

# AN EYE ON ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN IDIOMS AS AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THESE LANGUAGES

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# THE OBJECT OF STUDY:

ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN IDIOMS FROM THE STRUCTURAL, SEMANTIC, GRAMMATICAL & LEXICAL POINT OF VIEW.

IN BOTH LANGUAGES NON-MOTIVATED WORD-GROUPS ARE DESCRIBED AS PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS OR IDIOMS: ***RED FLOWER*** – MOTIVATED; ***RED TAPE*** – NON-MOTIVATED (*DEMOCRATIC METHOD*); ***HEAVY WEIGHT*** – MOTIVATED; ***HEAVY WEIGHT*** – NON-MOTIVATED (*SERIOUS PART IN A THEATRICAL PLAY*); ***IA KREH FLOKET*** – MOTIVATED; ***IA KREH BISHTIN*** – NON-MOTIVATED (*SAY NICE THINGS TO SB. JUST TO PLEASE HIM/HER*).



An idiom is defined as: 1) a peculiar way of saying something which has become established after long use. 2) an expression whose meaning cannot be predicted from the usual meanings of its constituent elements. 3) a style of artistic expression characteristic of a particular individual, school, period or medium. (**Noah Webster's dictionary**)

Ph unit is "an expression with independent meaning, consisting of two or more full words, highly idiomatic; it is fixed and cannot be freely made up in speech but is reproduced as a ready-made unit" (Jani Thomai)

*To have kittens (to be worried or nervous), to put your foot in your mouth (to say something you probably shouldn't do), to shed some light on the subject (to discover things); i zuri rrota bishtin (was found in difficulty), s'e ve ujin në zjarr (doesn't care) are examples of idioms.*

*I sat on the fence and watched the game – literal meaning; The politician sat on the fence and wouldn't give his opinion about the tax issue – idiomatic meaning* (one isn't making the clear choice regarding some issue) or *Ai i vrau gjithë mizat që i vinin rrotull – literal meaning* (kill the flies); *Ai nuk bën asnjë punë por gjithë ditën vret miza – idiomatic meaning* (waste time idly).

Conventionality: *kick the bucket – kthen sytë nga qielli (die)* has nothing to do with kicking buckets

**Inflexibility:** cannot say *kick the pail* instead of *kick the bucket* although *bucket* and *pail* are synonyms as we cannot say *m'u bë shkurre* instead of *m'u bë ferrë*

**Figuration:** idioms involve metaphors (*spend time, take the bull by the horns; qan me lote krokodili-shed crocodile tears; lepin sahanet – lick sb.'s boots*); metonymies (*lend a hand, tund degën e ullirit*); hyperbole (*not worth the paper it's printed on; bëhet mish e kocka me*)

# SOURCES OF IDIOMS

**Mythology:** *to clean Augean stables; filli i Arianës*

**Historical events:** *to burn one's boats; Scanderbeg's word must have Scanderbeg's arm*

**Traditions and customs:** *to bury the hatchet; më i bukur duvaku se nusja*

**Human activities:** for example, agriculture: *to break ground, si kofini pas të vjelash*; fishing: *all is fish that comes to his net; si peshku pa ujë*

**Literary works:** *much ado about nothing, lufton me mullinj të e erës* (fight with the windmills)

Ph units including the names of different parts of the body, colors, animals and verbs: eye – *to be the apple of one's eye, i hedh një sy*; heart – *to lose heart. m'u ngroh zemra*; arm – *to keep someone at arm's length, i kthehu krahët*; back – *to put one's back into sth, i ktheu kurrizin*; brain – *to have sth on the brain, humbi mendjen etc.*

# FROM THE GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL POINT OF VIEW, ENGLISH AND ALBANIAN IDIOMS ARE CLASSIFIED INTO:

Ph units functioning like **nouns**: *brain trust*, *the ins and outs*; *llogje Kavaje*

Ph units functioning like **verbs**: verb + noun: *to make a call*; *hëngri dajak*, verb + adverbial particle: *to give up*, *to put on/off/out*; *i ra prapa*, verb + and + verb: *pick and choose*, *cut and thrust*: *merr dhe jep*

Ph units functioning like **adjectives**: noun + noun: *bread and butter*; *kockë e lekurë* (too thin)

Ph units functioning like **adverbs**: noun + noun: *bread and cheese* (the dearest necessities of life); *pikë për pikë* (very detailed); preposition + noun: *by heart*; *by chance*; *on tiptoe*; *ne pike te hallit*

Ph units functioning as **prepositions**: *in consequence of*, *for certain*, *në vend të...*;

Ph units functioning as **interjections**: *upon my faith*, *s'ke ci*

If you say '*learning a language is an uphill task*', anyone who has walked or ridden a bicycle up a steep hill will immediately understand the effort involved or if you say '*duket si në pëllëmbë të dorës*' everyone will understand that it means 'very clear' because **idioms sometimes bring a clear picture to mind.**

Idioms are used in **informal written and spoken English and Albanian**, but tend to be avoided in academic writing. It would be acceptable to say: *Hunt's arguments do not hold water* (an idea is not true, does not work). In a written assignment, it would be more appropriate to use a formal word such as unconvincing or flawed instead of the idiom *do not hold water*.

**Appropriateness of usage of idioms** is another problem. In most idioms, changing a single word can produce a comic effect. Telling your conversation partner that *it is raining dogs and cats* or *it is raining cats and pigs*; *puna është bërë shko e shkel* or *puna është bërë shkel e ik* would certainly cause a smile.

Because idioms are part of a culture (an area where languages can be very different) they are very different to be translated.

So in translating idioms we must bear in mind these moments:

- There are cases when the idiom has its **corresponding variant** in each language – *kill two birds with a stone* – *me një gur vras dy zogj*; *to throw light on* – *te hedhësh dritë mbi*
- The formulation of the idiom doesn't coincide with that of the other language but the idea is there: *provide grist for the mill of* – *shpie ujë në mullirin e..* The formulation of the idiom in English is 'provide grist' – *shpie bereqet* whereas in Albanian the formulation is *shpie ujë* but it is clear that despite the different wording the idea is the same.
- The idiom doesn't exist at all in one of the languages. In this case the advice is to employ the following ways of translation:

- Literal translation and often adding such words as: sic thuhet, si i thonë, kësaj i thonë for ex: *this is to put the car before the horse – kësaj i thonë të tërheqë karroca kalin dhe jo kali karrocën.*
- Contextual translation for example: *you can't have your cake and eat it too – është e pamundur edhe ta ruash dhe ta hash kekun.*
- Paraphrase or descriptive translation – this is suitable especially in the translation of ph units which have to do with concrete historical events or have a terminological character. For example: *to cross the floor of the home, Hobson's choice* etc. these have no equivalents in other languages. Therefore, these units are paraphrased for ex: *to cross the floor of the house – të kalosh sa nga një parti në tjetrën.*

## SOME OF ENGLISH IDIOMS AND THEIR ALBANIAN EQUIVALENTS

- you can't get blood out of the stone* – *s'nxirret dhjamë nga pleshti*: it's very difficult to make someone give or tell you sth
- lick sb's boots* – *lëpin canakët e*: to obey, please sb in authority
- catch sb redhanded* – *kap me presh në dorë*: to see sb at the moment of doing sth wrong
- cock and bull story* – *përralle me mbret*: sth. very hard to believe
- shed crocodile tears* – *qan me lot krokodili*: to pretend that you feel sad,
- talk nineteen to dozen* – *grin sallatë*; to talk a lot
- by hook or by crook* – *ma hir a me pahir*: to do sth at any costs
- cry for the moon* – *kërkon qiqra në hell*: to want sth that is impossible
- make a mountain out of a mole hill* – *e bën qimen tra*: to treat sth as it is very difficult or worse than it is
- buy a pig in a poke* – *derr në thes*: buy sth without looking at it carefully
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## CONCLUSIONS

- Both English/Albanian languages are highly idiomatic.
- Idiomatic phrases are meaningful as a whole or complete item rather than a collection of separate words.
- Idioms are created from the free word-groups which in the course of the historical development of English and Albanian languages have acquired semantic and grammatical inseparability. We may also say that idioms are derived from different fields and those that are derived from more specific domains are likely to differ across cultures.
- English and Albanian idioms are very important in each spoken and written language; we encounter and use them everywhere.
- Idioms make a language difficult to understand because people don't know the culture and history behind the idiom. Sometimes changing a single word can produce a comic effect to the native. Also, idioms are generally impossible to be translated in either language because it is the area closest to culture. A word for word translation never makes sense.