

Carly Dickerson*

The linguistic expression of gender identity: Albania's "sworn virgins"

<https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2018-2012>

Abstract: This article focuses on the linguistic aspects of the construction of masculine identities by the *burneshat* (also known as "sworn virgins") of northern Albania: biological females who have become "social men". Unlike other "third genders" (Kulick, Don. 1999. Transgender and language: A review of the literature and suggestions for the future. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5(4). 605622.), the *burneshat* are motivated not by personal identity or sexual desire, but by the need to fulfill patriarchal roles within a traditional social code. *Burneshat* do not marry or engage in sexual relationships, and are thus seen as honorable and self-sacrificing (Young, Antonia. 2000. *Women who become men: Albanian sworn virgins*. Oxford & New York: Berg.). How do *burneshat* construct and express their identity linguistically, and how do others engage with this identity? I examine the effects of social and linguistic factors on variation in the use of grammatical gender in the speech of *burneshat* and others in their communities. I find that choices in grammatical gender are linked to the speaker's relationship to *burneshat*, the grammatical context of the token, and whether the token is in oral or written language. An analysis of other gendered practices confirms language's role in building masculine identities. Situated within a culture that embraces women becoming men, this study sheds light onto the linguistic practices used by speakers in the co-construction of gender.

Keywords: Albanian, sworn virgin, gender performance, masculinities, third gender

1 Introduction

Linguistic dimensions of transgenderism have typically been studied within qualitative frameworks, and have tended to focus on marginalized groups, such as the *hijras* (Hall and O'Donovan 1996), the *travestis* (Kulick 1997), and the *'yan daudu* (Gaudio 2014). These studies reveal that transgender individuals navigate, and often create, complex systems of gendered linguistic practices and gestures to assert unique identities that transcend traditional understandings of what it means to be male or female.

*Corresponding author: Carly Dickerson, Linguistics, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, USA, E-mail: dickerson.253@osu.edu

However, not only are there no empirical studies of sociolinguistic variation in transgender speech and the speech of others in reference to transgender people generally, there is also a lack of research on transgender individuals who occupy prominent positions in mainstream society and are treated on a par with their cisgender cohort. In this article, I address this gap in the literature by focusing on the linguistic aspects of the construction of masculine identities of *burnmeshat*:¹ biological females in Albania who have become “social men”. Given the small data set and the fact that there is a mix of data types in this analysis, it can only be considered the first step towards a full-blown quantitative analysis of grammatical gender and transgender individuals. However, these early results are indicative of gendered patterns of language use and gender ideologies, and can be a starting point for future work on the linguistic study of *burnmeshat*.

Unlike other “third genders” (Kulick 1999), *burnmeshat* are motivated not by personal identity or sexual desire, but by the need to fulfill patriarchal roles within a traditional social code. Although they are accepted and treated as men in their community, *burnmeshat* do not marry or engage in sexual relationships, and are thus seen as honourable and self-sacrificing (Young 2000).

For centuries, a practice of women swearing to live their lives as men has existed in traditional northern Albanian society. Known as “sworn virgins” in English and *burnmeshat* in Albanian, these individuals must give up their lives as females, promising to never marry and to remain virgins for life. In return, they take on masculine social roles, and are treated as men by members of their communities. This new masculine identity affords them privileges reserved only for men, such as the right to own property, carry a weapon, drink, smoke, and travel unchaperoned. Such freedom allows *burnmeshat* to earn a living and provide for their families (Šarčević 2004; Tarifa 2007; Elsie 2012; Young and Rice 2012).²

Under these circumstances, how do *burnmeshat* construct and express their identity linguistically, and how do others engage with this identity? Do *burnmeshat* follow the linguistic construction of masculinity used by biological males, or do they set themselves apart through the use of both male and female linguistic practices?

Previous research indicates that transgender people do strategically employ both masculine and feminine grammatical forms in self-reference, and that this usage is often subversive. For example, Bershtling (2014) finds that Hebrew’s

¹ Singular: *burnmeshë*.

² For further cultural and historical background on *burnmeshat*, there is no better or more authoritative book on the subject than Antonia Young’s *Women who become men: Albanian sworn virgins* (2000). Other excellent sources include Jill Peters’s (2013) photo project and a National Geographic short documentary “Sworn virgins” (2008), in which Antonia Young visits Pashkë, a *burnmeshë* living in the remote mountain village of Theth.

system of binary grammatical gender allows for “various subversive practices and performances of [gender] identity” among genderqueer individuals. But what if there is no mainstream or oppressive culture to subvert? What, if any, social or linguistic factors will constrain grammatical gender use? Furthermore, how do others write and talk about *burneshat*? Are *burneshat* perceived as occupying positions within or beyond a binary gender system?

Operating within a framework that understands gender as socially constructed, I explore the effects of social and linguistic factors on variation in the use of grammatical gender in the speech of *burneshat* and others in their communities. The data is from Albanian-language media articles and conversations recorded in 2014 during fieldwork in Durrës, Elbasan, Shkodër, and surrounding areas. Analysis indicates that choices in the grammatical gender used to refer to *burneshat* are linked to linguistic context as well as the speaker’s relationship to the *burneshë* in question, as well as the expression of particular traits (such as pride or strength). But first, Section 2 provides some necessary historical and cultural background for understanding the phenomenon of *burneshat* in Albanian culture. Section 3 covers the basics of grammatical gender in Albanian. Section 4 of this study provides an empirical analysis of grammatical gender use, and Section 5 looks at a variety of other gendered linguistic practices that are used to express gender identities. Section 6 offers a conclusion and suggests several directions for future study.

2 Cultural and historical background

The people of Albania’s northern highlands have traditionally lived according to the *Kanun*, a code of law that has existed for hundreds of years, and that dictates nearly every aspect of daily life (Elsie 2012). The *Kanun* requires swift, and often harsh, punishment. Central to the *Kanun* is the concept of *besa*. Roughly translated as ‘honor’, *besa* is the guiding principle behind every action and decision in the region. *Besa* encompasses ideals of fairness, giving one’s word, respect, and generous hospitality. An affront to *besa* is a serious offense according to the *Kanun*.

Although the *Kanun* has a detailed system of assigning punishments appropriate to the crime, serious crimes (such as murder, adultery, or extreme disrespect) were generally resolved by a policy of “blood for blood”, or a blood feud (*gjakmarrja*). Any male member of the offender’s clan was a possible target of revenge. Blood feuds, once started, could last for centuries, and resulted in the deaths of thousands of Albanian males (Young 2000; Kuntz 2014).

Because two clans could fall “into blood” at any time, every clan in the region had a *kulla* (fortified stone tower) in which all males would remain until the feud was resolved. For some families, a feud could last several decades, effectively imprisoning multiple generations of an entire family. Such a situation was economically crippling, as women in this patriarchal society were considered property by the *Kanun*; travel, weapons, finances, and decision-making powers were beyond the scope of what was allowed to women (Young 2000).

Faced with such dire circumstances, some women opted to take on a male identity in order to support their family, a choice upheld by the *Kanun* (Zherka 2011). Additionally, some families would choose to raise a daughter as a son, in the absence of an appropriate male heir. Another factor that could influence a woman’s decision to live as a male was avoidance of an undesired arranged marriage. According to the *Kanun*, the only way that a woman could avoid marriage and yet maintain her family’s honor was in the act of swearing virginity and living as a man for the rest of her life (Young 2000; Elsie 2012).

It should be noted that the influence of the *Kanun*, and along with it the tradition of *burmeshat*, has weakened considerably since the mid-twentieth century when Albania became a communist state. Today, fewer than one hundred *burmeshat* are estimated to still be alive, although that count is quickly decreasing as many *burmeshat* are now elderly (Young 2000; Paterniti 2014).

3 Grammatical gender in Albanian

Grammatical gender is an agreement class that “is largely redundant or non-functional with respect to its role in grammar and human communication, especially in comparison with other grammatical categories such as number or tense, and in view of its supposed non-universal character” (Kilarski 2007: 2). Although, as in most Indo-European languages, grammatical gender coincides with male and female sex (often referred to as “natural” gender [Corbeill 2008]), such a relationship is not necessary for linguistic gender systems. Indeed, “sex may be irrelevant, as in the Algonquian languages, where the distinction is between animate and inanimate” (Corbett 2006: 749). Furthermore, even in gender systems with a male-female contrast, most gender assignment of nouns can seem semantically arbitrary (Kilarski and Krynicki 2005). Consider, for example, that the word “the sun” is masculine in Spanish, feminine in German, and neuter in Russian.

Albanian has a grammatical gender system typical of Indo-European languages, in that nouns are either masculine or feminine. The Albanian pronominal system distinguishes between first, second, and third person, as well as

between singular and plural. Only the third person has a gender distinction (Çamaj 1984). However, as Albanian is a null-subject (pro-drop) language, pronouns are optional. Therefore, the grammatical gender of a verb's subject often is not overtly specified (Çamaj 1984).

It is, however, quite regularly the case that grammatical gender must be indicated in the use of adjectives, which follow the noun. Adjectives can either (a) agree with the head noun in gender and number, marking this agreement with an appropriate suffix, or they can (b) agree with gender, number, case, and definiteness, marking this with a particle connecting the noun to the adjective.

By requiring gender agreement in adjectives, Albanian provides numerous instances for gender marking. For example, a statement of one's nationality, occupation, or current mood indexes gender. On the other hand, Albanian's pro-drop nature allows for gender ambiguity in environments that in a language like English would require an overt gender marker. Compare the phrases in examples (1a-b) with those in examples (1c-d).

- (1) a. *jam* *shofer-Ø*
 am driver-MASC.
 'I am a driver'
- b. *është* *i* *mërzitur* *sot*
 is MASC. upset today
 'he is upset today'
- c. *është* *nga* *Franca*
 is from France
 '(he/she/it) is from France'
- d. *punon* *shumë*
 works a lot
 '(he/she/it) works a lot'

In (1a), the word *shofer* 'driver' has masculine agreement, and although there is no overt subject, the inflection on the verb informs us that the subject is first person and singular. Thus, the Albanian phrase provides more information than the English version. In (1b), both languages convey the same information, but by different means. In the Albanian, the adjective's gender marking tells us that the subject of the phrase is masculine. In the English an overt subject provides this information. In (1c-d), the subject is not specified, and the predicates do not contain any adjectival phrases that can be marked for gender agreement. In other words, in cases such as these, the English version necessarily provides gender information, yet the Albanian version is ambiguous.

4 Empirical analysis

4.1 Data collection and coding

This study draws upon five recorded interviews, roughly six hours in length. There are a total of twenty-five informants, all native Albanian speakers hailing mostly from northern and north-central Albania. For each interview, a *burmeshë*, an interviewer, and a variety of combinations of friends and family members were present. Only one of the five interviews did not include a *burmeshë*. Rather, this interview was with the family and friends of a *burmeshë* who had passed away a decade ago. The *burmeshat* in this study have been given pseudonyms: Rozafa, Fitore, Liana, Fatmira, and Rita. The oral data is supplemented by written data from thirteen Albanian-language newspaper articles that discuss various aspects of the phenomenon of *burmeshat*.³

Articles and interview transcriptions were combed for tokens of the dependent variable (*GENDER*), defined as the occurrence of a syntactic unit (NP or AP) that both referred to *burmeshat* and displayed grammatical gender (masculine or feminine). A total of 389 acceptable tokens were identified. These tokens were then coded for linguistic and social factors, as defined below:

- Part of Speech: Adjectives (A), Nouns (N). Both factors included pronominal forms (i. e. possessive adjectives and pronouns).
- Type: Pronominal (P), Non-Pronominal (N). Independent of being adjectives or nouns, tokens were further coded for whether or not they were pronominal in nature.
- Preceding Grammatical Gender: Masculine (M), Feminine (F), Unavailable (U). Preceding Grammatical Gender was defined as the grammatical gender of a previously occurring word or phrase that had as its referent the same *burmeshë* as the current token's referent. Instances of preceding grammatical gender were included only if they occurred one full sentence or less from the token. Tokens that did not meet this requirement were coded as U.

³ It should be noted that while the number of *burmeshat* interviewed and the number of articles used in this study are quite small, this is indicative of the general difficulty presented to the researcher in locating *burmeshat* and finding articles written about them in the original Albanian. For example, several *burmeshat* now live in nursing homes, another has moved out of the country, and one other refused to do an interview unless she received a large payment. While the data is certainly not exhaustive, nor representative of all *burmeshat* living in Albania today, it does reflect the researcher's efforts to gather as much Albanian-language data as possible.

- Language Medium: Oral (O), Written (W). Tokens from written materials, even if quotations from a speaker, were coded as Written (W).
- Relationship to *Burnmeshë*: Self (S), Family and Friends (F); Unfamiliar or Impersonal (U). *Burnmeshat* themselves, as the interview subjects, were coded as S.⁴
- Sex/Gender Identity: Male (M), Female (F), *Burnmeshë* (B) or Unavailable (U). All authorless articles were coded as U. Note that assigning a gender/sex category to *burnmeshat* is inherently problematic. After all, one of the main objectives of this study is to determine if *burnmeshat* language use expresses or can shed light on their feelings of gender identity. Furthermore, it is very likely that *burnmeshat* differ in the degree to which they feel inherently masculine or feminine. One *burnmeshë* may identify more as a cisgender woman fulfilling a male social role, while another may have personally identified as male from a very young age. Thus, *burnmeshat* were simply coded as B to avoid imposing any particular gender ideologies.
- Age: Teens and 20s (A), 30s (B), Middle-aged/40s-60s (C), 70 or Older (D), Unavailable (U). Note that age ranges were determined by generation rather than simply by decade. Articles without authors were coded as Unavailable.

4.2 Data analysis and results

Once coded, data was entered into Goldvarb X for Windows (Sankoff et al. 2005), a computer application commonly used in the study of sociolinguistic variation that can be used to carry out logistic regression. It is also useful in providing raw numbers and percentages for a variant in the various factor groups.

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of the masculine (M) variant of grammatical gender across linguistic and social factor groups. The overall distribution of the masculine variant reveals that, for all but one factor, the feminine variant is preferred (53.1%). Only the tokens coded for a masculine preceding gender had a majority of masculine variants.

⁴ There were no tokens in which a *burnmeshë* referred to another *burnmeshë* or to a (non-inclusive) group of *burnmeshat*. There were instances when a *burnmeshë* mentioned someone else who was in an almost identical situation, but this person was referred to as a woman who did similar work, rather than as a woman who had become a man. Such a woman did not swear an oath of virginity and celibacy, nor did she necessarily adopt a masculine appearance.

Table 1: Overall distribution of masculine grammatical gender marking.

Factor Group	Masculine		Total
	%	N	N
Overall Distribution	21.1	82	389
Part of Speech			
Adjective Phrase	26.4	55	208
Nominal Phrase	14.9	27	181
Type			
Non-pronominal	27.5	70	255
Pronominal	9.0	12	134
Preceding Grammatical Gender			
Masculine	53.1	26	49
Unavailable	30.8	41	133
Feminine	7.2	15	207
Language Medium			
Oral	25.0	56	224
Written	15.8	26	165
Relationship to <i>Burrneshë</i>			
Self	37.1	43	116
Unfamiliar/Impersonal	17.0	27	159
Family/Friends	11.1	12	108
Sex/Gender Identity			
<i>Burrneshë</i>	37.1	43	116
Male	15.0	12	80
Unavailable	13.5	12	89
Female	14.4	15	104
Age			
40–69	32.8	38	116
15–29	17.5	7	40
70 and older	16.7	10	60
30–39	18.1	15	83
Unavailable	13.3	12	90

However, two separate binomial step-up/step-down analyses (one for only linguistic factor groups and one for only social factor groups) found that four factor groups were statistically significant in predicting use of the masculine variant over the feminine: Preceding Grammatical Gender, Type (pronominal or non-pronominal), Language Medium, and Relationship to *Burrneshë*. Part of Speech, Age, and Gender/Sex Identity were not selected as significant. Table 2 provides the factor weights for the factors in the statistically significant factor groups.

Table 2: Factors contributing to the use of masculine grammatical gender for *burrneshat*.

Linguistic factor groups		Social factor groups	
	Total N: 389		Total N: 389
	Input: 0.145		Input: 0.190
Preceding Grammatical Gender		Relationship to <i>Burrneshë</i>	
Masculine	0.87	Self	0.68
Unavailable	0.69	Unfamiliar /Impersonal	0.53
Feminine	0.27	Family/Friend	0.27
	Range: 60		Range: 44
Type		Language Medium	
Non-pronominal	0.62	Oral	0.59
Pronominal	0.29	Written	0.38
	Range: 33		Range: 21

Factors not selected as significant: Part of Speech, Age; Gender/Sex Identity.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 Part of speech

Although the marginals for Part of Speech show a higher percentage of feminine tokens in nouns (85.1%) than in adjectives (73.6%), analysis found that part of speech does not play a significant role in the choice between masculine and feminine grammatical gender. This may be due, in part, to the methodological decision to code nominal adjectives based on their syntactic function (nouns) even if they are derived from adjectives.

4.3.2 Type

Pronominal phrases strongly disfavored the masculine, whereas nominal phrases displayed a preference for it. This can be accounted for by positing that (a) pronominal phrases (APs or NPs) are less lexically and perceptually salient in discourse than their non-pronominal counterparts,⁵ and (b) informants subconsciously tend to think of *burrneshat* as females.

⁵ See Ivanova-Sullivan (2014), Zufferey (2015), and Fauconnier and Sweetser (1996).

Non-pronominal nouns and adjectives carry a heavier semantic load (Zelinsky-Wibbelt 2000). That is, in addition to expressing gender, number, case, etc., they also provide lexical information (occupation, age, value judgments, appearance, manner, etc.). This additional information means that non-pronominal nouns and adjectives are more salient in speech, as speakers are more cognizant of their lexical selection. If informants are therefore less aware of their pronoun choice than they are of their other noun and adjective choices, pronominal items might be a more accurate reflection of one's subconscious understanding of a *burrneshë's* "true" gender.

In using lexical items, a person may have difficulty reconciling the perceived semantic discord between a word's masculine meaning and feminine morphology. For example, Writer 03 acknowledges that *burrneshat* "sacrifice" their sexual identity (i. e. their hetero cis-femaleness) for the greater social good (example 2a). In other words, the writer understands *burrneshat* to be girls who have become male for social, not personal, reasons. Nonetheless, when discussing the male duties required of *burrneshat*, the writer uses the masculine forms of "hero"⁶ and "member/representative of the family". Writer 03 uses only one other non-pronominal token in his article; it is also in the masculine (example 2b). Note, however, that all of the pronominal tokens in his article are feminine.

(2) Writer 03:

- a. [...] *një vajzë vendos që ta sakrifikojë identitetin e saj seksual për atë social dhe nuk ka **hero** më të madh se **kjo**, në kontekstin e zhvillimit të kësaj tradite shqiptare. Pasi të bëhet burrë, ajo shndërrohet në "ai", mban plisin, orën e xhepit sikur burrat, ndërron mimikën, administron pronën e shtëpisë, zgjidh problemet në komunitet si **pjesëtar i familjes**, [...]*

'[...] a girl decides to sacrifice her sexual identity for a social one and there is no greater **hero (M)** than **she**, in the context of carrying on this Albanian tradition. After becoming a man, she turns into "he", works the soil, keeps a pocket watch like a man, changes mannerisms, administers the house's property, settles community problems as a **representative (M) of the family**, [...]'

- b. [...] *janë ndjerë **krenarë** për atë që kanë bërë.*
'[...] they felt **proud (M)** for what they have done.'

⁶ The use of *hero* (M) rather than *heroinë* (F) is particularly interesting, given the title of the article: "Heroinat e verteta shqiptare – virgjëreshat e përbetuara" [True Albanian heroines – sworn virgins].

4.3.3 Preceding grammatical gender

In a cooperative conversation, speakers are likely to align themselves with their interlocutors. According to Garrod and Pickering (2009), dialogue

is a joint action at different levels. At the highest level, the goal of interlocutors is to align their mental representations. This emerges from joint activity at lower levels, both concerned with linguistic decisions (e. g. choice of words) and nonlinguistic processes (e. g. alignment of posture or speech rate) (Garrod and Pickering 2009: 56).

It is not surprising, then, that an instance of a preceding masculine or feminine grammatical gender would favour the masculine or feminine variant, respectively. Although an individual may tend to use the feminine gender when talking about *burmeshat*, hearing someone else use the masculine form could influence his or her choice of gender in the next utterance.

This phenomenon was coined the “birds of a feather” effect by Scherre and Naro (1991) in their study of agreement marking in Brazilian Portuguese:

the principle that governs the real use of markers is something more like ‘birds of a feather flock together,’ that is, the more markers there are, the more likely another marker will be used; the fewer markers there are, the less likely another will be used (1991: 24).

Although Scherre and Naro’s domain is syntax, the same principles are at work in other aspects of language (Pickering and Ferreira 2008). This effect likely increases when speakers mirror their interlocutors or repeat previous phrases. In their review of structural priming,⁷ Pickering and Ferreira (2008: 441) confirm that “In dialogue, interlocutors constantly switch between comprehension and production and are clearly able to use what they have just comprehended to guide what they produce. Thus it is not surprising that dialogue is extremely repetitive”.

In example (3) below, Rozafa’s second cousin, who almost always uses the feminine grammatical gender, employs the masculine following his mother’s use of the masculine.

(3)

Wife of Rozafa’s cousin: *Ka qenë shumë njeri i mirë, moj, ka qenë i dashtun, o zot.*
 ‘[Ø] was such a good (M) person (M), oh, [Ø] was
loved (M), oh my God.’

⁷ Citing Bock (1986), Pickering and Ferreira (2008) define structural priming as “a tendency to repeat or better process a current sentence because of its structural similarity to a previously experienced (‘prime’) sentence” (Pickering and Ferreira 2008: 427).

Rozafa's 2nd cousin: *Shumë i dashtun e tana.*
'Very **loved (M)** and all.'

It is not always the case, however, that speakers will adjust their use of grammatical gender. Indeed, as in example (4), a speaker may continue to use one grammatical gender despite the interlocutor's use of the other grammatical gender.

(4)

- 1st Interviewer: *Oh marshalla, dukesh më e vogël! si-*
'Oh Masha'Allah, you look **younger (F)**! like-'
- Liana: *"Marshalla" mund thotë ai është myslyman, por orthodoxët nuk thonë "marshalla".*
'He who is Muslim can say "Masha'Allah", but Orthodox people don't say "Masha'Allah".'
- 1st Interviewer: *E di, haha.*
'I know, haha.'
- Liana: *Jezu, haha. *tsk* Kështu janë ca gjëra që-*
'Jesus, haha. *tsk* This is how some things are.'
- 1st Interviewer: *Mund t'ju pyesim për fenë tuaj?*
'Can we ask you about your religion?'
- Liana: **Orthodoks.**
'**Orthodox (M).**'
- 1st Interviewer: *Ju jeni orthodokse.*
'You are **Orthodox (F).**'

In the above example, the interviewer employs the feminine when expressing surprise at Liana's age ("*Oh marshalla, dukesh më e vogël!*"). However, Liana's response to a question about religion employs the masculine ("*Orthodoks*"). Rather than the interviewer changing her gender usage for Liana, she replies using the feminine ("*Ju jeni orthodokse*"), despite receiving feedback indicating a preference for the masculine.⁸ A possible explanation for the interviewer's maintained usage of the feminine is that she has a firm understanding of Liana as a female, regardless of Liana's numerous masculine traits.

⁸ In fact, earlier in the interview, Liana had also explicitly stated a preference for "Sir" over "Ma'am".

Increased use of the masculine in the absence of a previous instance of grammatical gender is likely tied to the masculine's status as the default grammatical gender in Albanian when gender is unknown.⁹ When in doubt, or when discussing *burneshat* in the abstract, speakers or writers will be more likely to default to using the masculine.

Of course, the results show that, at most, only 53% of tokens are masculine, even when preceded by a masculine token. To some extent, this may reflect situations such as that of example (4) above, in which different speakers have different gender ideologies. However, there are also many examples in the data of linguistic variation. This occurs even in the speech or writing of a single informant, as in example (5).

(5) Article 02:

Ndërsa, Behari, një Burrneshë 86-vjeçare jetoi si djalë që nga mosha 6-vjeçare, sepse thjeshtë nuk u ndje si vajzë. Ai ishte rrahur nga nëna e tij, sepse nuk pranonte të vishej me rroba vajze. Ajo ishte vetëm në 12 vjeçe kur babai pranoi që ajo pjesën tjetër të jetës ta jetonte si burrë. Behari ishte në një intervistë të botuar më herët në GQ, kur ishte pyetur se pse një burrë nuk mund të jetonte si grua, përgjigja e tij ishte [...]

‘Meanwhile, Behar, a 86-year old (F) *Burrneshë* (F) lived as a boy since the age (F) of 6 years old (F), simply because [Ø] didn’t feel like a girl. **He** was beaten by **his** mother, because [Ø] wouldn’t agree to dress in girls’ clothes. **She** was only **12 years old (F)** when [Behar’s] father accepted that the rest of [Behar’s] life would be lived as a man. Behar was in a previous interview published by GQ, when [Ø] was asked why a man couldn’t live as a woman, **his** answer was [...]

The author of Article 02 switches between the masculine and feminine when writing about Behar. However, these switches do not seem to be motivated by any literary strategy to evoke gender transition; the masculine is used to describe Behar at a time when Behar was still “she” (“*Ai ishte rrahur nga nëna e tij*”), and the feminine is used when describing the father’s acceptance of Behar’s transition to masculinity (“*Ajo ishte vetëm në 12 vjeçe kur babai pranoi që ajo pjesën tjetër të jetës ta jetonte si burrë*”). Whether cases such as this one indicate a sort of unaware gender “code-switching”, or simply poor editing, is unclear.

⁹ The exception being the generic neuter; in Albanian the generic neuter (“it” in English) is expressed using the feminine forms *ajo/kjo* ‘this/that’ (Lloshi 1999).

4.3.4 Language medium

Compared to the oral data, written data contained fewer masculine tokens. This may be due, in part, to the nature of written texts. Although not always the case (see the previous example), articles and essays are generally edited and proof-read to avoid mistakes and inconsistencies. Additionally, the act of writing (typing) is a deliberate, conscious one; the writer is aware of his or her word choice. Given this more formal register, it makes sense that written materials would display less (unintentional) variation in grammatical gender.

The written materials also differ from the oral data with regard to informant demographics. Many tokens in the written data are produced by informants unfamiliar with *burrneshat*. The only data from *burrneshat* themselves come from two interviews – one with Liana and one with Rita. Thus, whether they have met a *burrneshë* once for an interview or are only writing about *burrneshat* from a philosophical point of view, writers do not have an established relationship with *burrneshat*. Tokens from friends and family of *burrneshat* are absent from the written data. On the other hand, the informants in the recorded interviews, with the exception of the three interviewers, are all either *burrneshat* themselves, or people familiar with them. Although friends and family have low rates of masculine usage, *burrneshat* have above average rates of masculine tokens (see the following section). With *burrneshat* providing nearly 30% of all tokens, their high participation in recorded interviews balances out family and friends' relatively low rates of using the masculine grammatical gender.

4.3.5 Sex/gender identity

Sex/Gender Identity of informants was not a significant factor in predicting use of grammatical gender. However, it is worth noting that all informants coded as Self (S) in the Relationship to *Burrneshë* factor group are the same informants who are coded as *Burrneshë* (B) in the Gender/Sex Identity factor group. Given that all tokens produced by *burrneshat* were used for self-reference, it can be understood that being a *burrneshë* is a significant factor in whether or not one will have a higher rate of masculine grammatical forms in one's speech.

4.3.6 Relationship to *burrneshë*

One's relationship to a *burrneshë* was significant in influencing use of grammatical gender. *Burrneshat* themselves were the most likely to use the

masculine gender, with this factor having a weight of 0.68. Family and friends were the least likely, with a factor weight of 0.27. These results may lend insight into how informants conceive of the gender identity of *burneshat*.

Informants who had not met *burneshat* and interviewers who met *burneshat* for the first time, had a lower rate of masculine tokens than *burneshat* themselves. It is tempting to interpret this behaviour as evidence that *burneshat*, despite their best masculinization efforts, nonetheless make a somewhat feminine first impression. However, it is important to consider the context in which these informants are speaking or writing about *burneshat*. They have sought to interview or learn about *burneshat* precisely because *burneshat* are “women who became men”. Thus, at the forefront of informants’ minds is the fact that the interview or article subject is originally a woman. Informants may be preoccupied with trying to understand or account for a *burneshë*’s complex gender identity and presentation. Such a fixation may influence a speaker or writer to use more feminine grammatical forms than they would if they had met a *burneshë* in a different social setting. Indeed, it is quite possible that in another context, these informants would not realize that the *burneshë* was not a biological male.

In comparison to journalists and interviewers, relatives and friends have solid relationships with *burneshat* that may in fact predate the transition. These informants are not fixated on gender identity; the *burneshat* in their lives are, for all intents and purposes, social men. Family and friends did not express any reluctance to accept them as such, nor is there any evidence of disrespect or ridicule towards *burneshat*. In fact, informants often insisted upon the manliness, outstanding character, and integrity of the *burneshat* in their lives. Therefore, it is unlikely that the preference for feminine tokens in the speech of friends and relatives reflects a rejection of a *burneshë*’s masculine identity. A more plausible explanation is that these speakers do not perceive any conflict between the original gender of *burneshat* and their adopted gender. For example, Fatmira’s nephew expresses such an understanding of his “aunt” (example 6).

(6)

Fatmira’s nephew: *Si hallë, por gjithmonë e veçantë, gjithmonë e veçantë. Nuk e di- nuk e di. Shumë e veçantë, e veçantë po si hallë. Po edhe shumë e fortë edhe shumë e fortë, edhe shumë interesante [?] gjithmonë fakti, a din. Interesante po e din, si gjithmonë e gatshme dhe gjithmonë e gatshme me ne e dashtun, e disponu si shok, marshalla.*

‘As a *hallë*,¹⁰ but always **special (F)**, always **special (F)**. I don’t kn- I don’t know. Very **special (F)**, **special (F)** but like a *hallë*. But also very **strong (F)** and very **strong (F)**, also very **interesting (F)** [?] always the fact, you know. **Interesting (F)** but you know, like always **willing to help (F)** and always **willing to help (F)** us and **loving (F)**, **there for you (F)** like a friend (M), Masha’Allah.’

These speakers have accepted and grown accustomed to their aunts, sisters, nieces, or cousins living as men. What outsiders might view as strange or intriguing, friends and relatives understand as a normal part of everyday life. Confident in a *burrneshë*’s masculinity, such speakers can comfortably use feminine grammatical forms without worrying about making ideological statements regarding a *burrneshë*’s “manliness”.

Burrneshat were the group with the heaviest factor weight for male tokens. This indicates that they may indeed be inclined see themselves as men, even if they readily acknowledge their biological differences and female childhoods. It also reflects a successful internal adoption of masculinity. Nonetheless, only 37% of tokens produced by *burrneshat* were masculine; *burrneshat* still mostly used feminine grammatical forms. The reason is probably the same as it is for relatives and friends – they do not deny the part of them that is female, nor do they feel obligated to choose between one gender or another.

However, an additional reason for feminine forms might be one of pride; *burrneshat* expressed a common sentiment of pride for what they have accomplished in their lives. In example (7) below, Rita revels in the memory of commendations from women’s groups. Rita may be a man, but Rita’s body is still that of a five-foot-tall woman – quite the challenge for a profession which requires a fair amount of bodily strength.

(7)

Rita: *E nisa punën si **ekskavatoriste**, dhe më pas, kërkjoja edhe më shumë. Këtu ruaj edhe një letër që ma ka sjellë një grua nga Bashkimi Sovjetik, Anastasia e quajnë, madje-madje, kam edhe një letër që më ka ardhur nga Shoqata e Grave Rumune. Anastasia më shkruan se “e vlerëson profesionin tim si **ekskavatoriste**, madje ajo më thotë se grua aviatore ka, edhe kamioniste, por ekskavatoriste është shumë e rrallë”.*

‘I began work as an **excavator (F)**, and later I looked for something more. Here I still hold on to a letter that a woman from the Soviet Union sent me,

¹⁰ Paternal aunt.

she was called Anastasia, maybe, I also have a letter that arrived from the Romanian Women's Association. Anastasia wrote that she "valued my profession as an **excavator (F)**, she even told me that there are women aviators (F), truck drivers (F) too, but an **excavator (F)** was very rare".'

4.3.7 Age

Age was not selected as significant. With the exception of informants aged 40 to 69, all age groups used the feminine gender for over 80% of tokens. A possible explanation for the higher rates of male tokens in the language of middle-aged informants may be that three out of the four *burneshat* speakers belong to this age group. Since *burneshat* use the masculine gender more than other informants, the percentages likely reflect the larger proportion of tokens originating from *burneshat*.

5 Other gendered linguistic practices

Interviews and written materials were rich in discursive data. There are numerous ways speakers and writers can perform, emphasize, or minimize the gender of *burneshat*. However, the following data also show that *burneshat* do not always pass as biological men. Whether by choice or as a result of physical limitations, sometimes *burneshat* evoke gendered identities that differ from what is typically male or female.

5.1 Style

When interviews took place in cafés, it was common to hear *burneshat* speak to waiters¹¹ loudly and with direct commands. Unfortunately, such interactions were not recorded, as they often occurred before or after the recording session. However, this same direct and at times aggressive way of talking can be observed in example (8) (below). Liana has been informed that a young American woman was in a relationship with an Albanian, but that he recently ended it. Liana is convinced that this man was only using the woman to get a visa, despite the (female) interviewer insisting that this was not the case.

¹¹ Servers in Albania are almost always men.

(8)

- Liana: *Eh?*
‘Eh?’
- Interviewer 01: *S’e di.*
‘I don’t know.’
- Liana: *Si “s’e di”?*
‘What do you mean, you “don’t know”?’
- Interviewer 01: *Atë e di vajza.*
‘The girl knows.’
- Liana: *Po vajza ka lidhje më me atë? Jo.*
‘Is the girl still in a relationship with him? No.’
- Interviewer 01: *Jo.*
‘No.’
- Liana: *Atëherë? Dole te fjala ime?*
‘Well then? Do you take my word?’
- Interviewer 01: *Keni të drejtë.*
‘You are right.’
- Liana: *Ke mendimin tim eh?*
‘You share my opinion eh?’
- Interviewer 01: *Keni të drejtë.*
‘You are right.’
- Liana: *Kam të drejtë por *tsk* egërsohem për këto gjëra. Dhe sikur ta di, përshembull, se kush është personi që ka arritur të fitojë zemrën e kësaj dhe ta plagosi zemrën e kësaj, unë e bëj 124 copash.*
‘I am right, but *tsk* I go crazy for these things. And if I knew, for example, who this person was who managed to win her heart and to break her heart, I would give him 124 lashes.’

During my time spent in Albania I have observed that this manner of speech, in which one dominates the conversation and speaks forcefully, seems to be reserved for men. Indeed, during interviews, several female relatives spoke with such soft, timid voices that the recording equipment was unable to pick up much of what they said. This passivity may be a reflection of the tradition for brides and new wives to speak softly, if at all. Gjovalin Shkurtaj (2010) writes that the bride was required to speak as quietly as possible, with her hands clasped at her heart:

Gjatë gjithë kohës së nusërisë ajo është e detyruar të zbatojë rregullat etnografike të të folurit me zë të ulët, shpesh duke mos lëshuar fare zë, por vetëm duke lëvizur buzët dhe duke mbajtur qëndrimin tipik të nusërisë me duart të vëna në mes në lartësinë e zemrës. (Shkurtaj 2010: 244)

[Throughout the entire period of being a new bride she must observe the ethnographic rules of speaking with a soft voice, often without producing any sound at all, but only moving her lips and maintaining the typical pose of the bride with hands placed at the height of the heart.]

5.2 Mannerism

Many authors and anthropologists have commented on the totally masculine appearance and behavior of *burmeshat* (Young 2000). However, sometimes *burmeshat* behave in ways unique to both cis-women and cis-men alike. This is particularly salient with regard to hospitality: because they are unmarried, *burmeshat* are accustomed to performing duties typically assigned to the wife, such as maintaining a home and welcoming guests with food and drink. *Burmeshat* are also in a unique position in that they are able to inhabit women's spaces and interact with women in ways that cis-men cannot. In particular, some *burmeshat* express their responsibility as defenders of women, as does Liana in example (9) below. Note, however, that Liana nonetheless frames women as belonging to a separate group, and maintains strongly gendered attitudes towards them.

(9)

Liana: *Ne e mbajmë kuranin, ne e mbajmë akoma atë betimin, ne e mbajmë që për zotin e shyqyr [?] nëqoftëse [?] ta kisha unë motër për shembull, këtë dhe të më bënte këtë dikush tjetër në fund te botës të shkonte unë do e gjeja. Po nuk do kalonte kollaj. Pse? Sepse karakteri i femrës është shumë e brishte. Është shumë e njomë, është shumë elastike. Ndërsa meshkujt janë kështu, “hajt mo!”*

‘We keep the Kuran, we still keep that oath, we keep it so that, God forbid [?] if [?] I had a sister for example, and someone else did something and went to the end of the earth, I would find them. But it wouldn't be easy. Why? Because the character of a woman is very fragile. It's very soft, it's very impressionable. Whereas men are like this, “Hey, come on!”’

5.3 Avoiding grammatical gender

Informants often navigated the Albanian system of binary grammatical gender by avoiding statements that would require assigning *burmeshat* gender. Instead, informants used proxy circumlocutions as well as constructions that allowed them to make the grammatical gender agree with words that stood as a proxy for the *burmeshtë* in question.

The most common device was the word *burneshë* itself. Its grammatical gender is feminine. Therefore, informants are able to use this word, and all of the semantic ambiguities it entails, without having to make decisions regarding grammatical gender (example 10).

(10) Article 02:

Burneshat, të njohura edhe “*virgjëresha të betuara*”, [...]’
‘*Burneshat (F)*, also *known (F)* as “sworn virgins”, [...]’

Speakers and writers often made the character or personality of *burneshat* the topic of a sentence, rather than the *burneshat* themselves (example 11), thus removing the burden of making judgments of gender identity. Below, adjectives agree in gender with the words for ‘nature’ and ‘person’.

(11)

- 3rd Interviewer: *Ishte kështu natyrë e dashur e afruar?*
 ‘[Ø] had this kind of **close (F) loving (F) nature (F)?**’
- Rozafa’s 2nd cousin: *Po, po.*
 ‘Yes, yes.’
- Rozafa’s cousin: *Shumë.*
 ‘Very.’
- Rozafa’s 2nd cousin: *Shumë. Gjithmonë nuk ka-*
 ‘Very. Always never had-’
- Rozafa’s friend: *Shumë **njëri i mirë.***
 ‘A really **good (M) person (M).**’

Circumlocution is another common strategy. In the interview with Rita and Rita’s relatives, the interviewer never uses the word *burneshë*. Rather, whenever it was necessary to refer to the concept of *burneshat*, he employed a roundabout method of describing the various activities or traits associated with *burneshat* (example 12).

(12)

2nd Interviewer: *Në atë periudhë që zgjodhe që të **punoje fort** edhe të bëje detyrën e një mashkulli, të- ta- ta ndieje vetën mashkull ti që të **punoshe fort**, etj., etj. [...]*

‘At that time when you chose to **work hard** and to do the work of a man, to- to- to feel yourself like a man, you who were **working hard**, etc. etc. [...]

5.4 Creating masculinities through lexical choices

Regardless of their grammatical gender, certain phrases can evoke strong masculine imagery. This effect is amplified within the cultural context of Albania, a country with a tradition of highly gendered social roles and practices. Some terms, like “mischievous”, “hard-working”, or “strong”, can be used for either men or women, but tend to be associated with boys and men (see example 13a). Other terms are much more tied to a man’s role in Albania; any attempt to use these words for women would be highly marked in Albanian culture (see example 13b).

(13)

- a. Rozafa’s aunt: *E veshu në [?], **punëtore, punëtore e thjesht shumë**.*
 ‘Dressed (F) in [?], **hardworking (F)**, a very **down-to-earth (F) hard-worker (F)**.’
- b. 3rd Interviewer: *Ju e-, gjithmonë e keni pasur Fitoren si **kryefamiljare**?*
 ‘You- you always had Fitore as **head (F) of the family**?’
- Fitore: *Po, si tip **kryefamiljare**. Kët- këtu e kam, si më thënë- unë kam adresu vëllain.*
 ‘Yes, like **a head (F) of the family**. Her- here I, how to say it, I set up my brother.’
- 3rd Interviewer: *Ti- ti ke thënë vëllait që ta bërë t-*
 ‘You- you told your brother to-’
- Fitore: *Unë jam bërë **shkak**.*
 ‘I was **the one responsible**.’
- 3rd Interviewer: *Ti je bërë **shkak**.*
 ‘You were **the one responsible**.’
- Fitore: *Po, po.*
 ‘Yes, yes.’
- 3rd Interviewer: *Domëthënë janë me shkuesi?*
 ‘You mean that they became engaged?’
- Fitore: *Po, po. Bie me shkuesi.¹²*
 ‘Yes, yes. They got engaged.’

Friends and relatives often adopt special terms of endearment or nicknames for *burrneshat*. These terms reveal the complexities of *burrneshat* gender identity, particularly for the people closest to them who knew them as little girls, prior to

¹² Traditionally, engagements are arranged by the two fathers, or other (male) family heads. Only recently has it become common practice for young people to choose their own partners without parental involvement.

transition. In examples (14a-c), relatives and friends of Rozafa, Rita, and Fitore explain these terms.

(14)

- a. 3rd Interviewer: *Si i thoshit juve, si i thërrisnit, a thërrisnit-*
 ‘How did you call [ROZAFIFA], how did you call [ROZAFIFA], did you call-’
- Rozafa’s 2nd cousin: *Na- ne fëmijët ne e kemi thirr- ne e kemi thirr “dadë”.*
 ‘We- us children, we called [ROZAFIFA]- we called [ROZAFIFA] “**dadë**”.’¹³
- 3rd Interviewer: *“xhaxha” apo-*
 ‘“**xhaxha**”¹⁴ or-’
- Wife of Rozafa’s cousin: *Dadë.*
 ‘**Dadë.**’
- 3rd Interviewer: *Dadë.*
 ‘**Dadë.**’
- Rozafa’s cousin: *Dada.*
 ‘**Dadë.**’
- Rozafa’s 2nd cousin: *Po, Dada.*
 ‘Yes, **Dadë.**’
- 3rd Interviewer: *Dadë siç i themi ne “hallë”.*
 ‘**Dadë** just like we say “**hallë**”.’¹⁵
- Rozafa’s 2nd cousin: *Dada. Po, Dada.*
 ‘**Dadë.** Yes, **Dadë.**’
- Rozafa’s acquaintance: *Si “aunt”. Është femërore por e tregon pak si burrë.*
 ‘**Like “aunt”. It’s feminine but expresses a bit of masculinity.**’
- Rozafa’s 2nd cousin: *Ne fëmijët-*
 ‘Us children-’
- Rozafa’s cousin: *Jo, jo.*
 ‘No, no.’
- Rozafa’s friend: *“Dadë” mund t’i thirrësh edhe nënës.*
 ‘**You can also call a mother “Dadë”.**’

¹³ According to Friedman and Joseph (2016: Section 4.3.1.1), the etymology of *dadë* is ‘female servant’. They note, however, that there is a “range of meanings for Alb *dadë* (from Newmark 1998: s.v.) [...]: ‘wetnurse; pet name in baby talk for the baby’s female caretaker; grandma, mommy, big sister’”.

¹⁴ Paternal uncle (Standard variant).

¹⁵ Paternal aunt.

- Rozafa's acquaintance: *Po.*
'Yes.'
- Rozafa's 2nd cousin: *Në shenj dashni, dashnije i kemi thirr*
'As a sign of affection, out of love we called'
- Rozafa's friend: *A kupton tani?*
'Understand now?'
- Rozafa's 2nd cousin: **Dadë.**
'**Dadë.**'
- Rozafa's friend: **Mund t'it hirrësh dhe gruas së axhës.**
'**You can also call the wife of your axha¹⁶ that.**'
- 3rd Interviewer: *Është aty dialekte domëthënë. Kuptoj.*
'So it's dialect, you mean. I understand.'
- b. Rita's sister: *[?] rrit si burrë, kjo kalamajt e mi e thanë gjithë*
Babë Rita.
'stayed like a man, my kids all call her **Babë¹⁷**
Rita.'
- Rita's niece: Uh we all call her **Babë Rita.**
- Rita: *Kala- kalamajt e lagjes-*
'Ki- Neighbourhood kids-'
- Rita's niece: It's her nickname.
- Rita's sister: *Edhe lagjia.*
'Neighbourhood also.'
- Rita: **Daja, daja.**
'**Daja,¹⁸ daja.**'
- Researcher: *Atëherë është vëllai jot?*
'So [Ø] is your brother?'
- Rita's sister: *Ehh, vëllai!*
'Ehh, brother!'
- Rita: *Ehh*
'Ehh'
- Researcher: **Daja, po.**
'**Daja, yes.**'
- Rita's sister: *Uh çuni i madh, 52 vjeç- 52 vjeç [?]. 52 vjeç ai [?] vij unë nga Italia që të fala **Babë Ritës.** Është 52 vjeç dhe është mësu që-*

¹⁶ Paternal uncle (Gheg dialectal variant).

¹⁷ Father.

¹⁸ Maternal uncle.

- ‘Uh the oldest boy, 52 years- 52 years [?]. 52 years. He [?] I come from Italy, that I greet **Babë Rita**. He’s 52 years old and he’s used to-’
- 2nd Interviewer: **Babë Ritës**, okay yeah.
‘Babë Rita, okay yeah.’
- Rita’s sister: *Se unë kam shumë kohë ka [?] rrin në Itali se- ‘Because I’ve spent a lot of time [?] in Italy because-’*
- Rita: *Edhe këtu **Babë Rita** [?]. ‘And here **Babë Rita** [?].’*
- c. 3rd Interviewer: *Po, si të thërrisnin, këta “**dadë**” të thërrisnin? ‘Yes, how do they call you, do they call you this “**dadë**”?’*
- Fitore: *Të gjithë “**dadës**” edhe heh! Tan edhe shoqnia edhe moshat e reja edhe të tan nipat e mbesat e- **tashi s’më thirrin teze, hallë, për shembull tana më thirrin dadë**. Edhe kur kam punu te klubi atje tan, edhe moshat e vjetra. ‘Everyone “**dadë**” and heh! Everybody and friends and younger people and all nephews and nieces and- **now they don’t call me “teze”¹⁹ or “hallë” for example, everybody calls me “dadë**’. Also when I worked at that club, everybody, the older people too.’*
- 3rd Interviewer: *Kuptoj, kuptoj. ‘I understand, I understand.’*
- Fitore: *Hah! “**Dadë**” njëri, “**heh dadë**” tjetër se ishin këta, për shembull, domëthënë nipët e me mbesat e- ‘Hah! One person started saying “**dadë**”, then another “Hey, **dadë**”, because they were, for example, like nephews and nieces-’*

As can be observed, the kinship terms used for *burmeshat* are in fact a combination of the masculine and feminine. For example, *Babë Rita* illustrates the opposing gender connotations of masculine “father” with the feminine sounding name “Rita”.

¹⁹ Maternal aunt.

6 Conclusion

The results of the present analysis, while only preliminary, indicate that language plays an important role in the construction of gender identity for *burrneshat*. In fact, language's role is twofold; it is both a means of gender performance and a window into the gender ideologies of the informants.

Grammatical gender was but one means of asserting gendered identities. As a whole, speakers and writers displayed a preference for feminine grammatical forms when referring to *burrneshat*. This was the case even for *burrneshat* themselves. However, analysis does point to certain linguistic and social factors that may be significant in above-chance selection of masculine forms: Type (pronominal or non-pronominal), Preceding Grammatical Gender, Medium, and Relationship to *Burrneshë*.

Analysis of gendered practices reinforces the notion that *burrneshat* have achieved incredibly masculine presentations. Even when the grammar is feminine, the connotations of many terms used to describe *burrneshat* are undoubtedly masculine. *Burrneshat* are proud of the sacrifices they've made in order to live freely and take care of others. This is evident in the use of feminine tokens to highlight professional accomplishments. Nonetheless, *burrneshat* have at their disposal several strategies for blending in with other men, including mannerisms and styles typically reserved for males.

Future study of language and gender identity in Albania would be well-served by a larger pool of informants and quality acoustic recordings. The larger pool of informants would include speakers who do not have any sort of personal relationship with or connection to *burrneshat*. After all, the limited scope of the present study did not allow for an investigation of the effect of speaker attitude towards *burrneshat*. An analysis of these speakers' attitudes and beliefs about gender in Albania would help to understand if the views expressed by people familiar with *burrneshat* reflect the views of Albanians in general. More data from more speakers would also allow for statistical analysis that distinguishes between self- and other-reference by *burrneshat* speakers.

It is possible that one might interpret these socially successful transitions from female to male as a sign that gender and sex equality is more progressive in Albania than in many Western nations. After all, the transgender civil rights movement in the United States is just now beginning to gain momentum. However, the findings of this study would suggest a different reality. In creating masculinities, speakers and writers seem to rely upon stereotypes of canonical maleness. Rather than forging new gender roles, *burrneshat* reinforce existing ones by choosing between the traditional male and female identities prescribed by a patriarchal society.

References

- Bershtling, O. 2014. Speech creates a kind of commitment. In L. Zimman, J. Davis & J. Raclaw (eds.), *Queer Excursions: Rethorizing Binaries in Language, Gender, and Sexuality*, 35–61, New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bock, J.K. 1986. Syntactic persistence in language production. *Cognitive Psychology* 18. 355–387.
- Çamaj, Martin. 1984. *Albanian grammar*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz.
- Corbeill, Anthony. 2008. *Genus quid est?* Roman scholars on grammatical gender and biological sex. *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 138(1). 75–105.
- Corbett, Greville G. 2006. Grammatical gender. In Keith Brown (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*, 2nd edn., 749–756 Oxford: Elsevier.
- Elsie, Robert 2012. Northern Albanian culture and the Kanun. *Paper given at the symposium albanese tradities en taal: 100 jaar onafhankelijk albanë/albanian language and culture: 100 years of independence*. University of Leiden. 10 November 2012.
- Fauconnier, Gilles & Eve Sweetser. 1996. *Spaces, worlds, and grammar*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Friedman, Victor A. & Brian D. Joseph. 2016. *The Balkan languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Garrod, Simon & Martin J. Pickering. 2009. Joint action, interactive alignment, and dialog. *Topics in Cognitive Science* 1. 292–304.
- Gaudio, Rudolf P. 2014. Acting like women, acted upon: Gender and agency in Hausa sexual narratives. In Lal Zimman, Jenny Davis & Joshua Raclaw (eds.), *Queer Excursions: Rethorizing binaries in language, gender, and sexuality*, 170–194. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Hall, K. & V. O'Donovan. 1996. Shifting Gender Positions Among Hindi-speaking Hijras. In V. Bergvall, J. Bing & A. Freed (eds.), *Rethinking Language and Gender Research: Theory and Practice*, 228–266. London: Longman
- Ivanova-Sullivan, Tanya. 2014. *Theoretical and experimental aspects of syntax-discourse interface in heritage grammars*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
- Kilarski, Marcin. 2007. On grammatical gender as an arbitrary and redundant category. In Douglas A. Kibbee (ed.), *History of linguistics 2005: Selected papers from the tenth international conference on the history of the language sciences (ICHOLS X), 15 September 2005, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois*, 24–26. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Kilarski, Marcin & Grzegorz Krynicki. 2005. Not arbitrary, not regular: The magic of gender assignment. In Nicole Delbecque, Johan van der Auwera & Dirk Geeraerts (eds.), *Perspectives on Variation: Sociolinguistic, Historical, Comparative*, 235–252. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Kulick, Don. 1997. The gender of Brazilian transgendered prostitutes. *American Anthropologist* 99(3). 574–585.
- Kulick, Don. 1999. Transgender and language: A review of the literature and suggestions for the future. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 5(4). 605–622.
- Kuntz, Katrin. 2014 (6 June). 'We'll get you': An Albanian boy's life ruined by blood feuds. *Spiegel Online*. <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/blood-feuds-still-prevalent-in-albania-a-973498.html> (accessed 27 July 2017).
- Lloshi, Xhevat. 1998. Albanian. In Uwe Hinrichs (ed.), *Handbuch der Südosteuropa-Linguistik*, 277–288. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag.

- Newmark, Leonard. 1998. Nyje. In Leonard Newmark (ed.), *Oxford Albanian-English dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Paterniti, Michael. 2014 (March 10). The mountains where women live as men. *GQ Magazine*. <http://www.gq.com/story/burmesha-albanian-women-living-as-men> (accessed 27 July 2017).
- Peters, J. (Photographer). 2013. *A Solemn Declaration, Sworn Virgins of Albania 2009 – 2013* [digital image series]. Retrieved from <http://www.jillpetersphotography.com/swornvirgins.html>.
- Pickering, Martin J. & Victor S. Ferreira. 2008. Structural priming: A critical review. *Psychological Bulletin* 134(3). 427–459.
- Sankoff, David, Sali A. Tagliamonte & Eric Smith. 2005. *Goldvarb X: A variable rule application for Macintosh and Windows [Computer software]*. Toronto: Department of Linguistics, University of Toronto.
- Šarčević, Predrag. 2004. Sex and Gender Identity of ‘Sworn Virgins’ in the Balkans. <http://www.udi.rs/articles/genderPS.pdf> (accessed 27 July 2017).
- Scherre, Maria, Marta Pereira & Anthony J. Naro. 1991. Marking in discourse: ‘Birds of a feather’. *Language Variation and Change* 3(1). 23–32.
- Shkurtaj, Gjovalin. 2010. *Etnografi e të folurit të shqipes*. Tiranë: Shtëpia Botuese Morava.
- Tarifa, Fatos. 2007. Balkan societies of ‘social men’: Transcending gender boundaries. *Societies Without Borders* 2(1). 75–92.
- Young, Antonia. 2000. *Women who become men: Albanian sworn virgins*. Oxford & New York: Berg.
- Young, Antonia. 2008. *Sworn virgins*. [Video web log]. Retrieved from National Geographic Web site. http://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/albania_swornvirgins (accessed 27 July 2017).
- Young, Antonia & Jenna Rice. 2012. De-centring Albanian patriarchy? Sworn virgins and the re-negotiation of gender norms in the post-communist era. In Andreas Hemming, Gentiana Kera & Enriketa Pandelejmoni (eds.), *Albania: Family, society and culture in the twentieth century*, 163–173. Berlin: LIT Verlag.
- Zelinsky-Wibbelt, Cornelia. 2000. *Discourse and the continuity of reference: Representing mental categorization*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Zherka, Elizabeth. 2011. Excluded from power: Historical gender inequalities in customary law in Kosovo and Northern Albania. Paper presented at the Annual REECAS Northwest Conference, April 16, 20–11.
- Zufferey, Sandrine. 2015. *Acquiring pragmatics: Social and cognitive perspectives*. New York, NY: Routledge.