

A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF FREQUENTLY USED IDIOMS IN ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN

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Abstract: Idioms constitute one of the most fascinating elements of a language, therefore, there is an extensive body of research concerning their use and function, particularly from a cross-linguistic perspective. The present study aims at providing a picture of frequently used idioms in English and Albanian, thus helping non-native speakers of the respective languages to understand them better and use them accurately in any communicative situation. It presents a contrastive analysis based on three types of equivalence, namely full equivalence, partial equivalence, and non-equivalence. The corpus of idioms used for analysis derives from the main dictionaries of idioms in both English and Albanian. Common European heritage, as well as the impact of English as the lingua franca of our days, accounts for a considerable number of idioms in both languages that display full (semantic and lexical) equivalence. There are also many frequently used idioms that display partial equivalence, most likely because of specific features of each of the languages with regard to their grammatical and lexical systems as well as the different cultural and social backgrounds. Consequently, both English and Albanian also make use of idioms that are not lexicalized in the respective languages precisely because of the different mindsets resulting from the impact of the said cultural, social, and linguistic factors.

Keywords: idioms, equivalence, cross-linguistic, English, Albanian

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Introduction

Idioms represent that element of a language that foreign speakers often find the most difficult part to master, and this occurs for various reasons, mainly because they go beyond the simple understanding of random words of a language and encompass a range of social and cultural factors. Therefore, a decent knowledge of idioms is not only a necessity, it is rather “*essential to a successful communication*” (Dixson, 2003, p. 1).

In English, according to Crystal (2008), the term idiom is used to refer to “*a sequence of words which is semantically and often syntactically restricted, so that they function as a single unit*” (p. 236). In Albanian, according to Thomai (2002), idioms, commonly referred to as *phraseological units*, are phrases in which syntactic relations of their constituents are not as clear as in random phrases because they are already formed units like words, and that is how they enter the discourse. Jackendoff (1995) also argues that idioms are part of our mental lexicon just like words, but Glucksberg (2001), on the other hand, disagrees and claims that idioms do not behave like words because of “their nonlogical nature”. Combining several definitions of idioms by distinguished linguists, Everaert (2010) defines idioms as “*conventionalized linguistic expressions which can be decomposed into potentially meaningful components and exhibit co-occurrence restrictions that cannot be explained in terms of rule-governed morphosyntactic or semantic restrictions*” (p. 4). We can say that they are generally defined as expressions whose meaning is not that easy to discern as it does not often derive from the meaning of their constituent parts, consequently, they do not usually allow literal translation as it affects their meaning. Furthermore, according to Everaert (2010), they can only be realistically defined and exist in a language community. Therefore, they continuously pose a challenge for translators who are required to be updated in regard to their use in different linguistic and cultural contexts.

English and Albanian are two Indo-European languages that make an extensive use of a very high number of idioms, and they are an indispensable part of these languages. Both languages include a relatively high number of idioms in their dictionaries. *The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* presents about 5000 idioms (Sieftring, 2004), whereas the *Cambridge International dictionary of Idioms* (2002) contains around 7000 idioms. It is estimated that today English has about 25000 idioms, and Clarke (2010) argues that at least 5500 idioms are in regular use. According to Thomai (1999), Albanian is estimated to have about 11000 idioms, even though this number may have increased in recent years mainly due to language contact.

There are idioms for all fields of life in both English and Albanian, and native speakers of the respective languages know them and, of course, use them in their everyday communication. Some of these idioms can be used formally and

others can be used informally, but to native speakers using them correctly in the right situations comes naturally. Foreign speakers, on the other hand, may sometimes struggle to understand them, therefore, mastering the idioms of the target language is necessary because it can help them to understand the native speakers and express themselves better, and also make their conversations more colorful. Furthermore, if they manage to get a solid grasp of idioms, they may sound like they have attained a native-like proficiency, and thus display a whole new level of confidence. According to Tali (2022), understanding figurative language as an element of the national culture that contributes to culture-specific and emotional communication with native speakers of a certain language is essential for intercultural communication in the 21st century.

Nevertheless, foreign speakers of English and Albanian, may not always struggle to understand the native speakers because there are many idioms that can be translated literally and used as semantic equivalents in the respective languages. But this is not an exclusivity of these two languages as many idioms have now become “international”, and they are used across languages.

Since English, as a major language, exercises a certain influence on smaller languages including Albanian, it is not uncommon to notice cases of literal translations of English idioms into Albanian. This has become increasingly common in recent years because of a more frequent contact between the Kosovan population and international organizations, whose official language is English, situated in the country since the end of the war in 1999, but the Internet as the “superpower” of information has certainly also played a significant role.

In English, idioms are mainly classified into three subgroups: pure idioms that are non-literal; semi-idioms that have one or more literal constituents; and literal idioms whose meaning can be easily determined from the meaning of their constituent parts (Strakšiene, 2009, as cited in Kovács, 2016). Based precisely on the degree of transparency, namely the meaning that can derive from the meaning of the constituent parts, Glucksberg (2001) classifies idioms into opaque and transparent.

In Albanian, on the other hand, idioms are classified based on several criteria such as construction (phrases and sentences), the degree of motivation (unmotivated and motivated), lexical-grammatical value (nominal, adjectival, verbal, adverbial); and there are also some other small groups such as, for example, interjectional phraseological units - *Punë e madhe!* (Big deal!), *T'u thaftë gjuha!* (May your tongue dry!), etc. (Thomai, 2002).

In terms of meaning, idioms are classified into two types: universal, whose meaning is common to many languages, and language or culture-specific, whose meaning is specific and because of linguistics and/or cultural restrictions, they cannot be easily understood by non-native speakers of that language (Aldahesh,

2013). Idioms are compared to a “mixed bag” that includes metaphors, metonymies, pairs of words, idioms with it, similes, sayings, phrasal verbs, grammatical idioms, and others (Kövecses, 2010, as cited in Kovács, 2016), and it is important to classify them in order to understand them properly.

According to Ionescu (2017), idioms have four main features: 1) Conventionality – their meaning derives from the context and it cannot be predicted; 2) Inflexibility – their syntactic constructions are limited; 3) Figuration – they involve figures of speech such as metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles; 4) Proverbiality – they describe repetitive situations that are of a particular interest.

In light of the abovementioned considerations, the present study addresses the following research questions:

- What types of cross-linguistic equivalence do English and Albanian idioms display?
- What factors influence the types of cross-linguistic equivalence displayed by English and Albanian idioms?

Methodology

This study presents a contrastive analysis of frequently used idioms in English and Albanian based on three types of cross-linguistic equivalence:

- a) full equivalence
- b) partial equivalence
- c) non-equivalence

Data collection

The corpus of idioms used for analysis derives mainly from two dictionaries of English idioms, *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* and *Oxford Dictionary of Idioms* (4th edition), and the largest Albanian dictionary of idioms, *Fjalor Frazelogjik i Gjuhës Shqipe (A Phraseological Dictionary of the Albanian Language)*, as well as some smaller dictionaries of idioms in both languages. Two online dictionaries, *Cambridge Dictionary* and *Collins English Dictionary*, have also served as very valuable sources with regard to updates on idioms and their use. The data comprises 404 frequently used English and Albanian idioms, of which 212 belong to English and 192 belong to Albanian.

Research procedure

The research procedure applied in this study was conducted in accordance with the following steps:

- Selecting idioms that are frequently used in both languages.

- Analyzing the said idioms in terms of cross-linguistic equivalence.
- Classifying them according to the type of cross-linguistic equivalence displayed.
- Emphasizing the differences and similarities between English and Albanian idioms in terms of the influences of social, cultural, and linguistic factors.

Analysis and Findings

Research findings indicate that English and Albanian idioms display three types of cross-linguistic equivalence, as presented below.

Full equivalence

The analysis of idiom dictionaries in English and Albanian have revealed that many of the frequently used idioms in both English and Albanian display full equivalence. This may be because of their shared characteristics as Indo-European languages, and their shared European heritage that accounts to a great extent to most of the similarities between the idioms in these languages. However, since the two languages are structurally different, word order as a specific feature differs in some of the idioms because, unlike English, Albanian, being a highly inflectional language, is more versatile in this regard. Therefore, minor discrepancies concerning mainly the word order are the result of the peculiarities of the grammatical systems of the respective languages. Khasanova et al. (2020) argue that some discrepancies are the result of the people's thinking process considering the fact that they belong to different nations and use different grammatical categories available in their languages.

Idioms that display full equivalence in English and Albanian concern different aspects of life.

According to Wierzbicka (2007), the human body is central to people's existence, and it is their reference point of orientation in the world even though she argues that categorization and conceptualization of body parts is different among different languages and cultures. Çakir (2016), on the other hand, argues that the relevance of body parts in certain languages depends on several factors such as geography, economy, and other factors. The examples below indicate the prevalence of English idioms and their Albanian equivalents that concern the body parts, and this similarity may be the result of their shared heritage, although there are variations, and the causes of variations are manifold as they include different social and cultural contexts that account for differences in the body parts or the domains used (Csábi, 2006).

The following English and Albanian body idioms display full equivalence:

(Be) on the tip of the tongue - (E ka) në majë të gjuhës (dikush); Bite your tongue - Kafsho gjuhën; Behind sb's back - (Ia punoi) pas shpine (dikujt); Clip your wings - Më preu krahët (dikush a diçka); Count them on the fingers of one hand - Numërohen me gishtat e dorës; Fall on deaf ears - Bie në veshë të shurdhër; Get out of hand - Më doli nga dora (diçka); Give sb a hand - Ia jap një dorë (dikujt); Have (someone's) blood on your hands - I ka (bërë) duart me gjak); (Have) a heart of gold - (Ka) zemër të artë (dikush); (Have) a thick skin - E ka lëkurën e trashë; My hands are tied - I kam duart e lidhura; Point the finger - E tregojnë me gisht (dikë); Two-faced - (Njeri) me dy fytyra/); Skin and bones - Kockë e lëkurë; Skin sb alive - E rrjep të gjallë; Stick your nose in - Fut hundët (hundën) (Gjevori, 1972); Wash your hands of something - Laj duart (nga diçka)

It is interesting to note that there are idioms that seemingly display full equivalence, but not in all their meanings, for example *Lay a hand on (someone/ something)* - *Vë dorë (mbi dikë, diçka)*. In English, this idiom has mainly a negative connotation because it means “to harm someone” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023) and, if used in plural (*Lay hands on*) “to seize or get possession of” (Collins, 2023), whereas in Albanian, in addition to the two negative meanings already explained in English, it also has a positive connotation because the main meaning of this idiom is “to put things in order, to help improve something” (Thomai, 1999).

Very few food idioms in English and Albanian display full equivalence:

A hard nut to crack - *Arrë e fortë (për t'u thyer)*; *Apple of discord* - *Mollë sherri*

Animal idioms are very popular in both English and Albanian, but even though these languages have a considerable number of animal idioms and their speakers seem to have very similar attitudes toward animals, only a few of them display full equivalence:

A barking dog never bites - *Qeni që leh (kurrë) nuk kafshon*; *Black sheep* - *Dele e zezë*; *Crocodile tears* - *Lot krokodili*; *Kill two birds with one stone* - *Me një gur vret dy zogj*; *Trojan horse* - *kali i Trojës*

Many English and Albanian idioms that convey actions also display full equivalence. Some of them are used informally either in English or Albanian, but that does not diminish their importance and their frequent use. Some of the following idioms have been presented in the dictionaries with the verbs in the past simple, and even though their use is flexible, we present them here in their original form as found in the dictionaries:

Break the ice - *Thyjej akullin*; *Read between the lines* - *Lexoj në mes të rreshtave*; *Eat your words* - *E ha fjalën (dikush)*; *Fall on deaf ears* - *Bie në*

veshë të shurdhër; Follow in someone's footsteps - Ndjekë hapat e dikujt; Go off the rails - Del nga binarët; Hit the mark - I ra në shenjë; Kill time - Vret kohën; Leave a lot to be desired - Lë shumë për të dëshiruar; Leave no stone unturned - S'le gur pa lëvizur; Make a name for oneself - Bëri emër (dikush); Put (someone) on a pedestal - E vunë në pedestal; Play with fire - Luan me zjarrin (dikush); Roll up your sleeves - Përvesh mëngët; Spill blood - Derdh gjak; Strike while the iron is hot - E rreh hekurin sa është i nxehtë (dikush); Take off your hat to someone - I heq kapelën (dikujt); Tighten your belt - Shtrëngoi rripin (dikush)

Although not all English dictionaries of idioms include it, the idiom *Break (the) silence* – *Thyej heshtjen* is also very common in everyday conversations in both English and Albanian, but this idiom can be somewhat confusing in English. Thus, according to Spears (2007), there is a difference between *Break the silence* and *Break silence*, because merely the omission of the definite article *the* causes a change of meaning, namely, the first one means to make noise interrupting the silence, and the second one means to give information about a topic that was previously avoided.

Miscellanea:

Alpha and omega - Alfa dhe omega; A dead weight - Peshë e vdekur; Devil's advocate - Avokati i djallit; Green light - (Hap) dritën jeshile; Like father like son - Si i ati edhe i biri; Needle in a haystack - (Kërkon) gjilpërën në kashtë; Of the same mind - Të një mendjeje (Gjevori, 1972); Someone's/ something's days are numbered - I ka ditët të numëruara (dikush/diçka); To be broke - Është trokë; Walls have ears - Muret kanë veshë

Gjocaj (2008) argues that the conjunction “*si*” (“as/like”) in Albanian has become very productive in forming phraseological units of comparative character. Such units are known in English as similes. They are expressions which compare two things, include the words *as* or *like*, and make the language we use more colorful and powerful (O'Dell & McCarthy, 2017). There are several similes in English and Albanian that display full equivalence, but in Albanian, they are mainly used informally:

As clear as crystal - I/e/të kthjellët si kristali; As cold as ice - I/e/të ftohtë si akulli; As smooth as silk - I/e/të butë si mëndafshi; As stubborn as a mule - Kokëfortë si mushkë; As sweet as honey - I/e/të ëmbël si mjalta; Like a headless chicken - Si pula pa kokë; Eat like a pig - Ha si derr; Eat like a bird - Ha si zog

A group of idioms that also display full equivalence in English and Albanian includes idioms with names of outstanding historical personalities and

mythological figures throughout the history of mankind, which are also present in many other Indo-European languages:

Achile's heel - Thembra e Akilit; Adam's apple - Molla e Adamit; (Be) more Catholic than the Pope - (Është) më katolik se Papa; Gordian knot - Nyjë gordiane; Penelope's web - Pëlhura e Penelopes; Pandora's box - Kutia e Pandorës; The sword of Damocles - Shpata e Damokleut

English idioms that found their way into Albanian

There are some idioms that have become quite popular and frequently used in Albanian, but they cannot be found in the dictionaries of Albanian idioms because they are actually literal translations of English idioms. According to Gjocaj (2008), these expressions have entered the Albanian language as calques and the main reason is that they are considered “trendy”. The interesting thing is that they are used with the same semantic implication as in their original language, therefore full equivalence is in order. The use of these idioms is so widespread that they have become part of the vocabulary of both laymen and professionals in different fields of life:

A picture is worth 1000 words - Një fotografi vlen sa 1000 fjalë; At a crossroad - Në udhëkryq; Butterflies in the stomach - Fluturat në stomak; Father figure - Figurë atërore; It takes two to tango - Duhet dy (veta) për tango; Light at the end of the tunnel - Dritë në fund të tunelit; In seventh heaven - Në qiellin e shtatë; Over my dead body - Mbi trupin tim të vdekur; Throw the towel - Hedh peshqirin; White lie - Gënjeshtër e bardhë

Some of the English idioms that found their way into Albanian as calques are especially used in business and politics:

A domino effect - Efekti domino; Behind closed doors - Prapa dyerve të mbyllura; Big fish - Peshk i madh; Black Friday - E premtja e zezë; Below belt - (Goditje) nën brez; Have an ace up your sleeve - Kam asin nën mëngë; Hot potato - Patate e nxehtë; Money laundering - Shpërlarje parash; On the table - Në (mbi) tavolinë; Under the table - Nën tavolinë; Zero tolerance - Zero tolerancë

Partial equivalence

Geeraerts (2006) argues that the meaning we construct in and through language is not a separate and independent module of mind because it involves our knowledge of the world, and it reflects human overall experience, therefore it is experientially grounded. However, concerning idioms, meaning is not the only element worth researching, and although it is the most fascinating and at the same time confusing feature, it is quite closely linked to their structure, and one cannot study one aspect without considering the other. A considerable

number of idioms in English and Albanian used in this study display partial equivalence and this refers precisely to the differences in their compositional structure (lexical and syntactic) and mental imagery.

Lexical differences

Some frequently used idioms in English and Albanian show differences in the lexical items employed in forming them. In some cases, the different lexical item is a verb, or a noun, in some others, they share only a noun, a verb, or an adverb, but not the rest of the items that make up the idioms, and in still others, they share more than one lexical item.

Different nouns: *Apple of the eye* - **Drita** (light) *e syrit*; *A thorn in someone's side* - (*E ka*) *gjëmbë në sy* (eye); *Born with a silverspoon* - *Ka lindur me këmishë* (shirt); *Castles in the air/Spain* - *Kështjellë në rërë* (sand); *Change your tune* - *E ndërron këngën* (song) (informal in Albanian); *Feet of clay* - (*Me*) *këmbë (prej) balte* (mud); *Get your ducks in a row* - *Vë punët* (work) *në radhë* (Gjevori, 1972); *Hold your tongue* - *Mbaj gojën* (mouth); *Sell like hotcakes* - *Shitet si hallvë* (halwa); *Show your true colours* - *Tregon fytyrën* (face) *e vërtetë*; *The icing on the cake* - *Qershia* (cherry) *mbi tortë*; *The other side of the coin* - *Ana tjetër e medaljes* (medal); *Walk/tread on eggshells* - *Ecën (si) mbi vezë* (eggs) (*dikush*); *Up to your ears* - (*Jam*) *deri në fyt* (throat)

Different verbs: *Air your dirty laundry in public* - *Ia nxjerr* (reveal) *të palarat në shesh* (*dikujt*); *Burn the bridges* - *I preu* (cut) *urat*; *Feel at home* - **Rri** (stay) *si në shtëpinë tënde*; *Give me a hand* - *I shtrij* (*zgjat*) (extend) *dorën* (*dikujt*); *Live in the ivory tower* - (*Është*) **mbyllur** (closed) *në kullën e fildishtë*; *Lose sleep over (something)* - *Më ikën* (*escapes*) *gjumi (për diçka)*; *Packed (squashed) like sardines* - *U bëmë* (became) *sardele*; *Turn a blind eye* - *E bën* (*make*) *një sy të verbër*

Same nouns: *A wolf in sheep's clothing* - **Ujku** *me lëkurë qengji* (with a lamb's skin); *Out of sight, out of mind* - *Larg syve* (away from the eyes), *larg mendjes* - This idiom is used in many Indo-European languages and the only difference is the choice of the lexical items *mind* and *heart*, some languages, including Albanian, sometimes use *heart*, and some others use *mind*. The idiom was used as early as about 850 B.C. by Homer in his famous epic *the Odyssey* (Terban, 1996).

Same verbs: *Caught with your pants/trousers down* - (*E kapi, e zuri*) *me presh në dorë* (*dikë*) (with leeks in his/her hand); *Come out smelling like a rose* - **Dola** *i larë* (washed); *Have a bee in your bonnet* - **Ka** *mizën nën kësulë* (the fly under the cap); *Kill with kindness* - *Të vret me pambuk* (with cotton); *Know sb through and through* - **E njoh** (*dikë*) *si paranë e kuqe* (like red money)

Same adverbs: **Between** the rock and a hard blue sea - **Ndërmjet** dy zjarresh (between two fires); **When** it rains it pours - **Kur** vijnë të këqijat, hapjau derën (When the evil things come, open the door); **When** pigs fly - **Kur** të zbardhet penda e korbit (When the raven's feather turns white); **Where** there's smoke, there's fire - **Ku** ka zë, s'është pa gjë (Where there is voice, there is action); **Why** keep a dog and bark yourself? - **Pse** t'i djeg gishtat kur kam mashën? (Why burn my fingers when I have a poker)

There are some proverbs in English and Albanian that also display differences in the lexical items used to form them, e.g. *Actions speak louder than words* - *Veprat flasin më shumë se fjalët* (Actions speak more than words); *A friend in need is a friend indeed* - *Miku i mirë njihet në ditë të vështira* (A good friend is known in difficult days); *Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today* - *Punën e sotme mos e lër për nesër* (Don't put today's work off until tomorrow)

Totally different lexical implementation

People are not only biological entities, they rather have a cultural and social identity that is revealed by the languages they speak because they embody their cultural and social experience, and since these experiences vary from culture to culture, that affects the people's knowledge of the world (Geeraerts, 2006). Consequently, it affects the understanding of the meanings attached to idiomatic expressions used in different circumstances of everyday communication.

When speakers of Albanian hear an idiom in English, they often tend to guess its meaning by focusing on one or more constituents of that idiom that are also found in an idiom in their own language, or that are familiar to them (see the examples above). English speakers do the same. They all try to find common lexical items because they contribute to a better understanding of idiomatic expressions, but this can become a difficult feat when there is no lexical resemblance to facilitate the process. Hence, there is a group of idioms in English that have their semantic equivalents in Albanian, but they do not employ equivalent lexical items. You will find the (literal) translation of Albanian idioms in brackets in order to notice the lexical differences:

Add insult to injury - *I hedh benzinë zjarrit* (throw oil on the fire); *A cock and bull story* - *Përralla me mbret* (fairy tales with a king); *A match made in heaven* - *Gjeti tenxherja kapakun* (the pot found its lid); *A storm in a teacup* - *E bën mizën buall* (turn a fly into an ox); *Barking up the wrong tree* - *S'ka ç'i bën gomarit e i bie samarit* (he/she can't do anything to the donkey, so he/she strikes the saddle); *Beat around the bush* - *Ia sjell rrotull* (dikujt) (he/she talks in circles); *Bite the bullet* - *Shtrëngoja dhëmbët* (buckle my teeth); *Birds of a feather flock together* - *Më thuaj me kë rri, të të them kush je* (tell me who you spend time with, and I'll tell you who you are); *Bring sb down a peg or two* - *Ia ul bishtin* (dikujt) (lower sb's tail);

Can't hold a candle to - Nuk i vjen (nuk i afrohet) as te gishti i këmbës (he/she doesn't even come to sb's toe); Catch more flies with honey than with vinegar - Fjala e mirë e thyen gurin (a good word breaks the stone); Drop you like a hot potato - E hoqi qafe (dikë a diçka) (got rid of sb/sth); Fit as a fiddle - Shëndoshë si molla (healthy like an apple); Footloose and fancy-free - Ku rafsha, mos u vrafsha (may I be unharmed if (where) I fall); Give the devil his/her due - Armikun vraje, por hakun mos ia ha (kill the enemy, but don't take his/her credit); Give someone the cold shoulder - S'e bëj hesap (I don't count him); Hit the roof - I iku petlla (his /her pancake escaped); Jump on the bandwagon - E mori vala (the wave took him/her); Let sleeping dogs lie - Mos i fryej zjarrit (don't blow the fire); Let the cat out of the bag - E nxjerr në lëndinë (diçka) (reveal something); Miss the boat - I iku zogu nga dora (the bird escaped from his/her hands); Live in a dream world - (Sheh) ëndrra me sy hapur (sb dreams with open eyes); On the same wavelength - Një kokë kanë (they have one head); Out of the frying pan and into the fire - Iku nga shiu në breshër (escaped from rain to hail); Pot calling the cattle black - I keshni të kesh (informal) (the mocked one will mock you); Pull the wool over someone's eyes - Ia shiti sapunin për djathë (sold sb soap as cheese); Split hairs - Kërkon qimen në vezë (looks for hair on an egg); Spitting image - (Sikur) i ka prerë kokën (dikujt) (it's like he/she cut sb's head); Tar sb with the same brush - E fut në një thes (puts sb in one (same) sack); The apple does not fall far from the tree - Dardha pikë nën dardhë (the pear falls under the pear); The grass is greener on the other side of the fence - Pula e fqinjes i duket më e majme (the neighbour's chicken seems fatter); The last straw - U mbush kupa (the cup is full); Two peas in a pod - (Janë) motër e vëlla (they are like sister and brother); Wet behind the ears - I ka buzët me qumësht (his/her lips are with milk); What goes around comes around - Çfarë të mbjellësh, do të korrësh (you will reap what you sow); When in Rome do as the Romans do - Sipas vendit bën kuvendin (dikush)(act in accordance with the place); You can say that again - S'e luan topi (diçka) (the cannon cannot move it).

Syntactic differences

Ionescu (2017) argues that the most frequent syntactic pattern of idioms across languages is V+NP (Object). This pattern is also observed in a considerable number of frequently used English and Albanian idioms analyzed in this study, namely 64 out of 168 idioms that display full equivalence, 60 out of 164 idioms that display partial equivalence, and 25 out of 72 idioms that do not have equivalents in the respective languages, as can be seen in the presented examples. Nevertheless, a number of these frequently used idioms in both English and Albanian also demonstrate significant differences in their syntactic

structure. They concern mainly the additional constituents, even though a syntactic analysis of English and Albanian idioms can be quite challenging because of the discrepancy in the structure of idiomatic counterparts in the respective languages, and also because of the broad spectrum of expressions that are labeled as idioms in both languages. Therefore, some idioms are analyzed at the phrase level, while others are analyzed at the clause level. Since the above-mentioned differences in syntactic structure are more noticeable in idioms that display partial equivalence, we have selected 16 examples that illustrate them most effectively: *Be all ears* - (*Jam gjithë (tërë) sy e veshë*) - in English we have the pattern V+NP, whereas in its Albanian counterpart, we have the coordination *gjithë sy e veshë* (all eyes and ears) because of the additional constituent *sy* (eyes); *Blood is thicker than water* - *Gjaku ujë nuk bahet* (Gjevori, 1972) – both idioms are independent clauses, but in the English version the structure is S-P-SC, whereas its Albanian counterpart has the following structure S-P-O (Blood doesn't become water); *Hand over the reigns* - *I lë në dorë (dikujt)* – in the English idiom we have the syntactic pattern V+NP because of the additional noun constituent – the object *reigns* which in Albanian is implied rather than stated; *In the blink of an eye* - *Sa hap e mbyll sytë* - the verb *blink* used in the English version is translated into Albanian by using two verbs *hap* (open) and *mbyll* (close) and also the noun *sytë* (eyes), because only in this combination it becomes the semantic equivalent of *blink*; *On pins and needles* - *Rri (si) mbi gjilpëra* – the English idiom involves the coordination of two nouns *pins* and *needles* whose meaning in Albanian is *gjilpëra*, but the Albanian idiom also has an additional constituent that is the verb *rri* (stay), whereas in the English version the verb is absent; *Once in a blue moon* – *Një herë në hënë* – in English, we have one additional constituent, the adjective *blue* that modifies the noun *moon* and it is absent in its Albanian counterpart; *Open old wounds* - *I hap plagën (dikujt)* – in English we have one additional constituent, namely the adjective *old* that modifies the noun, whereas in the Albanian counterpart the noun is used in the singular number; *Stab someone in the back* - *I ngul thikën pas shpine* – the Albanian idiom contains the noun constituent *thikën* (the knife) that the English equivalent lacks because the verb *stab* itself implies the action and the instrument used to perform the action, and its pattern is V+X+PP (Bruening, 2019).

In this regard, it is also of great importance to note that the notion of syntactic *frozenness* (Fraser, 1970), or *fixedness* as Langlotz (2006) calls it, is generally acknowledged by researchers as one of the main features of idiomaticity, and even though they are reluctant to admit it, there are idioms that do not adhere to this concept, especially in Albanian.

Differences in the mental imagery

Some English and Albanian idioms display certain differences in the mental images associated with them. The mental image can elicit an element from the same lexical domain or from a different domain. Examples of English and Albanian idioms that elicit images from the same domain:

– Body images: *Hold your tongue* - *Mbaj gojë*

– Animal images: *Have a bee in your bonnet* - *Ka mizën nën kësulë*; *When pigs fly* - *Kur të zbardhet penda e korbit*

– Food images: *The icing on the cake* - *Qershia mbi tortë*; *Walk/tread on eggshells* - *Ecën (si) mbi vezë (dikush)*; *The apple does not fall far from the tree* - *Dardha pikë nën dardhë*

– Miscellaneous: *Feet of clay* - *Këmbë (prej) balte*; *The other side of the coin* - *Ana tjetër e medaljes*; *Change your tune* - *E ndërron këngën*

Examples of English and Albanian idioms that elicit images from different domains: *A storm in a teacup* - *E bën mizën buall*; *Fit as a fiddle* - *Shëndoshë si molla*; *Jump on the bandwagon* - *E mori vala*; *It's raining cats and dogs* - *Po bie shi me gjyma*; *Miss the boat* - *I iku zogu nga dora*

Non-equivalence

Idiomatic non-equivalence may occur because the concept conveyed by an idiom in one language is not lexicalized in another language (Negro Alosque, 2011). In spite of their common European heritage, English and Albanian idioms display differences that are culturally rooted, therefore both languages use idioms that do not have equivalents in the respective languages. According to Smirkou (2021), this phenomenon results from the impact of a range of cultural factors such as customs, beliefs, history, religion, etc., and analyses of idioms or phraseological units reveal that they tend to be culture-bound or culture-specific (Szerszunowicz, 2012; Kovács, 2016). But Ionescu (2017) emphasizes they are not only bound by culture, but also by social context, within a pragmatic framework of human interaction, whereas Casadei (2020) also adds the linguistic factors as an important piece of the puzzle.

There are some frequently used idioms in English and Albanian that display non-equivalence, and of course the number is higher in English because of the higher number of idioms in this language. The following examples indicate frequently used idioms in English that do not have equivalents in Albanian:

Body parts: *Break a leg*; *Pull someone's leg*; *We see eye to eye*; *Vote with your feet*

Animals: *Monkey suit*; *The birds and the bees*; *The elephant in the room*

Food: *A piece of cake; Cut the cheese; Eat the humble pie; Have a bun in the oven*

Things: *A penny saved is a penny earned; Cook the book; It's not rocket science*

Miscellaneous: *Face the music; Fish for a compliment; Off the record; Take a rain check; Turn king's/queen's evidence; The whole nine yards; Mr. & Mrs. Right; Wedding jitters*

There are also some idioms that are commonly used in American English such as *The big apple; The almighty dollar; Rob Peter to pay Paul; A shotgun wedding* (Spears, 2000), then *Take the fifth (amendment)* (Spears, 2007), also *Plain Jane* (Gillet, 2012), that do not have equivalent counterparts in Albanian. The same applies to some expressions that Whitmell (2015) refers to as business idioms, but they are not included in the large dictionaries of English idioms even though she argues that they are a significant part of the business English vocabulary and very frequently used in spoken English, e.g. *Double-dip recession; Credit crunch; Fiscal cliff; Funny money; Market jitters; Ring-fencing; Robin Hood tax*

Some of the most popular idioms in English were coined, or at least introduced in English by the greatest playwright of all time, William Shakespeare, and some of them also do not have equivalents in Albanian, e.g.

A blessing in disguise; A penny for your thought; Back to the drawing board; Give the benefit of the doubt; Green-eyed monster; Ignorance is bliss; I will wear my heart upon a sleeve; Pound of flesh; Salad days; Steal someone's thunder; The world's your oyster

Compared to English, Albanian is a relatively small language, however, the following examples indicate some frequently used idioms in Albanian that do not have equivalents in English. For the sake of clarity, we have provided their literal translation as well as their meaning.

Body parts: *S'ka sy e faqe (dikush)* - (Sb) doesn't have eyes and cheeks - a person who cannot go out and face people or ask for favors because he/she has done something wrong and disgraceful; *Vë duart (dorën) në zjarr (për dikë)* - Put hands (hand) in the fire (for sb) - you trust someone completely; you can vouch for him/her.

Body parts and animals: *(U bëmë) si këmbët e dhisë* - (We became) like the goat's legs - people don't respect seniority anymore, nobody knows who is the oldest and who is the youngest, they don't appreciate the seniors; *Dhi e zgjebosur, bishtin përpetjë* - a scabby goat with its tail up - a worthless person who is also very conceited and arrogant.

Animals: *E shtien miza e s'e nxjerr bualli* - A fly puts something somewhere and a buffalo cannot get it out - when you start something casually, without thinking things through, and then in spite of hard work, you fail to make it work; *Nxjerr dhjamë nga pleshti (dikush)* - (Sb) gets fat from a flea - gets benefits from something even when it seems impossible; *Prit gomar të mbijë bar!* - Donkey, wait till the grass grows! - when you wait for something in vain, when something is uncertain and it will probably never happen; *Ra prej kalit në gomar (dikush)* - Sb fell off a horse onto a donkey - sb was given a lower rank, also sb married beneath him/her; *Si qeni i lëshuar nga zingjiri* - Like a dog off its leash - incontrollable, furious, hungry for something; *(Shkoi) si qeni në vreshtë (dikush)* - Sb went (died) like a dog in the vineyard - sb was killed/ hurt accidentally, without any reason; *Thes me pleshta* - A sack of fleas - a bunch of people who are unsuitable for a job; also something completely impossible.

Food: *E prish dasmën për një limon (dikush)* - (Sb) spoils the wedding for a lemon - destroys something great or important for something trivial, does not finish the work that is almost finished; *I bie bukës me shkelm* - Kicks the bread - to be ungrateful, to repay good with evil; *Peshku në det, tigani në zjarr* - The fish in the sea, the frying pan on the stove - work that is far from being finished, yet someone wants to prematurely enjoy its fruit; *Qumësht dallëndysheje* - swallow's milk - very rare food, extremely difficult to find; *S'është në tokë të bukës (dikush)* - (Sb) is not in the field of bread - sb has not started to work and earn his/her living yet; *Shto ujë e shto miell (dikush)* - Add water and add flour - to prolong something indefinitely by adding ingredients and exceeding the dimensions.

Miscellaneous: *Më çoi nëna të laj gojën* - My mother sent me to wash my mouth - to invite sb to an event just for appearances' sake; *Ca të nënës e ca të njerkës* - Some (are) of the mother and some of the stepmother - they are not treated equally, one is unjustly treated better than the other, one is loved more than the other; *E di Gjoni çfarë ka thesi* - Only John knows what's in the sack - every person knows his/her own worries, also only an insider knows the real situation; *E hedh gurin larg (dikush)* - Sb throws a stone far away - sb is very powerful and influential and can achieve what others cannot, also sb is aiming at something much higher than expressed by words; *E mban drejt timonin* - (Sb) keeps the steering wheel straight - sb has impeccable behavior and a strong sense of justice; *E mprehu lapsin (dikush)* - (Sb) sharpened the pencil - got ready to criticize someone and waited for them to make a mistake; *I bie po atij teli* - (Sb) hits the same string - repeats the same thing all over again, also acts in the same way; *Iu shua pragu (dikujt)* - Sb's threshold died out - all his/her family members died, and he/she is alone in the world; *S'kam bërë krushqi (me dikë)* - They are not my in-laws - I am not obliged to spend time with them and fulfill their requests or do them favors.

All this indicates that the description given to the term *idiom* by most of the dictionaries is inappropriate because they only suggest that an idiom consists of at least two words as its key feature, whereas its understanding is often taken for granted or simply implied (Szpila, 2007). However, research findings reveal that they are not simply “dead” metaphors with randomly determined meanings because, as seen from the examples above, their meanings stem from the speakers’ knowledge of conceptual metaphors (Gibbs & O’ Brien, 1990). Furthermore, according to Ionescu (2017), the main problem concerning the concept of equivalence in idiom analysis originates from the fact that most of the lexical terms that are used to form idioms are language specific, and that the meaning of idioms is affected by historic, cultural, and cognitive contexts that differ from one language community to another.

Conclusions

A contrastive analysis of English and Albanian idioms is not a piece of cake precisely because of the differences of approach to their defining and classifying by researchers in the respective languages. English is more flexible when it comes to all phraseological expressions it includes within the umbrella of the concept called “idiom”, whereas in Albanian, idioms are treated as internal language constructions that express the national specificity, and as such, they may be confusing to non-native speakers, therefore, they need to be translated either with an equivalent expression in the target language, or with an adequate expression that fulfills their stylistic function.

Nevertheless, this study indicates that in spite of the differences that derive from the impact of a range of factors, mainly social, cultural, and linguistic ones, most of the frequently used idioms in English and Albanian display full equivalence, furthermore, a considerable number of English idioms have found their way into Albanian as calques, thus contributing towards the language enrichment. It also shows that a lot of frequently used idioms in English and Albanian display partial equivalence, so they share the meaning, but not their compositional structure, and this refers to the differences in the lexical items employed in forming the idioms, and certain differences in syntactic patterns even though examples provided above in both languages also show similarities in this regard. Some frequently used idioms in English and Albanian that display partial equivalence also indicate differences with regard to the mental images associated with them and the domains they are drawn from.

Idioms are a reflection of the people’s mindsets created through their personal experience influenced by a range of factors, therefore, there is a group of frequently used idioms in English and Albanian that display non-equivalence in terms of both meaning and form as they do not have equivalents in the respective languages. Consequently, they must be translated adequately in order

to be comprehended by non-native speakers, and not be seen as obstacles to effective communication.

Nowadays, when the world has literally become *one* in terms of communication, and people are interacting more than ever, it is imperative that language barriers are removed, and this, among others, also implies the mastering of idioms, as a very specific element of a language, because disregarding them may cause misunderstandings and turn a completely random communicative situation into a disagreeable experience. Therefore, researchers need to work towards eradicating the said misunderstandings by orienting further research on idioms toward compilation of bilingual dictionaries of idioms because that would undoubtedly instigate a better understanding of idioms by non-native speakers, and thus broaden their horizons regarding language and its complexity.

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