

Phonemes of the Albanian Language

(DRAFT)

This short paper presents a comparative phonetic analysis of the Albanian and English phonemic inventories, focusing specifically on the vowel and consonant systems of both languages. The analysis begins by detailing the complete inventory of Albanian vowels and consonants. Subsequently, we map the phonetic proximity of these Albanian phonemes to their closest English counterparts, utilizing a comprehensive chart for visualization. The findings reveal a gradient of correspondence: while some Albanian phonemes exhibit close articulatory and acoustic similarity to English sounds, others demonstrate significant phonetic divergence. Importantly, the analysis identifies several Albanian phonemes without direct equivalents in the English inventory, highlighting areas of phonological contrasts and language acquisition difficulties for new learners.

1. The Albanian Alphabet

In addition to the nasalized vowels, here I have also added the /ng/ sound used by Sough Gheg speakers:

a ã b c ç d dh e ë f g gj h i ï j k l ll m n
nj ng o p q r rr s sh t th u û v x xh y ÿ z zh

	Description	Sounds	
Nonvocal	Obstruent Consonants		
	• voiceless	p, t, q, k, c, ç, s, sh, f, th, h	11
	• voiced	b, d, gj, g, x, xh, z, zh, v, dh	10
	Sonorant Consonants		9
Vocal	Vowels		
	• Non-nasalized	a e ë i o u y	7
	• Nasalized	ã ë ï û ÿ	5
	Total		42

Voicing

Laringal noise (pa dridhje)	
voiceless	p, t, q, k, c, ç, s, sh, f, th, h
Laringal Tone (Me Dridhje)	
voiced	b, d, gj, g, x, xh, z, zh, v, dh,?

sonorants	m, n, nj, j, l, ll, r, rr
vowels	a e ě i o u y; ã ĕ ĭ ũ ŷ

Nasalization

Consonants	
non-nasalized	p t q k c ç s sh f th h;
	b d gj g x xh z zh v dh;
	j l ll r rr
nasal	m n nj
Vowels	
non-nasalized	a e i o u y
nasalized	ã ĕ ĭ ũ ŷ

Current Albanian Vowels

The /a, e, i, o, u/ vowels are close to Latin ones. However, the /a/ and the /e/ vowels in LG are slightly more closed than LT ones. The /y/ vowels resembles german /ü/ whereas the /ë/ comes in two kinds, the /ĕ/ phoneme used in LT, and the schwa used by all Albanian spakers. Like French, Polish, and Portugese, Albanian has nasalized vowels. Usually, linguists recognize only five of them, ã ĕ ĭ ũ ŷ.

Approximation of Place of Articulation				
Position of the Mouth	Front		Central	Back
	Closed	i, ĭ, ĭ̃	y, Ÿ, ŷ	u, ũ, ù
	Half opened	e, ĕ, ĕ̃	ə, ĕ	o, ȯ
	Opened		a, ā, â	
Participation of Lips				
	unrounded	rounded	unrounded	rounded

Often, linguists present albanian vowels in the shape of a triangle, where /a/ indicates the lowering of the jaw at the lowest point, which linguistically is called an ‘open’ vowel because, at that position, the tongue is the farthest from the roof of the mouth. In contrast /i, y, u/ are called closed vowels because at that position, the tongue is the closest to the roof of the mouth. Horizontally, /i, y, e/ are articulated near the exit of the mouth, /e, ə, a/ at the center, and /u, o/ closer to the larygus. It should be noted that non Tosk articulation is more closed. Hence, it can be argued that for Central and Northern Albanians, vowels /a, o, e, i, u/ are

pronounced a bit higher than those of ST.

Current Albanian Consonants

In 1932, Lowman claimed that he could hear a slight aspiration, Matasović, and other linguists, claim that Albanian consonants have lost their aspiration. Other things to know about the Albanian sounds is that /ʔ/ is in fact an Albanian sound, as Lowman points out, found in words like ‘ç’?sht!?’ . In addition, as Camaj points out, the sounds ‘q, gj’, are pronounced differently by Southerners vs. non-Southerners. I would go as far as to say that the /q, gj/ *distinction* in pronunciation between speakers of ST and the rest, along with *nasalization*, *rhotacism*, *vowel length*, and the *frequency of schwa use*, makes up the main distinction between those who speak the standard and those who are still learning it.

/j/ corresponds with an /y/ in English words like ‘Yes’; and it is sometimes called a semivowel. Some consonants, like /c, ç, x, xh/, are single sound ones; not t-c, t-sh, d-x, d-zh. Among the phonemes present in Albanian, but in English, are /c, x /.

In the following table, the Albanian letters are given to the left, whereas the IPA symbols are put between forward slashes. The table, also gives the pairing of voiced/voiceless and palatal/non-palatal cognates. It also describes in detail the labels that correspond to each sound.

The IPA Chart and the Albanian Consonant Phonemes

In the following chart, taken from IPA website, circles, rectangles, and triangles, are used to border the Albanian consonant phonemes. Not all of them are in the current Tosk-based standard, and some of them might be controversial.

31 Albanian Consonant Phonemes

(Note: /q, gj, nj/ have two dialectal versions, 34 graphemes have been marked below)

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)												
	Bilabial		Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b				t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m		ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ			
Trill					r	rr						
Tap or Flap			ɸ		ɾ	ɽ						
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð		s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative					ɬ ɮ							
Approximant			ʋ		j		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant					l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Symbols to the right in a cell are voiced, to the left are voiceless. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

Lowman 1932
- not in 1972 Tosk Norm

Gheg /q, ɢ/ (Camaj 1984), /nj/ - not in 1972 Tosk Norm

IPA 1.9.1960 symbols

IPA 4.0.2011 symbols

IPA 5.0.2013 symbols

IPA 6.0.2016 symbols

IPA 7.0.2019 symbols

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IPA 576.0.3157 symbols

IPA 577.0.3159 symbols

IPA 578.0.3161 symbols

IPA 579.0.3163 symbols

IPA 580.0.3165 symbols

IPA 581.0.3167 symbols

IPA 582.0.3169 symbols

IPA 583.0.3171 symbols

IPA 584.0.3173 symbols

IPA 585.0.3175 symbols

IPA 586.0.3177 symbols

IPA 587.0.3179 symbols

IPA 588.0.3181 symbols

IPA 589.0.3183 symbols

IPA 590.0.3185 symbols

IPA 591.0.3187 symbols

IPA 592.0.3189 symbols

IPA 593.0.3191 symbols

IPA 594.0.3193 symbols

IPA 595.0.3195 symbols

IPA 596.0.3197 symbols

IPA 597.0.3199 symbols

IPA 598.0.3201 symbols

IPA 599.0.3203 symbols

IPA 600.0.3205 symbols

IPA 601.0.3207 symbols

IPA 602.0.3209 symbols

IPA 603.0.3211 symbols

g	g	gur (rock)	get
gj (LG)	dʒ̣	gjuhë (tongue)	~ job - <i>no English equivalent</i> - <i>unlike</i> the two sounds /dj/
gj (LT)	ʝ	gjuhë (tongue)	~ ραίμαγε 'rajmaɣe (birth) (mc.) - <i>no English equivalent</i>
h	h	me hapë (to open)	hay
i	i	tri (three)	three
î		dimën (winter)	~ winter
j	j	jashtë (out)	yelp
k	k	kollë (cough)	cough - <i>very little or no aspiration</i>
l	l	lejo (let)	let
ll	ł	kumbull (plum)	tell
m	m	amë (taste)	mother
n	n	nanë (mother)	need
ng	ŋ	i ngadalët (slow)	~ going
nj	ɲ	njeri (man, human)	minion
o	o (g)	motër (sister)	~ yawn; ~ lore
	ɔ (t)	dorë (hand)	~ not
p	p	punë (work)	pin - <i>very little or no aspiration</i>
q (LG)	t͡ɕ	shqiponjë (eagle)	~ λεχα /lēt͡ɕä/ (falcon) (srp) - <i>no English equivalent</i>
q (LT)	c	shqiponjë (eagle)	~ вреќа /'vr̩ɕa/ (bag) (mc) - <i>no English equivalent</i>
r	r	~ trí (three)	~ three - <i>no rounded lips; no retroflexing</i>
rr	r	rreth (circle)	~ perro (dog) (es) - <i>no English equivalent</i>
s	s	sa? (how many)	sap
sh	ʃ	shum (many)	shield
t	t	trim (brave)	trim
th	θ	i thatë (dry)	thin
u	u	mushkë (mule)	mule
ũ		shkumë (foam)	- <i>no English equivalent</i>
v	v	venë (wine)	volt
x	dʒ̣	xixë (sparkle)	- <i>no English equivalent</i> - <i>unlike</i> /ds/ in 'Goods'

			- it is the <u>voiced sound</u> of the c/x pair - If you can say /tc/ in Zeit, then make the /tc/ voiced /dz/. However, both of them are only one sound.
xh	dʒ	xhubletë (type of dress)	~ job - <i>unlike</i> the two sounds /dj/
y	y	hyllë (star)	~ German /ü/ Müller - <i>no English equivalent</i>
	ÿ	e shtyme (push)	- <i>no English equivalent</i>
z	z	Zanë (Fairy)	zealot
zh	ʒ	zhig (passion, etc)	vision

Albanian language has some diphthongs, but only in recently borrowed words. The so-called ‘diphthongs’ in Albanian are in fact vowel clusters. Typically, their pattern is a long vowel followed by a short one, as in: *shterua*, *grua*, *mua*, *thye*, *krye*, *zë*, *diell*, *roe*.

Correlation of Albanian Consonants

There are many ways to co-relate the sounds of a language. A few correlation of the albanian consonants follow:

voiced vs. voiceless

p	t	c	ç	q	k	f	th	s	sh
b	d	x	xh	gj	g	v	dh	z	zh

a correlation or contrasting of squares: *obstruents vs. fricatives + nasals*

m		n						nj			
p	b	t	d	c	x	ç	xh	q	gj	k	g
f	v	th	dh	s	z	sh	zh	0	0	h	0