

A classification of phraseological units according to connotation in English and Albanian

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Abstract

Phraseological units are one of the most striking linguistic phenomena and constitute a special and indivisible part of every language. They are known as complex many-sided linguistic units with a fully or partial figurative meaning which have endlessly varied manifestations in discourse. Frozenness and figurativeness have been identified as intrinsic features of any phraseological unit in all its innumerable representations in language use. Their multifaceted structure, characterized by a trinity of semantics and stylistic color reflects the national and cultural identity of a human community. Idiomatic expressions are an integral part of culture that exert a major influence on the comprehensibility of the language. It is proved that the vast majority of phraseological units possess emotive connotation in their meaning which is either positive or negative. The aim of this paper is to deal with the classification of verbal phraseological units according to connotation and the feelings each type of connotation comprises based on examples retrieved mainly from literary works and phraseological dictionaries. The practical value of the research and of the results obtained is that they can be used in comparative-typological research, in courses of comparative lexicology, in courses of theory and translation and in lexicographic practice when compiling a thematic phraseological dictionary.

Key words: phraseology, phraseological unit, culture, connotation, language, English, Albanian

1. Phraseology, culture and connotation.

Phraseology is the only domain of the linguistic study which eloquently illustrates the correlation between language and culture. Recently, phraseological research involved a linguistic, as well as a cultural analysis, by interpreting idioms as relevant cultural data. The scholars agree that phraseology can be perceived as “a testing ground for the anthropomorphic paradigm in linguistics, whose fundamental assumption is that the linguistic world-picture is commensurable with the mental attitudes and culture of a speech community” (Cowie, 2001). According to the anthropological approach, language is a reflection of the surrounding world; it represents and conceptualizes reality in a cultural manner and can be considered a crucial mechanism that contributes to the formation of a collective cultural identity. Phraseological units of a given culture have to be studied from different points of view, as they have a specific character and vary from one language to the other based on historical, geographical, cultural, linguistic, cross-linguistic and social features. Thus, they are motivated by

extralinguistic phenomena of a given culture or nation and the process of decoding them may pose problems and may result in an incorrect interpretation or translation.

Phraseologisms have a special place in English and Albanian, because they are both in the field of folklore and in the field of language phenomena. Many scholars emphasize the existence of some additional meaning which is secondary to denotative meaning which is variously called connotation. Connotation is defined as any component that complements the subject conceptual (or denotative) and grammatical content of a language unit and gives it expressiveness on the basis of data relevant to empirical, cultural-historical knowledge and knowledge of speakers about the world. Thus, connotation is an additional content of the word and its stylistic shades.

The connotative information is found in the language and speech units which are applied to its main content. Unlike the significant aspect of phraseological units, the connotative aspect often denotes not real features of the denotatum but the features attributed to it by the people. It is due to connotation that phraseological units are able to serve as expressive means of the phraseological system of the language. Emotive meaning also materializes a concept in the word, but, unlike logical meaning, emotive meaning has reference not directly to things or phenomena of the objective reality, but to the feelings and emotions of the speaker towards these things or to the emotions as such (Galperin, 1977). Emotions are a way of reflection of reality and its understanding and they are divided into two classes – *positive and negative*. The vast majority of phraseological units possess emotive connotations in their meaning. Phrases with an evaluative component in their meaning include words with a motivated value-loaded sign which is in the semantic content of the phrase and correspondingly impart positive or negative emotions. In order to make the speaker's attitude emotional, it is necessary to insert an emotional element into the linguistic unit. It is through expressive elements that emotions are imparted to the recipient. Expressiveness in language and speech may be understood as a kind of intensification of an utterance evoking the recipient's adequate emotive response.

2. A classification of verbal phraseological units according to connotation

Phraseological units reflect the objective reality of a particular cultural community, that is, unlike the significant aspect of phraseological units, the connotative aspect often denotes features attributed to it by the man. The evaluative potential of phraseological units is very significant that they are often used to express emotions in a corresponding context. Thanks to connotation, phraseological units are able to serve as expressive means of the phraseological system of the language. We are going to exemplify connotation by discussing a number of English and Albanian phraseological units which reflect the perceptions and the emotional attitude of a person to the surrounding reality. We have considered two groups: verbal phraseological units with a positive connotation and verbal phraseological units with a negative connotation.

2.1. Verbal phraseological units that have a positive connotation

Being closely connected with culture, phraseological units create thematic domains determined by cultural values, traditions, customs and other abstract notions like intellectual ability, emotional and expressive aspects, empathy and other positive traits of human nature. Therefore, we have classified verbal phraseological units with positive meaning as in the following:

[1] **pride**

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mbaj kokën lart

hold one's head high

In both languages, the above-mentioned phraseological units are motivated by the same conceptual metaphor (holding one's head high is a sign of pride) and they coincide in their meaning, lexical composition, imagery, stylistic orientation and grammatical structure.

[2] cuddling

T'u bëfsha kurban!

Human life is interpreted and generalized through linguistic consciousness and is verbalized by the system of lexical-phraseological means. Subjunctive mood is a typical Albanian way of expressing cuddling and there are numerous expressions and phraseological units that reflect the specific character of the Albanian language.

[3] generosity

ka zemër të bardhë

have a heart of gold

The connection between the two components “*zemër*” in Albanian (heart) and “*heart*” of the verbal phraseological units and their figurative referential is made through conceptual metonymy. The adjective “*të bardhë*” (white) which has positive connotation and the noun in genitive in English mean – have a noble, kind, helpful nature.

[4] praise

s'e bën nëna

nuk e ka shokun

[5] being happy

ka lindur me yll

born under a lucky star

The noun component “star” in English and “yll” (star) in Albanian is used to express happiness.

[6] being wealthy

ha me lugë të florinjte

born with a silver spoon in one's mouth

In English there is another variant form of the phraseological unit - ‘*born with a golden spoon in one's mouth*’ - which has the same meaning. Few people can afford eating in a silver/golden spoon.

[7] intelligence

s'ia ha qeni shkopin

të ha në dritë të syrit

të merr gjak në vetull

Ne mblodhëm ca shokë të mirë, nga ata që të marrin gjak në vetull. Ua prisnim udhën grykave, vrisnim vdekjen, lironim robërit. Unë ua them shkurt, po kjo punë zgjati shumë: u derdh gjak nga të dyja palët. Ata ishin të armatosur gjer në dhëmbë, me armë të forta, po as ne s'binim më poshtë. Hidheshim me sëpatë në dorë, merrnim gjak. (Mitrush Kuteli, Vepra letrare 3, 308)

have a good head on one's shoulders

Your son will do well in business: he has a good head on his shoulders. (Ilo Stefanllari, Fjalor frazeologjik anglisht-shqip, 176)

[8] mastery

i ka duart e arta:

i ka duart flori

ç'i sheh syri ia bën dora

Si thua ti? Shkollë ka vetëm dy klasa gjimnaz, po ç'i sheh syri ia bën dora... Është tri katër vjeçe më e vogël se ti dhe e bukur që t'i presësh kokën. Sa për karakter e sjellje, veten ka shoqe. (Shefqet Musaraj, Para agimit, 46)

[9] capability

të jep ujë në bisht të lugës

Oh, ajo është një bijë e dreqit që të jep ujë në bisht të lugës. (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 119)

të shpie në shtatë kronj e s'të jep ujë

Merr ndonjë grusht, se ta presin etjen, - e nxiti Agroni. – Janë të athëta, me erë të mirë. Mos e dëgjo Levën, se kjo të shpie në shtatë kronj e s'të jep ujë. (Mitrush Kuteli, Vepra letrare 3, 63)

The phraseological unit - “*nxjerr dhjamë nga pleshti*” - in Albanian which means “to be capable” has negative connotation in English - “*skin a flea for its hide*” (to be stingy).

“Generous!” I exclaimed; “why, he's the meanest little hunk that ever *skinned a flea for the hide and fat.*” (James M. Dixson, *English idioms*, 225)

[10] making a toast

Making a toast is very common in Albanian in colloquial language, like – “*T'u bëftë brus (bruz)!*” – is used to wish “Good luck!” and to wish abundance and prosperity to someone.

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*Të lumtë, moj çupë, këmbë të mbarë paske. **Brus t'u bëftë tërë jetën.** (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 140)*

T'u bëftë dita një mijë! – to wish a long life to someone.

*Të përqafojmë me dashuri të rrallë. **Dita t'u bëftë një mijë,** siç na e thotë zemra. (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 206)*

T'u bëftë gjak e dhjamë! – is used to wish everyone to enjoy their meal.

*Sa herë që ngrihen shëndete për të zotin e shtëpisë..., atiji bëhet qejfi dhe, kur gota zbrazet në gurmazin e bablokut, thotë me vete: “Hajt, **t'u bëftë gjak e dhjamë!**” (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 373)*

Të lumshin këmbët! – means “welcome”.

***Të lumshin këmbët** që erdhe e më gëzove, po ta kishe marrë edhe atë çamarrokun me vete. (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 494).*

The verbal phraseological unit - “*T'u rritë nderi!*” – is used to thank someone and - “*me nder qofsh*” – is received as an answer.

*Avdiu i zgjati paketën e cigareve. – **T'u rritë nderi!** – i tha llustraxhiu. – Dhe e ndezi. (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 707)*

2.2. Verbal phraseological units that have a negative connotation

We should note that verbal phraseological units of negative connotation prevail over those of positive connotation. This is explained by social and psychological factors. In every culture all that is good is considered to be standard and deviation from the standard has a wide range of various manifestations reflected in the denotative meaning of the phraseological unit. In every community, people have to face overcoming drawbacks, lacks, errors and many other bad and unpleasant situations, firmly reflected in the language.

[1] **disdain**

The verbal phraseological unit - “*e solli kokën*” – is used for someone we think is unworthy instead of the verb - “*erdhi*” (to come).

*Sapo e pa këtë njeri, Artanës iu prenë këmbët dhe u mbështet më shumë pas Etlevës. “Ç’është vallë ky gojëzënë? Që nga **e ka sjellë kokën?** Ç’kërkon?” Etleva nuk ngurroi fare, bëri disa hapa, iu afrua zhelanit dhe e pyeti: -Cili je ti? Nga ke ardhur? Ç’kërkon? (Mitrush Kuteli, Vepra letrare 3, 84)*

*E di që më lodhe! ...Unë pres që të hidhesh në sulm, ti **më grin sallatë.** (Jakov Xoxa, Juga e bardhë, Vëll. I, 442)*

“*grin sallatë*” – is used to talk about somebody who talks a lot and nobody listens to.

*Edhe kur Gjatollinjtë hidhnin rromuze poshtë e lart, duke thënë se **i kish edhe buzët me qumësht** e nuk mund të matej me ta, Sefedini dërgoi një katër a pesë në botën tjetër, që t'i bënte të fala babait e*

betohej se nuk do të shkelte të njëzetat përpara se t'i shuante gjithë Gjatollinjtë. (Mitrush Kuteli, Tregime të zgjedhura, 61)

“*i ka buzët me qumësht*” – is used about a person who is childish and immature.

[2] irony

Nënë Mellania e ironizonte me plot gojën: “Le të hajë ky, se ky do të na e bëjë vezën e kuqe...” Por, për t'ia bërë, ama, ia bënte gjithë sa kërkonte Miltoja për të ngrënë dhe shpeshherë veçan nga fëmijët. (Jakov Xoxa, Lulja e kripës së egër, 207-208)

The abovementioned phraseological unit is usually used in the negative form - “*s'bën vezën e kuqe*” - to express irony and refer to somebody who is unworthy.

‘*To get used to anything, like an eel to skinning*’ expresses irony about an experience that is repeated and brings about lots of suffering.

It ain't always pleasant to turn out for morning chapel, is it, Gig-lamps. But it's just like the eels with their skinning – it goes against the grain at first, but you soon get used to it. (Verdant Green, ch. Vii/James M. Dixon, English idioms, 82)

[3] pejorative

- “*zbardh dhëmbët*” in Albanian is used for grinning.

Ene zbardhi, ene dhëmbët... Ene këtu, ene në prag, ene të shtëpisë së tyn zoti... Ene s'kini turp, ene argaliseni... (Jakov Xoxa, Juga e bardhë, Vëll. I, 157)

“*do vrarë me bukë në gojë*”- is used to refer to someone who deserves punishment.

E si t'i japësh ujë këtij njeriu? E si të mos e vrasësh me bukë në gojë? (Mitrush Kuteli, Tregime të zgjedhura, 253)

In English phraseology - “*look like a mutton dressed up as lamb*” – is used about a woman who thinks herself attractive in clothes usually worn by those much younger. The phraseological unit 'mutton dressed as lamb' is first found in print in the journal of social gossip that Mrs. Frances Calvert compiled in 1811. Extracts from the journal were published in 1911 as *An Irish Beauty of the Regency*.

Do you think this skirt is too short? I don't want to look like mutton dressed as lamb. (Шнтова Л. Ф., Брускина Т. Л., English idioms and phrasal verbs, 107)

[4]ridicule

“*plasi Muçua për dyfek*” is used in Myzeqe region in Albania to criticize or ridicule someone who loves getting a promotion. Some people's personalities seem to change when they are promoted to a higher position (or change to a different position) at work.

Plasi Muçua për dyfek, shyqyr që e vunë kryetar Vangjelin dhe do të na e tregojë mendët e tij të bukura! (M. Muho, U. Çina, M. Ekonomi, Material leksikor nga krahinat, 195)

[5] contempt

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“*thyej/këput qafën*” is used with disdain about someone who has annoyed us as a threatening to leave.

Këputni qafën, ju them! Ja, po... ju lëshova arixhiun! Arixhiu, i ndërsyer nga këto fjalë, zgurdulloi sytë me hakërrimë. (Jakov Xoxa, Juga e bardhë, Vëll. I, 374)

“*s’më ha barku (për dikë)*” is used to express that we do not care about someone

Nuk më ha barku për të, nuk më merr malli kurrë, bile as që dua t’ia shoh sytë. (Jani Thomai, Fjalor frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe, 100)

In English - “*bite one’s lips*” – shows signs of disgust and mortification.

*The advocates on both sides are alternatively **biting their lips** to hear their conflicting misstatements and sophisms exposed. (James Main Dixson, English idioms, 28)*

“*bite the thumb*” was formerly a sign of contempt, often made use of by those who wished to pick a quarrel.

*I will **bite my thumb at them**, which is a disgrace to them, if they bear it. (Shakespeare: Romeo and Juliet/James M. Dixson, English idioms, 30)*

[6] cursing

It goes without saying that phraseological units are a reflection of culture, life experience, ways of thinking in a human community. The way of thinking determines the way of expressing and lexical concepts of a language. Cursing is very common in Albanian language. There are numerous verbal phraseological units where the verb used is in the subjunctive. The essence of the components in these phraseological units reflects the names and content of national objects, customs, national clothes, national cuisine, national traditions which are difficult to find in another culture. It is also difficult to translate such lexical concepts in another language. The formation of phraseology itself is associated with linguistic, like the grammatical rules of a language where the lexicon is subject to the internal laws of the language and non-linguistic factors, like historical background and processes, social environment, socio-political life etc.

The majority of verbal phraseological units that are used to curse, wish someone is dead, gets sick or goes bankrupt, as in the following examples:

Të rëntë pika! T’u shoftë pragu! Të zëntë sytë buka! Të humbtë vula! T’u shoftë ylli! T’u shoftë ymri! Të mbledhshin me çarçaf! T’u mbylltë dera! Mos pafsh diell me sy! Prapa diellit të vejë! Në djall të vejë (shkojë)! T’ë ngrënça drekën! Të marrtë dreqi! Të marrtë djalli! Të ngrëntë dheu! T’u shoftë emri! U bëfsh gur! E gjetsh nga mos e pandefsh! Të pafsha në rrugë të madhe!

“*U, na u bëfshin kurban, po pse, ne, që kemi më pak takat, do lajmë?*” dhe i çuan edhe ato. (Jakov Xoxa, Juga e bardhë, Vëll. II, 189)

*Dembela! Përsiprapë me muhabet, juve? **Harram ju qoftë** buka që ju jap! Më turpëruat! Më bëtë të mos dal faqe bote. Më bëtë të mbytem në lumë. (Jakov Xoxa, Juga e bardhë, Vëll. I, 346)*

In most cases, cursing is used against the others, as in the following conversation:

-Këtu janë të plagosurit?

-Këtu, or, bir, këtu...

-Si janë?

-S'ndjehen fare...

-Se mos kanë vdekur, moj?... – tha Peçi.

-Ik, ore, **t'u thaftë gjuha!** (Jakov Xoxa, *Juga e bardhë*, Vëll. II, 266)

or against herself/himself:

*Shpresa e kuptoi që ajo bisedë nuk mund të vazhdonte më me plugje ngritur dhe u çua. Ajo kishte brengën e Olimbisë, kurse kjo po qante hallin e Shpresës. - Mini murga, **m'u thaftë gjuha**, që s'më la të të gostisnja... Të m'i uronje jetë të lumtur... Se martesë e dytë është kjo, moj bijë, për Olimbinë. (Jakov Xoxa, *Juga e bardhë*, Vëll. II, 126)*

Conclusions

To carry out the research we selected verbal phraseological units from literary works, as the richest field in phraseology, and specialized dictionaries in English and Albanian. Based on the analysis of connotation in these languages, two groups of verbal phraseological units were identified, those that have a positive connotation and the other one that has a negative connotation. The investigated examples in both languages are grouped in several paradigms each reflecting a feeling, either positive or negative. We assert, as shown in the previously mentioned examples, that phraseological units are unique in every culture as they reflect the mentality of the linguistic community. Idiomatic expressions cannot be literally understood as they are closely linked with the geographical environment, historical background, economic life, religious beliefs, customs and psychological contexts of a nation. They are passed from one generation to the other through linguistic and cultural norms of usage. At the same time, phraseological units are generated from people's everyday life, social experience and folk wisdom and are bound to have commonalities and cultural overlaps because of the existence of a universal human spirit. Because of their specific and universal nature, they are real cultural symbols of the two nations.

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