

Phraseology and Set Phrases in Albanian Language

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Abstract: The new approach, in Albanian linguistics, concerning the phrase (*sintagmë*, in Albanian) consisting of two or more whatever successive elements as the minimal syntactic unit instead of the “word-group” (*togfjalësh*, in Albanian) consisting of at least two content words is of great interest to the field of phraseology as well. Researching in this frame, we adopt the set phrase theory for the multiword structure on which phraseology should be based. In our research in the field of phraseology, we consider the importance of the (set) phrase in justifying some cases which are accepted as idioms (phraseological unit, in Albanian), such as the idioms *vret e pret = [he, she] is brutal (kills and destroys, lit.)*, *varg e vistër, zhyt e mbyt, flakë e flakë*, etc. which are expressed through coordinated relations and which, as a result, are not justified by the word-group theory that is defined as subordinated relation of content words. We consider the importance of the phrase even in revealing other cases of multiword units, such as *në tym = without thinking (in smoke, lit.)*, *me spec, me bisht*, etc. expressed by prepositional phrases or *e piu = [he, she] had a bad end (drank it, lit.)*, *e qau; i dhashë një (në kokë)*, etc. expressed by phrases one component of which is not a content word, but a pronoun or a numeral, and which should be accepted as idioms.

Key words: phraseology, idiom, set phrase, word-group, content word.

1. Introduction

Phraseological multiword units are very useful tools in any (natural) language and since long ago people are interested in these phenomena of linguistic features, very often unique, but their inclusion in a particular discipline of study came very late. In the sense they are known today in linguistics, the terms “phraseological” and “phraseology” were first used by Swiss linguist Charles Bally (1909) when he wrote about the different types of stable word combinations which differ by the degree of stability from the free word combinations. Within the stable word combinations that he called “locutions phraseologiques” (phraseological locutions), Bally distinguishes the category of “unités phraseologiques” (phraseological units, that is, stable word combinations with semantic non-compositionality), such as *tout à fait, en depot de, avoir maille a partir avec quelqu’un, battre en retraite*, and the category of “séries phraseologiques” (phraseological series, that is, stable word combinations with semantic compositionality), such as *gravement malade, remporter une victoire, prendre une decision*, etc. Whereas the phraseological theory of Albanian language was widely developed only after the second half of the twentieth century. The first who dealt with it from the perspective of the linguistic discipline is J.Thomai. In “Cështje të frazeologjisë së gjuhës shqipe” (1981), J.Thomai defines linguistic phraseology as “the totality of those stable word combinations which were historically formed and crystallized as inseparable units and which are equivalent to a single word from the point of view of categorical meaning”.

2. Stability and word-groups in Albanian phraseology

The most general features of phraseological multiword units are two: polylexicality and stability. As far as the feature of stability is concerned, Dubois (1973) points out that “phraseology is determined not by the deviation it represents in relation to language, but from the stable character of its combination”. Regarding multiword units studied by phraseology, in Albanian phraseology they have been known so far by the name of (stable) “word-groups” (*togfjalësha*, in Albanian) and they consist of at least two content words (Floqi, 1968). Thus, in the text “Leksikologjia e gjuhës shqipe” (2006), it is pointed out that “the phraseological unit is a linguistic unit with an independent meaning, formed historically and for a long time, which has the value of a single word, which is reproduced and functions in speech as a ready-made and inseparable unit”.

3. Does phraseology study all stable word-groups?

Most Albanian linguists have dealt with only one kind or one definite group of stable word-groups according to their function.

Thus, as stable word-groups J.Rrota (1942) distinguishes those that he names “phraseological verbs” which constitute structures mainly with object or circumstantial complement relations, such as *kam gisht*, *baj ball*, *bie në sy*, *bie në gjunjë*, etc., and which play the role of verbal predicates.

M. Domi (1985) deals with the stable word-groups having the function of verbal predicates, formed by a verb and a noun, accompanied or not by a preposition and he names them “expressions”, such as *kam frikë*, *mbaj mend*, *ngul këmbë*, etc.

S. Prifti (1962) names the phraseological word-groups “adverbial expressions” and by that he means those which consist of a verb and an adverb and which have the function of verbal predicates, such as *u bënë afër*, *u bëra vonë*, etc. Whereas J.Thomai (1981), although he has extended the functional range of the stable word-groups studied by phraseology, when he admits that “the word-groups of the type *u bënë afër*, *u bëra vonë*, etc., are stable word-groups, but not of phraseological type”, he means that, according to him, not all stable word-groups are phraseological, that is, he reduces the phraseological volume only to one part of the stable word-groups.

The same opinion is also shared by A. Duro (2001) when he says that “the non-phraseological stable word-group *këpucë me qafa* is included in the group of non-phraseological stable word-groups of general language”, or when he says that “(non-phraseological) stable word-groups have not been assessed before as it ought to as particular lexical richness”.

Even S. Floqi (1968), when he admits that “phraseological, stable word-groups, as equivalent to a single word, [...] are not studied by syntax, but by lexicology (more precisely by phraseology)”, he rightly admits that stable word-groups are studied by phraseology, but he reduces the phraseological volume to the stable word-groups which are equivalent to a single word.

What joins all these linguists is the fact that they all talk about stability, but no one of them considers as phraseological all these stable multiword units.

All the above-mentioned scholars pay attention to the value feature of the equivalence to a single word. But this feature is only the consequence of the conditions of their constituent words' use: the condition of their combining ability restrictiveness and the condition of these words' semantic non-transparency. Treating them mainly from the value aspect and by not paying attention to the conditions of their formation, the above-mentioned authors have reduced the phraseological volume of the stable word-groups, but in some cases they include in the phraseological stable word-groups even word-groups whose combinations are not stable, but free, such as *ish e pamundur* = *it was impossible*, *hynte e dilte* = *[he/she] came in and went out*, *është mirë*, *Biblioteka Kombëtare*, *bombë dore*, *që sot e kësaj dite*, *bashkë me*, etc.

In order to give a positive answer to the question if phraseology studies all stable word-groups, we are helped by Fedoruk (1954)'s definition which explains that “The phraseology of a given language is often called the totality of stable word-groups” and mainly J.Stefi (1970)'s definition according to which “Phraseology is called the totality of stable word combinations of a language” to which we agree and which drive us to the conclusion that stable word-groups can only be phraseological and that phraseology should study all stable word-groups. This happens because, as we'll see below, stable word-groups constitute a separate group with particular features, different from those of free word-groups and common to all of them, and, for this reason, they should be studied by a particular field of the linguistic science.

4. Word-groups and phrases

The structural model Albanian linguists have worked on so far in phraseology, and not only in phraseology, is the “word-group” with at least two content words.

Is the word-group structure sufficient for the identification of phraseological multiword units? What is the distinction between the word-group and the phrase (sintagmë, in Albanian)? Should the term phrase be used instead of the term word-group? These are some of the questions we'll answer during our study.

The linguistic term word-group was coined to correspond to different foreign linguistic terms among which Saussure (1916)'s term of “syntagme” (phrase), but the lexical content that was given to this term is different from that of phrase. In consequence, for the word combination, Albanian language turns out to have two terms, but with different lexical contents.

The issue of the word-group's meaning has two aspects: the first aspect is related to the minimal amount of words, whereas the second aspect is related to the type of words the word-group consists of. The word-group consists of at least two words, but not of any type of words, but of two content words (Floqi, 1968). Regarding the amount of words, all the above-mentioned Albanian linguists and a lot of others share the same opinion, that the word-group is a syntactic unit which is characterized by two sentence-members (Përnaska, 1972). H.Agani (1975) objects to the two-sentence-member

multiword unit opening up the way for the phrase theory which "is always made up of two or more successive elements" (Saussure, 1916). In consequence, the phrase can consist of one or multi sentence-members and even other linguistic components, such as pronouns, numerals and prepositions, can be included within it, although they are not content words.

5. Importance of the phrase in syntax

Regarding the importance of phrases in syntax, we'll refer to Th. Dhima (2007)'s assessments, who points out that "the analysis in phrases reveals the hierarchic position of words in a more detailed and more clear way, revealing their real possible combinations...", whereas regarding the constructions with prepositions, he points out that "... they are distinct structures which are included within other more extended structures and which have a syntactic function", because prepositions "have a meaning in any case, which can be sometimes more distinct and concrete and sometimes more general and abstract".

6. Importance of the phrase in phraseology

The new approach concerning the phrase as the minimal syntactic unit is of great interest for the field of phraseology as well. Researching in this frame, we adopt the set phrase theory for the multiword structure on which phraseology should be based, as it is more inclusive than the word-group structure.

In our research in the field of phraseology, we consider the importance of phrases in revealing a lot of other cases of multiword units, such as *në tym = without thinking (in smoke, lit), me spec, me bisht, etc.*, expressed by prepositional phrases, or *e piu = [he, she] had a bad end (drank it, lit.), e qau; i dhashë një (në kokë), etc.*, expressed by phrases one component of which is not a content word, but a pronoun or a numeral, and which should be accepted as idioms (phraseological unit, in Albanian).

We consider the importance of phrases even in justifying some cases which are accepted as idioms, such as the idioms *vret e pret = [he, she] is brutal (kills and destroys, lit.), varg e vistër, zhyt e mbyt, flakë e flakë, etc.*, which are expressed through coordinated relations and which, as a result, are not justified by the word-group theory which is defined as subordinated relation of content words (Memushi, 2004).

Even idioms, such as *me kuç e me maç = all of them (with dogs and cats, lit.), fol e qesh, etc.*, can not be justified by the word-group theory, because they are expressed not only by coordinated relations, but also by prepositional phrases, that is, by two parallel phrases and not by a word-group.

Even cases, such as *(u zhduk) sa hap a mbyll sytë = (he/she disappeared) immediately (as fast as one opens and closes ones eyes, lit.), (bërtet) me sa ka në kokë, etc.*, are more precisely explained by the (verbal) phrase theory than as a sentence structure.

The phrase structure also contributes to considering "grammatical" locutions, such as *në drejtim të = in relation to, duke qenë se = as, etc.*, as phraseological multiword units because of their polylexical phrase structure and their stability.

7. Conditions of set phrases' formation

In order to understand what a set phrase is, we should know what a free phrase is. A free phrase is a word combination that "... can be broken up immediately after it was created and its constituent words regain their freedom to be combined differently" (Bally, 1909), in an unrestricted number of other combinations with the meaning they were used within the previous combination.

The freedom of (free) phrases has two sides:

One side of the phrases' freedom is the freedom of word selection independently of each other and according to the situation of communication.

The other side is the freedom of word combination as a simple arithmetic addition of their meanings (semantic compositionality).

The freedom of selection and combination of the phrases' constituent elements constitute the free phrases' particularities, whereas the impossibility to choose the constituent elements independently of each other and the impossibility to combine them as their simple arithmetic addition (semantic non-compositionality) constitute the particularities of another kind of phrases which are known as set or stable phrases. These particularities are consequences of the conditions of the set phrases' formation, such as the restricted combining possibilities and the semantic non-transparency of at least one constituent element of the phrase, which don't offer phrases the possibility to

break up immediately after their formation, nor do they offer phrases' constituent elements the possibility to regain their freedom to be combined differently. The second condition is only about the phrases whose constituent elements develop non-transparent meanings, whereas the first condition is general. In consequence, phrases' components which develop non-transparent meanings have restricted combining abilities as well.

We consider stability as the impossibility for some words to actualize their meaning or meanings in different contexts or to be combined differently with the same meaning outside the existing context, but only in a unique context, that is, within a restricted combination.

In the case of violating the freedom of combination, the unique context is realized through the non-transparent meaning of at least one word, such as *i kthej krahët dikujt = turn the back on someone, më bie bretku, jetë qeni, etc.* In the case of violating the freedom of selection, the unique context is realized through the transparent meaning of at least one word, such as *mjalt i ëmbël = very sweet (honey sweet, lit.), pus artezian, etc.* In the case *i kthej krahët dikujt* the unique context is realized through the non-transparent meanings of the word *krahët = back* and the word *kthej = turn*, whereas in the case of *mjalt i ëmbël* the unique context is realized through the transparent meaning of at least the word *mjalt = very*. Thus, stability, that is, the unique associative combination of the word *mjalt = honey* restricted only to the word *i ëmbël = sweet* is not different from that of the word *krahët* which is only restricted to the word *kthej*. The stable combination between *mjalt* and *i ëmbël* in opposition to what Bally says about the free phrase, is not broken up immediately after its formation and, at least one word (*mjalt*) that is part of it, doesn't regain its freedom to be combined differently with the adverbial meaning *shumë = very* with which it is used in this structure.

8. Reasons for studying set phrases as a separate group

It has been seen that a lot of times people use in speech set phrases rather than separate words. This shows the very important role of set phrases in language and the need to pay special attention to them. The reasons we study them as a separate group are as follow:

- 1) Set phrases are formed in a special way, unlike free phrases, because of the restricted combining abilities, such as *mjalt i ëmbël* or the semantic non-transparency of their constituent words, such as *i kthej krahët dikujt*.
- 2) They constitute a unique context for the use of their constituent words.
- 3) They don't constitute the characteristic feature of speech, that is, they are not created in speech, but they are used as ready-made elements in speech, because, as Saussure (1916) points out, "Le propre de la parole, c'est la liberte des combinaisons (the characteristic feature of speech is the freedom of combinations)", that's why the set phrases should be studied separately, unlike free phrases.

9. Set phrases' field of study

As set phrases with semantic non-compositionality have a whole meaning and constitute a (single) lexical unit, set phrases could be studied by lexicology because they are created for their meaning. But their formation is different from the formation of the other lexical units – they are formed by two or more words graphically separated. For this reason they could and should be studied by another branch or discipline, by phraseology which shifts from a branch of lexicology to a separate discipline. Moreover, phraseology, unlike lexicology, is more extensive and more complete, because it also includes the set phrases with compositional meaning which don't constitute lexical units, that is, they are not equivalent to a single word, such as *borë i bardhë = very white (snow white, lit.), shëndoshë e mirë = in very good health (healthy and good, lit.), rreth e rrotull, fshat më fshat, etc.*

In order to designate the set phrases' field of study as phraseology, the discovery of the "syntagme" (phrase) concept by Saussure (1916) is of special importance. The "syntagme" concept was translated by phrase in English and thus the former term "phraseology" (frazologji) was (also) given another meaning, the meaning of phrase studying, but, as we have already explained, set phrases only.

Conclusions

- 1) The word-group (with at least two content words) doesn't make up the minimal syntactic unit of language. The minimal syntactic unit of language is based on the phrase which "is always made up of two or more successive elements" (Saussure, 1916) and which reveals the real possible combinations of words.
- 2) The discipline that should study set phrases from the point of view of speech is phraseology, because set phrases constitute a separate group of ready-made units distinct from free phrases.

3) Phraseology should study all set phrases of a language, because all set phrases constitute a separate group distinct from free phrases.

4) According to the phrase theory, the range of idioms should be extended by other types of idioms, such as *në tym, me spec, me bisht etc.*, expressed by prepositional phrases, or *e piu, e qau, i dhashë një (në kokë) etc.*, expressed by phrases one component of which is a pronoun or a numeral.

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