



## Intransitive prepositions in Albanian language

Bahri Koskoviku <sup>a</sup> , Mensur Vokri <sup>b1</sup> 

<sup>a,b</sup>University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina", Department of Albanian Language, Prishtina 10000, Kosovo

### APA Citation:

Koskoviku, B., & Vokri, M. (2021). Intransitive prepositions in Albanian language. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 17(1), 412-420. Doi: 10.52462/jlls.25

Submission Date: 08/01/2021

Acceptance Date: 17/03/2021

---

### Abstract

The subject at hand of this paper is intransitive prepositions, which E. Klima (1965) defined as prepositions that do not select syntactic objects. This word group comprises those linguistic units which traditional grammar used to consider as bicategorical, sometimes as adverbs, and in other instances as prepositions created through conversion. Through syntactic and lexical analysis, we intend to confirm that such words in both uses are prepositions rather than adverbs. This type of phrases that are projected only X head does not take complement semantically and structurally. From this point of view, PPs that are generated at level X [P + compl] are opposed, where the presence of a complement is mandatory. Prepositions that project a PPs component at level X have [- compl] feature and are called intransitive prepositions, while prepositions with [+ compl] feature which project a PP at level X are called transitive prepositions. This means that the intuition of an Albanian speaker for the PP component is elaborated not only within the traditional framework PP-P – NP but also within PP-P structures. Another hypothesis of this paper is that the [- compl] feature of this type of prepositions is not an absolute feature, but rather a relative one – which means that we do not have genuine intransitive prepositions but rather double feature prepositions [- compl, + compl] which sometimes appear as intransitive, sometimes as transitive which – similar to transitive verbs with intransitive use – we have called *ergative prepositions*.

*Keywords:* intransitive preposition; transitive preposition; prepositional phrases; X-bar scheme; ergatives preposition

---

## 1. Introduction

According to traditional grammar, in examples (1) and (2) we have two different syntactic and lexical contexts of the use of the word *kundër* (against); hence, we have two different words: in the first case we have an adverb, since the word *kundër* (*against*) enters into syntactic combination with a verb, while in the second case the word *against* comes before a noun and is a preposition. Such a description is given not only in grammars but also in dictionaries.

(1) Ajo u deklarua *kundër* rrëzimit të teatrit (She spoke out *against the demolition of the theater*).

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author. Tel.: +383-44-423-994  
E-mail address: mensur.vokri@uni-pr.edu

(2) Ajo u deklarua *kundër* (She was *against*).

In modern syntactic theories, from E. Klima (1965), J. Emonds (1985) to R. Jackendoff (1973), R. Huddleston (2002), and so on, it is generally agreed upon that in both cases we have prepositions, only that in the first case we have a transitive preposition (the most common type of prepositions), while in the second case we have an intransitive preposition that does not take complements. According to this conception, a considerable number of adverbs from traditional linguistics, as well as conjunctions and particles become prepositions. From this point of view, the category of prepositions does not turn out to be an airtight category with a very limited number of words as is usually described in grammars and dictionaries.

### 1.1. Literature review

E. Klima (1965) states that many "adverbs" such as *downstairs* and *afterward* should be seen as intransitive prepositions that do not take objects. R. Jackendoff argues that such units should be analyzed as prepositions because they are phonologically similar to common prepositions just as intransitive verbs (in context): *eat*, *drink* and *smoke* are with their corresponding transitive verbs (R. Jackendoff 1973:345-346). Fraiser's (1976) analysis states that a class of post-verbal particles can precede or follow an opposite NP, such as *Mary threw a box out*. *Mary threw out a box* and taking into account the formal similarity between particles and prepositions, J. Emonds (1985) argues that these post-verbal particles should not be analyzed as part of the PRT (Particles) category, but as intransitive prepositions. Almost all verb particles come out as transitive prepositions and have the same semantic content, regardless of whether they appear with or without complements. And this formal similarity between parts and prepositions does not occur in other unproductive categories, such as modality, determinants, or comparative words (J. Emonds 1985:253).

According to R. Jackendoff what the English tradition considers as separate categories, such as particles in examples like *give up*, *go out*, etc., and "traditional adverbs" in *He did not play the harp inside* and prepositions in *He did not play the harp inside the hotel*, the rules for the formation of such constructions would be simplified if we refer to these units as PP category rather than as three independent categories (R. Jackendoff 1973:347). R. Huddleston in the examples: *He left after the accident* and *He left after you promised to help* asserts that there is no reason for *after* in the second example to be treated differently from the first example. In both cases, it can be analyzed as a preposition (R. Huddleston 2002: 600), i.e. in the context of analysis it is not subordinating conjunction as the traditional grammar claims. According to Huddleston whether or not a word takes a complement does not change its category (R. Huddleston 2002:601). For example, *She is the director of the company* and *she is the director* the word *director* in both cases is a noun, or in another example: *she was eating an apple* and *she was eating* the word *eating* in both cases is a verb, regardless if it takes complements. According to this concept, even a PP is realized in the sentence structure with or without complement, such as *He'd left two hours before the end*. *He'd left two hours before* (R. Huddleston 2002:613-614) and *before* in both cases is a preposition. G. Graffi, starting from the *projection principle* of the phrases that the presence of the head is a sufficient condition to form a phrase, the word such as *inside* is a PP realized only by its head (G. Graffi 2003:111). In the context of our discussion, it is an intransitive preposition. According to L. Rugova & B. Rugova (2012), the multiplication of categories for a single word with a single meaning is not right.

### 1.2. Research questions

The questions to be answered in this current study are as follows:

- a) Words such as *brenda* (*inside*), *jashtë* (*outside*), *kundër* (*against*) belong to PP categories or are bicategories, as described by traditional linguistics and as presented in dictionaries?
- b) Is the value of this type of preposition with the [-compl] feature an absolute or a contextual feature?
- c) If the feature of this type of prepositions is contextual, can we say that we are dealing with genuine intransitive prepositions or with a type of prepositions that have the ability for a double realization?

## 2. Method

For the realization of this research, the method used is that of direct observation, which aims to point out the empirical data on the existence of intransitive prepositions, the method of analysis for the interpretation of these data to see if we have PP that is realized only in the PP- P relation (only by head X), the comparative method, especially in relation to the English language, in order to see if the data presented for Albanian language constitute universal facts. In this research, statistical methods were also used to statistically verify whether the [-compl] feature of PP categories realized only by head X<sup>0</sup> is absolute or contextual.

### 2.1. Collection of data and analysis

Our research to identify data on the intensive use of the aforementioned prepositions includes mainly the language of fiction and the language of journalism, specifically some of Ismail Kadare's works, such as: “*Lulet e ftohta të marsit*”, “*Pasardhësi*”, “*Ikja e shtërgut*”, “*Përballë pasqyrës së një gruaje*”, then the language of portals such as “Telegrafi” and “Gazeta express”.

## 3. Results and discussions

Words consist of features, and generative grammar assumes that some of these features are universal for all languages (G. Graffi 2008:83). According to Greemshaw, essential to determining the nature of a category are its syntactic features (J. Greemshaw 2005:4). This is the general principle of generative grammar used for the first time by R. Jakobson for the phoneme, used by Chomsky for other levels of linguistic analysis.

According to this position, one type of prepositional phrase in Albanian is generated in the sentence structure at level X<sup>0</sup>. This type of PPs that is only realized from the bottom end, from a structural point of view is opposed by PPs generated at level X'(P + compl) where the presence of complement is mandatory. PPs that are projected only from the X<sup>0</sup> head, have the [- compl] features and are called intransitive prepositions, while prepositions with [+ compl] feature which project a PP at level X' with [+ compl] feature are called transitive prepositions. So, the intuition of an Albanian speaker for the PP component are elaborated in line with these two basic rules:

1. PP - P – NP
2. PP – P

We believe that these aspects of intuitive elaboration of PPs constitute universal aspects and are not just specific to Albanian. The structuring of a PPs according to the second rule at level X<sup>0</sup> is in line with the rules of projection drafted by Chomsky (1993) according to which the head is the only compulsory element of the syntax. As a matter of fact, this principle justifies the existence of intransitive prepositions.

The concept of intransitive prepositions is based on the idea that in the following examples:

- 1a) Genci hyri *brenda në shtëpi*. (Genc got *inside* the house) and
- 1b) Genci hyri *brenda*. (Genc got *inside*)

The word *brenda* in both cases is a preposition. In the first case, it projects a PP according to rule (1) PP-P-NP, whereas in the second example a PPs is projected only from head P under rule (2) PP - P. The generation of PPs according to the second example, only from the zero levels as per Klima's definition, makes for a type of prepositions that do not take objects. (R. Jackendoff 1973:345)

The categorical classification of the word *brenda* as a preposition in both examples is based on the principle of analogy with the relevant transitive verbs, as in *ha, pi, tymos* ('eat, drink, smoke') with intransitive use as in *ai ha, ai pi, ai tymos*, etc. ('he eats, he drinks, he smokes'). Verbs do not change their category status in both uses, regardless of their use with the feature (+ compl, - compl). Similarly, the word *brenda* does not change its categorical affiliation whether or not it is a compliment, so it is always a preposition.

The definition of prepositions according to the first example, respectively according to rule (1) (as described above), according to R. Jackendoff (1973) assumes that PPs are unchanged according to the formalized PP-P-NP rule, i.e. as a case determiner. This group includes prepositions that cannot be constructed structurally and semantically without their valence. (F. Koleci & G. Turano 2011:32)

As we have noted above, a preposition category, such as: *në, me, pa, mbi, nën, nëpër, mbi, prej, nga*, etc. ('in, with, without, over, under, across, over, from') only appear with their transitional use (+ compl) feature. A particular preposition category has dual-use with (- compl, + compl) feature, such as *brenda, jashtë, larg, afër, përballë, drejt, sipër, përpara, pas, prapa, përtej, tutje*, etc. ('inside, out, far, near, across, straight, up, forward, behind, backward, beyond').

It is obvious that in traditional grammars in the above example the word *brenda* is an adverb of place, but its use in a new grammar context before a name causes its transformation into preposition (Sh. Demiraj 1998:624).

According to "Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe 1" (2002) the affiliation of a word to this or that part of the speech is conditioned by its links in sentences, for example, words like *gjatë, afër* ('long, close') followed by a pronoun in the accusative case (*gjatë dimrit, afër shkollës* – 'during the winter, near the school') serve as prepositions, and are studied as an integral part of the *preposition + noun* phrase because they cannot be taken as part of the sentence itself, as would be the case in another context of use as an adjective, for instance, *Ai foli gjatë* ('He spoke long'), *Ai na qëndron afër* ('He stands close to us').

Indeed, it seems that the idea of the word being a preposition, since the time of Aristotle stems from the idea of it standing in front of another syntax object. This is also confirmed by the prefix *para-* and the root *fjalë-* (for the Albanian word *parafjalë* – preposition). Traditional grammar recognizes no prepositions without complements. The definition of prepositions in line with traditional linguistics takes place within this context even today in virtually all Albanian grammars. Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe 1 (Morfologjia) (2002) calls such prepositions "parafjalë ndajfoljore", while "Gramatika e gjuhës shqipe 2 (Sintaksa)" (2002) in example 1) has it as part of a sentence, and in example 2) as a conjunctive preposition.

Our hypothesis is based on the idea that prepositions with (- compl) feature do not have a new meaning or content in relation to prepositions with the counterpart (+ compl) feature because their use does not mark a new grammar context, so here we do not have the establishment of a new syntax object from a categorical point of view as traditional grammar sees it, and eventually, we have no *conversion*. According to L. Rugova & B. Rugova (2012) in traditional grammars, a single word with some functions was first explained as a preposition, then as an adverb, and even as subordinate conjunction. In new studies, such words are simply called prepositions, since the multiplication of categories for a single word with the same meaning is not accurate.

Even in Albanian language dictionaries, though classified as bicategorical, they have semantically the same content. Words with (- compl) *kundër*, *brenda*, *jashtë* ('against, inside, out) in the following examples do not represent a new lexeme in relation to the same words with the (+ compl) feature. Rather, if we analyze their uses in Albanian language dictionaries in semantic terms, they represent the same lexeme, just as they represent the same grammatical object in syntax.

(2a) Deputetët votuan *kundër projektligjit*. ('MPs voted *against* the project law')

(2b) Deputetët votuan *kundër* ('MPsvoted *against*)

(3a) Jeta doli *jashtë shtëpisë*. ('Jeta went outside the house')

(3b) Jeta doli *jashtë*. ('Jeta went *outside*').

In "Fjalori i gjuhës së sotme shqipe" (1980) the word *kundër* ('against') has almost the same lexical-semantic interpretation in both uses.

In the first use (adverb) it expresses the opposite direction, as in *eci kundër* (moved against) 2. a view or a position different to another, as in *i rrinte kundër* (was standing against) 3. *Stand in front, opposite* someone, as in *doli kundër*. (he was against). *Fliste kundër, u ngrit kundër* (he was talking against, he stood against).

In the second use (preposition) it is used before a noun, a pronoun, or a number in the accusative case and signifies the direction opposite to the movement of something, as in *kundër rrjedhjes së lumit* (against the river flow) 2. Someone or something we fight or oppose, as in *luftoi kundër armikut, u turren kundër tradhtarëve*. (he fought against the enemies; they took off against the traitors). 3. Something we should protect ourselves from, as in *mbrojtja kundër atomit*. (protection against atom) (Fjalori i gjuhës së sotme shqipe 1980:913).

According to the semantic interpretation in the dictionary, we may pose the question: do we have a new semantic interpretation of the word *against* in uses I and II, and ultimately, do we have a new grammatical context of the use of this word, respectively do we have a conversion?

Conversion according to Rr. Paçarizi implies, first of all, a new lexical interpretation of the word, the change of the meaning or the content of the word that naturally leads to the change of the relevance of the speech (*The International Seminar on Albanian Language, Literature and Culture* 2018: 287). So, the essence of conversion is not the change of categorical affiliation of the word, but the change of its content, because we have many cases when the word is similar in phonological terms but has a different content as is the case with homonyms. The lexical analysis above between use I and II does not show a substantial change of the word *kundër* in semantic terms.

4a) *Luftoi kundër armikut*. (He fought against the enemy)

b) *Doli kundër*. (vendimit të qeverisë) (He was against) (government's decision)), so we do not need to classify the word *kundër* as different lexemes in (a) and (b). This means that there is no grammatical conversion of the word *kundër* (against) in grammar terms, there is no change of its categorical affiliation.

The new grammatical context implies new grammatical links of the word, and the word necessarily assumes a new lexical content in line with the new grammatical context of use, which is usually associated with the change of categorical affiliation, as is shown by the use of the word *rreth* ('circle, around') in following examples:

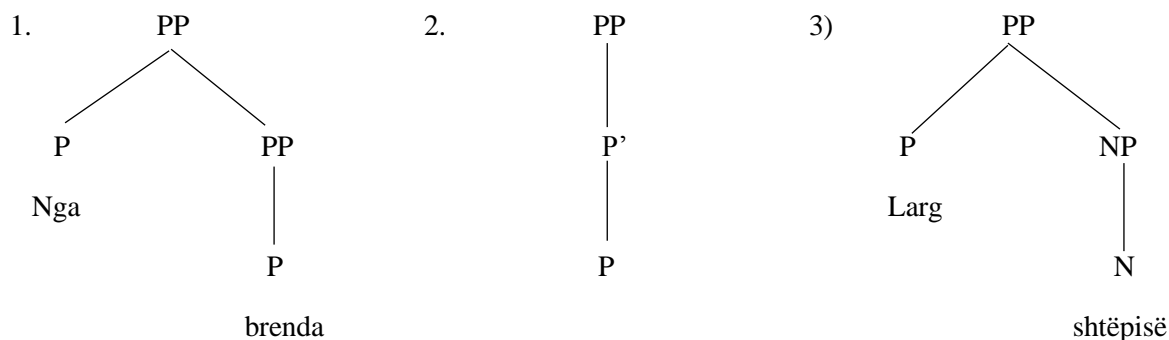
5a) E bëmë një *rreth* me ushtarë. ('We made a *circle* of soldiers').

b) Të gjithë u grumbulluam *rreth* plakut. ('We all gathered *around* the old man')

Emonds for such words in English states that *in, out, down, up* have a complete phonological resemblance to the corresponding prepositions and this is hardly accidental, and by giving an analogy

between the transitive verbs with intransitive use like as: *ai ha* ('he eats), *ai pi* ('he drinks), *ai tymos* ('he smokes), he states that here we have intransitive prepositions (J. Emonds 1970: 253).

R. Jackendoff, by exploring the preposition structure, states that prepositions take an NP, a PP, or nothing (R. Jackendoff 1973: 348). The latter discusses the existence of intransitive prepositions. The description given by R. Jackendoff for PPs can be practically explained through the PP - P- PP formula and illustrates examples like (1) *nga brenda* ('from inside') (2) *qëndroi brenda* (stayed inside). PP - P - NP illustrates the most common examples of Albanian, such as (3) *larg shtëpisë* ('away from home').



**Figure 1.** (X-bar theory). The structure of the prepositional phrase

R. Jackendoff (1973) also believes that the arguments for the existence of intransitive prepositions are apparent. First of all, we see a complete phonological similarity (almost identical) between common prepositions and "adverbs" (which do not take objects) as the following examples show:

- 6) *Ai hyri brenda në hotel.* ('He got inside the hotel')  
*Ai hyri brenda.* ('He got inside')  
*Iku larg shtëpisë.* ('He went far from home')  
*Iku larg.* ('He went far')  
*Doli jashtë shtëpisë.* ('He went outside the house')  
*Doli jashtë.* ('He went outside')  
*Rrinte përballë meje.* ('He stood in front of me')  
*Më rrinte përballë.etc.* ('He was standing in front')

Ultimately, words *brenda*, *jashtë*, *afër*, *përballë* etc. ('inside, out, near, in front of') that can appear with the [- compl] feature or the [+ compl] feature represent the same lexeme, but it is the type of preposition, their selection determines, and the context of use that determine their realization in the sentence structure at level  $X^0$  or at level  $X'$ .

Another aspect of our observation of intransitive prepositions has to do with their syntactic values. We remark that we have an intransitive preposition with [- compl] feature rather than a preposition with intransitive use, but which have a transitive use with [+ compl] feature in another context, similar to the analogy of E. Klima and Edmonds regarding the use of transitive verbs with intransitive use. So, the syntactic [- compl] feature is not a feature of absolute value. In other words, the features of this preposition type are determined by the context or semantic function of PP projection. In the following examples, all prepositions appear with the [+ compl] feature, and the PP projection is generated according to rule no. 1. The absence of the complement would make them ungrammatical sentences.

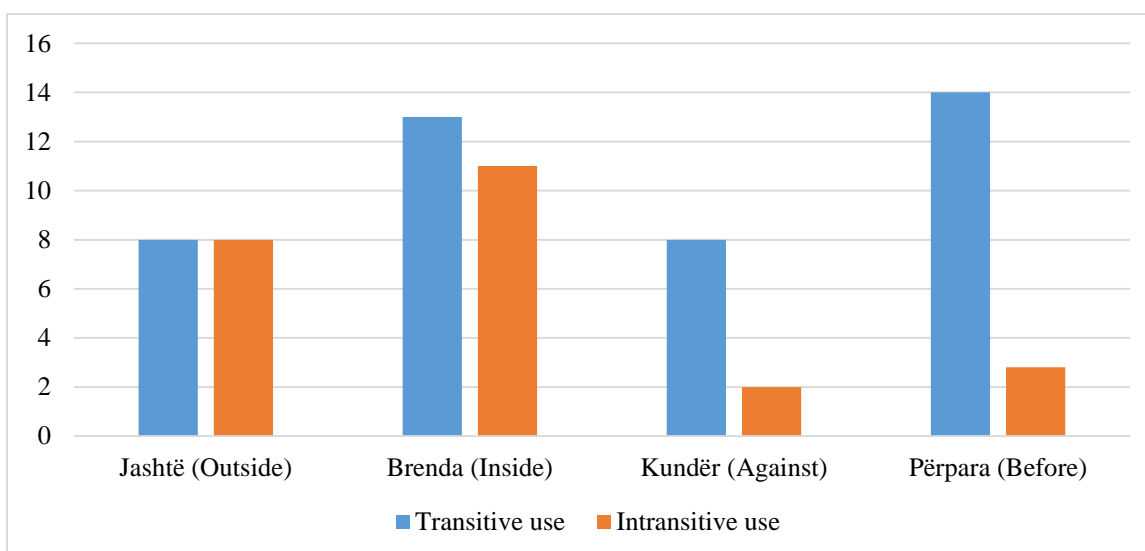
7) *Vetura u ndal përpara shtëpisë sonë.* ('The car pulled off *in front of our house*')

*Këto ngjarje ndodhën përpara shumë vitesh.* ('These events took place *many years ago*)

*Brenda pak javësh do të rikuperohet lëndimi i Hazard-it.* ('*Within a few weeks Hazard will recover from his injury*)

We hypothesize that prepositions with the [- compl] feature are not genuine intransitive prepositions but rather a type of prepositions with the ability to have a dual realization in syntactic terms with the [- compl, + compl] feature. So, the [- compl] feature does not have an absolute, but rather a relative value, and it is more contextual. We took the courage to call the prepositions of this type *ergative prepositions*, by drawing an analogy with transitive verbs or intransitive use.

That the [- compl] feature is a contextual value and statistically smaller than the uses with the [+ compl] feature is confirmed by a simple statistical analysis of the use of prepositions: *inside, outside, against, before*, from the novel of I. Kadare "Pasardhësi" where, with the exception of the preposition *outside*, all other prepositions are dominated by transitive usage.



**Figure 2.** Transitive and intransitive use of prepositions

Moreover, the research of the structure of adverbial phrases points to another very basic fact: adverbs are always intransitive, lacking argumentative and thematic structure, but have clear semantic content (G. Cocchi 1988:86), for instance:

8) *Ecte ngadalë.* ('He walked *slowly*')

*Lëvizte shpejt.* ('He moved *fast*')

*Vinte nga lart.* ('He came from *above*')

*Fliste rrëmbyeshëm.* ('He spoke *frantically*')

*Vështronte vëmendshëm.* ('He observed *attentively*')

*Veproi guximshëm.* ('He acted *boldly*')

*Ai atje.* ('That one *there*')

*Ne do të rrimë këtu.* ('We will stay *here*')

All the above adverbs have the [- compl] feature. This is an absolute feature of adverbs. In no other syntactic context do these adverbs emerge with the [+ compl] feature? This empirically confirmed

statement removes any doubt or dilemma regarding categorical affiliation of words *brenda*, *jashtë*, *kundër*, *larg*, *përtej* ('inside, out, against, far, beyond') as prepositions, which in the syntactic terms have the ability to appear as transitive or intransitive.

#### 4. Conclusions

Intransitive prepositions consist of that type of prepositions that do not choose syntax objects to form a maximum PP projection.

The intransitive type of prepositions is self-sufficient from the structural and semantic point of view in the context of use. This turns down a long-standing view of traditional linguistics that prepositions always depend on a noun before which they are used.

The [- compl] feature in intransitive prepositions is not absolute. It is a relative value that determines the context of use and the semantic function of PP projection. This means that we are not dealing with genuine transitive prepositions but rather with prepositions that have the ability to have a double, both transitive and intransitive realization in the sentence.

#### References

- Agalliu, F., Angoni, E., Demiraj, Sh., Dhrimo, A., Hysa, E., Lafa, E., Likaj, E. (2002). *Albanian Language Grammar 1*. Tirana: Science Academy of Albania – Institute for Linguistics and Literature.
- Çeliku, M., Domi, M., Floqi, S., Mansaku, S., Përnaska, R., Prifti, S., Totoni, M. (2002). *Albanian Language Grammar 2*. Science Academy of Albania – Institute for Linguistics and Literature.
- Cocch, G. (1988). *An introduction of English syntax*. Printed in Italy, Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso.
- Demiraj, Sh. (1988). *Historical grammar of Albanian language*. Pristina: Rilindja.
- Emonds E. J. (1985). *A unified theory of syntactic categories*. Dordrecht, Holland/Cinnaminson – USA: Foris Publications.
- Graffi, G. (2003). *Syntax, discourse structures*. (Translated in Albanian by Blerta Topalli). Tirana: Dituria.
- Graffi, G. (2008). *What's generative grammar?* (Translated in Albanian by Rami Memushaj). Tirana: Toena Publisher.
- Grimshaw, J. (2005). *Words and Structures*. Sandford, California: Center for the Study Language and Information.
- Jackendoff, S. R. (1973). *The base rules for the prepositional phrase*. Festschrift for Moris Halle. Edited by Stefen R. Andersen (Harward University) and Paul Kiparsky. The Massachusetts University of Technology.
- Koleci, F & Turano, G. (2011). *Introduction to generative syntax*. Tirana: Publishing House of University Book.
- Paçarizi, R. (2017). *Conversion and the formative stem in the Albanian language*. Pristina: The International Seminar on Albanian Language, Literature, and Culture. Faculty of Philology. University of Pristina "Hasan Prishtina".
- Rugova, S., Linditë & Rugova, B. (2012). *Prepositional phrases of the Albanian language*. St. Petersburg: Scientific conference dedicated to the 100th birth anniversary of Agnia Desnickaja.



Science Academy of People's Republic of Albania – Institute for Linguistics and Literature (1980).  
Dictionary of the present Albanian language. Tirana: Science Academy of the People's Republic of Albania – Institute for Linguistics and Literature.

#### **AUTHOR BIODATA**

**Bahri Koskoviku** is an engaged assistant in the Albanian language at the Faculty of Philology, the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" in Prishtina. He received his Ph.D. degree in Linguistics from the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina". He is interested in generative grammar, morphology, and general linguistics.

**Mensur Vokrri** is an assistant in the Albanian language at the Faculty of Philology, University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" in Prishtina. He received his MA degree in Linguistics from the University of Prishtina "Hasan Prishtina" and actually is a Ph.D. candidate in Linguistics at the same university. He is interested in morphology, the history of the Albanian language, general linguistics, and applied linguistics.