaqit, as seen by Rugova. Verbs also have a regular use, to the extent that such use is regular in the vernacular, according to

Munishi, or more specifically in what Ismaili had called the Linguistic basin of Pristina (Pellgu gjuhësor i Prishtinës). The verb "flas (to speak)" is "unë foli/ ti fol/ ai fol/ne folim, ju folni/ata folin", while irregular verb "jap (to give)" remains irregular but in reverse order from the usual form of Standard Albanian. The present form is "dha" (ta dha, s'ta dha, with nasal vowel, but the nasality is not stressed in writing). The aorist is "jepa" (ia jepa ni liber), the imperfect is "dhasha (jepja)" (kur dhasha mësim n kursin e anglishtes), while the participle is "jep" (kom jep). This inversion in order has its sociolinguistic reasons. The fact that the vernacular of Prishtina is reflected in the netlect of Kosova (I speak of Kosovo, as the prevalence rate is incomparably greater, enabled by technology) demonstrates the use of short forms of pronouns. For example, instead of "jua" is used "jau". The form is used also for "ua", while the short form "i" is being used properly. In addition, "u" (for plural) is replaced almost entirely by "ju".

The syntax is completely regular and isn't expressed by any kind of differences.

5. Abbreviations

Abbreviations are not issue to netlect, specifically in the sense that they aren't differentiation features of this specific linguistic formation. Hence, they have achieved a standardization of use and they perform certain functions with a high degree of language consensus. Abbreviations are frequently used and they have achieved a high degree of consensus among the speakers of the netlect. In this code of communication, a huge number of abbreviations taken from English were used, while those in Albanian are built according to the same model as those of English. This does not represent the constituent elements of a composite or complex word, but, first of all, it relies in presenting the most representative consonants and sometimes those more marcant. For example, "faleminderit" (thank you) is shortened to "flm" instead of "fmn" or "fn". Instead of "nm" for "natën e mire" (good night), the regularly used form is "ntm".

6. Formations of Albanian

"1her" (një herë- once); "2shim" (dyshim-doubt); "3gom" (tregomë-tell me); "7zon" (shtatzënë - pregnant); "as1her" (asnjëherë - never); "cka ka 3"? (çka ka të re?- wazzup); "dtl" (ditëlindje - b-day); "e vër8" (e vërtetë-true); "fk" (fakultet-faculty); "fr" (frajeri-boyfriend); "gz" (gëzohem- i'm glad); "hjg" (hajgare - joking, kidding); "i 3nt" (i trent - crazy); "kl" (klasë - classroom); "kz" (kallëzomë - tell me); "nsr" (nesër - tomorrow); "ntm" (natën e mirë - good night); "pldh" (pa lidhje - it makes no sens); "prsh" (përshëndetje - greetings); "sps" (s'ka për se - you are welcome); "spv" (secili për vete - each for itself); "srz" (seriozisht - seriously); "t2" (të dy - both); "td" (të dua - I love you); "tdsh" (të dua shumë - I love you so much); "v@" (vet/ë - itself).

7. Formations of English in Use in Albanian

atm -at the moment; bf – boyfriend; brb – be right back; btw -by the way; gr8 – great; gf –girlfriend; msg – message; omg -oh my god; pls/plz – please; RIP- Rest in peace; thnx -thank you; wtf -what the fuck

8. Conclusion

Communication through social network is the fastest developed way of communication. Therefore, it represents the fastest developing linguistic variety. This outburst of social networking equipped with sophisticated platforms and features resulted to the need of its users to reach a certain degree of standardization of the linguistic variety used in this way of communication.

Although we cannot talk about specific social networks for specific languages, it is obvious that the behaviour of English as Lingua Franca is inevitable. Due to the origin of technology, specific Languages are being developed in a way that it is independent. Nevertheless, this is accompanied with certain degree of influence from English, especially when it comes to the use of abbreviations.

The degree of development is very huge, both as linguistic variety and in technology. Hence, the terms used to name this way of communication are getting older and older, every day and by each applications. Nowadays, we can talk about Computer Mediated Communication, when the most part of this communication is realized on smartphones and other equipment. Also, the large scale of the use of this kind of communication resulted in a need to flatten regional differences. It created the conditions to have much more standardized use of grammar and reflection of graphemes for specific phonemes. It led towards larger scale of standardization in style as well. So, we have to agree that it is spoken language in written form, as Ferrara, Brunner and Whitremore characterized it "a hybrid register that resembles speech and writing, yet is neither." They further added that this is a Language variety that has never existed before. If it is a Language variety and has such well-established features which are still being developed, we can talk about a Netlect, which is a specific Linguistic variety ("lect"), realized in specific online platform (net).

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