

# The Phenomenon of Gender Shift in Albanian Language

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## Abstract

Gender is an important grammatical category for the Albanian language. According to this category, Albanian nouns are classified into *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter* and their gender affiliation is defined:

- by the ending sound of the stem, with case endings of the indefinite and definite singular form;
- syntactically through the agreement features of the dependent elements (determiners, adjectives, pronouns and so on).

But there is a large group of singular masculine nouns in Albanian, whose dependent elements have a special agreement: these elements have masculine forms in singular and feminine forms in plural. This group of nouns can be identified by the endings of plural: they are inanimate masculine nouns that have the endings *-e* and *-ra* in the plural form of the indefinite nominative case. The phenomenon, which has occasionally attracted the attention of some scholars of Albanian, exists in various Indo-European languages, such as Romanian, Italian, Slovak, Czech, modern Greek, etc., where a certain class of nouns in the singular appear as masculine, in the plural pass to the feminine.

The phenomenon of gender shift of some Albanian masculine nouns in plural is relatively old, especially in the Gheg dialect, where it appeared before the Buzuku's century (XV), although it appeared early even in the Tosk dialect. In the following years it was generalized and in '80 it was recommended in all normative books of Albanian language.

**Keywords:** shift gender, masculine, plural, Albanian language

## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of gender shift exists in various Indo-European languages, such as Romanian, Italian, Slovak, Czech, modern Greek, etc., where a certain class of nouns in the singular appear as masculine, while in the plural pass to the feminine. In the Albanian language this phenomenon is very widespread, and its recognition by language speakers is important because it is closely related to the right agreement of their attributes.

The object of this paper is exactly this class of ambigender nouns in the Albanian language, the place that these nouns occupy in relation to other nouns and especially masculine nouns,

the traces of this phenomenon in Old Albanian, the degree of spread throughout Albanian, the terms used, the origin of this phenomenon and the influence from other languages with which Albanian has been in contact. A special place in the paper is occupied by statistical data on these nouns, which help to create a complete framework for the spread of ambigender nouns in the Albanian language, to use the correct attributives with this group of nouns.

## 2. Methods and materials

This paper is part of several years of research work on the category of ambigender nouns in the Albanian language, work that is still in progress.

Based on extensive scientific literature on the category of the gender of general nouns and ambigender nouns in particular, by Albanian and foreign authors, in this paper we have provided a broad overview of studies related to this linguistic phenomenon by looking at comparative terms.

During the drafting of this part of the study that we are presenting, a method of mainly descriptive and comparative character has been used to bring to attention the contribution of various scholars in relation to this issue. This has helped us to focus on the study of the similarities and differences between them.

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to extract and analyze concrete data from this group of nouns: the statistical data extracted from the *Dictionary of the Albanian Language* (FGjSh, 2006) for these nouns were analyzed through the 'Concordance' program, thus reaching a more complete analysis of masculine nouns and within this class more detailed ambigender nouns.

Thanks to these methods, the list of ambigender nouns was exhaustively reviewed, processed, and classified in a short time which turned out to be a considerable amount when compared to the number of masculine nouns, the presented data and in different graphics of the research.

## 3. Gender category in the Albanian language

Gender is one of the most characteristic grammatical attributes for nouns in the Albanian language and is an internal feature of the noun. This grammatical attribute has its markers, but they do not always serve to determine the gender of nouns in the Albanian language. All nouns of the Albanian language have the attribute of gender. Most nouns are masculine or feminine; only a handful of nouns are neuter. The gender of a noun in the Albanian language appears in both numbers, in the singular and in the plural. Often their gender can be determined by the endings of the definite singular form or by the ending sounds of the stem.

a. Nouns in the Albanian language are grouped into three genders, according to the ending of the nominative case, in the singular and definitive form:

- Masculine nouns ending in *-i* or *-u* during inflection: *libr-i* (book), *laps-i* (pencil), *det-i* (sea), *ballkon-i* (balcony), *shok-u* (friend), *mi-u* (mouse), *ari-u* (bear), etc.).
- Feminine nouns that appear, with the endings *-a* or *-ja* during the inflection in the definite singular: *pem-a* (tree), *kodr-a* (hill), *der-a* (door), *kumbull-a* (plum), *anij-a* (ship), *pallto-ja* (coat), *radio-ja* (radio), etc.).
- Neuter gender nouns ending in *-t*, *-it* or *-të*: *të zi-të*, *të nuhatur-it* (smell), *të qenë-t* (being), etc.).

b. To distinguish the gender of the noun, in Albanian language we also use the ending sounds of the stem:

- Masculine nouns end in consonants: *kungull* (plum), *pallat* (palace), *dollap* (wardrobe), *oborr* (yard), *murg* (monk), *lexues* (reader), *pastrues* (cleaner), *lëshues* (issuer), *libër* (book), *semestër* (semester), etc.; some nouns end in an unstressed vowel *ë*: *kalë* (horse), *burrë* (man), *dhallë* (buttermilk), *ujë* (water), etc.; some in an accented vowel or in a group of vowels: *mi* (mouse), *mulli* (mill), *thua* (claw), *sy* (eye), etc.
- Feminine nouns end: with the unstressed vowel *ë*: *dorë* (hand), *kafshë* (animal), *kopsë* (button), *lojë* (game), *pjatë* (plate), *shpinë* (back), etc.); with accented vowels (*miqësi* (friendship), *kënaqësi* (pleasure), *liri* (freedom), *shami* (handkerchief), *pallto* (coat), etc.); with the unstressed vowel *-e* or *-o*: *anije* (ship), *fletore* (notebook), *fitore* (victory), *radio* (radio), *kosto* (cost), etc.); with consonants (*kumbull* (plum), *mjegull* (fog), *kodër* (hill), *thembër* (heel), *uthull* (vinegar), etc.
- Neuter Gender nouns have different final sounds, especially given the fact that most of them come from other parts of speech, e.g., from the participle of verbs or from adjectives: *të qeshur-it* (the laughter), *të parë-t* (the viewing), *të bardhë-t* (the white), *të ngrohtë-t* (the warmth), etc.).

As noted, we are not always able to determine the gender of nouns only from final sounds, because nouns can be of different genders even though they have the same final sounds:

Table 1: Final sounds of masculine noun stems

Masculine	Feminine
<b>The unstressed final vowel -ë</b>	
lumë (river)	derë (door)
kalë (horse)	fletë (sheet)
<b>The stressed final vowel -i</b>	
mi (mouse)	dashuri (love)
ari (bear)	liri (freedom)
<b>Consonant</b>	
kungull (pumpkin)	mjegull (fog)
brumbull (beetle)	uthull (vinegar)

So, marking only through ending sounds and the ending of the definitive singular is not enough to categorize all nouns by gender. As Hockett has pointed out, “The determining criterion for gender is agreement, that is, ‘the behavior of associated words’” (Hockett, 1958:231).”

From the syntactic point of view, the attribute of gender in the Albanian language is independent, it is not defined by other parts of speech, although the affiliation of a noun to a certain gender is more strongly syntactically distinguished in those cases. The gender of the attributives depends on the gender of the noun because it is the noun that requires them to be placed in a certain gender.

#### 4. Gender shift and terms used in the Albanian language

Generally, nouns in the Albanian language are used in a certain gender, both in the singular and in the plural. But a group of masculine nouns (which in the singular take masculine attributives), when used in the plural, take feminine attributives.

This phenomenon is present in the Albanian language, it is also noticed in various Indo-European languages, such as Romanian, Italian, Slovak, Czech, modern Greek, etc. and in the linguistic literature it is known as ‘ambiguity’ or ‘ambigender’ or ‘gender shift’.

Various linguists have used many terms for nouns of this type or for the process that takes place during gender reassignment, such as: *emna ambigena* or *bigëzime* by Justin Rrota (GGjSh I, 2002:213) (who in parts of his work has written about them without using any specific term); *heterogjeni* by Idriz Ajeti (Ajeti, 2017:390); *heterogjenitet* (Heterogenie = Genuswechsel) by Buholtz and Fiedler (Buchholz & Fiedler, 1987:208-209); *ambigjen* (nomi ambigeni) by N. Resuli (Ressuli, 1985:55); *ambigeneric* by Martin Camaj<sup>1</sup>; *dygjinishmëri* or *ambigjeni* by Rami Memushaj (Memushaj, 2006:233).

While giving explanations for the gender category in the Albanian language and distinguishing the three genders in which the noun appears (masculine, feminine and neuter), Alexander Rusakov considers it as “a fourth agreement class” when speaking about this group of masculine nouns: “Besides, there is a fourth agreement class that includes inanimate nouns that agree according to the masculine model in the singular and according to the feminine model in the plural (this is called “ambigender” in the Albanian grammatical tradition)” (Kapović et al., 2017:573).

The scholar Shaban Demiraj has pointed out the terms *ambigjen*, *asnjanës* and *heterogjen* in the previous linguistic literature in the Albanian language (Demiraj, 1966:83). According to him, the term *asnjanës* for this class of nouns is the most inappropriate, because this term has been used since ancient times to name a grammatical gender that is distinct from the masculine and feminine. This opinion is reinforced when he adds that the genuine neuter with Indo-European origin, although greatly reduced, is still alive, even in the Albanian language, neuter

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<sup>1</sup> “Those nouns that change gender (sg. m / pl. f.) may be called *ambigeneric*, meaning that the formation of the plural is not distributed according to gender categories” në M. Camaj, *Albanian grammar*, Otto Harrassovvilz. Wiesbaden 1984. ISBN 3-447-02467-4. p 19.

verbal nouns can potentially be formed from any verb such as *të folurit*, *të menduarit*, etc. Therefore, in the absence of a more appropriate term, prof. Demiraj argues that the term *ambigjen*, despite the criticism that it relies on the formal side without considering the semantic side, seems more appropriate, because it gives relatively more accurate grammatical characteristics of these nouns by distinguishing them from other masculine nouns that are homogeneous in both numbers, as well as by genuine neuters (Demiraj, 1966:83).

## 5. Traces of gender shift in old Albanian

The phenomenon of gender shift of some masculine nouns in plural is old<sup>2</sup>. It is generalized in the literary language and has become mandatory even by the normative works of the Albanian language (*GGjSh I*, 2002:61,63; *GjLShGj*, 1976:52-53).

Regarding the time when this phenomenon appeared in Albanian, we are bringing here the attitude of three scholars of the history of the Albanian language: Sh. Demiraj, K. Topalli and B. Bokshi, who share the lack of a narrowly defined time of first usages of this phenomenon.

Demiraj considers this phenomenon relatively old, before the old Albanian writings (around the 15<sup>th</sup> century), but, due to the lack of older documents, he does not accurately determine the time of its origin (Demiraj, 1972:65). According to him, gender shift in the plural of some nouns is a relatively old phenomenon, especially in the northern dialect, where it appeared before the Buzuk era (1555). But even in southern dialects it has appeared relatively early.

Topalli finds it difficult to determine the exact time but connects this phenomenon with the time when the plural stem was created in the Albanian language, which must be later than the appearance of the metaphony and palatalization of the velars, as well as after the decline of the masculine plural suffix, since only after the action of these phenomena the form of the nominative case could become the plural stem. This time can not be earlier than the beginning of preservation of the ending vowel, thus leading to the time of relations with Latin, however before the relations of Albanian with Slavic languages (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>3</sup>

Even Bokshi does not accurately define the beginning of this phenomenon in the Albanian language but gives as an approximate time the period before the XV century, arguing with the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Shaban Demiraj: “Dukuria e ndërrimit të gjinisë së emrave në shumës në gjuhën shqipe është relativisht e vjetër; ajo është përfutur që në periudhën paralettrare të shqipes, por koha e zanafillës së saj, për mungesë dokumentash më të vjetra, nuk mund të përcaktohet më tej ...” (The phenomenon of gender shift in plurals in the Albanian language is relatively old; it has been obtained since the para-literary period of Albanian, but the time of its origin, due to the lack of older documents, can not be further determined) in *Çështje të sistemit emëror të gjuhës shqipe*, Tiranë, 1972, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> See more at Topalli, K. (2011). *Gramatikë historike e shqipes*, Qendra e Studimeve Albanologjike, Instituti i Gjuhësisë dhe i Letërsisë, Tiranë, p 228.

fact that this was presented as a phenomenon developed by the old authors of the North (Bokshi, 2010:201).

## 6. The origin of gender shift in the Albanian language

The fact that this phenomenon is present in various Indo-European languages, such as Romanian, Italian, Slovak, Czech, Modern Greek, etc., has led some linguists to think that the phenomenon of gender shift has a common source in these languages. But Sh. Demiraj does not think of it this way: (Demiraj, 1966:83-97). First, he describes the various arguments of scholars for the source of this phenomenon, such as the influence from the Thracian substratum; popular Latin and as a parallel development in these languages, and then he gives his arguments. According to him, the birth of the phenomenon of gender shift in Albanian and Romanian, but also in other languages should not necessarily be searched in a common source, moreover when encountered in other languages, which are not related to the above languages (Demiraj, 1966:91). This phenomenon in Albanian is an independent internal development (as in other languages) and comes because of the general tendency for the disappearance of gender borders of inanimate nouns, especially in plural, because the speaker's attention is focused rather in determining plurality than of their merely conventional gender. This process is made possible by the action of analogy: the early evolution of ending sounds, to which even the plural formatives have not escaped, and the use of such nouns with the plural formative of the feminine source.

Even for the scholar K. Topalli, the presence in the masculine nouns of such a formative with feminine origin, which he calls the plural suffix with feminizing character, has made them change their gender, thus avoiding the expression using grammatical means of gender attribute in the plural, but expressing it only syntactically: cf. *male të larta* (high mountains) – *pallate të reja* (new buildings). Speaking about the important consequences that the creation of the plural stem in the Albanian language has brought for the inflection system, Topalli states that the creation of a special stem for the plural has given rise to the fading of gender differences of nouns in the plural until the complete disappearance. He argues that by not expressing the gender of nouns by special morphological means according to gender, this grammatical attribute in the plural is distinguished only semantically (from the natural gender to the nouns of humans and animals) or syntactically, by taking attributives of the same gender with the noun (cf. *lisa të blertë* - green oaks, but *fusha të blerta* - green fields) (Topalli, 2011:229).

For the plural formative *-e* Sh. Demiraj, although with some reservations, supports the opinion of the scholar B. Bokshi, according to whom the source of this formative should be at the end of the nominative plural case of the feminine nouns \*/āj/. (Demiraj, 1966:86). Following this argument, he states that this plural formative, originally feminine, over time has been used with neuter nouns in the plural and through them has passed to some masculine nouns. After the neutralizing, the singular-plural opposition in feminine nouns resembling *nuse* - *nuse* (bride - brides) and after the elimination of the neuter gender, the formative /-e/ has been felt as an indicator of the plural number of masculine nouns.

The feminine character of the formative /-e/ is also acknowledged by the researcher K. Topalli, who argues that it is not taken by masculine nouns that express spirits (e.g., *njerëz* (people), *djem* (boys), *çuna* (boys), *kuaj* (horses), *fshatarë* (peasants), *desh* (rams), *etër* (fathers), *bij* (sons), *kunetër* (brothers-in-law), *vëllezër* (brothers), etc.). He also adds that another proof of its feminine character is the change of gender of masculine nouns (inanimate) passing to the feminine when they take this formative in the plural (cf. *shtigje të ngushta* - narrow paths, *male të larta* - high mountains) (Topalli, 2011:239). According to him, this formative is also used for feminine nouns with a consonant stem, such as: *qytet* (city), *pushtet* (power), *shëndet* (health), *vërtyt* (virtue), *vullëndet* (wills), etc. who retained their feminine character in the plural even when they passed into the masculine. From these nouns this plural formative by analogy has spread to other nouns that had the same phonetic composition, that is to masculine inanimate nouns, where the use of the gender form of another gender did not cause misunderstandings or contradictions in discourse, e.g.: *shteg* - *shtigje* (path), *lug* - *lugje* (trough), *vig* - *vigje* (litter) (Topalli, 2011:240).

After analyzing the -e form of the plural, Topalli explains that this unstressed /e/ can have its source in a diphthong -jā, where the long / ā /, merging with the semivowel / j / which has a palatal character, has given the vowel /e/ (Topalli, 2011:241).

According to B. Bokshi, the ending of the plural -e of masculine nouns appeared in a certain period only in the inanimate nouns who were not neuter: *mur-e* (wall), *send-e* (thing), *sup-e* (shoulder), *varr-e* (grave), *fis-e* (tribe), *ves-e* (habit), *kuvend-e* (convent), *pus-e* (shadoof) etc. To explain this process, he gives two arguments: firstly, these nouns did not have an opposite sex, so they did not have corresponding feminine forms; secondly at that time inanimate feminine nouns did not construct the plural with the ending -e. (Bokshi, 2005 B:268-269).

Bokshi considers the gender shift in nouns with the formative -e generalized in both Albanian dialects, unlike what happened to nouns with the ending -ra (-na), which is not so generalized in Tosk Albanian (Bokshi, 2010:201).

Topalli considers relatively new and genderless the formative -na / -ra, as it has a use in all three genders. This formative is also found in the old writers and in the dialects of the diaspora, therefore the researcher states that this suffix was certainly created before the written period of Albanian language (Topalli, 2011:246).

Demiraj also considers that this form was used before the first writings of Albanian languages. According to him, this is an extension of the plural formative -a with the suffix -n- / -r- of the noun stem, a process known in the Albanian language. Demiraj illustrates these analogous constructions with two examples:

- the first example, supported by Gustav Meyer and Mahir Domi, is the noun in the plural *emna* / *emra* (noun), for which the morphemic division of the plural in the popular linguistic consciousness has become *em-na* / *em-ra*, distinguishing thus as the plural formative -na / -ra.

- the second example, accepted by Bokshi, is the plural *gjan-a* / *gjër-a* (things) or *zan-a* / *zër-a* (voices). In these two nouns the ending sound of the subject in the singular (*gjā* / *gjë*, *zā* / *zë*)

has been long lost, making it easier to distinguish the plural formative *-na / -ra* (Demiraj, 1986:238).

What unite the scholars who have made gender shift as the object of their studies, is that this phenomenon has been widespread in the northern dialect but has now become widespread and has become normative throughout Albanian language.

## 7. Ambigender nouns in the Albanian language

Based on the criteria set out in the *Grammar (GGjSh I 2002)*, those who form their plural with *-e* and some with *-ra* are mentioned as ambigender nouns. The largest place in this special group of ambigender nouns is occupied by those inanimate masculine ones who mark objects or abstract notions that form the plural of *-e* (*ballkon-e* (balcony), *debat-e* (debate), *tekst-e* (text), *variant-e* (variant), *zjarr-e* (fire), etc.), but gender shift is also observed in the plural of some former neuter nouns, as well as subject nouns with the suffix *-ra*: *bulmet-ra* (dairy), *dhjamë-ra* (fat), *miell-ra* (flour), *ujë-ra* (water), etc. (*GGjSh I 2002:92*). In addition to these inanimate nouns, two nouns that indicate persons: *personalitete* (personality), *personazhe* (character) and two nouns that indicate small live beings: *baktere* (bacteria), *insekte* (insect) are treated as ambigender.

The scholar Shaban Demiraj (Demiraj, 1972:52) includes in the group of ambigender nouns even some masculine nouns (some of them of neuter origin) that form the plural with *-a*: *hap-a* (step), *petk-a* (clothe) (Demiraj, 1972:53).

Bokshi emphasizes that not all the nouns that in the plural undergo a consonant palatalization process, appear with the ending *-e*, compare: *cak - caqe* (limit), *pellg - pellgje* (pond), *por fik - fiq* (fig), *qiell - qiej* (sky), etc.). According to him, the plural with *-e* was created by those nouns next to which a pluralia tantum was created through the figurative use of the mathematical plural, which had differentiated semantic meaning and had weakened the connection with the singular, therefore the form pluralia tantum should have been more exposed as such. Over time, the plural with *-e* of the pluralia tantum forms passed into the “mathematical” plural, cf. *pyll - pyj - pyje* (forest)<sup>4</sup>. Subsequently, the plural with *-e* of such nouns emerged without having previously had a pluralia tantum form (Bokshi, 2005 B:295-296).

K. Topalli while researching the evolution of an extinct paradigm of feminine nouns in different periods of language development, concludes that given the paradigmatic affiliation of these nouns in today's language, most of them are integrated into the paradigm of masculine nouns with zero ending: *pushtet-i* (power), *shëndet-i* (health), *turp-i* (shame), *vullnet-i* (willpower), etc. (Topalli, 1995:21). These nouns today are included in the group of ambigender nouns.

While Hysen Matoshi in his article about gender shift in Albanian language suggests that in the group of ambigender nouns, the noun *interest* should be treated as an exception, although

<sup>4</sup> *Pyll* in the sense of a large area of land covered with wood ..., *pyj* in the sense of some such surfaces, *pyje* in the sense of trees.

it forms the plural with the suffix *-a*: *interesa jetësore* (vital interests), *interesa kombëtare* (national interests) (Matoshi, 2000:56). He justifies this exception with the fact that the examples from the explanatory dictionary of Albanian testify the ambigender of this noun.

He also suggests that the nouns derived from Turkish, as: *akraballëk* (nepotism), *axhamillëk* (immaturity), etc. must be treated as a separate subdivision of ambigender nouns that make the plural with the suffix *-e* (*akraballëqe*, *axhamillëqe*, etc.) (Matoshi, 2000:56).

Given the fact that unlike the inanimate masculine nouns that make the plural with the suffixes *-e* and *-ra*: *mal-e*, *ujë-ra*, different scholars do not share the same opinion about one of the subgroups that this researcher includes in ambigender nouns, and specifically for masculine nouns that make the plural with the suffix *-a* (*hap-a*), an important place will be occupied by explanations for the nouns included in this group from the point of view of Demiraj.

Regarding the type of nouns that are considered ambigender, Demiraj distinguishes 5 groups of nouns in which gender shift occurs in the plural:

- Neuter source nouns, which in the plural take the formative / *-ra* / (Gegërisht / *-na* /), e.g., *ujë-ra të ftohta* (cold waters), *djathë-ra të mira* (good cheeses), etc.
- masculine nouns, which in the plural also take the formative / *-ra* / (Gegërisht / *-na* /), as e.g., *fshat-ra të pasura* (rich villages), *mall-ra të reja* (new goods), etc.
- Masculine nouns, which in the plural take the formative / *-e* /, as e.g., *mal-e të larta* (high mountains), *qytet-e të mëdha* (big cities), etc.
- Some masculine nouns, originally neuter, which in the plural take the formative / *-a* /, such as: *pek-a të reja* (new clothes), *rresht-a-t e para* (first rows), etc.
- Neuter prepositional nouns of the type *të mirë-të ~ të mir-a-të*, as e.g., *të mir-a të shumta* (many good ones), *të qeshur-a të gëzuara* (happy laughs), etc. (Demiraj, 2015:72, 74).

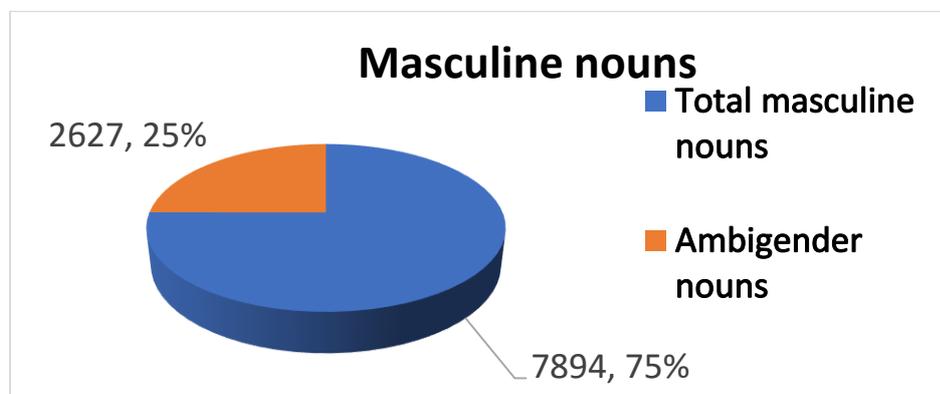
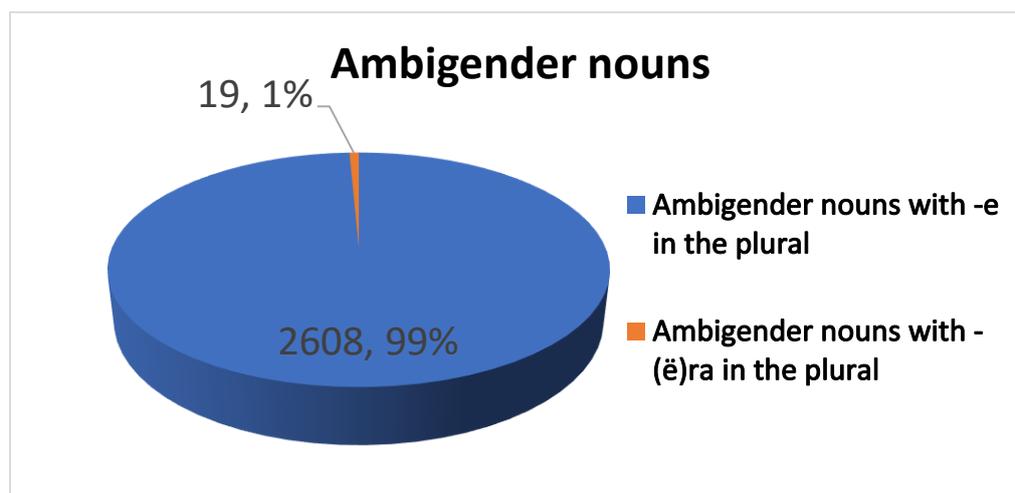
## 8. The spread of ambigender nouns in the Albanian language

Based on the criteria set out in the normative books of the Albanian language for this class of words and to provide an overview of the amount of these nouns, we have extracted some statistics from the “Fjalori i gjuhës shqipe” (Dictionary of the Albanian language), 2006:

Table 2: masculine nouns and ambigender nouns

Type of noun	No. of nouns
Total masculine nouns	7894
Ambigender nouns	2627
Ambigender nouns with the plural in <i>-e</i> <sup>5</sup>	2608
Ambigender nouns with the plural in <i>-(ë)ra</i>	19

Figure 1: Ratio of ambigender nouns to masculine nouns

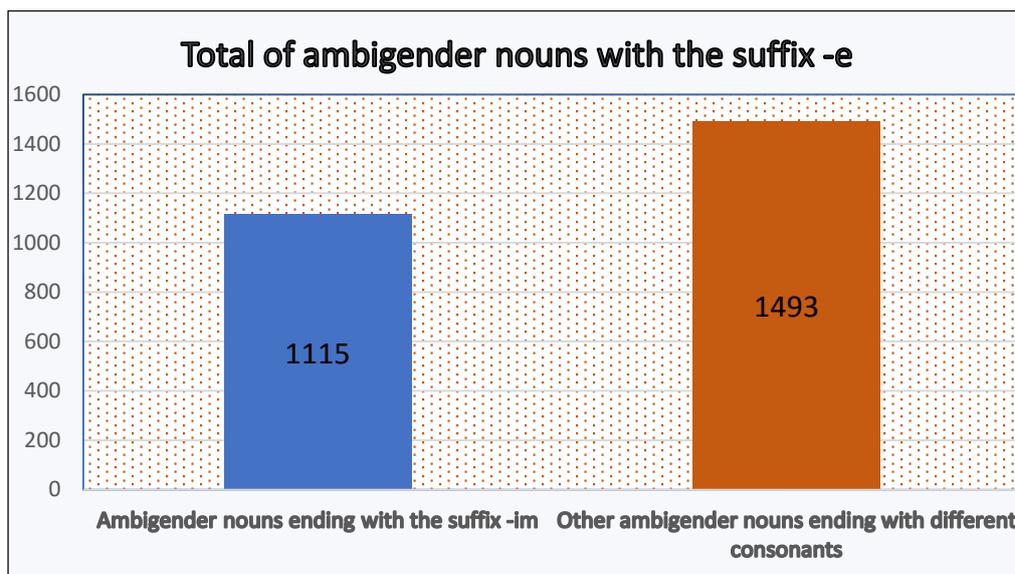
Figure 2: Ratio of ambigender nouns with plurals *-e* and *-ë (ë) ra*

Based on these statistics, it is noticed that ambigender nouns occupy a considerable place in relation to the masculine nouns of the Albanian language, about 2627 out of 7894 masculine nouns. Of the 2627 ambigender nouns, 2608 of them construct the plural with the suffix *-e*. Most of them (around 1115) are verbal nouns derived with the suffix *-im*, such as: *lexim* (reading), *përpunim* (processing), *pastrim* (cleaning), *ndërtim* (construction), *kërcim* (jumping), *filtrim* (filtering), *ushqim* (feeding), *nxitim* (hurrying), *shkrim* (writing), *korrigjim* (proofreading), *vizatim* (drawing), etc., although there are a considerable number of other nouns with the suffix *-e*, which are prime or non-prime formed in different ways. This part of ambigender nouns ends with different consonants, such as: *komb* (nation), *bilanc* (balance),

<sup>5</sup> This group contains even the Turkish borrowing words with the *-llëk* suffix (31 nouns) that undergo to the ending consonant palatalization process + the suffix *-e*: *boshllëk* / *boshllëqe* (emptiness), *çapkëllëk* / *çapkëllëqe* (clutter), *pisllëk* / *pisllëqe* (filth), etc.

*ilaç* (medicine), *kyç* (key), *acid* (acid), *send* (thing), *episod* (episode), *autograf* (autograph), *zarf* (envelope), *gong* (gong), *gardh* (fence), *teh* (blade), *shesh* (square), *lëmsh* (tangle), *makth* (nightmare), *borxh* (debt), *imazh* (image), *tatuazh* (tattoo), *tramvaj* (tram), *privilegj* (privilege), *merak* (worry), *tank* (tank), *ideal* (ideal), *sinjal* (signal), *tunel* (tunnel), *nivel* (level), *shall* (scarf), *protokoll* (protocol), *metropol* (metropolis), *tul* (pulp), *diagram* (diagram), *problem* (problem), *toponim* (toponym), *album* (album), *forum* (forum), *dëm* (damage), *plan* (plan), *refren* (refrain), *informacion* (information), *pozicion* (position), *ekskursion* (excursion), *diapazon* (range), *kanun* (canon), *rrap* (maple), *kamp* (camp), *sup* (shoulder), *fjalëkryq* (crossword), *seminar* (seminar), *dekor* (decor), *zjarr* (fire), *oborr* (yard), *kusur* (scrap), *qymyr* (coal), *atlas* (atlas), *biznes* (business), *indeks* (index), *kaktus* (cactus), *afat* (term), *rezultat* (result), *det* (sea), *automjet* (vehicle), *tapet* (carpet), *kopsht* (garden), *limit* (limit), *efekt* (effect), *variant* (variant), *apartament* (apartment), *koncert* (concert), *rast* (case), *kontribut* (contribution), *motiv* (motive), *kafaz* (cage), *kurriz* (ridge).

Figure 3: Ratio of ambigender nouns with the suffix -im to ambigender nouns with other ending consonants



From the concrete vocabulary collection of ambigender nouns, there is a very small number of nouns with the plural suffix -ra: *bar* (grass), *bulmet* (dairy), *byk* (hull), *djathë* (cheese), *drithë* (grain), *dhe* (ground), *dhjamë* (fat), *fshat* (village), *gjak* (blood), *krem* (cream), *lesh* (wool), *llum* (sludge), *mall* (good), *miell* (flour), *mish* (meat), *mut* (shit), *pleh* (manure), *stof* (coating), *ujë* (water).

The phenomenon of gender shift finds formal expression in the attributives, i.e., in adjectives, pronouns and numerals, which in the Albanian language agree with the main word, i.e., the noun when used in the plural.

*ky mësim i ri - këto mësimë të reja*  
(this new lesson - these new lessons)  
*një mur i lartë - disa mure të larta*

(a high wall - some high walls)

*ky shënim i shkurtër – këto shënime të shkurtra*

(this short note - these short notes)

*ujë i pastër – ujëra të pastra*

(clean water - clean waters)

Albanian users often have difficulty getting used to this category of nouns, but the degree of difficulty of agreement these attributives to ambigender nouns is not the same.

One of the long-term goals for the continuation of this paper is to study exactly the degree of agreements of attributives with this category of nouns in cases where they are in the function of the determiner, as well as in cases when they are used in anaphoric and predicative function in a sentence or period. To achieve this goal, we are in the process of observing the written language, but also of the spoken language, although the latter presents greater difficulties.

Preliminary data from the study of written language show that adjective attributes were more frequent than other attributives and that users correctly agree adjectives with ambigender nouns more easily than pronouns and numerals. However, there are many wrong agreements of the adjectives with the ambigender noun.

Meanwhile, the work continues to extract concrete data on the use of these nouns and adapt the attributives to them, which will be a good orientation for the usage of these nouns in different textbooks. Also, this data should be considered in further revisions that are thought to be made in the future to the Albanian orthography, especially the controversial plural forms.

## 9. Conclusion

The process of gender shift to a group of masculine nouns during the transition from the singular to the plural is known in various Indo-European languages, such as Romanian, Italian, Slovak, Czech, Modern Greek, etc.

The prevailing scientific opinion is that although gender shift is known in various Indo-European languages, it is an internal development of Albanian language and its origins is at least before the XV century, before the writings of Northern authors.

The gender category of the noun in the Albanian language is a syntactic category, which is reflected in the agreement of the attributives to these nouns.

According to the statistics published by the *Fjalori i gjuhës shqipe*, the phenomenon of gender shift is very widespread in the Albanian language. They occupy a quarter of the total number of masculine nouns.

With all the terms encountered in the language literature, the most accepted and used term by scholars for this group of nouns is ‘ambigjen’.

Ambigender nouns in the Albanian language are inanimate masculine nouns that denote abstract objects or notions that form the plural with the suffix -e (99% of ambigender nouns) and material nouns that form the plural with the suffix -ra (1% of ambigender nouns).

Often users find no answers when referring to previous explanatory dictionaries of Albanian (e.g., dictionaries of 1980, 1984, 2006, 2020) for this group of ambigender nouns: these nouns are not illustrated with examples in the plural and are not accompanied by attributives to see their agreement in the sentence.

From a previous work on the study of the Albanian written language, especially of the attributives, it has been noticed that the adjectives are used more often than numerals and pronouns. These adjectives agree better with ambigender nouns than other attributives but need further study to verify their usage in written and spoken Albanian.

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