

Specific Initial (Introductory) Formulas in Albanian (Decasyllabic) Songs of the Frontier Warriors

Abstract: This paper primarily seeks to demonstrate the position and importance of specific initial (introductory) formulas in the Albanian songs of the frontier warriors (Alb. *këngë kreshnikësh*, *këngë të kreshnikëve*), proposing their classification into several categories. The analysis performed on the corpus consisting of 102 songs has resulted in a typology similar to the one in Detelić 1996. Such a classification serves as a starting point for further research and future mandatory study of structural and other concordances between the corresponding formulas in South Slavic epic, which could be useful in shedding light on the issue of originality of the Albanian songs.

Keywords: specific initial (introductory) formulas, formulaity, Albanian songs of the Frontier Warriors, classification, typology

Introductory remarks

Whilst developing on the model of the neighbouring South Slavic Christian and Muslim epics, Albanian decasyllabic songs, known as *këngë kreshnikësh*¹ (Eng. songs of the frontier warriors/songs of *kreshniks*²) were first recorded as late as the end of the nineteenth century. Although written in decasyllables, atypical of Albanian epics, these songs have taken primacy over the octosyllabic songs. In spite of the fact that they were traditionally sung in the far north of Albania (and in the adjacent areas), they are nowadays regarded as referential pan-Albanian folk creations and are accepted as national instead of regional in all Albanian-speaking territories.

In addition to being of a somewhat limited scope compared to South Slavic epic poetry, the Albanian songs of the frontier warriors differ from it in several other respects. Firstly, the fact that they do not describe historical events denotes them as heroic instead of historic. The very existence of a

¹ Some of the recorded terms are also *këngë* (*kāngë/kājķē/kātķē*) *lahute/të moçme/trimash/kershish/të Mujit e Halilit/agajsh të Jutbinës* (Eng. *lahuta/anchient/heroic/kreshnik songs/songs of Muji and Halil/of agas of Udbina*). However, we disagree with the term *heroic songs* due to the existence of a specific type of Albanian octosyllabic songs called *këngë trimnije* or, literally, *heroic songs*.

² According to Stanišić 1995, *kreshnik*, Eng. “knight, hero”, comes from the Serb. *krajišnik* via the transitional form *кряешник*.

separate type of Albanian octosyllabic songs called *këngë trimnije* (Eng. *heroic songs*) in which historical figures and events are described points to the conclusion that these are actually two typologically different kinds of songs. Furthermore, the next property which largely separates them from South Slavic decasyllabic songs is reflected in the absence of temporal determination. Whilst in the songs collected by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić there is a clear reference to certain historical events (e.g. the Battle of Kosovo, the First Serbian Uprising etc.), such a reference lacks in the Albanian songs, which makes them temporally indifferent. It has been concluded, on the basis of numerous analyses of this type of Albanian songs aimed at determining the temporal context and framework in which they originated, that they certainly did not emerge later than the seventeenth or eighteenth century, i.e. the period when, according to an overwhelming majority of authors, they doubtlessly crystallized as an individual kind of oral tradition with the Albanians (Elsie 2011, 2).

The disagreement about their origin, originality, date etc. has divided authors into two main opposing groups: the one supporting the theory of their indigenesness,³ and the other suggesting that they essentially do not differ from Vuk's songs of the Hrnjica Brothers cycle. However, regardless of the degree of concordance of topics (*sujets*) between these two oral traditions (which, in a wider context, may certainly be denoted as Balkan traditions), Kolsti (1990, 60) concluded, using the example of Salih Ugljanin, that via language each culture transfers specific tradition attributed to it, thus incorporating a series of specific (for a certain people typical) sub-themes. Consequently, each (even the smallest) additional element has the capacity to completely change the course of narrative, thereby modifying its final shape. However, since the issue of the strata that undoubtedly resemble Serbian decasyllabic songs remains open, it is necessary to pay them full attention in the context of determining the date of Albanian songs. Even if such information remains unrevealed, the very process of studying the exchange of formulas, motifs, characters and other elements is invaluable since it should eventually provide answers to the question what happens when oral poetry is transferred from one group of languages to the adjacent (Parry 1971, 477), in this case an unrelated one.

³ These are mainly Albanian authors and supporters of the so-called *Illyrian hypothesis of the origin of Albanians*, which is nowadays the most widely spread one (despite a lot of evidence to the contrary). Their primary intention is to prove the Illyrian origin of Albanians, which would clearly demonstrate that Albanians had lived in the territory (of all contentious areas) of the Balkans before the Slavs settled there.

Objectives and methodology

The primary objective of the paper is to perform a synoptic semantic-structural analysis of specific introductory formulas in North Albanian decasyllabic songs, whereas the contrasting is carried out by means of corresponding formulas in South Slavic (both Christian and Muslim) oral decasyllabic songs. A thus defined objective of research also implies examining the degree of concordance between the aforementioned formulas, expressed in terms of absolute, partial or zero equivalence categories.

Based on the analysis performed on the corpus consisting of 102 Albanian songs, a classification is carried out according to which the formulas are divided into several basic types: **situational**, **temporal**, and **numerical** in addition to a specific type denoted as **fairytale-like formulas**, which are not found in the corresponding South Slavic songs. Certain attention has been paid to the types and subtypes of Albanian formulas where partial or zero equivalence with the Serbian ones has been determined.

Corpus

The corpus used for performing a contrastive analysis of specific introductory formulas in Albanian decasyllabic songs has been excerpted from the following:

- a) resources in Albanian:
- EL: *Epika legjendare (cikli i kreshnikëve)*, Tirana: Instituti i folklorit, 1966
 - EKL: *Eposi i kreshnikëve dhe legjenda*, Visaret e kombit, vëllimi II, Tirana: Plejad, 2005
- b) resources in Serbian:
- Vuk II–IX: Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, *Srpske narodne pjesme* I–IV, Belgrade: Prosveta, 1976, 1988; I–IX, Belgrade: Državno izdanje, 1897–1902
 - SANU II–IV: *Srpske narodne pjesme iz neobjavljenih rukopisa Vuka Stefanovića Karadžića*, II–IV, Belgrade: SANU, 1973–1974
 - KN I–II: *Narodne pjesme muslimana u Bosni i Hercegovini, sabrao Kosta Herman 1898–1899*, 2 vols., Sarajevo: Svetlost, 1976

The titles and quoted parts of both Albanian and Serbian songs are given herein in their original form and in English translation/adaptation. In some instances translations/adaptations of Albanian songs by Robert Elsie and Janice Mathie-Heck (Elsie & Mathie-Heck 2004) are used and these are marked with an asterisk (*), whilst all other unmarked translations are ours.

Specific introductory (initial) formulas in the Albanian songs of the frontier warriors

If their role in the preservation of oral heritage is taken into account, formulas may also be regarded as keepers of specific codes of tradition. In times of limited literacy (that is, widespread illiteracy), the structure of orally transmitted songs had to be such as to enable the singer to memorize them as easily as possible and to pass them to the next generation (Fan 2011, 53). In this way formulas became a valuable means of preserving tradition, culture, collective memory etc., whilst their function became multifaceted. Specific introductory formulas in the Albanian songs of the frontier warriors are analyzed herein based on such an approach to formulas, as well as on Parry's definition of the formula⁴ as *a group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea* (Parry 1971, 272).

Specific introductory formulas encompassed herein cover any formula formally and semantically linked to the text, closed at the beginning and closed/open at the end, the use of which might be determined as standardized. Unlike general introductory formulas, their link to the song is distinctive, whilst in order for a formula to be classified into this category it needs to have three important properties: variability of form, vividness and cumulativity (Detelić 1992, 282). Since one of their essential functions is to introduce the listener to narrative, they are consequentially conveyors of information on the event sung about, which, in addition to the main character, includes the spatial and temporal determination.

The excerpted specific initial formulas in Albanian songs are here classified in accordance with the typology of the corresponding South Slavic formulas proposed by Detelić (1996, 127–129), whilst the analysis has arrived at four basic types and several subtypes. Their statistical analysis, aimed at obtaining as representative results as possible, has also been performed in addition to the contrastive and comparative analyses, the purpose of which is twofold: to demonstrate their differentiation and distribution by types, as well as to point out the portion of those formulas that have not been recorded in the corresponding South Slavic songs.

1 Situational formulas

In terms of percentage, the number of situational introductory formulas in the Albanian songs of the frontier warriors is much lower than in the Serbian songs. Out of a total of 102 Albanian songs considered here, situational initial formulas occur in only nine instances, which accounts for approxi-

⁴ The definition which, as is well known, was also adopted by Albert Lord, who further defined formulaic expression as *a line or half line constructed on the pattern of the formulas* (Lord 1960, 4) to be used herein for the purpose of analysis.

mately nine percent of the analyzed corpus. Nevertheless, if we know that as many as 55 Albanian songs begin with an invocation (unlike the Serbian songs, where only 64 of the corpus of 1184 songs begin with a general introductory formula according to Detelić 1996), it is necessary to direct attention to specific formulas subsequent thereto, that is to the entire so-called introductory block composed of a general and specific formula. However, there are only five instances in which a situational formula is preceded by an invocation, which does not have a substantial effect on their portion in the total number of introductory formulas. As to their semantic structure and type, “venë po pine” (Eng. “they are drinking wine”) and “janë mbledhë” (Eng. “they (have) gathered together”) occur in a majority of instances:

<p>Janë mbledhë tridhetë kapidana. kanë fillue pijen e po pijnë, venë të kuqe e raki të bardhë; vena e kuqe në faqe u ka dalë e rakija n'kuvend i ka qitë. (EL, 12: 1-5)</p> <p>Up to thirty captains gathered together, Started drinking in copious amounts, Drinking red wine and white plum brandy; Red wine struck them into their cheeks, And the brandy made them gather together.</p>	<p>Vino piju trides' kapetana U primorje na bijeloj kuli, A na kuli silna Bokčevića, Medju njima Bokčević Šćepane. (Vuk VII, 19: 1-4)</p> <p>Thirty captains are drinking wine, In a white tower near the sea, In the tower of the mighty Bokčevići, Amongst them is Bokčević Šćepan.</p>
<p>Venë po pinë krentë e Senjës, në kudhë të bardhë të Senjanin Ivanit. (EL, 52: 1-2)</p> <p>Leaders from Senj are drinking wine, in the white tower of Senjanin Ivan.</p>	<p>Vino pije Senjanin Ivo Nasred Senja grada bijeloga Su dobrije šezdeset Senjana: (Vuk VI, 72:1-3).</p> <p>Senjanjin Ivo is drinking wine In the white city of Senj with sixty good men from Senj.</p>
<p>Kur ka kjenë Dizdar Osman Aga, në kudhë të vet, tuj pi venë të kuqe, Hajkuna, e bija, i ban hysmet, po i ep venë me tas të praruem, po ja shtren ajo me dorë të bardhë; po pin venë edhe kjenka gie, për uj të kritë mendja i kish ra, atherë vajzës aj i kishte thanë: (EL, 51: 1-8)</p> <p>There was once Disdar Osman Aga, He is drinking red wine in the tower His daughter Ajkuna serving him, He is drinking wine from the finest glass, His daughter serving him with her white hand, He is drinking wine and is well-fed, Cold water cleared his thoughts, So he spoke to his daughter:</p>	<p>Vino pije Kupinović Vuče U malenu selu Kupinovu, Služi vino vijernica ljubana. (Vuk VI, 6: 1-3)</p> <p>Kupinović Vuk is drinking wine In a small village of Kupinovo, Wine is served by his faithful wife.</p>

The examples given above lead to the conclusion that the formulas of the “they are/he is drinking wine” type may also be conveyors of rather complex information instead of only that of characters, space or time of an action to be further developed in the narrative part of the song. In the song *Vuk Harambashi e Hajkuna e Dezdar Osman Agës* (EL, 51; *Vuk Harambasha and Dezdar Osman Aga’s Hajkuna*), for instance, information we obtain from the formula does not merely contain references to the space, but also to the psychological/physical condition of the main character: “he is drinking wine and is well-fed, / cold water cleared his thoughts.” Furthermore, the use of the attribute *white* is almost equally frequent in these songs as it is in the Serbian ones, as already discussed in Sivački 2013. Numerous other examples testify to the fact that this is one of the most frequent epithets in Albanian songs, amongst which are some of those we have already given above: “red [lit. black] wine and white plum brandy”⁵; “in the white tower of Senjanin Ivan” etc.

Toponyms and anthroponyms of undisputed Slavic origin occur within the *kreshnik* epic space – whether being of an attested Slavic etymology, or directly taken from one of the Slavic languages surrounding the Albanian language territory. These toponyms generally appear in two forms: one, which is phonetically adjusted to the Albanian language, and another, which has preserved its original appearance. Since there are a lot of these examples, we will focus our attention only on those toponyms and anthroponyms that occur in specific introductory formulas.

Even the first examples given above contain Slavic toponyms, such as *Senj*, Alb. *Senjë* (*Sejë*) and the anthroponym *Senjanin Ivan*, Alb. *Senjanin Ivani* in the song *Martesa e Halilit të ri me Rushën e Galan Kapetanit* (EL, 52; Eng. *Wedding of the young Halil with Galan Captain’s Rusba*). The oiconym *Senjë* has retained its original form from Serbian, which is rather interesting from the dialectological perspective, especially if we take into account the tendency of the Northern Albanian (Gegë) dialect to phonetically simplify final consonants or consonant clusters, especially the sonant *nj>j*. In other analyzed examples this toponym occurs in the form *Sejë* (e.g. in the songs *Muja merr çikën e Kralit të Sejës* (EL, 96) Eng. *Muja captures the daughter of the King of Senj*; *Agë Jabanxbija*,⁶ *Muji dhe Kralji i Sejës* (EL, 87) Eng. *Agë Jabanxbija, Muji and the King of Senj*; and *Kotuzi* (EL, 57). What we have here is unequivocally the same toponym in two different phonetic forms, since we know that the sonant *-nj* is reduced in the Gegë dialect, particu-

⁵ It is worth mentioning that the position of the adjective *i, e bardhë* (Eng. “white”) is fixed unlike in Serbian; it always comes after a noun and is accompanied by a prepositive article, which cannot be seen in the translation.

⁶ *Jabanxbija* (Serb. vern. *jabandžija*) means “a foreigner”.

larly between two vowels or at the end of a word (Gjinari 2003) – e.g. Tosk. *ftonj* > Geg. *ftoj*; Tosk. *lanj* > Geg. *laj* etc. In all songs in which it appears, this toponym occurs without any attribute and is usually both semantically and structurally attached to the noun *krajl* (*kral*)/*krajli*, Eng. *king/kingdom*, except when it occurs independently or within a prepositional-case structure: “e në **Sejë** për me më çue” (Eng. “and to set off for Senj”); “ka një çikë të bukur **Krali i Sejës**” (Eng. “The King of Senj has a beautiful daughter”) etc.

The introductory formula from the song *Bejlegu ndërmjet dy vllazënve të panjoftun* (EKL, 12; Eng. *Rivalry between two unknown brothers*) is characterized by a common epic feature also found in Serbian examples, and that is the chaining of formulas – known also as concatenation. In this instance the chaining is carried out by combining two typologically equal formulas “they (have) gathered” and “he is drinking wine”. A nominal or verbal phrase, i.e. a verb itself is here employed for the purpose of marking action in both Albanian and Serbian songs:

Janë mbledhë tridhetë kapidana.
kanë fillue pijen e po *pijnë*,
venë të kuqe e raki të bardhë;
vena e kuqe në faqe u ka dalë
 e rakija n'kuvend i ka qitë.
 (EL, 12: 1–5)

Up to thirty captains gathered together,
 Started drinking in copious amounts
 Drinking red wine and white plum brandy;
 Red wine struck them into their cheeks,
 And the brandy made them gather together.

A formal-structural inconsistency may be observed in this case: “janë mbledhë” is a vernacular form occurring under the Slavic influence, whereby the verb *jam* (Eng. *be*) is used for forming the perfect tense, unlike standard Albanian where the verb *kam* (Eng. *have*) is used. The aforementioned inconsistency is manifested in the subsequent line, whereas the so-called Gegë participle is retained – Alb. *fillue* (Eng. *began*), which most likely suggests erroneous recording of this part of the song.

Assuming that the songs of the frontier warriors incorporated to a certain extent the formulas from the South Slavic songs, in addition to subjects, motifs, characters and other elements, the question arises as to why situational formulas are not as frequent in the Albanian songs. Their relatively limited percentage of the total number of specific introductory formulas, in addition to their poor stratification⁷ compared to the corresponding formulas in Serbian songs, may be explained by formal-structural differences between the two languages. One of the restrictions of a morphological nature

⁷ Situational formulas are amongst the most frequent ones in Serbian songs (in addition to the formulas of communication and movement) and this type comprises as many as 13 subtypes (Detelić 1996), which shows how numerous they actually are by comparison to the corresponding Albanian formulas.

pertains to *figurae etymologicae*,⁸ which in this case do not have absolutely equivalent translations in Albanian; therefore, no direct borrowing could have occurred without disturbing their grammatical structure in the target language.

2 *Fairytales-like formulas*

The typological classification of specific introductory formulas has revealed a rather large number of songs (as many as 50, i.e. 49 percent) containing the initial formula “so there was/there once was”/“there was a”/“when there was” or some of its possible variants. In an overwhelming majority of instances (as in the previous case) they occur within the introductory block, i.e. they are preceded by a general formula, but it is worth emphasizing that the largest number of songs that do not contain an invocation begins with this very type of formula. Its most frequent form in Albanian is “kur ish/janë kânë/kenë” etc., the literal translation equivalents of which are “when there was/were”, which at first may lead to the conclusion that this is a formula of a temporal kind. However, since the time-related dimension of the plot is in no manner determined therein, there is no difference whatsoever between such a beginning and the most common introductory formula in fairytales: “Once upon a time [there was]...”

Another important property of this type of formulas is that they easily combine with other formulas into a structure which is closed at the beginning and open at its other end. If their structure, that is the quantity of information they convey, is looked at, the conclusion seems inevitable that their single function is to provide an answer to the question *who*: “When there was an old man with motherless children” (EL, 36: 1); “So there was Aga Hasan Aga” (EL, 46: 1); “There was Hysen Gradenica” (EL, 63: 1); “When there was Gjuri Harambasha” (EL, 78: 1), etc. Only when supplemented or chained, i.e. combined with other formulas, do they become direct conveyors of information on the space, time, situation, other characters etc.:

Ishin kanë Muji e Halili,	There were once Mujo and Halili,
shum trimni bashkë kin pa' ba,	Many braveries together they made,
të gjitha Mujit i kin pa mbetë.	But Mujo took credit for all of them.
(EL, 101: 1-3)	

⁸ Out of the thirteen subtypes of situational formulas mentioned above, *figurae etymologicae* have been found in four.

the relationship between Albanian and South Slavic epics, but also between these two Balkan cultural traditions.

The following example is from the song *Gjuri Harambash* (EL, 87; Eng. *Gjuri Harambash*), in which an epic repetition assumes the role of describing the title character, a notorious *Shkija*,¹¹ which is accomplished by a semantically appealing construction “nuk ka lanë” (Eng. “left no/did not leave”). Such a repetitive series is then interrupted by a semantically identical, yet structurally discordant construction “s’ka lanë” (Eng. “left no/did not leave”), employed for metrical reasons, i.e. so that the decasyllable remains undisturbed:

Kur ish kanë ai Gjuri Harambash, zollumtar zoti si e ka falë, nuk ka lanë drum per pa thye, s’ka lanë nanë per me u gzue, nuk ka lanë çikë m’u fejue, nuk ka lanë pazar me u çilë, nuk ka lanë djet të ri me u rritë.	There was once Gjuri Harambash, Tyrant he was, God did make him that way, No road did he leave uncrossed, No mother did he leave in joy, No maiden did he let engaged, No market did he let open, No lad did he let grow up.
(EL, 78: 1–7)	

The frequency of this version of a fairytale-like formula in Albanian songs reveals, inter alia, its plausible originality, since its elements do not occur in such an arrangement in formulas of the surrounding Slavic peoples. Besides, its metrical suitability to the Albanian decasyllabic verse, as well as its capacity to fit into any context owing to its simple semantic structure, must have largely contributed to its popularity with local singers. If compared to any other specific formula, e.g. “he is drinking wine”, it appears that regardless of how fixed or petrified it is due to being widespread and able to adjust to a large number of different situations, it still has a tendency of restricting and pointing to the action of “wine drinking”, which is usually done *somewhere* or *with somebody*, whilst the formula “there was a...” mainly imposes no constraints. Hence in this case its neutral connotation contributes to its greater universality.

The temporal indifference is particularly distinctive in these formulas (merely one out of 50 songs contains temporal markers), which is compensated in two manners: by further describing the character(s) or by describing the spatial context:

¹¹ The Albanian forms *shkau*, *shkina*, *shkie*, Eng. *Serb* (m.), *Serb* (f.), *Serbs* are derived from the Latin appellative *sclavus* (Stanišić 1995, 37), and in the songs of the frontier warriors they semantically encompass all other Slavic peoples, considering that therein *the consistent opposing party... are the Slavs... without any individualization. The land of the opponent: Kingdom* (Medenica 1974).

Ishin kanë Muji e Halili,
kin pa' dalë ne bjeshkë te nelta.
(EL, 100: 1-2)

Kur ish kenë nji plakë me jetima,
i kish pasë nandë djelm e 'i çikë,
me gazep e mjera i ki' rritë,
me lesh ferrash i veshë e i bathë,
me lypë dyerësh u ep me granëIsh'
kenë ardhë nji vjetë fort e keqe,
in lidhë jetimat me dekë.
(EL, 36: 1-7)

There once were Mujo and Halili,
They went out to highland mountains.

There once was an old man with motherless
children,
Nine sons and one daughter had he,
In poverty and woes did he bring them up,
He dressed them in rough cloths only,
Door to door begging for food for them,
A terrible year fell upon them,
His poor children almost died on him.

The contrasting with Serbian songs has demonstrated that fairytale-like formulas do not exist or at least have not been recorded there; however, judging by the type of formulas attached to their free end, they may be partially replaced by the formula “mother/emperor is feeding...” (cf. Vuk II, 15; SANU II, 24). Being unique itself, the introductory formula Serb. “netko bješe (Strahiniću bane)” (Eng. “[Strahinić Ban] a noble man he was”)¹² might be compared to this type to a certain extent. Its parallel in Albanian songs is “a hero of all heroes that [name]” Alb. “trim mbi trima ay”/“ky trim trimit”, as in the song *Gjergj Elez Alija* (EL, 5), the sujet of which treats the *Bolani Dojčin* motif (Eng. *Ailing Doichin*). We have noticed a certain similarity also in the category of formulas of *appellation* (Suvajdžić 2008, 159), the function of which is realized by a declarative introduction of the hero; however, we may not denote them as fairytale-like. It is our opinion that both the Albanian and Serbian formulas intertwine only on the level of function, whilst completely diverging both semantically and structurally; therefore we cannot speak of their typological concordance.

According to many of their properties,¹³ such as the motif, lack of a more specific spatial determination of the sujet etc., the aforementioned Albanian song *Gjergj Elez Alija* differs from the other songs of the frontier warriors and is therefore worthy of being paid greater attention. The first dissimilarity compared to the Serbian version *Bolani Dojčin* (Vuk II, 78)¹⁴ pertains to different types of correlation between the introductory and final formulas.

¹² Trans. by Geoffrey N. W. Locke (1997, 115).

¹³ See Medenica 1974.

¹⁴ Since the motif of a sick hero (known as the *ailing Doichin motif*) exists not only in the South Slavic but also in the epics of other Balkan peoples (which most likely makes the number of songs with this motif a three-digit one; e.g. in his analysis Fochi (1956, cit. in Medenica 1974) analyzed as many as 85 songs with this sujet (44 Romanian, 26 Bulgarian, 13 Serbo-Croatian and 2 Albanian), we shall focus here on contrasting it with the mentioned Serbian version exclusively in order to draw attention to possible derogations of the Albanian song, which should later be analyzed more thoroughly to determine

The mentioned correlation is in the Albanian song achieved by reference to the same personality¹⁵ (similar to the Serbian song *Banović Strabinja*: “Strahinych Ban, a noble man was he; Of all the heroes that have ever been, / One nobler than the Ban was never seen”),¹⁶ whilst in the analyzed Serbian version it is achieved by emphasizing the cause in the initial, and the consequence in the final formula. Establishing such a connection between the initial and final formulas serves the purpose of expressing the finiteness of a told tale, which (unlike some other instances)¹⁷ is impossible to continue:

Albanian introductory formula:

Trim mbi trima ay Gjergj Elez Alija!
 Qe nand' vjet nand' varra në shtat m'i ka!
 Veç një motër nat' e ditë te kryet,
 ja lan varrat me ujt e gurrës nandvjeçe,
 ja lan varrat me ata lott e syve,
 ja terë gjakun me ata flokët e ballit,
 shtatin vllaut ja shtërngon m'ruba të
 nanës,
 n'petka t'babës trupin ja hijeshon,
 armët e brezit ja rendon mbi krye!
 (EL, 5:1-9)

Gjergj Elez Alia, the greatest of heroes,
 For nine years now on his bed has he
 languished,

Albanian final formula:

Amanet, more shtegtari i malit!
 N'kofsh tuj kndue ksajt, kajkën me e
 pushue.
 N'kofsh tu kajtë ksajt, gjamën për me e
 xanë!
 Kah kërkova gjithkund bjeshkë e
 m'bjeshkë,
 kah verova gjithkund vrri e n'vrri,
 kah mjerova gjithkund shpi e n'shpi,
 kërkund s'ndesha m'Gjergj Elez Ali!
 (EL, 5:183-190)

Oh, wanderer passing by into the
 mountains,

whether such innovations are under the influence of Albanian, or their origin can be traced to another (either adjacent or non-adjacent) cultural tradition.

¹⁵ The difference that may be noticed between the forms *Gjergj Elez Alija* and *Gjergj Elez Ali* is of a formal-grammatical nature and it pertains to the aspect of the personal noun affecting the flexion in Albanian: the former form is definite whilst the latter is indefinite. It is necessary to emphasize that there is a derogation from standard Albanian in the case of the initial formula and the form *Gjergj Elez Alija*, which is reflected in the following: (1) employing the phonetically modified personal pronoun *ay* (3rd pers. sing., m.), the standard form of which is *ai*, which assumes the role of the demonstrative pronoun *ky* (also 3rd pers. sing., m.); and (2) employing the noun in the definite form with the aforementioned demonstrative pronoun (which is a vernacular form, since in standard Albanian the demonstrative pronoun *ky* requires nouns in the indefinite form). The use of the definite aspect results in both concretization and individualization of the noun, thus simultaneously causing change on the semantic level. If an absolute separation and emphatic use of the definite aspect occurred in the initial formula, then the final formula contains a sort of a statement, leading to a conclusion that the formal-grammatical aspect follows the weakening of the signal from the initial to the final formula, which is the most probable reason why the singer chose to “sacrifice” the decasyllable in the first case.

¹⁶ Trans. Locke 1997, 115 and 165.

¹⁷ See Detelić 1996.

body”). In this manner a rounded image of a great hero ailing for nine years is depicted, whilst spatial coordinates are omitted.

Later in the song *Gjergj Elez Alija* different tools are used to introduce the sister tending to Gjergj – contrast: “veç nji motër nat’ e ditë te kryet” (Eng. “Night and day one sister stays at his bedside”^{*}); repetition: “ja lan varrat me ujt e gurrës nandvjeçe, / ja lan varrat me ata lott e syve” (Eng. “here she is cleansing his wounds with spring water, / here she is cleansing his wounds and shedding tears”), etc. In the entire course of the narrative the listener is informed that Gjergj is nearly dead by internal formulas in the form of frequent references to his difficult condition and by other means:

P’a prej vorrit, Gjergj, ti konke çue...?	“From the grave, Gjergj, have you risen?” [*]
	*** **
Të lumët goja, baloz, mirë po thue!	“I well understand, haughty words have you
Qe nandë vjet qi kam marrë rrugn e vorrit	spoken, Nine years have gone by that I’ve been on death’s door” [*]

Therefore, the cuckoo speaking to the wanderer passing by in the final part of the song should not be construed as an act of introducing a harbinger of death, but a guardian of the memory of the extraordinary hero, thus leaving the legacy of keeping the story of Gjergj Elez Alija and his sister alive. The very legacy (Alb. *amanet*) is the original Albanian addition to this sujet,²¹ which is referred to in as many as 28 songs from our corpus. However, the occurrence of this lexeme in initial and final formulas is negligible, since it is found in the initial position only in one other formula (in the song *Martesa e Ali Bajraktarit* (KE, 14) Eng. *Wedding of Ali Bajraktari*): “Kur ish kenë Ali Bajraktari, / amanet baba ja kish lane” (Eng. “Once there was Ali Bajraktari, / and his father left him a legacy”). In all other instances it appears in the medial position whilst functioning within an internal formula.

If the final formulas in both songs are taken into consideration, a striking difference can be noticed primarily with regard to their length: a concise and effective Serbian formula consisting of only one verse as opposed to the Albanian formula containing a developed lamenting ending. The Serbian final formula abides by the narrative structure of epic songs within which the death of the hero usually represents the end of the sujet (Ajdačić 2007), although there are instances in which a song continues even afterwards (e.g. Vuk II, 16 etc.). On the other hand, brother and sister die together in the Albanian song, whilst the phraseology of the formula used to describe their death is rather similar to the Serbian — “Those were his words. He spoke them, and he died”:

²¹ E.g. see Medenica 1974; Skendi 1954, etc.

Vlla e motër dekun paskan ramun, Kurkuj shpirti ma mirë s'i ka dalun! (EL, 5: 166–167)	Dead to the ground fell both brother and sister, No better spirits have ever been rendered!*
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Such an arrangement of the Albanian song suggests the conclusion that it could easily end with line 167. However, it continues with a lamenting formula followed by the final formula of funeral assuming the role of an internal one:

Gjamë të madhe shokët qi m'i kanë ba! Po ja çilin nji vorr bukur të gjanë, vlla e motër ngrykas për me i xanë e'i muranë të bukur e kanë mba- rue, vlla e motër kurr mos me u harrue.	His friends began mourning in great lamenta- tion, And for the two siblings a wide grave dug open, For brother and sister, their arms round each other, And over the grave did they make a fair tomb- stone, That brother and sister would not be forgotten.*
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It is quite interesting to take a look at the Albanian adjective *i, e bukur* (Eng. *nice, beautiful*; m./f.), which in this case is attached to the nouns *vorr*²² (Eng. *grave*) and *muranë* (Eng. *tomb*). On the level of semantics this attribution approaches the final formula “she buried him nicely” in Serbian songs, wherefrom it had probably been taken since the singer was certainly able to choose another epithet (e.g. *large, wide* etc.). This leads to a conclusion that the epithet *nice* is not related to the aforementioned lexemes in order to describe their external (physical) appearance, but its semantics (just as it is in the Serbian formula) is directed towards demonstrating that the hero and his sister had been buried honourably and properly. As a result, there is no need to describe the very act of their burial any further, which opens the possibility of ending the song even with a formula such as this one.

Other versions of this song demonstrate²³ that it is absolutely possible to add other types of formulas after the final formula in *Ailing Doychin* and not only the previously mentioned final formula of funeral, hence prolonging it in this manner. Alternatively, any other general final formula would also be suitable, as well as animal speech (as it is the case in the Albanian song), or a personal comment of the singer. However, it is questionable as to what would be gained in this case for the following two reasons:

1) if a general final formula or a personal comment is added, its dispersed signal will largely “suffocate” both the intensity and effectiveness of

²² The standard form of this lexeme is *varr*, the Northern Gegë form of which contains a nasalized vocal *-a*, thus entailing one of the most distinctive differences between the Northern and Southern Albanian dialects.

²³ E.g. Miladinovci 88, 154, 155 etc.

the formula “Those were his words. He spoke them, and he died”, as well as the ending of the song;

2) if a specific formula (be it an introductory formula in the position of an internal or a final one) or an animal speech is added, the sujet itself will be somewhat altered, which means new elements will be adjoined thereto in a similar manner as in the Albanian version: e.g. leaving a legacy, lament (by mother/sister), burial etc. All of the specified above, as well as numerous potential elements that could be supplied, account for an alteration in the sujet and the narrative itself; hence the song will become completely different if different formulas are added.

In addition to the aforementioned options, there is also the possibility of their mutual combining (e.g. specific final + general final formula), but in this case the existing final formula would particularly lose its strength, whilst its function would be reduced to informing of the death of the main character.

If we go back to the final formula in the Albanian song: “*kërkund s’ndesha m’Gjergj Elez Ali!*”²⁴ which can literally be translated as: “Nowhere have I found/stumbled upon Gjergj Elez Ali”, we may draw the conclusion that for semantic reasons it requires chaining with at least one more formula, since it has one flexible end. The function of the adverb *kërkund*²⁵ (Eng. nowhere) is here subordinate to achieving a contrast with regard to a series of previous formulas in which the effect of the final line is enhanced through repetition and chaining of similar formulas. In addition, lines 183–184 (“should you be singing, cease here for a moment, / should you be crying, stop lamenting”) ensure a certain kind of tension and somewhat amplify the rather weakened signal at the very end of the song (particularly after the death of the hero). Upon it, the narrative circle between the final and introductory formulas is closed and a correlation between them established through chaining concordant formulas semantically and structurally.

²⁴ The aforementioned indefinite aspect of the proper noun Gjergj Elez Ali is by no means a coincidence, since the context suggests that in terms of semantics not only does it denote a concrete person, but it also takes on the meaning “someone/somebody like Gjergj Elez Alija” or simply “a/one Gjergj Elez Alija” (which is achieved by the use of articles in the languages that have them). This is why despite the fact that one would expect the use of the definite aspect in this case, the formal-grammatical aspect is subordinated to the needs of the context and metrics (since, inter alia, rhyme is achieved by means of the indefinite form).

²⁵ *Kërkund* is a vernacular form of the standard *kërrkund*.

3 Temporal (time-relating) formulas

Temporal or time-relating formulas are a distinctive type of initial formulas occurring in twenty songs either at the very beginning or within the introductory block, i.e. after a general initial formula. The most frequent are those relating to nature in one way or another, or those determined by a natural occurrence. Instances of formulas of this type containing a specific date (or at least a year) are rare, whilst those in which the time of action is specified through the Sun/Moon, light/darkness or day/night are by far the most frequent, as it is the case in the song *Gjogu i Mujit* (EL, 9; Eng. *Mujo's Courser*):

Nata a shkue, hana s'ka dalë,	Night was passing, moon not risen,
Muji 'i ander e ki' andrue,	Mujo was dreaming a dream,
andër paka hargelen tuj pjellë:	Dreaming about his mare foaling:
(EL, 9:1-3)	

The prophetic dream formula expressed by means of the *figura etymologica* “he was dreaming a dream” achieves its function through chaining with the initial temporal formula the semantics of which has the role of emphasizing secrecy (accentuating darkness) in order to create an ambience of conspiracy and mystical occurrence. There are two important reasons why this formula requires particular attention: (1) since a dream formula in Serbian epics rarely predicts a joyous event (Suvajdžić 2000), further contrasting might reveal information on how it was transferred to *kreshnik* epic and what changes it underwent along the way; (2) the fact that we have not found a prophetic dream formula in any other introductory block in the Albanian songs, its very presence in a limited corpus such as this one suggests that this is a direct influence of another genre and/or tradition.

In addition to the combination of two typologically different introductory formulas (“the night has come” and “he was dreaming a dream”), the half-line “Moon not risen”²⁶ serves the purpose of preparing for the contrast that follows in the next line:

ki'ba mazin bardhë si bora	And this foal was as white as snow
(EL, 9:4)	

as well as later on in the narrative complex, when Ajkuna goes to check if Mujo's dream came true:

ndriti qymja si bora e malit,	The foal shone like the mountain snowflakes,
hyllin bardh shkruie n'shtek të ballit.	A star was shining on its forehead!*
(EL, 9: 21-22)	

²⁶ The phrasing “the Moon did not come out” is used in the actual original version in Albanian.

Another version of this initial formula is found in the song *Muji e Jevrenija* (EL, 23; Eng. *Mujo and Jevrenija*):

Drita dalë, hana prarue, ç'kin ba çikat e Krajlisë? (EL: 23: 2–3)	The light has appeared, the Moon is of gold, What is it the maidens of the Kingdom are doing?
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The second line already contains the *interrogative* formula: “what are they doing”, which also appears independently as an internal formula in a fairly large number of songs. The singer most commonly embeds this formula between two internal formulas, of which one is closed at the end and the other one is open at the beginning, which is most likely done for two particular reasons: either to boost the effect of the previous event and of the introduction to what ensues in the narrative; or to change the course of action, particularly in the songs of the “Muslim type”,²⁷ one of the basic properties of which is an excessively ornamental style accompanied by frequent introductions or shifts in action, plot, characters, scene etc. Since no standardized beginning in the form of the Slavic antithesis has been observed in any of the Albanian songs analyzed here, it seems that introductory formulas of this type might be a kind of substitute, although the Slavic antithesis occurs in the narrative of several songs. Interrogative formulas of the “what are they doing” type in the initial position have been observed in only four instances, which we found to be insufficient for classifying them as a separate formula type.

With regard to the temporal aspect (i.e. temporal definiteness/indefiniteness), a parallel between the Albanian and Serbian songs may be drawn according to several criteria. Firstly, the hero/maiden/antagonist *are* always *early*; an action is more closely temporally determined by an adverb or adverbial phrase, while the most common one in both languages is *when*,²⁸ etc. However, the analyzed corpus of Albanian songs contains no temporal formula referencing a historical event, contrary to, for example, the Serbian songs with the initial formula of the “in + year” type.

On the other hand, although seemingly far less complex, Albanian temporal formulas abound in beautiful descriptions of the scene where an event takes place, as well as in contrasts aimed at emphasizing not only characters, but also the background against which they are placed.

²⁷ See Medenica 1974.

²⁸ Formal-structural requirements, on the one hand, and metrical, on the other, compel the Albanian singer (and the Serbian as well) to use several basic (semantically equal, yet formally different) versions of this formula beginning with *when* in each of the examples specified above, the function of which here is not temporal marking as it is in the Serbian language.

For instance, the introductory formula from the song *Omeri prej Mujit* (EL, 27; Eng. *Omer, son of Mujo*) demonstrates emotional engagement to a rather large degree, as opposed to the similar formula from the Serbian song *Ropstvo i ženidba Jakšića Šćepana* (Vuk II, 95; Eng. *Captivity and Marriage of Jakšić Šćepan*), which remains relatively “stiff” and frugal in this regard:

<p>Još zorica nije zab'jelila, Ni danica lica pomolila, Bijela je vila pokliknula Sa Avale zelene planine, Vila zove u Bijograd Stojni Po imenu dva brata Jakšića, Jakšić-Mitra i Jakšić-Šćepana: (Vuk II, 95: 1-7)</p> <p>The dayspring has yet not appeared, Nor has the daystar shown her face, The white fairy has loudly cried From Avala, mountain of green, The fairy calls up to Belgrade the Capital She calls by name two Jakšić brothers, Jakšić Mitar and Jakšić Šćepan:</p>	<p>Dritë ka dalë e drit-o nuk ka ba, ka ra dielli e me xe nuk po xe! Kish nevojë drita mos me dalë, kish nevojë dielli mos me ra: Janë xanë rob dy agët ma t'mirët, janë xanë rob Muji me Halilin! (EL 27: 2-7)</p> <p>The day dawned, but little light shone, The sun came up, no warmth provided, Better had the light not come out, Better had the sun not risen, The two best agas were made prisoner, Caught were Mujo and Halili!*</p>
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Although the formula provides no indication of the actual place of the event, unlike the one in the Serbian song, the delayed character introduction (only in lines six and seven), contrasts and repetitions sufficiently compensate for the poor spatial definition. In this respect, it is interesting to note that temporal and spatial coordinates in Albanian songs are marked in an inverse proportionality.

The subsequent type of temporal introductory formulas may be denoted as *preceding* (Suvajdzic 2002) or as a form of preparation for the forthcoming main action as the narrative continues. In addition, they frequently appear together with the formula Serb. “poranio” (Eng. “be early”)²⁹ or with the movement formula “(he) rose to his feet”. In the examples given below almost identical introductory formulas appear, whereas the main characters³⁰ are firstly introduced in a fairytale beginning and placed in a temporal context (“early in the morning”), followed by a concretization of

²⁹ There is no absolute translation equivalent for the Serbian verb *poraniti*, since it means “do something early in the morning”, which can refer to any action. It is commonly translated as either “rise/be early” or “go somewhere early”.

³⁰ In both cases these are Mujo and Halil corresponding to Muja and Alija from Vuk’s songs.

the ambience and a preparation of the listener for the introduction to the main action by means of an interrogative formula:

<p>Kur ish kanë Muji me Halilin, nadje heret trimat kenkan çue, ma kanë ndezë zjarmin n'oxhak, m'i kanë pi kafet sheqerli e po e pijnë duhanin stambollëli. Ça ka qitë Muji e Halilit i ka thanë? (EL 26: 3–8)</p>	<p>When Mujo was with Halili, They jumped to their feet early in the morning, Lit the fire on the hearthstone, Drank coffee with a lot of sugar, And lit the pipes with Istanbul tobacco. What did Mujo say to Halili?</p>
<p>Kanka kanë Qetobash Muja,³¹ heret nadjet Muja kanka çue e po pin kafë me sheqer. Shka kanë ba orët e bjeshkëve? (EL 61: 2–5)</p>	<p>There once was Chetobasha Mujo, He jumped to his feet early in the morning To drink coffee with sugar. What did mountain fairies do?</p>
<p>Kur m'ish kenë Muji e Halili, m'ishin çua natje heret, m'ishin veshë e m'ishin mbathë, m'i kanë pjekë kafet me sheqerr.</p>	<p>When there was Mujo with Halili, They got up early in the morning, Got dressed and put on their shoes, They made coffee with a lot of sugar.</p>
*** **	
<p>E Muja ç'ka qitë e i ka thanë? (EL 77: 1–4; 12)</p>	<p>What did Mujo say?</p>

Our examples demonstrate the chaining of three different introductory formulas according to the principle³² that can schematically be represented as: fairytale-like + temporal formula + situational formula. Their being clichéd is undisputable, but their mutual relationship is obviously firm, thus making them an appealing introductory block fulfilling the requirements as regards metrics, character introduction, spatial and temporal coordinates, etc. This type of a block may be joined by the previously mentioned interrogative formula (these usually are of the “what did he do” or “what did he say” type), although its link to the rest of the formulas is not so strong, as confirmed by our last example in which the interrogative formula only appears in verse 12.

³¹ Qetobash (Serb. četobaša) meaning: “the leader of a company”. It is not a personal name but a rank, but being associated with some of the famous anti-Ottoman rebels time and again, it eventually became their nickname, or an element of the name itself.

³² Observed in six more cases (EL 6, 44, 69, 70, 75, 85 and 86), thus amounting to a total of ten examples of formulas combined in this manner, which accounts for almost ten percent of the corpus.

4 Numerical formulas

Numerical formulas are also quite frequent in Albanian songs. Our corpus contains 14 instances (14%), in which five ordinal numbers appear: three, seven, twelve, thirty and three hundred. Typical of all of the analyzed examples is that they appear as a phrase composed of a number and a noun, as well as that they are mostly supplemented with another formula, the most common of which is “they gathered”:

<p>In mbledhë treqind agët e Jutbinës. Gjumi i randë Halilin ma ka marrë edhe Muji shokve m'u ka thanë: (EL, 32:1)</p> <p>Three hundred agas of Udbina came, But Halili was sound asleep, Mujo spoke to his companions: Tridhetë agë ishin bashkue, n'ulicë të Judbinës ishin dalë, po e qortojnë Gjeto Basha Mujën edhe agët Mujs po i thonë: (EL, 62: 1)</p> <p>Thirty agas gathered together, They took to the streets of Udbina, Qetobasha Mujo rebuked all the agas, And the agas retorted this:</p>	<p>Të shtatë krajlat mendim po bajnë, si me çartë Mujon me Halilin. (EL, 39:1-2)</p> <p>Seven kings started thinking How to set Mujo against Halili. Tridhetë agë bashkë ishin mbledhë e po qortojnë Gjeto Basha Mujën. (EL, 96:1)</p> <p>Thirty agas gathered together, Qetobasha Mujo rebuked all the agas. Tridhetë agë ishin bashkue e kishin marrë llafen tue llafue. (EL, 97:1)</p> <p>Thirty agas gathered together, They were talking with one another.</p>
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Both the initial formula of the song *Smililiq Alia* (EL 62) and the very title contain lexemes of Slavic origin: the toponym *Judbinë* (Serb. *Udbina*) and the patronym *Smililiq* (Serb. *Smiljanić*). Since there is no place called Udbina (*Jutbinë*, *Udbinjë* and *Jutbi*) in Northern Albania, this oikonym (in addition to a certain number of others) was directly taken from Muslim decasyllabic songs. Similarly to the previously mentioned town of Senj, the toponym in question does not occur with an attribution either, but within a prepositional-case structure, mainly in the accusative case combined with the preposition *në* (Eng. in, on, at). Such a prepositional-case structure metrically fits into the first half-line of the decasyllable since it contains four syllables,³³ which is the simplest solution for the singer who is therefore not obliged to attach any attribution thereto. Another form in which this toponym frequently occurs is “*në fushë të Jutbinës*” (Eng. “on the field of Udbina”). Considering that such a hexasyllabic half-line enables easy incorporation into the decasyllable, the singer uses it quite often as a spatial

³³ The epic decasyllable is also referred to as *asymmetric* because of its 4 + 6 structure, whereas the lyric decasyllable with its 5 + 5 structure is referred to as *symmetric*.

determinant of an action (usually a battle or a duel). On the other hand, *Smililiq Alia* is a phonetically altered form of Serb. *Smiljanić Ilija*, and also occurs as *Smilaliq Ali*, *Sminanicë Serdar* and *Smi Nanice Serdar* in our corpus. According to Skendi (1964), the form *Smililiq* was derived through progressive assimilation, encompassing also the intermediate stage *Smilaliq* in which *-n>-l*, occurring in certain other songs, as we have previously pointed out.

Numerical formulas can be found in Serbian songs as well, but in a somewhat smaller percentage (according to Detelić 1996, only in 2% of the songs) and they usually contain ordinal numbers *two/nine/thirty* as predominant within the initial numerical-noun structure:

Putem idu <i>dva</i> mlada putnika, Putem idu, a putem beesedu: (SANU II, 6: 1–2)	<i>Two</i> young wayfarers are walking down the road, Walking down the road, saying:
Vino pije <i>trideset</i> ajduka U gorici pod jelom zelenom I medj' njima Mitar arambaša, Vino služi Stojko Mitroviću. (Vuk VII,41)	<i>Thirty</i> haiduks are drinking wine In the forest, under a green fir Among them, Mitar the Chieftain, Wine is served by Stojko Mitrović.
Rodi majka <i>devet</i> posobaca, U zlo doba, u godine gladne, Sve je devet majka odranila, Sve preslicom i desnicom rukom, I osam je majka oženila. (SANU II, 24: 1–5)	Mother gave birth to <i>nine</i> sons in a row, In evil times, in the years of famine, All of the nine were raised by the mother, With her distaff and her right hand, Eight of them the mother married off.

These examples from Serbian songs show a similar tendency of combining with other types of formulas, as is the case in Albanian songs. The formulas “they’re walking down the road”, “mother gave birth”, etc. in this context are close to the Albanian “ishin bashkue” (“they gathered”) or “mendim po bajnë” (“they started thinking”). This is not surprising since numerical-noun structures (or more accurately, phrases) themselves may not denote any action whatsoever, but merely provide information on the character(s) introduced at the beginning, and therefore need to be supplemented with at least a verb in order to function as formulas.

Discussion and conclusion

In accordance with our primary goal – to establish the degree of concordance between specific initial formulas in the Albanian decasyllabic and corresponding South Slavic songs, as well as their typology – the analysis has resulted in four clearly differentiated types of formulas: situational,

temporal, numerical and fairytale-like. We have found that interrogative formulas may be classified as a separate type, but have chosen not to define them as a subtype of initial formulas due to the fact that they occur in the song-initial position in very few instances.

Contrary to the initial assumption based on the share of situational formulas in the corpus of South Slavic songs, these formulas actualize their frequency to a larger extent through chaining with other specific, primarily fairytale-like and numerical formulas. Their perceptibly smaller number compared to the South Slavic ones is reflected in both formal-structural and anthropological-cultural differences, ultimately resulting in the development of formulas of other types, primarily the fairytale-like one. The latter is at the same time the only type of formulas demonstrating zero equivalence with specific introductory formulas in South Slavic songs, which may be characterized to some extent as a certain kind of innovation brought into the decasyllable verse by the Albanian songs. Although this is an international formula taken from another epic genre, its neutral connotation and its function of conveying exclusively one piece of information (i.e. introduction of the [main] character[s] in the narrative) make it productive and favourite with Albanian singers. Therefore, it also has an accentuated tendency of chaining with other specific formulas, whilst assuming the role of a general formula rather often, as concluded based on these two crucial facts:

(1) a relatively high percentage of the songs of the frontier warriors begin with a general formula (62 songs, i.e. 60%); hence their absence in the initial part is a derogation rather than a rule (which is particularly noticeable in comparison with South Slavic songs). Out of the remaining 50 songs within the corpus, as many as 22 begin with this type of formula, thus making them by far the most productive;

(2) since one of the basic functions of general formulas is to mark a code shift, and each piece of information of importance for narrative is redundant in this case, fairytale-like formulas are probably the most appropriate substitute since they are connected to narrative only by information on the character that is being introduced, which is not the case with other specific formulas usually carrying spatial-temporal markers.

Given the antiquity of this type of formulas in epics, their frequency in our corpus points to the degree of development of the epic expression of Albanian songs insofar as we have not encountered highly developed formulas in terms of phraseology and style compared to the Serbian decasyllable. There are two possible interpretations of such an occurrence: syntactical-metrical restrictions (emphasized on several occasions herein) of Albanian as a language unrelated to Slavic languages; and a limited period of time during which these songs were developing, which supports the theory that they do not date farther back than the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

Temporal initial formulas have revealed several other innovations of the Albanian songs, such as chaining with a specific type of so-called interrogative (usually internal) formulas. Since the corpus has revealed that the Albanian songs do not begin with the rudimentary form of the Slavic anthesis otherwise existing therein, a conclusion may be drawn that a more thorough research is necessary in order to determine whether this is an indigenous and intrinsic Albanian property and what its function is.

The formal-structural analysis has drawn attention to another instrument in the hands of the Albanian singer, which does not exist in Serbian songs in the same form for rather obvious reasons: the definite/indefinite aspect as a grammatical category having a direct influence on semantics. Our example has demonstrated in which manner it is possible to carry out a concretization and separation with regard to generalization, hence altering the phraseology of an expression, i.e. of a personal noun in this instance. This is by no means an unusual occurrence in the languages in which there are clearly expressed categories of definite and indefinite aspects, but it is most certainly interesting in the context of epics since it offers a possibility to gain an insight into the tools unavailable to the Slavic singer. We believe that a detailed analysis may lead to an answer to the question as to how much the Albanian decasyllable has evolved after it was taken from the South Slavic tradition and to what extent it has introduced innovations not only in terms of motifs and other elements (amongst which e.g. legacy, word of honour etc.), but also in terms of style.

The corpus itself has imposed the need for determining the degree of concordance between the Albanian and South Slavic epic space. Although observed on a limited material, it turned out that attachment of an attribution (most commonly of the attribute *white*) to oiconyms is not a common occurrence in Albanian songs (despite the fact that it is one of the most frequent ones in general), regardless of its presence in both Christian and Muslim South Slavic decasyllabic songs (Detelić & Ilić 2006, 18–19). In this case contrasting might shed light on certain aspects of the relationship between these two epics, as well as on the idea of the town/city and the manner in which transferred elements behave within an unrelated epic tradition etc.

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