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## Research Article

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### Natural Gender and Cultural Cognition in Albanian Animal Idioms: How Male-Female Animal Pairs Structure Figurative Meaning

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#### Abstract

This study examines approximately 150 Albanian idiomatic expressions derived from animal terms, with a particular focus on how natural gender functions as a structuring principle in the formation of figurative meaning. Drawing on material from *Fjalori frazeologjik i gjuhës shqipe* (1999) ("Phraseological Dictionary of the Albanian Language") and *Fjalori i gjuhës së sotme shqipe* (1980) ("Dictionary of Contemporary Albanian"), the analysis investigates how the physical traits and behavioral patterns of animals motivate idiomatic extensions to human character, social roles, and moral evaluation. The central aim is to explore the semantic divergences that emerge between idioms formed with male and female animal names, and to show how these divergences reflect culturally embedded conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity. Methodologically, the study applies qualitative semantic analysis informed by cognitive linguistics and cultural linguistics. The idioms are organized into paired lexical sets, *pulë (hen) - gjel (rooster)*, *dele (ewe) - dash (ram)*, *dhi (goat) - cjan (billy goat)*, *lopë (cow) - viç (calf)/ka (bull)/qe (oxen)*, *kalë (horse) - pelë (mare)*, *mace (cat) - maçok (tomcat)*, which allow for a systematic comparison of shared features, motivational imagery, and evaluative orientations. The findings indicate that male animal idioms typically foreground agency, strength, assertiveness, or risk, whereas female animal idioms emphasize vulnerability, domesticity, emotional sensitivity, or economic burden. These patterns reflect not merely biological characteristics but culturally transmitted symbolic codes embedded in Albanian pastoral life. The results demonstrate that Albanian animal-based phraseology functions as a dense repository of cultural cognition, where gender distinctions are reproduced, reinforced, and naturalized through everyday language use. By revealing the semantic asymmetries across male-female pairs, the study contributes to broader discussions on the cultural grounding of idioms and the ways in which linguistic structures encode social hierarchies, behavioral expectations, and gendered moral evaluations. The analysis highlights the value of phraseology as a site where language, culture, and cognition intersect, offering insights into how traditional ecological knowledge continues to shape contemporary figurative language.

**Keywords:** Albanian phraseology, animal idioms, natural gender, cultural conceptualizations, cognitive linguistics, semantic motivation, figurative language.

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