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# *Acquisition of Albanian as a first language from the perspective of natural order hypothesis*

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## **Abstract**

This study deals with the natural order hypothesis in language acquisition, which posits that there is an order in which grammatical morphemes are acquired in the first, but also second language acquisition. There have been numerous studies addressing the order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes for major international languages, but there have been no such studies for Albanian language. A study of the natural order could serve to improve acquisition of Albanian as mother tongue, to enhance language curricula in schools, and to facilitate learning of Albanian as a second language. This research involved over 100 junior researchers in a cross-sectional research observing more than 200 children in the age of 0 to 11 years, organised in four age-groups, over a period of two weeks. The observation collected naturalist non-experimental data to find out whether there is a natural order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes and structures in Albanian as a first language. The existence of an order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes by difficulty level was

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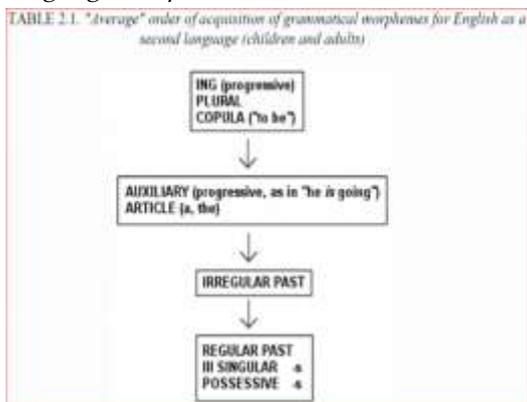
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clearly established. An unplanned finding of the study was the significant role of dialect and vernacular in the process of acquisition of Albanian as a first language. At the same time, it was difficult to clearly ascertain the role of school and environment in acquiring standard Albanian.

**Keywords:** *Natural order, language acquisition, grammatical morphemes, dialect.*

The natural order hypothesis was initially formulated by Brown (1973), who reported that three children observed during a nine-year longitudinal study, acquiring English language as their mother tongue, acquired some grammatical morphemes or function words earlier than others. For instance, the present continuous/*ing*/ morpheme (as in "he is playing baseball") and the plural marker/*s*/ (as in "*two dogs*") were among the first acquired morphemes, unlike the singular marker /*s*/ (as in "*He lives in New York*") and the/*s*/ marker for possession (as in "*John's hat*") that were acquired between six months to one year later (Krashen, 2009). A number of studies that will be discussed in the theory section below have resulted in a general chronological ranking of grammatical morphemes and functions corresponding to an order of acquisition respective to the learner's age.

*Table 1: Krashen's list on order of acquisition of English as a second language morphemes.*



The current study is based on the literature available on the natural order hypothesis and on an empirical research carried out by AAB bachelor students. There have been numerous studies on natural order of language acquisition on the main world languages, whereas the current study is the first of its kind on Albanian as mother tongue.

Compared to scope of research refereed in the literature review section, this study has a more comprehensive and more thematically varied scope since it looks into the evolution of forming questions, negations, sentences, the use and acquisition of verb tenses, and other parts of speech (adjectives, adverbs, pronouns) and so on. During the research process it became apparent that there is a need to also address the relations between the standard Albanian and dialects/various regional speeches in Kosovo, since they proved to be a critical element in the process of acquisition of Albanian as mother tongue.

Age of the observed children served as independent variables (the first column in the table below), with dependent variables taking the form of various grammatical morphemes, questions, negations, making of sentences, use of adjectives,

adverbs, and so on (the upper row), as well as various dimensions such as learning by imitation, generalization, and transitional forms, presented in the bottom row in the table below.

*Table 2: The variables used during the empirical research*

Aspect Age	Questio ns	Negation s	Tense s	Sentenc es	Othe r form s	Dialect/spee ch
1-2 years						
3-4 years						
5-7 years						
8-11 year						
Depend · variabl es	First occurrence	Transitional forms	Imitation generalisatio n	Individual differences Cognitive development		

This research has its limitations, as it is the first of its kind in Kosovo, implemented by a team with limited qualifications in applied linguistics, and the empirical research carried out by junior students. These limitations can be overcome in future studies by applying standardised instruments for observing and measuring the level of language acquisition, involving a larger number of respondents and, in particular, by ensuring more focused observation of age-groups.

The main goal of this research was to look into the order of acquisition of various grammatical morphemes, structures and functions of Albanian as a mother tongue among children, as manifested in their everyday communication and interaction with their environment and, whenever feasible, to compare this

order of acquisition with the respective order in English as a first language.

**Objectives:** The goal was achieved by identifying the first occurrences of the selected linguistic forms and functions. The research also looked into the various learning processes (imitation - generalization), the extent to which cognitive development is reflected in the language used by children (for example understanding of the concept of time and its reflection in the tenses used); assessment of the influence of dialect and regional speeches in language acquisition; finally, the influence of individual learner characteristics on the order of acquisitions was also tackled.

**Research questions:** The research on natural order of acquisition of Albanian as a first language was built on the following guiding questions:

What is the order of acquisition of grammatical and syntactical forms and functions during the acquisition of Albanian as a first language?

What is the timeline and dynamics of acquisition of identical morphemes in Albanian and English languages?

What is the role of dialect/regional speeches and their relation with the standard Albanian language in the process of acquisition of Albanian as a first language in Kosovo?

What is the role of school towards the application of dialect during the acquisition of Albanian as a first language?

**Hypothesis:** The basic premise was the null hypothesis that there is not a set order of acquisition of various linguistic forms and functions of Albanian as a first language.

**Relevance:**

- Through this study, Albanian joins the group of languages that have been studied regarding the presence of a natural order of acquisition of the first language.

- The identified order of acquisition of Albanian language can inform curriculum developers and authors of school text-books about a natural modality of acquisition of grammatical morphemes (forms, functions and structures);
- The collected data may serve as a primary source to other scholars who will engage in studying this important field.

Outline: This paper outlines basic theories and concepts that served as a theoretical frame for data collection and analysis on the selected topic. Next, the research methodology is presented, followed by the findings from the empirical research. The article closes with a brief outline of the conclusions and suggestions for further research that could also include Albania and regions in Macedonia where Albanian is spoken.

### *The theoretical framework*

Natural order hypothesis: After Brown, who was briefly discussed in the introduction of this article, it was de Villiers and de Villiers (1978) who confirmed findings of Brown's longitudinal research after they presented results of their cross-sectional research on acquisition of English as a first language. There "They confirmed Brown's longitudinal results cross-sectionally, showing that items that Brown found to be acquired earliest in time were also the ones that children tended to get right more often. In other words, for those morphemes studied, the difficulty order was similar to the acquisition order" (Krashen, 2009, p. 12).

Consequently, it is logical to expect that there is an order according to which children acquire structures, morphemes and linguistic functions in their mother tongue. At the same time, a

number of scholars (Krashen, 2009; Dulay and Burt, 1974, 1975; Kessler, 1977) have studied the order of acquisition of English as a second language, finding numerous similarities in the order of acquisition between the first language, which is the object addressed by this article, and the second language.

They claim that notwithstanding dissimilarities in the process of acquisition, it is still possible to discern a natural order of acquisition with the second languages, too. Other scholars have expressed reservations regarding the natural order hypothesis for second languages, pointing out to the glitches of comparing first and second language acquisition processes, most notably since the second language normally follows the first language significantly later – with the exception of bilingual children. Among critiques to Krashen's natural order theory Fry states that "Larsen - Freeman and Long in their criticism add that there is no explanation offered of the morpheme orders." (Fry, 2018). In general, key criticism against the natural order hypothesis is based on the fact that morphemes refer to language production, whereas Krashen's theories are mainly connected to language competence and acquisition. Nevertheless, there seems to be agreement across the board among scholars on the existence of a natural order when referring to acquisition of first languages, and can therefore serve as a theoretical basis for our study.

Learning difficulty: Closely related to the natural order hypothesis of languages is the concept of learning difficulty. DeKeyser (2003) distinguishes between objective and subjective difficulties. He states that objective difficulty deals with the difficulties inherent with a number of grammatical forms." Based on different grammatical theories, some grammatical forms will be easier to acquire, whereas others will be more difficult. For illustration, it is to be expected that complex tenses containing auxiliary verbs will be more difficult to learn than

simple tenses. On the other hand, subjective difficulty has to do with actual difficulties that are experienced by language learners. For the purpose of this study, the concept of objective difficulty is more relevant since it appears to be closer to the concept of natural order hypothesis.

The processability theory is a relevant theory which, according to Pienemann (2005) “presupposes that means of processability will be acquired according to an order of actualisation in the process of reproduction” (p 13). Even though the processability theory is primarily a theory of linguistic production and not of language acquisition, it still finds application in better understanding and explaining also the processes language acquisition. Consequently, the gradual acquisition of languages according to a set order is applied also in our case of acquisition of Albanian as a first language: from simple and easier forms towards more complex forms or from words (through phrases and simple sentences) to compound and complex sentences. On this, Pienemann (2008) states that: “original version of PT is that language development is constrained by processability. This affects first and second language development (albeit in different ways). It also affects interlanguage variation and L1 transfer.” (p. 13). Put in other words, gradual processability, or acquisition of structures according to a hierarchic order (read natural order), also applies in cases of acquisition of first languages. This means that failing to acquire a lower order procedure (for instance step 3 below) will render it impossible to acquire a procedure of higher order and, consequently, makes it impossible for the learner to acquire grammatical features that depend on them (Ellis, 2009, p. 146).

This hierarchy of acquisition – processability according to Pienemann (taken from Ellis, 2009, p. 146) - is structured as follows:

1. Word/lema

2. category procedure (lexical category)
3. phrasal procedure (head)
4. S-procedure and the word order rule
5. matrix/subordinate clause.

Further in this article, we will witness an order of acquisition, more or less, similar to the processability steps above.

Types of languages and natural order: Studies on the natural order of acquisition of L1 were initially carried on English language. Due to the analytic nature of English language, the identified order of acquisition was viewed as a simplified and measurable order of acquisition of a number of morphemes. Namely, Brown established that from among the English basic morphemes, the *-ing* denoting continuous present tense was the first to be acquired. Similarly to *-ing*, the third person and genitive case ending *-s*, and past simple *-ed*, and other analytic morphemes have unchanged forms for all respective aspects and tenses. As a result, the entire theory of natural order of acquisition was viewed from this simplified perspective and the expectation was created that it is possible and relatively straightforward to measure the natural order of acquisition also for other languages, synthetic ones, such as Albanian, included.

However, as it became apparent in the early stages of the current study, reference to acquisition of English morphemes (as L1) did not suffice to address acquisition of Albanian as a first language. The complexity of the case ending system in Albanian language rendered any such exercise significantly different and in many ways more complex. Formal marking of number, person, case and definiteness in the same word (such as *të miat* – Eng. *mine*) is far more complex than, for instance, working to identify the first occurrence of the English possessive pronoun *mine*, wherein various aspects mentioned

above are expressed through analytic mechanisms. For illustration the plural form (*they* or *these are mine*).

This because English and Albanian vary significantly by their very nature. Both these languages apply analytic and synthetic mechanisms for expression of various grammatical meanings. However, despite the presence of both mechanisms, in Albanian language the synthetic element is dominating, whereas English language is predominantly analytic.

Numerous Albanian and international authors (Demiraj, 1988a, 1988b; Pedersen, 1894; Meyer, 1883; Ismajli, 2003; Bokshi, 1980), have studied and ascertained presence of both elements in Albanian language; they witness a dominating presence of synthetic mechanisms, albeit parallel with a minor presence of the analytic ones. In the Albanian Language Grammar of the Albanian Academy of Sciences we learn that "Grammatical forms of Albanian language are both analytic and synthetic" (Akademia e Shkencave e Shqipërisë, 2002). Further in the same text the various forms are described, but without stating which of the forms are dominating in Albanian language. Among the synthetic forms authors describe a number of inflections (*mal-i*, *hap-a*, *hap-ëm*, *mir-i*)<sup>i</sup> that are added to the main parts of speech, a number of word-forming suffixes (*shokë*, *male*, *burra* etc.) and phonetic changes. Among analytic forms are included the forms established with auxiliary verbs (*kam* – have and *jam* – be), with word-forming particles (*të punoja* – to work, *pa punuar* – without work, *për të punuar* – to work and so on), and articles presented analytically similar to prepositions in English (*i/e nxënësit* – of the student) and so on. Shaban Demiraj (1988b), tells that during its historical evolution, Albanian language developed synthetic-analytic elements, whereas English language developed analytic – synthetic ones. In his Historical Grammar of Albanian, but also in his other publications, is pointed out that:

The evolution of structural words made for some of them to ... turn into entities forming categories, and as a result the grammatical structure of languages transformed from a synthetic type, ... into a synthetic-analytic type (as was the case with Latin, Greek, Albanian, Slavic languages etc.), or analytic–synthetic (as was the case with English, western roman languages, etc.). (Demiraj, 1998b, p. 31).

Demiraj continues presenting dominating synthetic elements found in Albanian language that express mood, inflection, verb tenses, definiteness, word order (more rigid or more flexible) in a sentence (Demiraj, 1988a). Another author, Besim Bokshi (1980), in a publication on nominal inflections, also confirms the dominating synthetic features of Albanian language by studying and presenting morphological and phrasal aspects of nominal flexion.

As briefly discussed above, whereas Albanian language is characterised by a dominating synthetic element, English language features prevailing analytic means:

Most of grammatical categories which could be formed synthetically, can also be expressed by analytic means (such as comparison of adjectives, or genitive case); others can be formed through periphrastic means or by using functional words (as is the case with numerous tenses and aspects), or ceased to be expressed (as for instance, grammatical gender). Due to the limited number of case endings, the modern English language is considered an analytic language (Dorgeloh, 2009).

Role of dialect: Dialect and vernacular appeared to be important aspects that had to be taken in consideration during the study of acquisition of Albanian as a first language.

Consequently, the dialect shed new light on the role of family and school in the process of language acquisition. In the Grammar of Contemporary English we learn that regional variations appear to take place mainly in phonology. Put in other words, we commonly discern various dialect based on their pronunciation and accent before realizing that it is also their vocabulary that varies. Grammatical variations are less frequent and therefore less conspicuous (Quirk, 1992). During this research, however, a large number of grammatical variations were encountered (such as *shkojna*, *shkojmi*, *shkojim*, *shkojmë*)<sup>ii</sup> partly contradicting the above statement. In the same book (Quirk, 1992) authors note “a significant polarisation between the speeches of the uneducated persons and the educated ones in a way that the first are identified with a regional dialect, whereas the latter avoid the regional dialect using a form beyond dialect borders.” (p.19). As will be seen later, schooling and teacher support does not appear to have a significant impact in the use of standard Albanian language by children even after several years of schooling.

Rexhep Ismajli (2003), discussing the relation between popular and standard Albanian, refers to them as ‘standard’ and ‘organic’ variations pointing out that the ‘organic’ variety is the mother tongue, that is the first variety which is acquired through imitation. This is a socially homogenous and isolated variety, with well-defined physiognomy, spoken by people in a given geographic area, a milieu, and therefore presented as a dialect - a vernacular. Further, the author points out that that standard variety is connected mainly to the written language and that *The standard is more autonomous, normed, polyvalent, ... and psychologically non-spontaneous, controlled, and acquired through schooling*. This fragment refers to a number of aspects under the current study, but two are more relevant: (i) the organic variety is acquired through imitation and (ii) the

standard is acquired through schooling. These two theses have been tested through the research in order to find out about the role of family and environment on one side, and that of schooling on the other, in acquiring Albanian as a first language. Further the author presents another important thesis on the role of addressing popular and standard variety of Albanian language in teaching and learning in schools. Ismajli (2003, p. 170) thinks that the popular variety can serve to improve the development of verbal expression and communication skills, whereas the standard variety could serve to explain the language norm to students. However, he insists that these should be applied through an integrated approach in teaching. The research has addressed this segment of teaching by looking at the verbal production of the observed children.

Transitional forms: An important aspect for acquiring the first language is the so called concept of transitional forms. In this context, Stephen Krashen (2009) tells about the distinction between fully acquired forms and morphemes and those partially acquired. The latter take on transitional or developing usages reflected in mispronunciation and errors (p.12). As the current study found, this is a common phenomenon for Albanian language, too. For illustration, *mami më /fa/* (in stead of /*më tha/*)<sup>iii</sup>, *Dea nuk don me ku<sup>iv</sup>* - (use of third person singular and mispronunciation of the word *shkuar*); *butujose* (*bukuroshe*), *tutël* (*kukull*)<sup>v</sup> and so on. These transitional forms are of great interest, since a number of them, instead of transforming into well-formed structures, with the passing of time get petrified and remain in use as final forms by children and even young persons.

### *Forming questions*

Similar to other grammatical categories, forming questions appears to follow the same pattern of natural order of

acquisition. Discussing creation of interrogative forms or questions, Lois Bloom (1991) states that “A regularity has been found in the way children learn to form questions in English language. In this context, one is dealing with a predictable order of presentation of question words. Usually 'What' is the first question word used by children. It is usually acquired as part of a whole entity ('whassis?') and some time will pass before the child understands that the produced form has different versions *What is this?* Or *What are these?* (Lightbown and Spada, 2013, p. 11). These findings were confirmed in another earlier study by Bloom et al, who state that “Children in this study learned to make questions with /wh/ question words in an identical development order so that *what*, *where*, and *who* were acquired before words *why*, *how*, and *when* (Bloom, 1982). In the current study, efforts were made to ascertain the order of first occurrence of question words and forming of questions in Albanian.

*Forming of negative sentences - negation:*

In “How languages are learned”, Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada (2013) state that as in the case of questions, expression of contradiction and forming of negative sentences requires a learning process that moves from simple forms through to more complex negative sentences (p. 9). Further, they provide an order for creating negative forms consisting of several stages starting from gesticulations expressing contradiction and using the word ‘no’ (*stages 1 and 2*), up to more complex negative sentences (with question tags in stage 6). The same as in English language, other studies have confirmed existence of an order of acquisition of negative forms in other languages as well (Wode, 1981). The current research has looked into the phenomenon of phased forming of negative forms in Albanian as a first language.

*Language acquisition through imitation and generalization:*

Imitation and generalization are important processes of acquisition of first language. Regarding imitation, Fraser (1963, p. 121) states that “*children’s imitation of grammatical constructs regularly surpassed their comprehension, which in turn was superior to their freely generated speech.*” This means that children commonly express more than they understand or verbalise in their purposeful speech. Namely, they can reiterate structures heard in their environment, but could not identify the same objects when shown to them in pictures (Fraser, 1963). Generalization, on the other hand, is a learning process that creates linguistic constructs building on material they pick up from everyday communication and interaction. Explaining the process of generalization, Adele Goldberg poses the following questions:

How do learners acquire generalizations such that they can produce an open-ended number of novel utterances based on a finite amount of input? Why are languages the way they are? ... These approaches emphasize that speakers’ knowledge of language consists of systematic collections of form-function pairings that are learned on the basis of the language they hear around them. (Goldberg, 2006).

The current research focused on the moment of transition from imitation to acquisition through generalization.

*Methodology:*

Empirical data were collected by 97 bachelor students, who conducted a survey of about 200 children by observing their (verbal and nonverbal) communication with other people in their environment. Observed children were divided into four

age groups: 0-2, 3-4, 5-7, and 7-11 years. This division is based on the important stages of cognitive development of the child, also corresponding to the cognitive development phases identified by the Piaget. The age group of 1-2 years represents initial forms of proper communication with the environment, the age of 3-4 years brings significant changes in the development of imagination and verbal communication, the age of 5-7 is related to the acquisition of reading and writing skills and socialization and more active interaction with other children, whether in nurseries or in pre-school institutions; the last phase (pre-operational) reflects a more complex phase of development and more intensive use of verbal and written communication. These four phases partly coincide with the cognitive development stages of Piaget (1959), with the age-group 11-16 years (formal operational stage) not included in this research. This stage is left aside on purpose as it does not bring about any significant development (from the perspective of natural order hypothesis), and also because it exceeded the research skills of our team of (junior bachelor) students of English.

The research was carried out by collecting naturalist linguistic materials (Creswell, 2012) that emerged from the communication of observed children with their environment. The observation was of a non-experimental naturalistic type (Frey, 1999) and was focused on forming and use of: questions, negative forms, verb tenses, sentences, and the use of other forms (adjectives, pronouns, and adverbs). The research workload was equally divided among the researchers: each student observed at least one to two children in one or two different age-groups focusing in at least two aspects (such as questions, or negatives, or verb tenses) over a period of two weeks. The observed children were the researchers' family or kin, or they were neighbours. Observations were carried out

only after formal approval by the child's parents. Whenever possible and with special permission, researchers also observed children in preschool institutions.

Apart from classical observation, the researchers engaged in keeping written notes on linguistic materials observed and provided audio and/or video evidence of their observations. At least half of the researchers (those engaged with children over 4 years of age) drafted simple sets of questions (based on guidelines given in the observation protocol).

Together with recording or taking notes of materials, researchers registered their most important observations in a table consisting of five columns, one for each of the observed aspects: questions, negations, verb tenses, forming of sentences and other forms respectively. Researchers observed and filled in the tables based on written instructions distributed prior to the research and practised in preparatory sessions with the lead researcher. Data on the sixth aspect (dialect and vernacular) were processed and analysed after all materials had been collected.

The collected naturalist data were then processed, coded and classified, according to age-groups and aspects observed, by thirteen junior researchers, those who proved most active during the process of data collection. Each of them were asked to process data on one (out of five) aspect and two (out of four) age groups. In more concrete terms, one student, for example, processed data on forming of questions for two age-groups. This made it possible for cross-checking since all data were processed by at least two different students. Apart from mere processing of data, this group of thirteen students also took note of their preliminary generalizations from the processed data.

Key difficulties encountered by the researchers involved observation of the youngest children, who kept silent or got

distracted every time a telephone/camera/or voice recorder was activated.<sup>vi</sup>

### ***Presentation and discussion of outcomes***

Findings of the research on natural order of acquisition of Albanian as a first language are presented below, structured according to key aspects (variables) and by age-group of observed children:

Aspects analysed (dependent variables):

- questions
- negatives
- sentences
- verb tenses
- use of various forms (adjectives, adverbs, pronouns) and
- influence of dialect and vernacular (included later on).

Age groups<sup>vii</sup> (independent variables):

- 1-2 years old
- 3-4 years old
- 5-7 years old
- 8-11 years old.

Aspect 1: Questions

#### ***Age 1-2:***

At this age, especially during the first year, we come across simple telegraphic questions formed with particle ('a') or with question words ('where' or more rarely 'why'), but which express a complete meaning. Questions are deficient in terms of syntax as they omit secondary elements of the sentence and are based on structural words, predicate, and more often subject.

- Examples: A? "Ku beba?" [Where baby?]/ Ku mama? [Where Mommy?]/ Ku papa? [Go bye-bye?]/ Ku babi? [Where Daddy?]

At this stage, we encounter requests more often than questions. Requests are expressed with exclamations and interjections. Gestures play a very important role at this stage, as do the nonverbal expressions, which more often express emotions and persistence. Requests are mainly expressed with one word only (noun) and sometimes with a noun and a verb (*ama ujë*) [give water]. Intonation appears to be very important at this age.

*Mamaa! Mil! Opa!?* [Mammy! Good! Take me!?] *Amaaa!* [Give meeee!], *Totaaaa* [Caaaake] (asking for cake); *Pshe?* [Why?]; *Amaaa!* [Give me!]; *Pet a?* [Again?]; “*aaaaa qafi*” [“Hug you”] holding arms in the form of a hug. ‘a?’[a], ‘e?’[e], ‘ë?’[ə]; ‘*ama ujë*’ [Give me water]; ‘*ama top*’ [give me ball]; ‘*ama mu*’ [give me]; ‘*mami jep*’ [Mammy give]; ‘*ama lugë*’ [give spoon]

The question in some cases emerges only from intonation due to lack of other indicators:

- *Mami vi unë?* [Mummy I come?] (Can I go with you?).

Elements of more complex questions appear during the second year of life, such as:

- “*A kojna te Andi?* (A do të shkojmë te Andi?) [Shall we go at Andi’s?]”, “*Qa ban ti n’kol?*” [What you do at school?], “*A e din qa oqt*” [Do you know what it is?] “*A pim bjen lojna*” [Will you bring me toys?], “*A nuk ka televigjoli ljet a?*” [Doesn’t the TV have network?]. The latter, *Doesn’t the TV have network* – most likely learnt by way of imitation. “*Ku opa te Gani?*” [Go bye-bye at Gani’s].

### **Age 3-4**

More complex questions are made at this age, including particle ‘a’ and all question words, including *why*, *who*, *when* and questions beginning with *what*, *how many*, etc.

- Examples: Why? Who? Where?

- *Për sa pot vyjn lojat? (Për cka po të duhen lodrat?) [What do you need the toys for?]*<sup>viii</sup>  
*A pot vyen sikjo? (A po të duhet kjo?) [Do you need this?]*  
*A po i don dyat? [Do you want both of them?]*  
*Ska po skrun? (Çka po shkruan?) [What are you writing?]*  
*Kul ka me alë babi? (Kur ka me ardhë babi?) [When is Daddy coming?]*  
*Sa mke ble? (Cka më ke ble?) [What have you bought me?]*  
*A fej me ty sot? (A flejë me ty sot?) [Can I sleep with you today?]*

However, the process of forming correct and more complex questions, from the syntactic aspect, is not complete at this age. Namely, the questions are made more complex, more complete, but they often lack the syntactic accuracy and correct pronunciation of sounds. Gestures, mimics and other nonverbal signs play an important role at this stage, too.

At this stage, children's questions show that they still do not distinguish very well the time concept:

*Mam a shkona edhe na qatje [Mammy, shall we go there too?]*  
(Watching a wedding party on TV which took place several months ago).

### **Age 5-7:**

This is the kindergarten and school age, which is expressed both in the content and in more complex question forms. At this stage, questions are mainly formed using the Albanian language interrogative particle 'A' and relative pronouns 'who' 'what' 'why'.

- Examples: *A po i bajna detyrat? [Shall we do homework?], A guxoj mi ble dy loja? [May I buy two toys?], Cka je tu shkru ti? [What are you writing?]* *Pse pom bon shumë pyetje? [Why are you asking me so many questions?], A ma jep pak*

*telefonin? [Will you give me your phone for a while?], A ma lexon prallen ti sot? [Will you read me the fairy tale today?], A skom me shku neser ne shkollë a? [Am I not going to school tomorrow?], A munesh me ma ndreq qit lojë? [Can you fix me this toy?], Kush ka me ardhë neser? [Who is coming tomorrow?] E ti kush je? [And who are you?], Qysh e ki emrin? [What is your name?], Kush të pëlqen ty ma shumë? [Who do you like more?]  
Sa osht ora? [What time is it?], kur ja fillon msimi [When does the lesson start?], shka kemi sot per dreke" [What do we have for lunch today?]. Also: pse spe rrin ti te na [why aren't you staying at our place?], a kemi me shku te halla mi pa? [Are we going to Auntie's for a visit?].*

Pronunciation errors still occur at this stage because of their young age. However, it is worth pointing out that dialect forms start to appear more frequently, mainly in vocabulary. Namely, the pre-primary and the first grade do not have the expected impact in the quality of questions formed by children at this age.

This stage represents also the more complex understanding of the time concept. Children start becoming more aware of the future and past tense – expressed by way of questions:

- *Kur është mas pushimit? [When is it after holiday?], A keni me ardh nesër? [Are you coming tomorrow?]*

### **Age 7-11:**

Children already form more complex and, from the grammatical and syntactic aspect, more accurate questions. By this time, children form complete interrogative sentences with all parts of the sentence, including interrogative pronouns, interrogative particle 'a', personal pronouns, objects, and so on. At this age, we also come across correct usage of questions

formed in the present and past tense. Question words ‘Which and Who’ also start to be used more frequently at this age, most likely as a form of standardized language acquired at school. It is important to emphasize that only at this stage one can notice the impact of education on application of standard language and in forming questions, including polite requests (for example *A ban me ma qu ni foto të bebes?* [Could you send me a picture of the baby?]). However, the dialect forms are also retained, albeit at a smaller degree:

*Kur është programi?* [When is the programme?], *A jeni ju në fakulltet?* [Are you at faculty?], *Qka studioni?* [What do you study?], *Cila ngjyre e keni qef?* [What colour do you like?], *Qka je tu thanë?* [What are you saying?], *Qysh po kalon fakulltet?* [How are you getting along faculty?].

*A keni me nejt?* [Are you staying?], *A kini me shku najkun per vikend?* [Are you going anywhere for the weekend?], *A ban me ma qu ni foto bebes?* [Could you send me a picture of your baby?], *Kush a qajo qika nfoto?* [Who is that girl in the picture?], *Pse pom bertet?* [Why are you shouting at me?], *Qka tha mami me ba?* [What did Mum say to do?].

*Aspect: Negative form – negative sentences:*

### **Age 1-2:**

Expressing negation, objection and protest at this stage is very expressive and consists of few verbal and many more powerful and emotionally charged nonverbal elements. This is present particularly when related to food, parents, competition, rejection of unknown persons, etc. The main verbal forms are: ‘joo’ [noo], ‘ë-ë’ [ə-ə], ‘jemiii’ [mine], followed mainly with mimics and powerful gesticulations as a sign of negation and objection. At this stage appear adjectives expressing likes or dislikes (*keq – milë*) [bad – good]; the negative form is often

formed by combining the verb with the negative word /jo/ [no] instead of the particle *nuk* [not] (Jo du - s'du) [*no want for don't want*] or by providing the affirmative form due to inability to pronounce a certain phoneme (/s/); for example *ta jap* [*I will give it to you*] intending to say *s'ta jap* [*I won't give it to you*]. In such cases, the meaning is derived mainly from the abundant mimics or gesticulations at this age. More examples for illustration of the above generalisations:

- Jo [No], “ jo jo, ë-ë [no no, ə ə] (more frequent) with facial mimics expressing refusal, *Ma-maaa* [*don't don't*], *jemiiii* [*mine*], *Joooo* [*Nooooo*], *MAMI i mile* [*MAMMY good*], *BABI i mile* [*DADDY good*], *ma/ mo* [no/not](for “don't”), *a-a*, Jo [No], *sssdu* [*don't want*]; *Se jo se du* [*No because I don't want*]; *Jo se keq* [*No because bad*].
- Shakes the head in the form of negation, body movement denoting rejection, facial aggressive mimics, moves away with entire body denoting negation.

#### **Age 3-4 years:**

Children of this age already form short negative sentences by using negative particle *nuk* [not] (and its short form 's' [n't] in combination with a verb for example 'sdu' ['won't]). The negation is still emotionally charged and conveyed with body expressive forms. Sentences consist of telegraphic elements but far more complete than in those of 1-2 years of age, thus expressing complete negative stances or opinions, often including also justification of such stances. Examples: *jo nuk du* [*no, I don't want to*], *kurgjo hiq sdu* [*I want nothing at all*], *hiq sdu* [*don't want*] *jom idhnu skom ty moter mo* [*I'm mad at you, you no longer my sister*], *du me shku n'çerdhe edhe n'fakulltet* [*I want to go to the kindergarten and to faculty*], *sdu me shku n'klas te pare hiq* [*I don't want to go to first grade at all*], *Joooo,une hiq spo don* [*No, I wants not*].

Negative sentences are often constructed based on the negative comparison of two things or concepts:

Examples: *Qenin e du, macen se du* [I like the dog, don't like the cat]; *Une ty nuk du* [I no love you]; *une ty jom idhnu* [I mad at you]; *Nuk e kam ba unë, ai e ka ba*; [I didn't do it, he did it]; *mos bëtit ti mu, ti je e keqe* [Don't shout you me, you are bad].

### **Age 5-7 years:**

Children of this age use better constructed and more complex forms. Their emotionally outlined attitudes continue to be present here as well; however, a more rational thinking is observed and negation is often followed with justification. Negative sentences are used at this age to give orders, but also to stage threats. One can observe here errors in using persons (*s'ka me lujtë ma me ty - në vend të skam*) [no more play with you - instead of I will not play any more with you), use of dialect or vernacular forms (*sum, spe, ncuk, etc.*) [not, why, no, etc.]

- Examples: *Jo se ajo loder osht i keq* [No because that toy is bad], *Jo se ajo mu niher mka bertiiiiit edhe osht i keq* [No because she shouted at me once and is bad], *Jo une nuk bona kurgjoo* [No, I did nothing], *une se kom preeek* [I didn't touch], *Jo se nuk jom fmi* [No 'cause I am not a child], *Jo se shume nxeht* [No because is too hot],
- *Ma ka marre kukllen e nuk osht tu ma kthy* [He/she took my doll and won't give it back]; *Jo spe du kerrin* [No, I don't want the car]; *ama telefonin* [Give me the phone]; *Shko prej shpies tem* [Leave my house]; *mas hajde ma* [Don't come again]; *Mos m'ba kaq shum pyetjeeee (i inatosur)* [Don't ask me so many questions (upset)]; *S'ka me lujt ma me ty* [I won't play any more with you].

*Acquisition of Albanian as a first language from the perspective of natural order hypothesis*

- *Ncuk, duke tundur kokën [Ntzə, shaking his/her head]; Jo qaq shumë [Not so much]; Hiq sum pelqen [I don't like him/her at all];*

The adverb *never* and the negative particle *either*,

- *Se kom pa kurrë; [I never saw him/her]; s'jom tu e gjetë librin [Can't find the book]; As dje nuk kemi pas shkolle [We had no school yesterday either].*

**Age 8-11 years old:**

Negative sentences become more complex, but the change does not match the difference in age (as was the case with the more complex forms of questions).

Examples: *Jo nuk shkoj [No I won't go], Jo dielli e kish nxe [No, the sun warmed it], Se msusja neve hiq detyra nuk na ka jep edhe une nuk po du me msu [Teacher gave us no homework and I don't want to study], Mu nuk um pëlqen [I don't like him/her], Shumë e keqe [Very bad], Hiq se kam qef [I don't like him/her at all], Për mu nuk është [It is not for me]. Jo nuk është qashtu! [No, it is not like that!] Jo, nuk e di [No, I don't know], Tenisi nuk më pëlqen [I don't like tennis], Jo unë nuk rri me bebe [No, I won't stay with the baby];*

The level of use of dialect and vernacular at this age is also surprising.

- *Mu nuk um pëlqen kafsha gjarpri [I don't like animal snake], Mu s'um pelqen landa e pundores [I don't like the handicraft subject]; Ja,ja,ja [no, no, no]; Nc [ntzə]; jo mor cfarë banketi [no, what party, come on]; Nuk um hahet dardha qaq [I don't like pear so much].*

*Aspect – verb tenses:*

**Age 1-2 years:**

Out of 59 cases analysed for the aspect of verb usage, 27 do not use any tense but instead use parts of speech either solely or

combined with one another; 25 use present tense in active voice; 6 use past tense or a mixing of tenses; and one child uses past perfect tense, which was either an imitation or a very specific individual case.

Another thing worth mentioning is that the observed children from 12 until 20 months of age predominantly use only present tense in active voice. Other cases are with children of above two and around three years old, where one can observe the simple past tense, or in some cases a mixture of these two tenses.

With children that do not use any of the tense, one can observe usage of specific parts of speech. Under the age of 20 months, children mostly use nouns (mum, dad, cradle, water, snacks) and particles. From 20 months of age and onwards, they use more noun phrases with adjectives in order to describe and achieve what they want (babi mil [*daddy good*], nga pejt [*run fast*], fjal e keqe [*bad word*]).

#### ***Age 3-4 years:***

Out of 59 observed children, the following was noted: 32 examples in the present tense, 21 in present perfect tense, 11 in simple past tense, 5 in past perfect tense, 12 in future tense and in 10 cases no significant example was registered.

In light of the above, it can be said that children of 3-4 years old, in compliance with the processability theory, initially learn to use the simple present tense, then simple past and finally future simple tense. Most of them have difficulties with correct pronunciation of words. Most of them do not make the distinction between the time concept of the past tense and the future tense, whereas some of them have grasped these concepts. This means that the grasping of the time concept begins approximately at this time with the observed children. Some children use the third person singular when referring to

themselves. Children of this age mainly use the key elements of the sentence, rarely using adverbs, structural words, particles and conjunctions.

Based on the language used by children it can be noted that parents do not use standard language or more complex concepts in communication with their children. It is likely that while conversing with their children, parents use the modified language or child language. For example, all children use the form of auxiliary verb *kam* [*have*] (as in *I have to go*) instead of the form “*do të*” [*will*] while forming the future tense; or they use ‘*jam kanë*’ [dialect form of *have been*] instead of ‘*kam qenë*’ [*have been*]. This aspect would require further research of the form and content of parents’ communication with their children.

#### ***Age 5-7 years:***

Confusion of verb tenses:

*During the research of the tense forms for the age of 5-7 years old, more complex forms have been encountered, as well as confusions of the used tenses. This shows that children are now beyond the imitation phase, they understand mainly the time concept but they have problems with articulating and using the correct tense forms and relating them with time.*

Examples of incorrect usage: *Dje kom me shku te Lisa* [I will go yesterday at Lisa’s]; *Dje kena me shku te dajt* [We will go yesterday at uncle’s]; *Une jam kan neshel te dajt* [I was at my uncle’s tomorrow]; *Kur I bleve patikat* [When did you buy the sneakers?]; *Qetash kemi shku* [We will go now]; *Aroni du akullore* [Aron want ice-cream]; *Ku ke shku nesër?* [Where did you go tomorrow?]; *Jom kon nesër* [I was there tomorrow]; *Ka me ardh dje te Kosova* [He/she will come to Kosovo yesterday].

Examples of correct usage: *Mesuesja na ka then mi be detyrat* [The teacher told us to do our homework]; *Kam me shku te dajet* [I will go at my uncle's]; *Jam kan ne shitore* [I was at the shop]; *Kam me shku papa me mamin* [I will go bye-bye with Mammy]; *mami ka ku punë* [Mammy went to work]; *Pak ma von vi* [I will come a bit later]; *Kena mu knaq në pushim* [We will have fun on our holiday]; *E ka pa në film* [He/she saw it in the movie].

Form of learning: imitation – generalisation: transfer of learning through imitation to generalisation of more complex forms is observed at this age. Example: *Kom me ta këputë gjuhen* [I will cut your tongue]. An expression learnt through imitation from parents or the people around. However, on the other hand, we come across an original reaction of the child towards the action understood: *Une e mshefna gjuhen* [I hid my tongue] – the generalised response (learnt as a reaction to a threat and as a result of understanding);

### ***Age 8-11 years:***

A more frequent use of past tenses, as well as more complex forms combined with adjectives, was observed here. But at the same time one can observe strengthening instead of weakening of dialect and vernacular forms.

Thus, while monitoring 59 respondents of the mentioned age, 14 cases of use of present tense were encountered; 2 cases of past perfect; 19 cases of present perfect; 5 cases of simple past; 1 of past progressive tense; 7 cases of future tense; in 15 cases it was difficult to clearly tell tenses used.

Therefore, in contrast to children of 3-4 and 5-7 years old, the age group of 8-11 years uses almost all verb tenses. In general, they apply good pronunciation of words. They can use conjunctions and they are aware of what is 'yesterday' and 'tomorrow'. In general, they can make the difference between the concepts of yesterday, today and tomorrow.

*Unë di ma shumë se ti me numëru [I can count more than you](present tense and comparison of adjectives); Unë kesh e bleva [I went and bought it]; Kisha harru me ble ni laps [I had forgotten to buy a pencil]; Msusja e ka shkrujtë [The teacher wrote it]; Mka msu [He/she taught me]; Jena kan [We've been]; Kom shkru [I have written]; Kom ba [I've done]; Dje kam shku me lujt [I went to play yesterday]; Testin e matematikes e kam kry [I have completed the math test];*

*Unë do të punoj [I will work]; Do të lexoj një lektyrë [I will read a book]. Kum hangër picë [I ate pizza]; Gjyshi jem i ka pas dy grue [My grandfather had two wife] (incorrect use of the noun wife in plural). Mam neser në ora 8 kam mu kan në shkollë [Mum, I have to be at school tomorrow at 8]; Shumë e mirë u kan koha sot [The weather was very good today]; T'hanen kam me shku me lu basket [On Monday I will go to play basketball].*

They do not identify themselves with the third person singular as was the case with younger ages.

*Unë kam qenë dje të luaj futboll. [I went yesterday to play football] /Unë do të shkoj nesër në shkollë [I will go to school tomorrow]. Yet, errors are still encountered in expressing themselves, as well as the usage of inadequate or words outside the standard language.*

*Aspect: sentences*

### **Age 1-2 years:**

At this age, child form incomplete sentences to express complete thoughts, often using third instead of first person singular when talking about themselves: *Jora ku!* (*Jora ka shku*) [*Jora left*]. Usually, sentences consist of 1 or 2 words. At least on surface, words appear unconnected and telegraphic.

For example, burning of the hand is *xhixha* [hot]; sentences often consist of a single noun: “mama” [mammy], “baba” [daddy], “Kuku” [wow], “Dada”, “Aba”, “Hala (Halla) [Auntie]”, or referring to various animals “*mjau mjau* (maca) [meaow, meaow (cat)]”, “*hum hum* (qeni) [woof, woof (dog)]”. Sentences are usually in the first person of present tense and in exclamative and imperative form “*du çokolladë* [want chocolate], *jo* [no], *nuk po du* [don’t want], *nuk po shkoj* [I’m not going]. They use the verb mainly in the present tense, while sentences are incomplete. In spoken language obstacles are encountered in linking words, whereas conjunctions and particles are missing.

#### ***Age 3-4 years:***

Sentences at this age are still mainly in the present tense, though the number of words and parts of speech has increased (verbs, adjectives, structural words), use of objects is noted, etc.

- *Unë e kum pa filmin* [I have seen the movie]; *Unë e di ma mirë se ti* [I know better than you].
- *Pe fytj (frytj)* [I am blowing it]. *Hajde t’perqafoj, t’qafi* [Let me hug you]; *Une e kom qendesen mamin e dyte* [Qendesa is my second mum]; *Ka shku lag (larg)* [He/she went far away]; *Hekma zinxhirin, jom bo nuqe* [Remove my chain, I became a bride]. *Une du me lujt me kuklla* [I want to play with dolls]. *Me ka marr mari (malli)* [I miss you].

At this age, sentences begin to express an understanding of the concept of future and past time:

- *Kom me gjet gjyshe tjetër* [I will find another grandmother]; *Kom me ndrru ne spital* [I will swap her in the hospital]; *Oj tete te ka hup djari (djali)* [Auntie, your son is lost]; *Vi te ti nese mi ploteson deshirat* [I will come to your place if you fulfil my wishes]; *Msim me msu* [Lesson to learn]; *ka me shku shkollë* [Has to go to school]; *kur ta vraj kamen mami fet ku e ke vra*

*kamen e une fam te ruga [When I hurt my leg, Mammy ask where you hurt your leg and I say in the street].*

**Age 5-7 years:**

As a result of education and cognitive maturity, sentences at this age contain more sentence elements, they are more complex and describe things in more detail. Example: *babi mka thane me shku drejt mandej djathtas mandej ne kthesen e pare mu kthi majtas [Daddy told me to go straight, then to the right and then on take the first turn left].*

Thoughts are now more complex and expressed more accurately: *Msusja nuk mka pelqy [I didn't like the teacher]. Une kaloj shume mire ne shkolle [I have a great time at school]. Edukatorja na ka mësuar qysh me numëru [Our educator taught us how to count]; Shumë është lehtë [It is very easy]; Unë i di numrat edhe në shqip edhe në anglisht [I know numbers both in Albanian and in English].*

**Age 8-11 years:**

At this stage, children use more complex forms and sentences, including indirect speech (*I thash mamit a bujna te daj, thojke jo*) [*I told Mum, we should sleep over at uncle's, she said no*] and sometimes even subordinated clauses.

Examples: *Une kom me shku ne hane kom mu bo astronaut [I will go to the Moon to become an astronaut]. Jom biznesmen pe maj mallin me kamiona [I am a businessman I am getting goods by trucks]. Po dal jasht, po luj me top [I'm going outside; I'm playing with a ball]. Nuk po du me shku ne Albi, du mi pa pinguinat [I don't want to go to Albi's, I want to see penguins]. Shum po vonohesh [You're so late]. Mami i ka dy shoqe [Mum has two friends]; Albina, po me bon shum nervoz [Albina, you make me so upset]. Une spo kom qka me bo [There's nothing I can do]. Kanihere pe rrej mamin [Sometimes I lie to my Mum]. Kta veq mu po me bërtasin [They're shouting only at me]. Po du qaj [I want tea]. Spom shkohet [I don't feel like going]. Po du mi*

*vesh qeto tesha* [I want to wear those clothes]. *Mkeni lodh me kto detyra* [You've badgered me with this homework]. *Une jom spiderman* [I'm a Spiderman]. *Llamburgjini kom me ble kur bohna i madh* [I will buy a Lamborghini when I am a grownup].

As noted in the examples above, simple sentences remain however the most frequent syntactic forms used to express opinion. Something else that appears with somewhat stronger persistence at this stage (as also presented in the examples above) is the strengthening of the dialect element in spoken language. Parallel to the dialect and regional vernacular, one also comes across the usage of standardized language. This shows the increased role of school, but also a growing influence by the neighbourhood:

*Une do të bëhem mjeke, ushtarë, këngëtare, violoniste, futboller, infermiere* [I will become a doctor, soldier, violinist, football player, nurse]. *Ka ra bore* [It snowed]. *Kena msu për zgjedhimin e foljeve* [We learnt about conjugation of verbs]. *Po du me ba një pyetje* [I want to make a question]. *Kena ba test* [We did a test].

*Aspect: Use of various forms and parts of speech*

### **Age 1-2 years:**

Comparison of adjectives

At this age, the adjective serves to qualify a noun (even when not followed by it). The use of comparative degree was not observed. *Bukujose, e milë, buda, e kece, babi mile* [Beauty, good, fool, bad, daddy good].

### ***Pronouns***

Obviously, children of this age are focused on the first person of pronouns (personal, possessive) and possessive adjectives.

Transitional forms are also present (see below *tu, e vet, ota, mue*) [*your, his/her, they, me*]. Examples: *Jemja, tu, jemi, e jemja, e vet, jem, ota (jotja), mue* [*mine, your, my, his, mine, yours, me*].

#### *Adverbs and relative pronouns*

A wide range of adverbs and relative pronouns is used at this age (more frequently *where* and *when*).

Examples of adverbs: *dje* [*yesterday*], *sot* [*today*], *neser* [*tomorrow*], *tash* [*now*], *tu* [*here*], *jashte* [*outside*], *neqel* [*tomorrow*], *qitu* [*here*], *pak* [*little*], *qum* [*a lot*], *larg* [*far*], *shum* [*much*], *kur* [*when*].

### *Transitional forms*

With regards to phonetically unclear words, we came across instances that children cannot use the sound SH [ʃ] in a word when this sound is followed by a consonant. They often describe things based on the noise they produce ((for instance, *wroom* (*car*)) and so on. While articulating words they tend to use voiced sounds, either modifying the sounds or completely omitting them.

*Rlzu* (*rrëzuar*) [*fall*], *ljet* (*dhjet*) [*ten*], *lad* (*çokollatë*) [*chocolate*], *oqt* (*është*) [*is*], *pehen* (*prehër*) [*lap*], *zhdu* (*nuk dua*) [*I do not want*], *kojna* (*shkojmë*) [*let us go*], *mjau* (*cat*), *bee* (*sheep*), *keli* (*kerri*) [*car*], *jes papa* [*yes we go*].

#### **Age 3-4 years:**

Comparison of adjectives begins at this age and so does the use of degrees of comparison. Actually, one can talk more about the awareness related to the degrees of comparison than about their proper usage, namely it is observed that understanding precedes articulation. This is because instead of using comparative degree *i mirë - më i mire* [*good -better*], children of

this age prefer to use *shumë i mirë* [very good] or *sa bukur* [how beautiful] or using a word denoting greater quality of something *sjam e total – jam e male* [I'm not little – I'm big]. Although rarely, forms such as *ma i mav (më i madh)* [older], *ma e mir* [better], *ma i folt (më i fortë)* [stronger] are also encountered. In addition, using more than one adjective in an utterance (sentence) also appears at this age (*e male, e tuqe*) [big, red].

Adjectives are compared by using a limited number of words and forms; in general those adjectives that are heard more often are used by placing in front of them the word *shumë* [very], *e madhe* [big], *e vogël* [small], *e mirë* [good], *e keqe* [bad], while other words are very rare: *Sjam e total, jam e male* [I'm not small, I am big]; *un jam i mav ai osht i vovej* [I am big, he is small]; *un jam i madh sa ti* [I am as big as you are], *ma i folt se babi* [stronger than Daddy]; *ma e mirë* [better]; *qum bukul* [very beautiful]; *Unë jam rritë ma e madhe* [I have grown taller], and so on.

*Je e keqe* [You're bad]; *butujose (bukuroshe)* [beauty], *tutel (kukull)* [doll]; *e male e tuqe* [big red]; *laki zi* [black nail color]; *un jo e vogël* [I'm not little]; *sa e bukur* [how beautiful]; *filma vizatimor (me siguri me imitim)* [cartoons - probably through imitation]; *unt un* [me hungry]; *ni keqee; e bukur, e mile* [you bad, beautiful, good].

#### *Pronouns:*

Children of this age begin using more pronouns and not only personal ones but also other types, such as demonstrative pronouns. They also begin understanding the plural of pronouns and also their application in standard language. They also distinguish pronoun gender and number although they still do not use them accurately. One encounters here usage of pronouns in gender and number as well as expressed in two or more forms of the same pronoun: *jemja, jem, em, jeme, jemi* [mine]. With regards to pronouns, it is somewhat surprising that no considerable progress is observed from the age 1-2 years old.

*Examples:*

- *Ti [you], un [I], aj [he], ajo [she], na [we], atë [that], këtë [this], kjo [this], mu [me], kto [these], ty [you]*
- *Jemja [mine], jem [mine], em [mine], mijat [mine –plural], jeme [mine], jemi [mine], tonden [yours], e vet [his], mue [me].*

*Adverbs:*

The comparative degree of adverbs was also encountered here, whereas adverbs of time, place and quantity are more often used (*ma anej, veq pak*) [*further, just a little*]. Examples: *Nalt [high], nesra [tomorrow], qeshtu [like this], qetash [now], larg [far], kur [when], ma von [later], neser [tomorrow], ku [where], tash [now], neshel [tomorrow], ma anej [further there], qetu [here], pak [little], veq pak [just a little], dje [yesterday], shum [a lot].*

*Transitional forms:*

At the age of 3-4 years old, children also articulate words through voiced sounds. Likewise, at this age children begin to recognize more objects describing them the way they see and hear. These transitional forms are understood almost without any exception and are used with empathy by their family members. For example, a family stated that the word /*tutël*/ (*kukull*) [*doll*] was used similarly by the elder sister and the other members of the family.

- *Jonat [ours], arll [come], xysi [grandpa], ydyn, shlojn [drop], las [speak], lak [colour], tutël [doll], sangalep [carrot]. Naqa [pleased], ere [and], fam [say], doa [hand], gjogi [bird], mquqja [teacher], dili [sun], koka [coke], pija [drank].*

### **Age 5-7 years:**

#### *Comparison of adjectives*

Adjectives are almost regularly used at this age, however, a distinctive feature at this age is that comparison of adjectives is applied very seldom! Examples: *Keq* [bad], *e mil* [good], *djali i keq* [bad boy], *e mirë* [good], *I vogël* [small], *të gjatë* [long], *të njëjtë* [same], *e kuq* [red].

#### *Pronouns:*

Personal and possessive pronouns and possessive adjectives are used correctly at this age. However, a frequent use of dialect forms (*jemja*) [mine] is observed here as well. Illustrations: *Unë* [I], *ti* [you], *ai* [he], *ne* [we]; but also *Im - imja* [my - mine], *yt - jote* [your - yours], etc.

#### *Adverbs*

Adverbs are used extensively at this age. This may reflect an evolution in understanding of the concepts of time, place and size (including the rule of the conservation of objects). However, as with adjectives, the limited usage of comparative and superlative degrees of adverbs is impressive. On the other hand there is a growing use of dialect forms (see below). As with adverbs, relative pronouns (*ku*, *kur*, *pse*) [where, when, why] continue to be widely and correctly used by children of this age: *Sot* [today], *dje* [yesterday], *nesër* [tomorrow], *atje* [there], *nalt-lart* [high], *larg* [far], *pram-mbremë* [yesterday evening], *shumë* [a lot], *shumë mire* [very good], *sot-sot* [today], *tash* [now], *kurrë* [never], *sonte* [tonight], *niher-njëherë* [once], *ktthu-ktu* [here], *lart* [up], *posht* [down].

### *Transitional forms*

Words, unintelligible for the interviewer, are observed here; however, these words most likely bear a meaning for the child and the family, as transitional forms towards a certain meaning or function. Examples: *Mshueshka*, *qatmakin*, *e tuq*. The word *e tuq* here – refers to the red colour. *Mshueshka* – *mësueses* [to the teacher], while the word *qatmakin* might refer to *çamçakëzin* [chewing gum]

### **Age 8-11 years:**

At this age, children use correctly most of the parts of speech. Use of comparative degrees is observed with adjectives and adverbs; the list of properly used pronouns is extended and incomprehensible words begin to vanish.

*Aspect: Dialect usage and its impact*

### **Age 1-2 years:**

At this age, it is not clear whether pronunciation and usage of incorrect forms is the result of using dialect forms (vernaculars), typical errors of the age or transitional forms. It was observed that in some cases it is the issue of using dialect forms (language heard in the child's environment). Such are the cases of using the dialect form *du* instead of *dua* [want], *kojna* instead of *shkojmë* [we go], *tamin* instead of *qumështin* [milk], *lu* instead of *luaj* [play], and so on. The last three cases are cases of both dialect forms (*tamlin* – *shkojna*) [milk – we go] and transitional forms (*tamin* – instead of *tamlin* [milk] and *kojna* instead of *shkojna* [we go]).

More examples: *Mami vi une?* [Mammy, I come?]; *Unë koj* (*une po shkoj*) [I am going]; *Du lu top* [I wanna play with the ball]; *Duu mami* (*të dua mami*) [Love you Mammy]; *Du pi tamin* (*qumështin*)

[*I want to drink milk*]; *Une tat kuka* (unë fle me kukulla) [*I sleep with dolls*];

The expression *une tat kuka* [*I sleep with dolls*] is a pure transitional form as it is not a form borrowed neither from the dialect nor from any regional vernacular. On the contrary, it seems that the children's transitional form *tat* [*sleep*] has influenced the spoken language of the adults, given that one can often come across formulations using the word *tat* (denoting sleep) in discussions between adult persons.

### ***Age 3-4 years:***

Dialect forms at this age are the result of the language used by the family and the environment where the child is growing up. During the research, no influence of the kindergarten or nursery-school was observed in the form of standard Albanian language used by children of this age. This may occur either due to inadequate inclusion of children in preschool institutions or as a result of language (dialect or vernacular) used in such institutions. At this age, usage of dialect forms begins to differentiate from usage of transitional forms.

*Jo gabim e ki* [*No, you're wrong*]; *Nuk është qështu* [*It's not like that*]; *Un e kum pa filmin* [*I have watched the movie*];

The vernacular forms *ki* [*you are*], *kum* [*I have*] and *qështu* [*like this*] may continue to be used by the child even after going to school.

On the other hand, researchers have also registered regular forms of standard language with this age group: *Jo, nuk dua* [*No, I don't want to*]; *Nuk ta jap* [*I won't give it to you*]; *Nuk te thirra* [*I didn't call you*]; *Nuk dua te luj* [*I don't want to play*]; *Mos ma merr* [*Don't take it from me*]. In all five sentences one encounters only one dialect usage (*luj*) [*play*]. Based on this, one finds that most often, the family influences the usage of non-standard language forms in the spoken language of pre-school children<sup>ix</sup>.

**Age 5-7 years:**

One can easily notice the influence of education in this age group (especially the pre-primary grade and first grades of primary education). Children use more correct and more complete forms. In general, the collected examples show a qualitative and positive transfer in expression and in the forms used. It seems that, besides the more regular and more complete spoken language, the education gained at school also reflects at this age (*Mos rrej se s'bënë*) [*Don't lie because it is improper*].

**Examples:**

- *Mami a t'dal me lujt me top* ["*Mammy, may I go out to play football*"], *Mami a me dergon ne shkollë?* ["*Mammy, will you take me to school?*"], *Mami kur kena me shku te daj?* ["*Mammy, wher are we going at uncle's?*"], *Kur vjen babi?* ["*When is Daddy coming?*"]
- *Kur t'rritna dua t'bëhem ose mësuese ose profesoreshë* [*I want to be either a teacher or a professor when I grow up*], *kur jam kan e vogel jam qu n'katër n'mëngjes* [*When I was little I woke up at four in the morning*], *Dje e kemi msu njeriu dhe natyra* [*Yesterday we studied Man and Nature*]
- *E ti kush je?* [*And who are you?*] *Qysh e ki emrin?* [*What is your name?*] *Kush të pëlqen ty ma shumë?* [*Who do you like more?*] *A keni me ardh nesër?* [*Are you coming tomorrow?*]
- *Shumë është lehtë* [*It is very easy*]; *Unë i di numrat edhe në shqip edhe në anglisht* [*I know numbers both in Albanian and in English*].

Nevertheless, one observes frequent occurrences of dialect usage:

- *Kur është mas pushimit?* [*When is it after the break?*] *Mos m'ba kaq shum pyetjeeee (i inatosur)* [*Don't ask me so many*

*questions (upset)]; S'ka me lujt ma me ty [No more playing with you]; Nuk e kum ba unë [It wasn't me]; Unë ngaj ma shpejt se ai [I run faster than he does]; Idhnohum e apet nrequm [We quarrel and reconcile again]; E kum pas shoqe prej klasës parashkollor [She was my friend since pre-school grade].*

One can assume that this happens due to a child's individual situation, but also due to the language used in the family and at school. As a rule, however, this age shows greater progress in using standard Albanian language – compared to all other age groups.

***Age 8-11 years:***

Two equally powerful tendencies are observed in this group: respect of standard and greater usage of dialect and vernacular forms. A more careful study of this age group may give important indications also on the quality of schooling in Kosovo for the respective level (grade 3-6) of education.

### **Summary of findings**

The table below provides a summary of initial occurrence of main forms and categories for the respective studied aspects.

*Table 3: A more summarised presentation of findings:*

Aspect	Question	Negation	Verb tenses	Sentences	Forms (adjectives/ adverbs)	Dialect/ standard
Age 1-2	Particle /a/? Requests Exclamation Cajoling	Nonverbal mimics, no, not, exclamation	Infinitive Present One word	Incomplete sentences S - P	Basic adjectives Personal pronouns Some question words	Transitional forms Some dialect
3-4	Simple questions Do ... Request	Nonverbal No, not, /no/ + verb	Present Other forms with mistakes appear	Incomplete sentences 1-5 words S-P + IO-O	Basic forms are compared (Adj. and Adv.) Possessive pronouns - mine Question words: Why, Who	Dialect Transitional form Some standard
5-7	More complex questions Question words	Simple and more complex negative sentences	Use of past and future tense	More complete sentences , also compound sentences . Complex sentences are lacking	Comparison of adj. Comparison of adv. Possessive adjectives	Standard language Some dialect

8-11	Complete questions Not so complex forms	Simple and more complex negative sentences	Use of past and future tense. Passive voice, indirect speech and verb modalities are lacking	Compound sentences are lacking	Comparison of adj. (comparative degree) Comparison of adv. Possessive pronouns and many pronouns	Not clear. A more complex situation. Needs to be studied
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### *Conclusions*

In the end, we can conclude that, as in the case of English language, there appears to be a natural order of acquisition of various morphemes and forms in Albanian as a first language.

Based on the results of our research, the main tendencies in acquisition of Albanian as a first language, an upward movement is discerned - from simple to more complex forms - relative to the age of observed children, in accordance with Piennemann's Processability Theory. More specifically, the following processes in the development of speaking are noticed among the observed children:

- From non-verbal - emotional expression to rational and verbal thinking (in coherence with the stages of cognitive development).
- From simple forms, often through transitional forms, to the standard language or dialect forms.
- Lack of complex forms (conditionals, passives, reported speech and so on). If Piennemann's stages of language acquisition are taken as a criterion (see above in the

theoretical framework), then stage four rarely takes place among younger Kosovars since no compound sentences with relative and/or subordinate clauses have been recorded during the observation.

- Relative lack of more advanced concepts (even in the 8-11 age group). Most of the language recorded is characterized by a limited vocabulary both in content and form.
- Repetition of dialect forms (kum - [*I have*], qështu - [*like this*], zdu - [*I do not want*], shkojna - [*we go*], etc.). This phenomenon is also a source of concern since it results in petrification of dialect or vernacular forms.
- The equivocal role of the school: on the one hand, promoting the use of standard Albanian (especially in primary education), but also in the petrification of dialect and vernacular forms (in lower secondary education), on the other hand.
- The increased importance of imitation in the use of dialect and other forms (see the summarized table presentation of the main findings above). Most of the collected materials appear to have been learnt through imitation, rather than generalization or systematic efforts of parents, the environment, and even teachers.

Referring back to research questions, one can say that, as in the case of English, there is a natural pattern of acquisition of Albanian as a first language. However, based on this first research, similarities and differences between the forms acquired in these two languages cannot be identified with certainty. This may also be due to the significant differences between the two languages in the forming of different grammatical categories and aspects: English as an analytic and Albanian as a synthetic language. A pattern identified with

Albanian language acquisition is that it goes from the simple to more complex forms: from one word to more words; from individual words to connecting them in a more complex and meaningful wholes; from the initial use of present tense to more complex tense forms, albeit the most complex ones are rarely or not encountered at all; from using a basic adjective to describe a noun, through comparing two base adjectives (*unë milë - ti keq*) [me good - you bad] to the use of the comparative form, though rarely using the superlative form of comparison; moving from non-verbal questions or requests to one word questions, and further to more complex forms of questions, and so on. These sequences in acquisition of various forms matches the cognitive development of children. Nevertheless, variations are noticed depending on: environment the child is raised in, the quality of the language material the child is exposed to, learner characteristics of individual children, parents' work and engagement in child's language development, quality of education and teaching, and so on.

Two important things emerged during the research, which were not originally planned:

1. While in English there is a language standard in speech and, particularly in writing, in Albanian, the use of dialect and even vernacular forms has emerged as an important element in the process of language acquisition.
2. The use of more complex morphological and syntactic forms in Albanian language are seldom or never encountered. Children are limited to the use of simple sentences and three or four basic verb tenses, they rarely use superlative forms of adjectives, and possess a limited vocabulary (even when observing children over the age of ten). These are some indications of a relatively poor education provisions, in the field of languages, in particular, but they are also indications of the simple

language material students are exposed to in the family early in their life.

Consequently, the quality of language material children are exposed to and use for communication in their families and environment, together with the quality of education and teaching provided in Kosovar schools, come to the forefront as issues that require thorough consideration and study in the future.

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<sup>i</sup> Mal-i – masculine definite suffix i; hap-a – past simple suffix a; hap-ëm – first person plural suffix - ëm, mir-i – case ending for accusative – I and so on.

<sup>ii</sup> Different ways of saying *let's go*, all in vernacular.

<sup>iii</sup> *mami më* /fa/ - similar to mom /tod/ me, instead of *told me* in English

<sup>iv</sup> Dea does not want to go – pronounced like /Dea don won go/

<sup>v</sup> *butujose* (for bukuroshe – beauty in English), *tutël* (for kukull – doll in English)

<sup>vi</sup> On the other hand, the research lacked a procedure – a more standardized questionnaire for all age groups.

<sup>vii</sup> Age groups were defined also based on the Piaget model on the stages of cognitive development of the child.

<sup>viii</sup> Guidelines for reading examples in this article:

*No brackets* - The form as pronounced/uttered by the child in mother tongue ex. *Për sa pot vijn lojat?*

*Sometimes* (round brackets) - the meaning in standard Albanian. Ex. (Për cka po të duhen lodrat?)

*[square brackets]* - the meaning in English. Ex. [What do you need the toys for?]

<sup>ix</sup> Another study may explore the level of influence of various factors: family, pre-school institutions, environment, in the forms used in children's spoken language.

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