

A brief approach of adjectival phraseological units formed by hyperbolic and litotes transfer in English and Albanian

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Abstract:

This paper focuses on the phraseological units which are formed by the transfer of the figures of speech, particularly on the transfer of the hyperbole and litotes in English and Albanian language.

Figurative language is used widely and as such it must be given a special attention. What is interesting is the relationship between the phraseological units and the figures of speech, which both aim to make language more powerful, colorful and vivid. English as well as the Albanian language abounds from the great number of phraseological units, though it is only recently that it has been given a special attention to this field of research. Within figurative language studies, it has been paid a lot of attention to metaphor and verbal irony, considering them as the master tropes, whereas the study of other figures of speech occupies an ancillary position. Thus, hyperbole or litotes need to be seen as part of everyday life, especially in conversations although not many people are aware of this term and its usage. This paper concentrates on the hyperbole and litotes from a phraseological perspective, analyzing some phraseological units formed by the transfer of these two figures of speech, in order to reach a better understanding of the nature and usage of hyperbole and litotes in English and Albanian.

Key words: Phraseological units, transfer, hyperbole, litotes

INTRODUCTION

Beyond language, linguistics and the central role that phraseological units play in the communication process, nowadays it seems to be widely known among linguists and scholars the fact that communication among people cannot be established if the speaker and the listener do not share some basic knowledge or do not have at least a common frame of reference. Therefore, language and culture are seen as similar systems and interdependent. Phraseology appears to be the discipline, which interprets and reflects better the cultural framework of the whole society of a particular language, so it is the study field, which tries to provide an explanation about phraseological units containing words loaded with cultural meaning.

English is rich in phraseological units and this is demonstrated by a great number of dictionaries on idioms, as well from the great importance that phraseological units represent which is included and emphasized in all the English language course books. Phraseological units are taught from the very beginning; when one start to learn the English language. Thus, considering its importance, various researches are conducted on the field of phraseology. What draws attention when one studies phraseological units is to find the way, how these phraseological units are created. There are many, but in this research we aim at phraseological units coined by the transference of the literary figures specifically hyperbole and litotes into phraseological units. Regardless the fact that not much attention has been paid to Albanian phraseology, definitely it is one of the languages that has an abundance of phraseological units; it does not lag behind in comparison with the English language. According to an Albanian scholar some phraseological units are created from the figurative transformation of free word-groups. "This process goes under three phrases: simple word-group – "prearranged" word-group -

phraseological unit (Memishaj, 2006). Hyperbole and litotes, as means performing this transformation occupy a decent place in the process of transformation.

For example: “Her brain is the size of a pea” the meaning is that she is not very clever and we have to do with a hyperbole, whereas it is noticed that when we have the sentence “she is a pea brain” we have to do with a phraseological unit and the meaning is “foolish or unintelligent person” according to Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged. The semas motivating the phraseological meaning are components of semantic structures of the words, building the comparison (the enlargement / the lessening).

Hyperbole is mainly used more effectively in communication in order to grab the attention of the others by putting more emphasis or making a comparison which is exaggerated. In literary works this is required to make the reader pay more attention to certain things, so that they can be easily remembered.

Katz (1996: 3-4) asserts that hyperbole is “employed to convey the speaker’s beliefs or feelings about the topic”. It is such the case with the speakers, whereas in literary works it has to do with the writers’ beliefs and feeling and what they want to convey to the reader and how they want their ideas to be perceived. Therefore, McCarthy and Cater (2004: 150), after examining hyperboles have come to the conclusion that exaggerations are “creative intensifications for evaluative or affective purposes”. What it is meant by this quote has to do with the impact that these sentences containing hyperbole have on the listener or reader, be it positive or negative. Regarding hyperbolic types, Smith (1657) distinguishes two kinds of hyperboles: *auxesis* as a kind of overstatement and *meiosis* as a kind of understatement. This phenomenon can be seen in the Albanian language as well. For example, (Burrë) **katërqind dërhemë** – a great man, it is a case of overstatement because literally the phraseologica unit would be translated ‘a man of

four hundred feet'. The word 'four hundred' intensifies its meaning even though it is an exaggeration. Whereas, mbytet me një pikë ujë – incapable of doing something, it is a case of understatement. Literally it would be translated as 'he drowns with one single drop of water' and the word one creates evaluative or affective purpose, which in this case is meiosis. The first one is an extreme intensification and expanding of an entity, and the second as an extreme reduction or attenuation of an entity. However, Carter and McCarthy (1997: 29) assert that "the precise attitude expressed can only be identified in the particular context". This explains why the trope is essentially an evaluative tool because often quantification is put at the service of assessment. These two scholars focus on the interactive nature of hyperbole, the importance of listener reaction to its understanding, listeners' acceptance of extreme formulations, the creation of impossible worlds and its manifest counter-factuality. The categories from McCarthy and Carter's are shown with examples extracted from Stefanllari I. (1998) "Fjalori Frazologjik Anglisht – Shqip" phraseological dictionary:

1. Numerical expressions (hundreds, thousands, millions, and so...) e.g. ~ **Feel/look like a million dollars** – ndjehem (dukem) për bukuri
2. Amount or quantity + of: (plenty, loads, masses, heaps and so...) e.g. **There are plenty of (other) fish in the sea.** **Fig.** There are other choices; used to refer to persons
3. Expressions that indicate time and duration (hours, centuries, years, and the plural form of the word ages, etc.). **E.g. in an age of years in a long time. How have you been? I haven't talked to you in an age of years. Jane hasn't ridden a horse in an age of years.**
4. Size, Degree + nouns (huge, enormous, endless, gigantic, etc.). ~ **Come down like a ton of bricks** – If someone comes down on you like ton of bricks, they criticize you severely because you have done something wrong.

The distinction between the literal and non literal meaning of the hyperbolic expressions is important. For example if we say ‘this suitcase weighs a ton’ means that it is too heavy and it is easy to grasp its meaning whereas on the other hand there are cases that even though the hyperbole may have a literal meaning sometimes cannot be understood in the context. For example, someone comments on a car size as a “white elephant” in my white elephant costs a lot of petrol“. Some figures of speech including hyperbole have become established and conventionalized (Gibbs; 1994, Giora, 1999, McCarthy & Carter, 2004) thus it can be emphasized that they have lost the literal effect or meaning they intend to imply. There are other cases such as for the words ‘terrific, ages, etc. It deserves a mention the word terrific, which in peoples mind creates the idea of terror but it is not like that anymore. It means only great or excellent. On the other hand, when we hear ‘It’s ages I haven’t seen you’ indicated a very long time, but nowadays it does not usually have that exaggerated force it used to have. Nevertheless, Claridge (2011:197) notes that the term “ages” in certain instances does have its exaggerated sense but weakened.

As mentioned previously, it is not surprising that very little is known about hyperbole. The attention has been more on metaphor as for Aristotle, for example, metaphor represents the paradigm trope including, not only what we call metaphor, but also simile, metonymy, personification and hyperbole (Rhetoric 3: 10- 11, Poetics 20-22; quoted in Dascal and Gross, 1999: 122). Recently there are many scholars contradicting the fact and one of them, Gibbs (1994: 76) argues that there are forms of figurative language other than metaphorical that have been ignored as a result of this intensive metaphor investigation, and he regards hyperbole together with sarcasm, understatement, jocularly and rhetorical questions as forms of verbal irony. Figurative language is necessary in literary works and hyperbole, being considered as such is still related as a

useful tool of literary works to be regarded as a classic trope whose study belongs to that of rhetoric. A great interest in hyperbole was due to its relation with humour or verbal irony leading to pragmatic functions which is accomplished by exaggeration and understatement. Keuz et al. (1996: 91), have been studying eight main forms of non literal language in a literary corpus, and they conclude that “in terms of sheer occurrence hyperbole seems to deserve more notice than it has received to date”. This shows that after metaphor, hyperbole was the most common trope; exaggeration was by far the figure that most often interacted with other non-literal forms. It was involved in almost 80% of the cases of co-occurrence, and it interacted with every other type of non-literal language with the exception of its logical opposite, understatement (Keuz et al. (1996: 91).

In relation to non-literal language, hyperbole is another trope which helps in coining new phraseological units. These phraseological units can be used to create strong emotions or effects when we want to emphasize something. However, such hyperbolic phraseological units are mostly used in verbal discourse.

Adjectival phraseological units formed by hyperbolic transfer in English¹

~ **Feel/look like a million dollars** – ndjehem (dukem) për bukuri

He has completely recovered from his operation; he says he feels **like a million dollars**.

I'm on holiday, it's a beautiful morning, and I feel **like a million dollars**. It's a good to see you both again. Jake, you look **like a million dollars**.

¹ Stefanllari, I. (1998) “ Fjalori Frazieologjik Anglisht – Shqip” Urban Dictionary

~ **A mile wide and an inch deep** - Impressive at first but with experience, found to be stupid or unimaginative.

"That John Kerry seems to have gravitas." "He's **a mile wide and an inch deep**."

~ **Weigh a ton** (*informal*) - to be very heavy "This suitcase *weighs a ton!*"

~ **Come down like a ton of bricks** – If someone comes down on you like ton of bricks, they criticize you severely because you have done something wrong.

"If you mix up the order, the boss will come down on you **like a ton of bricks**".

~ **Cost a fortune** – something is very expensive; extremely expensive.

I'd love to buy a Rolls-Royce, but **they cost a fortune**.

Adjectival phraseological units formed by hyperbolic transfer in Albanian language

~ (Burrë) **katërqind dërrhemë burrë** i zoti dhe me përvojë, që e njeh mirë jetën dhe di të gjykojë me gjakftohtësi; burrë me karakter të fortë e guximtar, që e mban fjalën e dhënë.

Bajrarn Curri ka qenë edhe trim edhe burrë katërqind dërrhemë, diplomat i mbaruar. (Let. polit.-shoq.).

~Një djall e gjysmë thjeshtligj. shumë; mjaft shtrenjtë; një dreq e gjysmë.

Në qendër të Tokios një pëllëmbë tokë kushton një djall e gjysmë. (Let. art. p.)

S'e gjen në të gjithë dheun (dikë a diçka) është shumë i mirë, s'i gjendet shoku a shoqja; **s'ka të dytë**.

- *Për punë e do ti a për ndere e do ti, atë s'e gjeje në gjithë dheun. Ishte pleqnar i zoti. (Let. art.).*

~**Të çon (të shpie) në njëqind (në dyzet) çezma e s'të jep ujë** (dikush) *sh. të çon (të shpie) në krua (në shtatë kroje) e s'të jep ujë* (dikush). - *Ai kish kurdisur një dredhi për t'i*

gënjyer, t'i sillte vërdallë, t'u ngjallte shpresa, shkurt t'i shpinte në njëqind çezma e të mos u jepte ujë. (Let. art. p.).

~ (Njeri) **me shtatë (palë) zemra** njeri shumë trim, që nuk i trembet asgjëje, që nuk di se ç'është frika.

(Është) me gjashtë gishta (dikush) është vjedhës i madh, të qëron. *Lame hajdutin nuk e kapnin dot, ishte me gjashtë gishta e i regjur në zanatin e vjetër sa vetë njerëzimi. (Let. art).*

Noton në një (në dy) gisht ujë (dikush). 1. Është shumë i zoti, ia del mbanë edhe me pak gjë, s'humb kurrë. 2. Është trim i madh; **të merr gjak në vetull.**

- *S'ndreqet puna me atë karafil. Noton në dy gisht ujë, se sa ka dalë nga pelenat! - iu përgjegj Ndini. (Let. art.).*

Ka katërqind mendje (dikush) nuk ka një mendim të përcaktuar qartë; i vijnë mendime të ndryshme; ndryshon shpejt mendim, nuk është i qëndrueshëm në një mendim.

- *S'të them që të kesh katërqind mendje, por edhe kaq i prerë si je ti, jo, se nuk lë shteg për diskutim. (Pub.).*

(Është) katërqind qyqesh (diçka) është shumë e vjetër; vjen që nga kohë e moçme.

Qe kjo kullë bash katërqind qyqesh asht e si mundin me e rrënue do cuba. (Let. art.).

It is noticed that in both languages there is a number being involved to show exaggeration and to intensify the meaning of the phraseological units. At the same time, in both languages we have sentence adjectival phraseological units that are formed by hyperbolic transfer such as: It cost a fortune – kushtoi një djall e gjysmë.

Phraseological units formed by litotes transfer

Litotes is the rhetorical figure in which an affirmative is expressed by the negative of the contrary (Jespersen 1917:62). Litotes, is a figure of speech which derives from a Greek word meaning “simple”. It consists in understatement by

using double negatives. For example, using the expression “She is not a beauty queen,” means “She is ugly” or saying “I am not as young as I used to be” in order to avoid saying “I am old”. Litotes have an ironical effect. Litotes uses ironical understatement in order to emphasize an idea or situation rather than minimizing its importance.

The phraseological unit ‘have a hope in hell’ and ‘minimizers’ (Bolinger 1972) like a red penny, only occur in the scope of negation. It is noticed that many litotes constructions involve rather a fixed combinations of lexical elements.

Adjectival phraseological units formed by litotes transfer in the English language

~ **No great shakes** – jo shumë i mirë; mediokër

She’s **no great shakes** as an actress.

I can play golf a little, but I’m **no great shakes** at it.

~ **Not as black as it/one is painted** – nuk është aq i zi sa duket (sa thuhet)

‘I am glad for my own sake, that he is **not as black as he is painted**; said Agatha.

~ **Not/never bat an eyelid** – nuk i bën syri tërr, nuk i dridhet qerpiku

The condemned man listened to his sentence **without batting an eyelid**.

The rock nearly hit him, but he didn’t **bat an eyelid**.

~ **Not have a bean** – s’kam asnjë grosh (asnjë dysh)

‘You know there is a young man hanging around?’ ‘Yes, he **hasn’t a bean**,’ Dinny smiled.

‘Have money left Jack?’ ‘**Not a bean**. I didn’t realized it was going to be such an expensive evening.’

~ **Not turn a hair** – nuk i lëviz as një fije floku, nuk tregon kurrfarë frike, habie etj.

He had tried to convey to her without other people’s noticing it how how glad he was to see her, and he had much admired the

way his loves was able to receive the quick signals of affection **without turning a single fair hair.**

~ **Not worth a damn, a straw, a red cent, a tinker's cuss etc** – s'vlen asnjë grosh , nuk vlen fare

This mediocre painting isn't **worth a damn.**

So long as you and your opinions can be taken seriously, Harold's position isn't **worth a damn.**

Adjectival phraseological units formed by litotes transfer in the Albanian language

S'dëgjon andej (dikush). 1. Është i fortë, duron shumë a qëndron pa u mposhtur, s'do t'ia dijë, nuk ke ç'i bën. - *Kape me darë, po deshe, shtypi gishtat me tanë forcën e ku di unë, s'ndigjon andej ai, sikur sikur s'e ka prekë kush. (Ligj. fol.).*

S'është asgjëkundi (dikush) nuk është aspak në rregull, nuk e ka fare në vijë një punë; s'është normal; **s'është gjëkundi.** - *Të marr edhe ty me vete, po ç'të të dua, ti s'je asgjëkundi. (Let. art.).*

Nuk i veton ashka e syrit (dikujt) nuk ka frikë fare, as që do t'ia dijë, është trim i madh;

nuk i dridhet bebja e syrit. - *Hej, bre Nik, ashka e syrit nuk të veton, të dhashtë Zoti ymër e kyvet! (Folk.).*

Nuk mban baltë në vesh (dikush) është shumë i ndërgjegjshëm e i çiltër, nuk duron dot dyshime të kota mbi vete; e thotë hapur të vërtetën. - *Im nip është ca i sertë, por baltë në vesh nuk mban. Kështu keqet me shumë vetë. (Let. art.).*

Nuk e fsheh ballin (dikush). 1. Është trim i madh; **s'i trembet (s'i fiket) syri.** *Mic trimi del i pari, pa e fshehë ballin, me luftue për nanë e për babë. (Folk.).* 2. Është i çiltër e i sinqertë; është ballëlarë e nuk ka përse të turpërohet. - *Më merr edhe mua me vete, - i tha Ana. E pastër nga shpirti, ajo nuk e fshihte ballin para Sashës së dashur. (Let. art.p.).*

S'i qesh buza (dikujt) është i ngrysur, gjithnjë rri i zymtë, është i zymtë e nursëz; rri gjithnjë si i pakënaqur e i mërzitur;

s'i qesh fytira. *Risilietët u gëzuan kur e panë atë makinë të mrekullueshme, por ç'e do, janë njerëz që nuk u qesh buza për shumë kohë.*

(Pub.). **Çel e s'mbyll** (dikush) *keq.* nuk pushon së foluri, është llafazan i madh, por nuk të mbaron punë; premtion e s'bën gjë; **hap e s'mbyll.** - *Nuk të kuptoj, çfarë të shtyn të bësh kështu, çel e s'mbyll, ke humbur besimin tek të gjithë.* (Let. art.).

Agjëron ditën e vjedh natën (dikush) *keq.* paraqitet i mirë, por në të vërtetë është i keq, sillet mirë në dukje, por bën poshtërsi fshehtas.

Ungjilli nuk thotë që të agjërosh ditën e të vjedhësh natën, po të jesh gjithnjë i mirë.

(Pub.). *Mua ma sollën, po nuk e zura me dorë.* (Folk.).

Nuk zë gjë me dorë (dikush) nuk punon fare, është dembel; **i ka duart të thara; i ka krahët të tharë; (rri) me duar kryq.**

As punë as zanat Goxhua. I kishte thënë gruas se që i sëmure dhe nuk zinte gjë me dorë. (Let.art).

S'bën (s'vlen) asnjë dysh (diçka) nuk vlen fare, s'ka asnjë vlerë; **s'bën një lek; s'bën dy (pesë) para.**

Shpallja e dhënies së makinerisë me qira ishte shenjë se politika e mëparshme e kësaj ndërmarrjeje nuk vlente më asnjë dysh. (Let. art. p.).

S'e bën dysh fjalën (e dhënë) (dikush) e plotëson premtimin; është i besës; **e mban fjalën; nuk e ha fjalën.**

Sa herë ka marrë përsipër rregullimin e makinerive që ka ndërmarrja, nuk e ka bërë fjalën dysh. (Pub.).

(Është) **ferrë ndër lule** (dikush) është njeri i keq, që prish e dëmton, që nuk durohet në një mjedis të mirë.

- *Edhe im atë, për fat të keq, ban pjesë në këtë turmë të verbënish, që formojnë ballin pengues në zhvillimin e përparimin e shoqërisë sonë. Këta janë ferra ndër lule.* (Let. art.).

(Është) **fishek pa barut** (dikush) është njeri pa vlerë ose i parrezikshëm; (është) **fishek i lagur.** *Në mëngjes syri i vetëtinte Markos, ndërsa, sa hynte në rrjedhën e madhe të*

njerëzve, bëhej fishek pa barut, i binte guximi dhe vrulli. (Let. art. p.).

S'të jep as gur për të çarë kokën (dikush) është shumë dorështrënguar, është koprrac i madh e *shpirtlig*; **s'të jep as litar për t'u varur.**

- *Tek ai nuk vete, Pipo, se ai as gur për të çarë kokën nuk të jep. Përse t'i shtrij dorën e t'i bëj qejfin? (Let. art. p.).*

Manastir pa hair *iron.* njeri shumë dorështrënguar, njeri nga i cili nuk merr dot gjë a të cilit nuk i nxjerr asgjë; shtëpi jomikpritëse.

- *Ama, edhe ti gjete kishë të falesh! Prenga është manastir pa hair, mos prit gjë prej tij. (Let. art.).*

Është) **shejtan budalla** (dikush) është i zgjuar, por hiqet sikur s'kupton a sikur di, shtiret si budalla e ta hedh. *Faiku u kthye i qetë dhe, kur e akuzuan për vjedhje, bënte si shejtan budalla. - I kujt është ky thes, o Simo? (Let. art.).*

In the examples provided it observed that in both language it is the presence of the negative particle respectively in English 'no' and in Albanian 's', nuk, pa'. In both languages the purpose is to use ironical understatement in order to emphasize (an idea or situation) in this research a quality as the focus was on the adjectival phraseological units formed by the means of litotes transfer. One thing that is observed is in the Albanian language there are some adjectival phraseological units formed by noun + noun and both of them are negative, as in the case of '**shejtan budalla**' or one noun denotes a positive thing and the other a negative thing, for example, '**manastir pa hair, ferrë ndër lule**'

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion it is an undisputed fact that the findings of Gibbs and Colstone (2012), which focus on how figurative language is comprehended and produced by different people, it

requires more cognitive effort since tropes vary in their meaning, functions and objectives. The importance of the formulaic expressions attracted many scholars' attention. Robert, & Kreuz (1994) conducted a study on various figures of speech to determine the discourse goals of using the figurative language. Even from this observation, in both languages the purpose of these figures accomplish certain communicative goals among which the hyperbolic phraseologic units were found out to be used for humour and emphasis and litotes phraseological units are used for irony. Furthermore, after conducting a study on the occurrence of figurative language in literature, Kreuz et al. (1996) underlined the significance of hyperbole. From their findings, hyperbole had been noticed to be involved in 80% of the interactional cases of co-occurrence among other tropes (p.92). Thus, phraseological units formed by hyperbolic and litotes transfer are very important in both languages, helping people express themselves in various ways, and writers in bringing color to their works.

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