"FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS?" DEATH AND DYING-RELATED LANGUAGE/ VOCABULARY. LINGUISTIC BOUNDARIES IN ALBANIAN AND ROMANIAN

Dr. Benita STAVRE
Dr. Daniela STOICA
Dr. Erinda PAPA
,,Fan S. Noli'' University, Korce, Albania
benastavre@yahoo.com
stoicad26@yahoo.com
erindapapa@yahoo.com

Abstract:
Balkan languages entail many euphemisms regarding death and funeral rituals. This paper focuses on the comparative study of Romanian and Albanian euphemisms, emphasizing their often use in similar contexts and at the same time their semantic differences. The analyzed examples of Romanian and Albanian euphemisms are from everyday talk. The article will also include debates regarding the methods and context of using these euphemisms in the two languages, focusing on cultural and linguistic differences.

Key-words:
Euphemism, Balkan languages, death, rituals, cultural differences.

The number of the Balkan or European linguists interested in bringing into light facts covered by the history dust has not been small. J. Thunmann, encouraged by a trilingual dictionary compiled by Teodor Kavalioti, an Albanian monk in 1770[1], enabled even later research in matters of Balkan linguistic convergence, which so far has been analyzed not only in matters of lexical similarities, semantic borrowings, phraseologic usages, but on phonetic, morphological and syntactic relations as well. Whenever one deals with a linguistic issue about the

[1] Dh. Bello, "Lidhja Gjuhësore Ballkanike", in: *Buletini Shkencor*, Nr. 6, 2004.

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Balkan linguistic convergence, it seems as if everything had been exhausted in matters of language. However, it has never been. The range of Balkan relations reflects such an infinite source of common historical events that the language as well as the ethnography will never be entirely exhausted by research.

The main inspiration for this linguistic study does not rely just on a framework of the linguistic means used by Albanians and Romanians in their everyday life. It aims at throwing some light on the linguistic reflection of the mentality and culture and on its impact on bringing people closer/ together or setting them apart. The spiritual life of a country embodied in folk songs, dances, blessings or curses, sayings or poetry, is worth being studied, so as to introduce formally in matters of linguistic studies, what is informally used by people every day/ so that, what people use every day, in an informal manner, be formalized in linguistic studies. This has, in fact, constituted the real grounds of this research.

Romanian and Albanian have been studied to a great extent, so far. In fact, one of the most delicate issues regarding the history of the Romanian language concerns the lexic inherited from the Thraco-Dacian language. This issue has been at the centre of many scholars' attention from Dimitrie Cantemir[2] until today.

In 1938 the academic Alexandru Rosetti, after a rigorous analysis, selected from a list of 185 words common to Romanian and Albanian 80 lexical units which had their origin in the Thraco-Dacian substratum[3]. In later editions, this number was cautiously raised up to 91[4]. Prior to A. Rosetti's work, the Romanic linguistics had partial information, sometimes insufficiently argued, regarding the knowledge of the autochthonous elements of the Romanian language. Among these sources one can mention the monographical work of the Slovene scholar Fr. Miklosich, *Die slavischen Elemente im Rumunischen* containing a short chapter entitled ''Das alteinheimische'' (Viena, 1861, pages 6-11), Alexandru Cihac's section *Elements albanais* from *Dictionnaire d'étymologie daco-romane,* Ovid Densusianu's broad research in *Histoire de la langue roumaine*, where he attributed the autochthonous elements

[2] In *Descriptio Moldaviae*

[3] In the first two parts of *Istoria limbii romane (I. Limba Latina, II. Limbile balcanice, Bucuresti, 1938)* These two parts were re-edited several times in the course of time and included in the final edition from 1986 *Istoria limbii romane, I. De la origini pana la inceputul veacului al XVII-lea* (Bucuresti, Editura Stiintifica si Enciclopedica).

[4] Foreign specialists can use now the complete French version of the final edition: *Histoire de la langue roumaine dès origins au XVIIe siècle*, Édition de Dana-Mihaela Zamfir, Cluj – Napoca: Clusium, 2002.

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of the Romanian language either to the Ilyrian or to the Albanian[5], and finally Th. Capidan's research *Raporturile albano-române (Dacoromania*, II, 1921-1922, pages 444-554).

The last decades have brought several contributions to the elaborate study of the words with Thraco-Dacian origin in Romanian. Among the most important ones there are : the chapter ''Influenţa autohtonă'' written by Professor Cicerone Poghirc in the treatise *Istoria limbii romane,* 2nd Volume (ed. Ion Cotenu, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1969, pages 313-364), where the comparative frame is enlarged and extended to other Indo-European languages besides Thraco-Dacian and Albanian ; I. I. Rusu's monographical work *Elemente autohtone in limba română-Substratul comun româno-albanez* (Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, 1970) and *Etnogeneza românilor- Fondul autohton şi componenţa latino-romanică* (Bucureşti, Editura Ştiinţifică si Enciclopedică 1981), in which the author deals again with the 74 words discussed in the first work along with 102 more deducted from the comparison with various Indo-European languages, but the results are not always convincing. Another important contribution is represented by *Vocabularul autohton al limbii române* (Bucureşti, Ed. Şt. şi Enciclopedică, 1983) and *Cercetări asupra fondului traco-dac* (Bucureşti, Institutul Român de Tracologie) by professor Grigore Brâncuş, whose specialisation in Albanian allowed him to make a more elaborate comparison between 90 words in Romanian and their counterparts in Albanian (in almost complete agreement with the results obtained by Al. Rosetti, C. Poghirc and I.I. Russu). Important contributions were also brought by

1. Eqrem Çabej whose work, unfortunately unfinished, questions the issue of the substratum, stating that there is need for further linguistic evidence. He seems to support/ to agree with the theory of mutual borrowings between the two countries, providing a number of phraseologic examples with the same structure.[6]
2. Vladimir Orel, whose work *Albanian Etymological Dictionary* (Leiden-Boston, Köln, Brill, 1998) is based mainly on Gustav Meyer's and Çabej's Albanian etymological dictionaries.

The theory of the linguistic exchange, supported even by other Albanian linguists, reviews the historical evidence of the moving groups of people, mostly *Aromuns* (???) from the ancient Wallachia. These groups of shepherds, who settled in the Albanian coastline, needed further linguistic material to communicate with the native inhabitants of

[5] *Histoire de la langue roumaine* Tome I, Paris, 1901, pages 3-8, 136-140; Tome II, 1914-1938, p. 148.
[6] J.Thomai, 1981, *Çështje të Frazeologjisë së Gjuhës Shqipe*, Tiranë.

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those areas.[7] Since that time on, people or groups of people from both countries have exchanged social, cultural, and consequently, linguistic material throughout huge periods of time.

The issue of the linguistic coincidence among phrases people of both countries use in order to refer to death is a new field of study which aims at providing first-hand information on increasing knowledge in matters of how linguistic means can reflect the traditional mentality of the people that use them. Euphemisms, probably better than any other linguistic means, express the need people have to communicate their inner emotional world:

"*Euphemism comes from the Greek words* ***eu*** *meaning well and* ***pheme*** *meaning speak used when people want to find a polite or less direct way of talking about difficult or embarrassing topics like death or bodily functions*". (Shoebottom, 2001).

Robert Burchfield, for many years the editor of The Oxford Dictionary, once observed that "a language without euphemisms would be a defective instrument of communication." All epochs, of course, have employed euphemisms both to download minimize and to amplify: to disguise the forbidden, to dress up the rude and the unpleasant.

Euphemisms can be formed in several ways. One of the most common is the so-called circumlocution, which is to "speak round" a given word without saying it. In time, circumlocutions become recognized as established euphemisms for particular words or ideas.

1. Euphemistic influences in society

According to Borg (1986) we, as a society, are uncomfortable with the words *death* and *dying* and therefore, we use many euphemisms for death in a denial of the reality around us. Borg conveys the idea of death by saying that someone has "*passed away*" or "*has met the maker*"; when talking about life insurance, couples would say "*if something should happen to me*" and not "*when I die*". We have become death deniers because of the changes in our society, the obvious decrease in the number of deaths at an early age, the development of specialized professions and places such as hospices to care for the dying and the emergence of geographical mobility with many people leaving some distance from their ageing and dying relatives so they are distanced from experiences of death.

According to Page (2003) every war brings us new euphemisms to make death sound less deadly. But euphemisms can emerge even in humoristic circumstances. Why do we laugh at and euphemize death?

[7] Gj. Shkurtaj, 1999, *Sociolingistia*, Tiranë: SHBU.

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Freud wrote that humor was a method of dealing with subconscious issues: "Humor acts as a defense mechanism against unpleasure". It is generally accepted that laughter is a great way to release pent up emotions, that it mediates between us and our discomfort with our own mortality.

Linguistic studies in Albanian have up to now studied euphemisms in a social context. The ethnography of speech in this aspect has been fully enriched by areas of study which do not just focus on social groups' linguistic network, but on the age and lifespan of the euphemism. In his research, unfortunately interrupted by an antagonistic view of the communist regime in Albania, Eqerem Cabej writes: "*The mentality of a nation rises through its own culture. Usages, customs, rituals, religions, sayings, are part of the people's culture and they reach (???) nowadays like echoes of the ancient times, as well as an undisputable value of the linguistic ethnography."*[8] Studying euphemisms would bring into life attitudes in matters of mentality and their linguistic reflection, in the form of first hand material that linguists and ethnographs could make good use of, in either a diachronic or a synchronic study in their fields. This seems to be the background information which supports the main concern of this study: identifying similar euphemistic usage of death-related words in Albanian and Romanian, and thus construing a common mentality which, as it is to be represented further into the research, is reflected into the lexical as well as the structural usage of the euphemisms in both languages.

First of all, Albanian and Romanian peoples have always had a tendency to avoid death and its "Black" connotation. The practice of using euphemisms for death is likely to have originated with the magical belief that uttering the word ''death'' meant 'inviting' death.

Another reason may be the unstable history these two countries have had. Faced with wars, which have time after time not just disturbed, but troubled their lives, Albanians and Romanians have survived through social problems like: long-term invasions, struggles, emigration, death, etc. No matter how often they had to fight, send children and husbands to the battlefield, or even mourn them for long periods, they tried to avoid the idea of death and burial in their lives as much as possible. This is why, in a common mentality it was often accepted a new way either of healing the pain of losing someone close/ dear, or of expressing a harmless revenge in an ironic usage of the word structures.

[8] E. Cabej, *Mbi Disa Eufemizma të Shqipes,* Studime gjuhësore, Prishtinë, 1978(transl. by authors)

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The *black*, a word which is to be found in many Albanian euphemisms, is another common aspect related to funerals and mourning in the tradition of these two nations. This tradition, as opposed to many Oriental peoples who usually wear white in this case, seems to have its origin in the Thracian funeral rite. According to some ancient sources, the Thraco-Dacians used to put little stones of white and black color under the dead person's head. The white stones represented the happy days, whereas the black ones, the unhappy days within the life of the deceased. This tradition is still preserved in many rural areas from Romania, where such stones are placed under the dead person's head, thrown on the coffin or buried in the tomb in special pots.

2. Gender distinctions of women's speech

The Albanian literature witnesses/ offers hundreds of examples of the above-mentioned kind, of which one of the most typical would be the following: "Në pyettë nëna për mua/ i thoni që u martua/ në pyettë se ç'nuse mori/ tre plumba kraharori/ në pyettë se ç'krushq i vanë/ shkabat dhe sorrat ta hanë"[9] (If my old mom send notice about me/ Tell her I got married to thee./ If she asks about my wed/ Three chest bullets let it just be said./ For my best men if she spoke/ Let her know the vultures and rooks do mock.) It would be cruel to utter death-related words to a mother waiting for good news from her son who had gone to fight in the war. A bride in black, like death, is still a bride, which soothes the maternal sorrow. The same way of conceiving death, as a bride, is to be found in some Romanian folk ballads like *Mioritza*, considered the masterpiece of the Romanian folklore and the best expression of the Romanian mentality and spirituality. In this ballad, the death of the Moldavian shepherd (who is likely to be killed by other two shepherds) needs to be described to his mother as a wedding, not as a brutal murder. This also corresponds to a certain mentality according to which, if the deceased has never been married, then his/her funeral has to be organized as a wedding: '*'Tu Mioara mea,/ Să te'nduri de ea/ Şi-i spune curat/ Că m-am însurat/ Cu-o fată de crai,/ Pe-o gură de rai./ Iar la cea măicuţă/ Să nu spui, drăguţă,/ Că la nunta mea/ A căzut o stea,/ C'am avut nuntaşi/ Brazi şi păltinaşi,/ Preoţi, munţii mari,/ Paseri, lăutari,/ Păsărele mii,/ Şi stele făclii*!...''[10] (' For her sake have pity, / Let it just be said / I have gone to wed / A princess most noble / There on Heaven's doorsill./To that mother, old, /Let it not be told /That a star

[9] *Kënga e Nizamit",* Albanian Folk Ballad.
[10] Vasile Alecsandri's version, citing an electr. source *http://members.cox.net/melopea/miorita/balada.html*

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fell, bright, / For my bridal night; / Firs and maple trees / Were my guests, priests / Were the mountains high; / Fiddlers, birds that fly, / All birds of the sky; /Torchlights, stars on high.'')[11]

From *Mioritza* we may quote another euphemism for death ''*Şi la nunta mea/A căzut o stea''* (''At my *wedding, tell /How a bright star fell'')* which may be considered the equivalent of *i perëndoj ylli* in Albanian. The star (yll/stea) is a symbol of the spirit, associated with an archaic mentality according to which, when a person dies, a star will fall.

This also explains why most of the euphemisms on death in Albanian and Romanian were used by women and nowadays tend to become something of the past. Linguistic research on lexicology in Albania, have found an undisputable source of euphemisms in the so-called "out-skirts regions"[12]. Due to a mentality whose foundations lie deep in religion and superstitions, women, who were the least likely to recognize social, scientific and technological progress, used to avoid terminology on delicate issues, like sexual communication, illness and death and funeral ceremonies. It is in the *women's speech*[13] that the mentality makes use of a human linguistic means, expressing therefore much more that it can be, by simply using the proper words. The difference is obvious in the following examples, you would feel pity for a person whose death is described as *U martua me dheun e zi (with no equivalent in Romanian)*, but not in the case of somebody else described as *Mbuloi balta baltën - I-a umplut ţărâna gura*, even though you might not know either of them.

The connotation of *Black* accompanying after-death mourning is the main reflection of the women's speech in the Albanian euphemisms. Both Albanian and Romanian mothers, sisters, wives mourn by wearing black clothes, in the past even by covering their hair with a black scarf. If a woman *hodhi cipën e zezë (S-a îmbrăcat in doliu/Şi- a pus val de doliu* in Romanian*)*, she would be of course mourning for someone close. The same grieving attitude is conveyed even by euphemisms of the kind *i ziu (sărmanul, nenorocitul, amărâtul), i nxirrosuri, katrani (* in Romanian *cătrănitul, nenorocitul, necăjitul), korbi ai (săracul), ditëziu*, which refer to the extreme harm somebody's death has caused to himself, or to his family in the case of *iu nxi dera korbës, është në zi (este in doliu).* Nevertheless, in Romanian, the euphemisms referring to the deceased (*săracul, sărmanul, nenorocitul, amărâtul, necăjitul)* do not contain the word 'black' or black color connotations, but they do

[11] translated by William D. Snodgrass, citing an electr. *http://www.spiritromanesc.go.ro/Miorita-eng.html*

[12] Gj.Shkurtaj, *Sociolinguistika,* SHBLU, Tiranë, 1999, p. 248.

[13] E. Bibaj, *Eufemizmat në Ligjërimin "Grarisht" të Trevave të Korçës,* Buletini 8 Uk "Fan S.Noli, 2004.

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contain connotations referring to the spiritual state of the person in mourning who is uttering them (profound unhappiness, sadness).

Of the same context and with great significance for the mentality are the euphemisms referring to the consequences of death upon the family life. Being family-nucleus countries, Albania and Romania have reflected strong family relations whose resistance was best tested by death. In Albania, for example, as opposed to Romania, a widow could not remarry, no matter what social and economic position or living standard she had. Many times the death of "the man in the house" would be and is still referred to as *iu prish shtëpia, i shkretoi vatrën, i mbylli derën e shtëpisë, e la pa njeri (a lăsat-o singură cuc* in Romanian*), e la shkretë, i vuri ferrën* (if he was an only child). The meaning of a broken family could not be mortified (???) by creating a new nucleus. However, that would not be the same in the case of a dead woman. She would just be an *e ndjera, e mjera* or *e gjora (nefericita, sărmana, biata, săraca, amărâta* in Romanian*)* for the misfortune of the short lifespan she had, or her being deprived from raising her children. However, a widower would still have to remarry, due to the lack of ability in managing personal and family life on his own.

Another example of gender difference in the usage is also to be found in expressions such as *vuri kujen, i përvëloi zemrën (Mă arde/frige la inimă)* or *mbeti me duar në gji-* (referring to women that keep mourning a lot the death of relatives). In the North of Albania, Gjovalin Shkurtaj points out the existence of some lamenting people that would glorify the life of the dead person by *lëshojnë gjëmë* in the case of men or *britmën e vajit* in the case of women, as well as the strange custom of scratching faces and necks during lamentation (no more in use), as a sign of extreme grief for somebody.[14] As compared to Albanian, in Romanian we do not deal with such gender differences in usage.

3. Metaphorical connotations of the euphemistic use

3.1*. Black* is not the only means of conveying the idea of death in Albania. The words chosen to refer to somebody dying or dead mean a lot for that person, the relations he had with other people in his lifetime or the reaction of people toward his death. So somebody who *e mori ora e ligë* (*i-a sunat ceasul* in Romanian) did not die the same way as somebody who *iu mbaruan ditët (i s-au sfârşit zilele)*, or a *varrndritur (no equivalent in Romanian)* is not used to be like a *varrvithisuri (no equivalent in Romanian)*; somebody who *ka shkuar në Parajsë (s-a dus in Rai)* did not enjoy the same respect in his lifetime as someone who *ka*

[14] Gj. Shkurtaj, 2004, *Etnografi e te folurit të gjuhës shqipe,*SHBLU, Tiranë, p. 64.

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shkuar në Ferr (s-a dus in Iad). The list of euphemisms either of the former or of the latter meaning is long. For the sake of convenience they can be divided into:

- verbal euphemistic usage such as: *mbylli sytë-a închis ochii (pentru totdeauna), mbaroi- s-a sfârşit/ s-a isprăvit, u nda nga jeta- s-a săvârşit (sfârşit) din viaţă, na la- ne-a părăsit, dha frymën e fundit- şi-a dat ultima suflare, iu këput peri(no equivalent in Romanian), i vuri shpatullat dhéut - Şi-a închinat fruntea în ţărână* (carrying a positive connotation) or *nuk e pati të gjatë- n-a durat mult, i lau hesapet- a încheiat socotelile, iku prapa diellit- s-a dus pe lumea cealaltă, iku aty nga nuk kthehesh më- s-a dus/a plecat pe drumul fără de întoarcere/ a plecat pe calea veşniciei (with positive connotation in Romanian), na e mori të keqen, na la shëndenë, harroi të merrte frymë (no equivalents in Romanian), kafshoi dhe- i-a umplut ţărâna gura* (carrying a negative connotation both in Albanian and Romanian).
- substantivised adjectives such as: *krahëthati- săracul, sărmanul, amărâtul; vulëhumbur -cel dispărut, cel plecat dintre noi, disparutul, decedatul; i ditëshkurtri* on the one side, and *varrvidhisuri, i shuari,* on the other, with no equivalents in Romanian.
- Desiderative structural sentences such as: *Ai që i bëftë shpirti dritë;, Ai që rahmet pastë; Ai që i ndrittë varri;, Ai që i qoftë dhéu i lehtë - Să -i fie tărâna uşoara!,* as well as *Ai që e ndjeftë Perëndia- Dumnezeu să -l ierte!*.

3.2. Another euphemistic connotation could be the ironic one, usually conveying a hidden disgust toward the dead, which for the sake of the norms cannot be openly/ overtly expressed. This group includes euphemisms like: *iku me të shumtit –s-a dus pe lumea cealaltă, ia ka ba korbit me sy, u punësua në minierë, po i bie këmbana-i-a sunat ceasul, është me një këmbë në varr- este cu un picior în groapă*. Like the above mentioned examples, these ones do mean much more than their composing words. The choice of their elements has a function which goes beyond mere communication. Linguistic and behavioral boundaries blend together to bring into light attitudes that, mostly, Albanian people have maintained through centuries.

3.3. A relieving connotation is that of making death less frightening and more acceptable to children. More than a mere avoidance, this is a necessity. It is not easy to explain to children the complicated philosophy of life and death, so words like *vdekje (death), i vdekur (the dead), varrim (burial)* or *përjetësi (eternity)* do not mean a lot to them. Instead, Albanian and Romanian have provided means to make things more understandable for a childish mentality. They are

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usually told that one of their relatives *Ka ikur në qiell- S-a dus în ceruri; E ka thirrur Zoti- L-a luat Domnul; Ka fluturuar në Parajsë- S-a dus in Rai,* or even more "earthly" *E ka zënë gjumi i madh. - Doarme somnul cel mare/cel de veci.* Moreover, the latter euphemism in Albanian and Romanian expresses a common view on death- death understood as a long sleep.

4. Mythological influence on the euphemistic use

4.1. Death understood as the beginning of another life in another world (entering another world)

According to ancient Greek and Roman mythology, the deceased was supposed to pay the entrance into the other world. This belief has been preserved in the funeral rite in many regions of Romania, where a coin is usually placed on or in the mouth or the hand of the deceased. With this coin called ''ort'' in Romanian, the dead person will pay the journey to the other world to the priest performing the funeral (just like in the ancient Greek mythology the deceased paid an obolus to Charon/Kharon, the ferryman of Hades who carried the souls of the recently deceased across the river Styx, that separated the world of the living from the world of the dead). This is how we can account for the origin of a frequently used euphemism for death in Romanian: *a da ortul popii* (in literal translation *to give the obolus to the priest*) which does not have its counterpart in Albanian. Nevertheless, according to Albanian sources[15], this custom is also present in the funeral rite in the town of Korce. The cited source states that the coin will be used by the deceased to buy his/her tomb. This is why in Albania, women will use phrases like: *t'i vëmë lekun* (let's put the coin/let's give him/her the coin) or *të të japim lekun për shtëpinë e re* (let's give you the coin for the new house). By extension, in some Romanian regions, we may also come across the variant *Și-a dat pielea popii (*in literal transl*. he/she gave his/her skin to the priest).* These euphemisms in both languages express the belief of both peoples in the existence of another world, where the soul continues to exist.

4.2. Life understood as a thread or as a one way road whose end is marked by death

In the Greek mythology the *Moirae* were responsible for spinning, measuring, and cutting the thread of life for each living being. No one, not even the gods, could escape the destiny they were written/ pre-attributed. This is how one may account for euphemisms like *Iu këput*

[15] E. Bibaj, *Eufemizmat në Ligjërimin "Grarisht" të Trevave të Korçës,* Buletini 8 Uk "Fan S.Noli, 2004.

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peri in Albanian. Closely related to this way of conceiving death is the idea of death understood as a one way road found in the following euphemisms: *Shkoi atje nga ku nuk kthehesh më – S-a dus pe drumul fără de întoarcere/A plecat pe calea veşniciei.*

4.3*.* Death understood as becoming one with the earth (from which we came from) - return to a primordial state of the being. These euphemisms also refer to the ritual of burial, which is similar in the Romanian and Albanian tradition.

Kafshoi/Mori dhe - A muşcat ţărâna, I-a umplut ţărâna gura
Mbuloi balta balten – I-a umplut ţărâna gura
Hengri baltë - Şi-a închinat fruntea în ţărână
I ha shpina dhe/Ia shtroi shpatullat dheut – without equivalents in Romanian

In this case, an interesting euphemism used ironically in Romanian which does not have its counterpart in Albanian is *S-a făcut oale şi ulcele* (*He/ she became pottery* in literal translation).

5. Religious influence on the euphemistic use

Another element fanatically preserved for centuries is the religious framework that shrouds the usage of euphemisms. This background did even resist the period of religious intolerance of the communist regime in Albania and it reveals itself in the words or structures used to refer to the Albanian burial ceremony, the people's attitude towards life after death and various forms of comforting words, people of different religions use. People of all religions may say *U nda prej kësaj jete- S-a săvârşit/sfârşit/s-a stins din viaţă; Ndërroi jetë*, when somebody dies referring to the religious attitude of a post- human life. By simply saying *Vdiq- A murit (he/she died),* one would exclude the religious connotation of a spiritual rebirth after death.

As a lexical category, euphemisms could not escape the belonging to a language-mentality group. This means that the way they are used depends on the way people think and on the attitude a religious group has toward what is right and what is wrong in their own teachings. The choice of words reveals a lot of information on the lexical background available to different religions.

When somebody dies, Catholic people in Albania comfort themselves or the others by saying: *Pastë dritë, Dritë i bëftë shpirti, Krishti e pastë në parriz, U mprehtë në paqe (Odihnească-se în pace).* They refer to a dead person by saying *Dritëpasti* or *Ndjespasti* (*răposatul,* the equivalent in Romanian).

People of a Muslim religion in Albania would avoid a word like *Krisht* and use *Allahu* instead. So expressions such as *Pastë rahmet;*

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Allahu e pastë në xhehnet; Kjoftë mirë n' atë dyrja, are common in a Muslim linguistic background[16]. A dead person for them is a *Merhumi* or *Rahmetliu.* However, the Turkish influence for this religion is not just linguistic. There are Turkish elements used in death and commemorative ceremonies in Albanian. Expressions like *Të hëngsha hallvën!* may commonly be encountered instead of *Vdeksh!*.

Orthodox people would feel more comfortable if they used comfort words of the kind *E ndjeftë Perëndia (L-a luat Domnul/ A adormit întru Domnul* in Romanian*); U mprehtë në Parajsë (S-a dus în Rai* in Romanian)*; Ju pastë lënë uratën*[17] or if they say *I ndjeri (răposatul, defunctul, regretatul* in Romanian*), Ndjezoti* or *Gojëlidhuri*[18]. Euphemisms of the kind *I lidhën gojën* or *I bëri këmbët bigë*, or *Do t'i hamë grurët* have the same lexical meaning but they are used with a negative connotation. *E gjeti kokën e kandilit,* or *I rri kryqi mbi kokë* (*îi stă stâlpul/crucea la cap* in Romanian) are also reflections of the orthodox customs of lighting an oil lamp every forty days after the death of a person, so that his/her spirit could know where his/her house is and visit his/her relatives in the dark, or having a cross in the tomb of a dying person so as to distinguish him/her even after death from the deceased belonging to other religions.

Even though some of these euphemisms in Albanian do not have their counterparts in Romanian, the Saint Trinity, the cross, the candle with its light also represent symbols of the Christian faith and funeral ritual in Romanian. The light of the candle may also symbolize the light of the soul in its vertical ascension to God. Another important symbol and element of the Christian funeral rite is the wheat (cake) which is prepared when someone dies or is remembered - *coliva* in Romanian or *grurët* in Albanian, which appears in euphemisms like *e cu coliva pe piept* (for somebody whose death is imminent) in Romanian, also used with a negative meaning. The word *halva* exists in Romanian too, but it does not appear in euphemisms for death.

Such euphemistic usages constitute evidence of the richness of the spiritual life of the people using them. They also reflect the power of using a linguistic background in a mentality context, based on religious customs and attitudes.

6. Social and political influence on the euphemisms

The issue of the age of an euphemism is always a puzzling one. The creation and the usage of the euphemisms depends on a lot of factors mentioned above, including history, religion, mentality, customs,

[16] GJ. Shkurtaj, 2004, *Etnografi e të folurit të shqipes*, Tiranë: SHBLU, p. 238.
[17] Ibid.
[18] It is a common custom among Albanian Orthodox to tie the jaw and the feet of a corpse so as to give it an appropriate look for a coffin.

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as well as political, social and educational background of the people using them. They depend on the geographical area of the country people live in and the dialect of the language they make use of.

Up to the first half of the last century, the euphemistic usage in Albania and Romania was mostly limited to folk speech. It was reflected in poetry, songs or even oral dirges. "*Edhe shpirti kur të me dalë/ mike moj do të të dua".*[19](Though my soul be taken/ My love for thee won't be shaken.) Most euphemisms were used in the countryside, by old women.

During the second half of the last century, however, some of them came out of usage, others were created, and a number changed their structure. In a more formal usage of language, either in the press articles or in a new attitude of delivering a speech before a person was buried (so as to avoid the religious ceremony), new euphemistic expressions came into use. This linguistic attitude is reflected in *U nda nga jeta, I jap lamtumirën e fundi- îmi iau bun ramas de la raposat, I bëj nderimet e fundit- îi aduc un ultim omagiu* or *E përcjell për në banesën e fundit*. Such usages revealed themselves free of old mentality or religious terminology, and reflected a more mature and neutral usage of language. They substituted informal local usages of the kind *Shkoi në Shën Triadhë* (Korçë), *Shkoi te Depoja e Duhanit* (Lushnjë)[20], *Shkoi te Arra e Madhe* (Gramsh), *Shkoi te Lisat* (Kastrat).[21]

Yet informal usages did not come out of use altogether. The new phenomenon of the food-ration cards used during the communist epoch brought about new ironic euphemistic usages of the kind *E dorëzoi triskën/tallonin* (with the equivalent in Romanian *a dat în primire)*. The settlement of the many mines and their full-time work in supplying the country economy with coal and other minerals brought a new euphemism, ironically referring to a dead person as a miner, *U punësua në minierë* or *U bë drejtor miniere.*[22]

The young generation of nowadays avoids using almost the majority of the euphemisms mentioned in this research. Instead of sexual and religious distinctions modern euphemisms are reflecting a foreign tendency of usage. *U pethanos*[23]*, Na tha Ciao/Arrivederci, Na e beri me dorë, Të bën të fala*, are commonly used in the everyday speech

[19] J. Thomai, *Cështje të frazeologjisë të gjuhës shqipe,* Tiranë, 1981, transl. by authors.
[20] Gj. Shkurtaj, 1999, p. 251.
[21] Ibid., p. 260.
[22] Ibid.
[23] From the Greek word πέθανε (he/she died)

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of the youngsters, alongside with the more formal versions of literary versions *Vdiq (died), Vdekja (death)* or *Varroset (get buried).*

When it is necessary to reach decisions in terms of formal and informal linguistic usage, most of the best ones arise after having searched through that infinite source of knowledge and information that is either spoken or written in the form of folk creativity. This inexhaustible source gives form to the notion of "Being". It crystallizes the spirit and the mind into songs, tales, legends, sayings, superstitions, taboos, unwritten laws, as well as blessing or cursing formulas. It makes others see what cannot be, unless expressed, or understand what cannot be said by means of words. The euphemistic use in topics too interdicted to be openly/ overtly described or too difficult to be accepted, becomes a reflection of the linguistic power of a nation. By analyzing *death-related* euphemisms used in Albanian and Romanian, willingly or not, we entered the respective worlds and comparatively described the way this experience affects both nations. It was necessary to refer to mythology and history, to religion and politics, to gender and region, so as to understand the issue whether or not both countries had the same attitude towards death, the same customs or burial ceremonies, or the same after-death concept of a post-human life. Better than commonly organized surveys with direct questions on the above issues, the research, surprisingly, revealed common structures of phrases used in euphemisms; it emphasized a common Balkan origin of both countries; and what is more important, it revealed a common sense of the past reflected in actual usages in both languages.

Even though it is to be accepted that the lifespan of an euphemism lasts for as long as the society accepts it as a common means of communication, the importance of its being studied does not disappear with its going out of use. On the contrary, it is because of this, that euphemisms carry vital information about the people who use them, the reasons and the period of their usage. By doing this with death-related euphemisms used in Albania and Romania, we could see that both countries share past customs of death ceremonies such as accompanying the deceased person with objects representing significant elements either of their lifetime or their after-death entrance in the world of the spirits. Of great interest were the common stories reflected in ballads, two of which were of almost the same nature. Differences in the mourning revealed different connotations of *Black* and *White*. Death could be conceptualized by both nations either as the beginning of another life, as an interruption of the life thread, or as a return to the primordial state of being (earth). The three concepts were respectively reflected in similar euphemisms.

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The main distinctive features, however, emerged in terms of religious and regional usages. Both languages preserved contrastive comforting formulas of dialectological and gender distinctions. Albanian did even reflect great Turkish influence on its traditional ceremonies and its linguistic reflection.

For these reasons and the supporting information they have had in this paper, we may draw a common Albanian and Romanian conclusion: "Nëse dëgjon të bjerë këmbana, uro që ajo të mos jetë për ty" (Albanian), Dacă auzi că bat clopotele, doreşte-ţi sa nu bată pentru tine. (If you hear the bell toll, wish it won't toll for thee).

ANNEX

Albanian	***Romanian***	***English***
I perendoi ylli	*I-a apus steaua*	*His star is waning?**
U martua me dheun e zi		*Married the black soil**
Mbuloi balta balten	*I-a umplut ţărâna gura*	*Dust to dust*
Hodhi cipën e zezë	*S-a îmbrăcat in doliu/Şi- a pus val de doliu*	*To cover oneself with the black robe**
I ziu	*sărmanul, nenorocitul, amărâtul, săracul*	*Wretch; poor wretch*
I nxirosuri; Katrani	*cătrănitul, nenorocitul, necăjitul*	*Wretch; poor wretch*
Korbi ai	*Săracul, sărmanul*	*Poor man; unlucky*
Ditëziu	*sărmanul, , amărâtul, săracul*	*Ill-fated; wretched, unlucky*
Iu nxi dera korbës; Është në zi	*este in doliu*	*She is mourning; in grief*
iu prish shtëpia		*One's house is devastated**
i shkretoi vatrën,		*One's house is devastated**
i mbylli derën e shtëpisë,		*To have the door shut**
e la pa njeri; e la shkretë	*a lăsat-o singură cuc*	*Be left with none beside**
i vuri ferrën		
e ndjera, e mjera or e gjora	*nefericita, sărmana, biata, săraca, amărâta, defuncta, decedata, segretata*	*Defunct, deceased*
vuri kujen		*Began to cry*
i përvëloi zemrën	*Mă arde/frige la inimă*	
mbeti me duar në gji		*Hands in the checks/chips*

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lëshojnë gjëmë		*To cry out loud**
Lëshojnë britmën e vajit		*Gave the crying call**
e mori ora e ligë	*i-a sunat ceasul*	*Be taken by the evil fairies*
iu mbaruan ditët	*I s-au sfârşit zilele*	*His days came to an end; having had one's days*
varrndritur		
varrvithisuri		*Sunken-Grave*
ka shkuar në Parajsë	*S-a dus in Rai*	*Gone to Heaven*
ka shkuar në Ferr	*S-a dus in Iad*	*Gone to Hell*
mbylli sytë	*a închis ochii (pentru totdeauna*	*Closed his eyes*
mbaroi	*s-a sfârşit/ s-a isprăvit*	*ended*
u nda nga jeta	*- s-a săvârşit (sfârşit) din viaţă, na la- ne-a părăsit*	*To depart from life**
dha frymën e fundit	*şi-a dat ultima suflare*	*Breathed the last*
iu këput peri	_____	*To break the yarn*
i vuri shpatullat dhéut	*Şi-a închinat fruntea în ţărână*	*Lied on the ground**
nuk e pati të gjatë	*n-a durat mult*	*Didn't last long*
i lau hesapet	*a încheiat socotelile*	*To settle a score with life*
iku prapa diellit	*s-a dus pe lumea cealaltă*	*Kick the bucket*
iku aty nga nuk kthehesh më	*s-a dus/a plecat pe drumul fără de întoarcere/ a plecat pe calea veşniciei*	*Bought a one-way ticket*
na e mori të keqen, na la shëndenë, harroi të merrte frymë		*Have had one's days; paid the last visit; forgot to breathe**
kafshoi dhé	*i-a umplut ţărâna gura*	*Bit the dust*
krahëthati	*saracul, sărmanul, amărâtul*	*wretched*
vulëhumbur	*cel dispărut, cel plecat dintre noi, disparutul, decedatul*	*Lost; forfeited*
ditëshkurtri		*Having had one's days*
varrvidhisuri, i shuari		*Sunken-Grave*
Ai që i bëftë shpirti dritë		*Having one's soul at light**
Ai që rahmet pastë; Ai që i ndrittë varri;, Ai që i qoftë dhéu i lehtë	*Să -i fie tărâna uşoara*	
Ai që e ndjeftë Perëndia	*Dumnezeu să -l ierte*	*May God forgive him/her*
iku me të shumtit	*s-a dus pe lumea cealaltă*	*Join the majority/ join the greater number*

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u punësua në minierë		*Be employed in the mine**
po i bie këmbana	*i-a sunat ceasul*	*For whom the bell tolls*
është me një këmbë në varr	*este cu un picior în groapă*	*To be nearing one's end*
Ka ikur në qiell	*S-a dus în ceruri*	*Gone to Heaven*
E ka thirrur Zoti	*L-a luat Domnul*	*Gone to meet the Maker; God took him; Gone to his Heavenly father; Gone to the Final Reward*
Ka fluturuar në Parajsë	*S-a dus in Rai*	*Flied to Heaven*
E ka zënë gjumi i madh	*Doarme somnul cel mare/cel de veci*	*Fall to eternal sleep*
Iu këput peri		*To break the yarn*
Shkoi atje nga ku nuk kthehesh më	*S-a dus pe drumul fără de întoarcere/A plecat pe calea veşniciei*	*To buy a one-way ticket*
Kafshoi/Mori dhe	*A muşcat ţărâna, I-a umplut ţărâna gura*	*Bit the dust*
Mbuloi balta balten	*I-a umplut ţărâna gura*	*Dust to dust*
Hengri baltë	*Şi-a închinat fruntea în ţărână*	*Bit the dust*
I ha shpina dhe/Ia shtroi shpatullat dheut	*Şi-a închinat fruntea în ţărână, I-a umplut ţărâna gura*	*Bit the dust*
U nda prej kësaj jete	*S-a săvârşit/sfârşit/s-a stins din viaţă*	*Parted from this life*
Pastë dritë, Dritë i bëftë shpirti, Krishti e pastë në parriz, U mprehtë në paqe	*Odihnească-se în pace*	*Rest in Peace*
Të hëngsha hallvën		
E ndjeftë Perëndia	*L-a luat Domnul/ A adormit întru Domnul*	*May God forgive him*
U mprehtë në Parajsë	*S-a dus n Rai*	*Be taken to Heaven*
Ju pastë lënë uratën		*May you be blessed* (by the defunct)*
I ndjeri	*răposatul, defunctul, regretatul*	*Wretch; defunct; deceased*
Ndjezoti or Gojëlidhuri		*Be forgiven by God or Devil**
I lidhën gojën		*To have one's mouth tied*
I bëri këmbët bigë		*Having had one's legs up**
Do t'i hamë grurët		*We'll eat his wheat**

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E gjeti kokën e kandilit		*To have found the snuff of the candle**
I rri kryqi mbi kokë	*ţi stă stâlpul/crucea la cap*	*With the cross over one's head**
U nda nga jeta		*Parted from this life*
I jap lamtumirën e fundit	*Imi iau bun ramas de la raposat*	*To bid farewell to somebody*
I bëj nderimet e fundit	*Ii aduc un ultim omagiu*	*To pay the last homage to somebody*
E përcjell për në banesën e fundit		*Be taken to the last abode*
Shkoi në Shën Triadhë		*Gone to St. Triadhe**
Shkoi te Depoja e Duhanit		*Gone to the tobacco warehouse**
Shkoi te Arra e Madhe		*Gone to the big Walnut**
Shkoi te Lisat		*Gone to the Oakes**
E dorëzoi triskën/tallonin	*a dat în primire*	*Handed in the food-ration card*

** In the case of impossible English variants, a word – by – word translation takes place.*

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