

# **The language of corruption and informality in Albanian: lexical semantics meets the social and political sciences.**

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**Abstract:** Corruption is an omnipresent concept in public discourse and a significantly researched topic, yet there is little research on how people speak about corruption or how corruption is framed, a factor that we believe to be central to the understanding of corrupt practices. The present paper employs a lexical-semantic approach to the language of corruption in Albania. It examines corruption by integrating sociological and economic approaches, with the Agency Theory. This combination is used to analyze both corruption and informality through a frame semantics approach, effectively linking theoretical concepts to linguistic expressions. Further, a prolific inventarisation

of the Albanian lexicon of corruption, as reflected in lexicographic sources and reference corpus, is delivered in the paper. Lastly, several petty corruption cases from the Albanian press are analyzed to understand better how corruption is framed linguistically.

**Keywords:** Agency Theory; Albanian language; corruption; frame semantics; informality; lexicography.

**Gjuha e korrupsionit dhe e informalitetit në shqipe: pikëtakime të semantikës leksikore shkencat sociale e politike.**

**Abstrakti:** Korrupsioni është një koncept mjaft i pranishëm në diskursin publik dhe jo pak i studiuar, megjithatë pak studime janë kryer për mënyrën se si flasin njerëzit për korrupsionin ose si kornizohet korrupsioni, një faktor ky që në gjykimin tonë e ndikon të kuptuarit e praktikave korruptive. Në këtë artikull, ndiqet qasja leksiko-semantike për të analizuar gjuhën e korrupsionit në Shqipëri. Si fillim, prezantohen thukët studimet gjuhësore për disa aspekte të diskursit mbi korrupsionin. Më tej, artikulli trajton disa qasje sociologjike e ekonomike ndaj korrupsionit dhe informalitetit. Sa i takon këtij të fundit, merret në konsideratë Teoria e Agjencisë (Teoria e vepruesit principal) për ta shqyrtuar korrupsionin, përmes qasjes së kornizave semantike. Artikulli përmban një inventarizim të leksikut shqip për korrupsionin, duke iu referuar burimeve leksikografike dhe korpusit të referencës. Për fund, për ta bërë më të qartë mënyrën se si kornizohet gjuhësish korupsioni, në artikull analizohen disa raste të korrupsionit të vogël, të pasqyruara në shtypin shqiptar.

**Fjalët kyç:** Gjuha shqipe; informalitet; korrupsion; leksikografi; semantika e kornizave; Teoria e agjencisë (Teoria e vepruesit principal).

## 1. Introduction

Corruption is a well-known phenomenon pervasive in public discourse, especially in the print media. Since corruption is an important political, social, legal, and economic factor, it is not surprising that there is extensive literature on the subject. However, most of the works focus on universal mechanisms of combating corruption and do not consider

how people speak about corruption or how corruption is framed, a factor that we believe to be central to the understanding of corrupt practices. In addition, there is more strictly scientific literature, mainly from disciplines like law, social, and political sciences. It is, however, even more surprising that there are very few studies on the ‘language of corruption’ used by ordinary people. In this article, we will present a frame-based approach to the lexis used in Albanian language to speak about corruption cases. We are convinced that only a culture-sensitive localized understanding can help to get a deeper knowledge of corrupt practices. We will show that our approach can integrate basic concepts developed in social sciences into a lexical-semantic analysis. We believe that framing corruption cases specifically affects the public perception of corruption. Moncada, Martinez-Villegas, and Perez (2024) claim that frames have both long-term and short-term effects in changing the audience’s opinions (either at an individual or societal level). Salient frames, thus, affect the perception of corruption, and, as Urestad Pedersen (2018) claims, how we speak about corruption is highly relevant to the success of any anti-corruption policy.

In the first place, a linguistic approach to the language of corruption serves to detect texts dealing with corruption cases. To illustrate this point, we present some data from the Albanian news portal ‘Panorama’. We can find articles on the topic by searching for the keyword *korruption*, which brings results as e.g.:

- (1) *Sot nuk ka meritokraci – Jorida Tabaku: çdo kontratë mban era korruption, qeveria rrëzoi propozimin tim [...]* (Panorama 24.01.2024).

“Nowadays there is no meritocracy – Jorida Tabaku: every contract smells like corruption, the government rejected my proposal.”

However, newspaper articles on cases of corruption may also contain other lexemes, e.g. *ryshfet* denotes the benefit the corrupt person receives:

- (2) *Arrestohet pedagogu, mori ryshfet per provimin.* (Panorama 08.07.2014).

“A lecturer was arrested; he took bribe for the exam.”

In example (3), an act of corruption is explained in more detail: asking for money in exchange for permission to open a business.

(3) *Të dy keta inspektorë akuzohen për moszbatim të dispozitave ligjore, për rryshfet dhe shkelje të kodit të etikës. Dy inspektorët në fjalë u denonuan një natë më parë nga Fiks Fare, që paraqiti me pamje momentin kur inspektorët kërkonin para nën dorë në këmbim të dhënies së lejes për hapjen e një dyqani peshku në Kamëz.* (Panorama, Sep 20, 2016).

“These two inspectors are accused of not complying with legal provisions of bribery and infringement of the ethical code. The two inspectors were reported last night by Fiks Fare, who transmitted on TV when the inspectors asked for bribe money in exchange for opening a fish shop in Kamëz.”

Our article is exploratory in nature and aims to outline a new research agenda. More specifically, we will address the following two research questions:

- 1) How is corruption represented in the lexicon and in language use in Albanian?
- 2) How do Albanian media frame corruption, and what linguistic elements are emphasized or omitted?

The present study focuses on corruption in a broad understanding (i.e. informality, see below). A lexical semantic approach allows us to include adjacent lexemes and semantic fields. Furthermore, for the analysis of the lexis denoting activities related to the concept of corruption and the broader term informality, we need abstract social models that allow us to identify the relevant texts. The structure of our paper is the following: in section 2, we will give a short overview of the very few linguistic works dealing with aspects of discourses on corruption. Section 3 is dedicated to our sociological and economic concepts of corruption and informality, selected for our linguistic study. In section 4, we will introduce our frame semantic approach to corruption. In section 5 we spell out our methodology by detailing data collection and analytical procedures. In section 6 we present data from Albanian lexicography and corpora, whereas section 7 is dedicated to a frame semantic pilot study of the discourses in the Albanian press.

Finally, we wrap up the main findings and offer an outlook for future research.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Literature review: linguistic studies on the language of corruption and informality**

Surprisingly, linguists have not paid much attention to the words which can be used to speak about corruption. What we found are some Russian studies on metaphors of corruption. Baranov (2004), Barabaš (2017), and Barabaš and Penčeva (2017) discuss Russian metaphors like ‘Corruption is a disease’. Bratu and Kažoka (2016) and (2018) compare the metaphors used in five European languages. Jović (2022) examines how corruption scandals, their actors, and actions are linguistically conceptualized in Serbian public discourse. Using the Agrokomerc scandal (1987–1989) as a case study, she analyzes vocabulary and discourse-specific metaphors in 137 articles from the Serbian newspaper *Politika*. A corpus-linguistic, data-driven approach is applied to identify key lexical units for broader interdisciplinary analysis. Polzenhagen and Wolf (2007) provide a cultural-linguistic analysis of African English expressions from the fields of political leadership, wealth, and corruption. They discuss some underlying conceptual metaphors which reflect salient cultural practices like gift-giving, negotiating, and favouritism.

As to Albanian, M. Sadiku (2015) has made a pioneering contribution by examining the linguistic strategies, particularly conceptual metaphors, that shape the discourse on corruption during the parliamentary election campaign in Kosovo. It is worth mentioning the works by the political scientist B. Kajsiu, who has published on discourses of corruption in Albania and Southern America. Of linguistic interest might be his claim that the English lexeme *corruption* is what he calls a “floating signifier” in the sense that this lexeme is

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<sup>1</sup> The frame semantic approach presented here has mainly been developed within the research project “From informality to corruption (1817-2018): Serbia and Croatia in comparison” 2019-2023, funded by the German Research Foundation DFG (HA 2659/11-1).

“overflowed with meaning because it is articulated differently within different discourses” (2018, p. 302). Finally, in a case study on discourses on corruption in Italy, Urestad Petersen (2018) underlines the relevance of adequate language use in anti-corruption policy.

### **3. Theoretical Framework: Informality and Agency Theory**

Although corruption is an everyday topic, there is no consensus on its definition. We rely on two approaches: as an overarching umbrella model, we refer to Misztal’s theory of informality, which distinguishes reciprocal exchange as a type of social interaction. In addition, we use elements from agency theory. We argue that the concept of informality has the advantage of placing actions designated as corrupt practices in the context of other practices with non-negative connotations. The agency model from institutional economics is relevant because it has found its way into important and well-known definitions (see below).

Misztal (1999) argues that informality is a general principle of human interaction and that societies should strive for a balance between formal social practices and informality. She proposes the following definition of informality:

[...] informality is defined as a form of interaction among partners enjoying relative freedom in the interpretation of their roles' requirements (Misztal 1999, p. 46).

A similar approach is used in the ‘Global Encyclopedia of Informality’:

“Informality refers to the world’s open secrets, unwritten rules, and hidden practices of getting things done.” (<https://www.informality.com/>)

According to Ledenoval, these “practices are captured in the language of participants, local jargons that we interpret as ‘language games’ [...]” (Ledenova 2018b, Preface XIX). The concept of informality, thus, has a strong focus on language use and is, therefore, very well suited for our linguistic approach. We will come back to this point in chapter 6.2

where we will present examples from Albanian jargon (e.g. the use of the lexeme *kafe*). In contrast to the mainstream of (anti-)corruption research, informality is a value-neutral concept. Misztal (1999) identifies exchange as one central realm of social interaction. This interaction type consists of the following features (applied to example 4 above):

- i. the interaction partners fulfill specific roles: e.g. fishmonger and public servant;
- ii. have particular goals and aspirations: e.g. opening a business, getting money;
- iii. are subject to rules and norms: e.g. regulations for the registration of business;
- iv. sociability as a style of exchange comes close to balancing informality and formality is located somehow between a superficial encounter in the public space on the one hand and a relationship between friends on the other relations; this holds for the interaction between the public servant and the fishmonger;
- v. reciprocity: e.g. the fishmonger receives the license and the servant some money.

A very influential model for describing commonly recognized cases of corruption in modern understanding is Agency Theory (AT), also called Principal-Agent Theory, which originated in New Institutional Economics. It has found its way into political science research on corruption (e.g. Rose-Ackermann 2010). We will briefly outline AT and show which components of the model will be included in our analysis. Referring to the seminal paper by Jensen and Meckling (1976), Eisenhardt characterizes AT as follows:

Specifically, agency theory is directed at the ubiquitous agency relationship, in which one party (the principal) delegates work to another (the agent), who performs that work. Agency theory attempts to describe this relationship using the metaphor of a contract (1989, p. 58).

Agency Theory has found wide acceptance in the field of anti-corruption research. It is also the basis of Transparency International's definition of corruption:

“the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”  
(<https://www.transparency.org/en/what-is-corruption>)

If we semantically decompose this definition to uncover the non-overt elements, the components of AT can be recognized very well:

“X entrusts Y with power. Y abuses this power for his own benefit.”

In a further step, we can decompose the English noun *abuse*. In the Cambridge Dictionary (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/>), *abuse* in its first meaning has the following explication:

“The use of something in a way that is harmful or morally wrong.”

We can identify X as the principal and Y as the agent. In addition, it is expressed that Y behaves opportunistically by pursuing his interests; in the terminology of AT, one could say he breaks the contract (*for private gain*), which is a manifestation of the agency problem. Moreover, one can see that Y’s behaviour is evaluated negatively by the speaker (*morally wrong*). Many scholars distinguish ‘grand’ from ‘petty’ corruption depending on the position of the actors:

“Grand corruption consists of acts committed at a high level of government that distort policies or the central functioning of the state, enabling leaders to benefit at the expense of the public good.”

“Petty corruption refers to everyday abuse of entrusted power by low- and mid-level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens, who often are trying to access basic goods or services in places like hospitals, schools, police departments and other agencies.”  
(<https://www.transparency.org/en/corruptionary>, accessed 10.03.2024)

## **4. Analytical framework: The Conversion of the Agency Theory into Frame Semantics**

Central elements of AT can be ‘translated’ into lexical semantics. Our text analysis is based on the annotation of the words referring to the following frame elements:<sup>2</sup>

The interaction partners participating in the exchange

PRINCIPAL: The principal entrusts power/assigns a position to the Agent.

AGENT: Someone who receives money or other material goods in exchange for fulfilling a request of the Client

CLIENT: Someone who has a Request/Wish and, therefore, gives money or other material goods to the Agent

Content of the exchange

SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT: An entity in the form of money, gifts, rewards, material goods, privileges, etc. offered by the client to the Agent

SERVICE\_FOR\_CLIENT: The Agent does what the Client wants, acts at the benefit of the Client/according to the Client’s wishes

Rules

NEXUS\_OF\_CONTRACTS as the basis of the contract between principal and agent can be expressed as a contract of employment, regulations, laws, duties of a civil servant, etc.

In addition to these frame elements, a sentence may contain some sort of EVALUATION in the sense of the speaker using neutral lexis or condemning the act of exchange by calling it for example ‘immoral’. In our analysis of the lexicographic sources in Chapter 5, we will restrict ourselves to lexical units with an explicit negative component, whereas the text analysis in Chapter 6, also contains non-evaluative lexemes. Our lexical semantic approach is inspired by frame semantics. In Skënderi Rakiplari (2020 and 2022a/b), we have shown how frame semantics can be applied to analyze school textbooks and public debates. There are different approaches to frames (for an overview see Ziem 2014). According to frame semantics, the lexeme

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<sup>2</sup> In our notation FRAME ELEMENTS are written in capital letters.

*korruption* evokes a network of nodes and relations, containing significantly more knowledge of the meaning of the word than recorded in the dictionary; in this sense, the lexeme evokes a frame with several slots to be filled. If we hear this lexeme, a whole scene is activated which involves slots for the elements discussed above: PRINCIPAL, AGENT, CLIENT, SERVICE, CONTRACT.

The advantage of the frame semantic approach to corruption among others is the treatment of the evaluative component ('abuse', 'amoral'). Our approach makes it possible to cover situations where the speaker describes the action as legitimate. Thus, the frame element SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT can be encoded with a negative evaluation as *ryshfet* 'bribe' or neutrally as *dhurata* 'gift' (see below the definitions in the dictionaries). Last but not least, our lexical semantic approach can be embedded in an interdisciplinary context and can thus also be used outside linguistics, as it draws on social science models by using the terms of AT which allows for the comparison of discourses in different countries and languages.

## 5. Methodology

As pointed out in Section 2, the language of corruption is an understudied field, not only for the Albanian language. As we cannot rely on existing research, we propose an explorative research design based on mixed methods combining mainly qualitative with select quantitative methods. We collect data from lexicographic sources, major corpora, and from news portals. In the first step, we analyze the lexicographic sources of the Albanian language by pursuing a semasiological approach, i.e. we start with the intuitively known lexemes containing the morpheme *korrup-* and the lexemes found in the meaning explanations. We collect the data from dictionaries of the standard language which are complemented by select data from dictionaries of jargon.

In the second step, we check the frequency of select lexemes in the two large corpora available for Albanian (Albanian National Corpus and sqTenTen20). Based on this first inventorisation of the lexicon of

corruption and informality, we proceed to a pilot study of the public discourse of Albanian where we apply our frame semantic approach. This pilot study allows for the identification of the direction of future research in the language of corruption in Albanian (and other languages).

## **6. Lexicography as a window to the lexical inventory of corruption and informality**

### **6.1. Dictionaries of Standard Albanian**

As a first step, we ask how are corruption-related terms represented in Albanian lexicographic sources? We include the main monolingual normative dictionaries. We start with the term *korupsion* and its derivates and then also include lexemes found in the definitions: *ryshfet* and *mitë*. Our analysis focuses on the frame elements mentioned above:

PRINCIPAL, AGENT, CLIENT, SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT, SERVICE\_FOR\_CLIENT, NEXUS\_OF\_CONTRACTS, and the explicit EVALUATION.

The following are the dictionaries of the standard Albanian language that we have examined:

-Fjalori i Gjuhës së sotme shqipe (1980) (available at: <http://www.fjalori.shkenca.org/>)  
-Fjalor i Gjuhës Shqipe (ASHSH 2006) (available at: <https://fjalorthi.com/>)

Our point of departure is the lexicographic analysis of the core vocabulary of corruption: the lexemes *korupsion*, *mitë*, *ryshfet*, and their derivates. In the following, we present the lexicon entries and the meaning explanations with their translation into English. Further, we briefly discuss how the individual frame elements of the frame corruption are encoded.

	Definition	Translation
<i>ryshfet</i>	Para ose diçka tjetër që i jepet falas nën dorë një nëpunësi ose punonjësi në detyrë që të bëjë një punë a një shërbim jashtë ligjit, mitë; <i>Njeri i ryshfeteve. I dha një ryshfet. Nuk merr (nuk ha) ryshfet. E dënuan për ryshfet. Luftojmë ryshfetin.</i>	Money or something else handed over to an employee or an official to commit an illegal act; a bribe; <i>corrupt people; he gave a bribe; He does not take (does not eat) bribes. He was convicted of bribery. We fight against bribery.</i>
<i>ryshfetçi</i>	Ai që merr ryshfet. <i>Dënimi i ryshfetçinjve.</i>	Someone who takes a bribe. <i>Punishment of the bribed ones.</i>
<i>korruptim</i>	Veprimi dhe gjendja sipas kuptimeve të foljeve korruptoj, korruptohem.	The action and the state corresponding to the meaning of the verbs <i>to corrupt</i> , <i>to be corrupted</i> (passive form).
<i>korruptoj</i>	E prish dikë nga ana morale dhe e bëj të marrë rrugë të keq për qëllime të caktuara; e shtyj dikë me anë të dhuratash, ryshfetesh etj. që të veprojë në kundërshtim me detyrën që ka, të shkelë ligjet etj. për të më bërë shërbime. <i>Përpiken të korruptojnë rinë në (në vendet borgjeze e revizioniste).</i>	To ruin someone morally and to make him take a bad path for specific goals; I make someone through presents, bribes, etc. to act against his duty, to break the law, etc. for the sake of serving me. <i>(They) try to corrupt the youth (in the bourgeois and revisionist</i>

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*countries). They corrupted him/her by bribes.*  
*E korruptuan me ryshfete.*

*i/e korruptuar* Që është prishur nga ana morale dhe është futur në rugë të keqe; që ka marrë dhurata, ryshfete etj. nga dikush për t'i shërbyer këtij duke shkelur detyrën që ka dhe ligjet në fuqi, që është korruptuar. *Shoqëri e korruptuar.* *Nëpunës të korruptuar.* *Aparat shtetëror i korruptuar.* What is morally rotten and has gotten into a bad path; that has taken presents, bribes etc. from someone to serve him by breaking the duty that he/she has and the laws in power, that is corrupted. *Corrupted society.* *Corrupted officials.* *Corrupted state apparatus.*

*Korruptues* Që prish nga ana morale dhe të bën të futesh në rrugë të keqe për qëllime të caktuara, që përdor dhuratat, ryshfetet etj. për të vënë në shërbim të tij, duke të shtyrë të shkelësh detyrën e ligjet në fuqi. *Shtyp (libër) korruptues.* *Metoda korruptuese.* Something that ruins from a moral perspective and makes you get into a bad path for specific goals, that uses presents, bribes etc. to make you get under his service, by pushing you to break the duty and the laws in power. *Corrupted media (book).* *Corruptive methods.*

*Mitë* 1. *keq.* Para a diçka tjetër që dikush ia jep nën dorë një nënpunësi në kundërshtim me moralin socialist që t'i mbarojë një punë në rrugë të jashtë ligjshme; ryshfet. 1. *neg.* Money or something else that someone gives under the table to a civil servant against the socialist morality, to get something done illegally. *Taking/*

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*Marrja (dhënia) e mitës giving mitë (graft) is dënohet me ligj. Merrte mitë. punished by law. He used to take graft.*

	2. ethnogr. Shuma e parave që familja e dhëndrit i jepte familjes së nuses; shpërblim në para që i jepej shkuesit.	2. ethnogr. The amount of money that the family of the groom would give to the family of the bride; the monetary reward given to the visitor.
<i>mitëdhënës</i>	Ai që jep mitë.	<i>Someone who gives bribes.</i>
<i>Mitëmarrës</i>	Ai që merr mitë, ryshfetçi.	<i>Someone who takes a bribe.</i>
<i>Mitos- mitosem</i>	I jap mitë dikujt.	<i>To give someone a bribe. To be bribed (reflexive verb form).</i>

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**Table 1:** The corruption lexicon in Fjalori i Gjuhës së sotme shqipe (1980).

As it is shown in the table 1, in the dictionary from 1980, the inventory of lexemes contains several derivates of the morpheme *korrup-*, but not the noun *korrupsion* “corruption”; one may notice the presence of the communist ideology in the illustrations for the definition of words *korruptoj* – corrupt (v) and *i, e korruptuar* - corrupted (adj). Corruption is associated with bourgeois and revisionist countries, and it is clearly stated in the dictionary that it goes against socialist morality.

SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT: money, presents, or something else unspecified.  
 SERVICE\_FOR\_CLIENT: an unspecified act, namely service.  
 AGENT: official  
 PRINCIPAL remains implicit

EVALUATION: bad path (rrugë të keqe), illegal, against socialist morality, morally rotten; see also the lexicographic label *keq*. ‘pejorative’.

NEXUS\_OF\_CONTRACT: duty, law.

It is worth mentioning that the dictionary contains three lexemes specifically denoting the CLIENT (*mitëdhënës*) and the AGENT (*mitëmarrës*, *ryshfetçi*).

The corruption lexicon in Fjalori i Gjuhës Shqipe (2006) has the following lemmas: /*ryshfet*/, /*ryshfetçi*/, /*korruption*/, /*korruptim*/, /*korrupt/ój*/, /*korruptuar* (i, e)/, /*korruptuës*, -e/, /*mite*/, /*nëndorës*/. For want of space, we are not including the detailed entries and their corresponding translation but just pointing at some differences that this dictionary has in comparison to the communist era dictionary of 1980.

In the dictionary of 2006, some entries are removed (e.g. *mitëdhënës* and *mitëmarrës*) and the communist ideological component of the definitions is completely filtered out. As a new lexeme, we find *nëndorës* for AGENT related to the metaphor ‘under the hand’, i.e. under the table.

In the definitions the SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT is only ‘money’ and/or privilege, whereas the SERVICE\_FOR\_CLIENT is an unspecified act related to the interest of the client; AGENT: public official, CLIENT: Ø, PRINCIPAL: Ø, NEXUS\_OF\_CONTRACT: law, EVALUATION: illegal, to ruin morally.

Let us have a closer look at the dictionary definitions with special regard to the frame elements we identified above. Visible variation is found in the lexemes referring to CLIENT and AGENT *mitëdhënës*, *ryshfetçi*, *mitëmarrës*, and *nëndorës*. In the definitions, the AGENT is encoded at first as *nëpunësi* ‘official’ and later also as *punonjësi* ‘employee’ which seems to reflect the extension of the understanding of corruption. The frame element PRINCIPAL does not appear in the lexicographic definitions at all, meaning it is not mentioned that the agent has received his power from the state or a company or the like.

As SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT we find either synonyms of bribe (*mite*, *ryshfet*), ‘money’ (*para*, *holla*) or something else (*ose diçka tjetër*) and as SERVICE\_FOR\_CLIENT, ‘illegal service’, ‘an illegal action’ (*shërbim jashtë ligjit*). The negative evaluation is usually

associated with moral aspects as in *rrugë të keqe* ‘bad way’. The NEXUS\_OF\_CONTRACTS usually remains vague (‘law’). An interesting observation is the influence of the political system on the meaning definitions: the dictionary from 1980 relates corruption to Western countries.

## **6.2. The corruption slang (The dictionaries Ibrahimi 2009, zhargonisht)**

The dictionary entries in 6.1 were excerpted from the standard Albanian language dictionaries. However, many colloquial words and phrases about corruption are nonstandard expressions that tend not to be included in the dictionaries mentioned above. Using slang to imply bribery emphasizes the sense of informality discussed above. As we know slang is about social bonds between those included in the interaction (Eble 2006), whereas one of the features of informality is *sociability*. Especially when petty corruption is (about to be) performed, people will likely employ slang words and phrases with a twofold function. It both suits the informality setting and diminishes the effect of the wrong-doing or immorality, due to euphemistic signifiers.

Below, we present some data from the Dictionary of Albanian Slangs and Euphemisms Ibrahimi (2009) and the urban dictionary zhargonisht (<https://zhargonisht.wordpress.com>). Note that this is not an empirical study *sui generis*. We aim to pave the way for future studies on jargon.

**Kafe** – A common word to refer to bribe in colloquial Albanian is the word *kafe* ‘coffee’. In this case, SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT is *coffee*. In the dictionary Ibrahimi (2009), under the entry *kafe* the following is given:

(4)        *e do edhe ai kafen e vet = Bakshish, nëndorë*

“He also wants his coffee = tip, underhand = under the table”

**Virus i gripit** – ‘influenza virus’, a further slang expression for corruption found in Ibrahim (2009). The entry is accompanied by the phraseology *O Mete, për vete*, “Mete, for yourself”, where Mete is a name, and the rest of the sentence means something like “Mete, mind your business!”

**tefter për ryshfet** – notebook for bribe is an expression denoting *pasaportë* ‘passport’ which gives an indication of a certain practice of petty corruption.

**dorë e majtë** – ‘The left hand’ is translated as ‘corruption’ or ‘theft’.

### 6.3. Corpus data in the Albanian National Corpus and sqTenTen20

As a next step, we ask to what extent do dictionary definitions align with actual language use? We checked the frequency of the lexical entries found in the standard dictionaries in Chapter 6.1. The table below shows the lemma frequencies in the two major corpora of Albanian, the Albanian National Corpus ANC compiled by Morozova et alii and the Web corpus sqTenTen20 compiled by the SketchEngine team. The ANC contains primarily original prose texts (fiction, non-fiction, press) representing the Albanian standard language and does not display any variation in its lemmata. sqTenTen, in contrast, is based on texts from the www collected in 2020. It, therefore, does contain non-standard spellings like *rryshfet* or *korruption* (standard spelling *ryshfet* and *korruption*). It is interesting to note that we found the adjective *korruptiv* not listed in any of the dictionaries.

(5) *Ne kemi debatuar në qeveri edhe për shkak të nuhatjes sime profesionale që për mua kanë qenë korruptive.* (Panorama 31.1.2017)

“We have debated in the government, even because in my professional intuition (those) have been corruptive.”

	ANC Lemma frequency	sqTenTen20s Lemma frequency
<b>Size of corpus</b>	23.4 million words	616.599.025 tokens 528,084,150 words
korruption	4354 / 186.06 pmw	75,431 / 122.33 pmt
korrupcion	0	1.466 / 2.38 pmt
korupsion	0	633 / 1.03 pmt
korupcion	0	253 / 0.41 pmt
korruptoj	968 / 41.36 pmw	2,417 / 3.92 pmt
koruptoj		73 / 0.12 pmt
korruptiv	430 / 18.37 pmw	2511 / 4.07 pmt
ryshfet	334 / 14.27 pmw	2.874 / 4.66 pmt
rryshfet	0	652 / 1.06 pmt
mitë	202 / 8.63 pmw	932 / 1.51 pmt
korruptim	57 / 2.43 pmw	1.124 / 1.82 pmt
korruptues	25 / 1.06 pmw	430 / 0.7 pmt
korruptueshëm	6 / 0.25 pmw	97 / 0.16 pmt
mitëdhënës	1 / 0.04 pmw	6 / 0.01 pmt
ryshfetçi	1 / 0.04 pmw	7 / 0.01 pmt
rryshfetçi	0	4 / 0.01 pmt
mitëmarrës	0	12 / 0.02 pmt
nëndorës	0	0

**Table 2:** The frequency of the corruption lexemes in ANC and sqTenTen20

The data show that the noun *korruption* is by far the most frequent lexeme, followed by the verb *korruptoj* and the adjective *korruptiv*. The adjectives *korruptues* and *korruptueshëm* are much less frequent. The two lexemes denoting the service for the agent *ryshfet* and *mitë* are found with a medium degree of frequency. A further interesting observation is the fact that the nouns denoting the agent or the client *mitëdhënës*, *ryshfetçi* and *mitëmarrës* are so marginal that it is justified to say that they are not part of the Albanian language at all.

## 7. Pilot study: Cases of petty corruption in Albanian news

### 7.1 The method

In this section, we present a small pilot study by applying our frame semantic approach to select newspaper articles on cases of petty corruption in Albania. We will restrict ourselves to cases of petty corruption, where low- and mid-level public officials interact with ordinary citizens. In Hansen&Lisov (2015, p. 203) we proposed the following steps for a lexical-semantic analysis of texts on corruption:

1. Find the lexical units evoking the frame CORRUPTION;
2. Identify the frame elements;
3. Find and analyze the lexical units encoding these frame elements.

The material was collected from the following sources:

1. Gazeta Tema (GT) – Tema Newspaper (online version);
2. Gazeta Dita (GD) – Dita Newspaper (online version).

The articles were selected randomly, after fulfilling the thematic criteria of reporting petty corruption cases. In our analysis, we focus solely on the textual part written by the journalist and exclude the official police or SPAK<sup>3</sup> release (*njoftimi i policisë*) in some cases added to the news. We would like to illustrate our approach based on the following news article from the portal TemA:

(1) “Ky është korrupsion, nuk kërkova këto”- Tentuan t’u japid ryshfet policëve për të mos marrë gjobë, arrestohet dy persona. Dy shoferë automjetesh, janë arrestuar nga policia rrugore gjatë 24 orëve të fundit, pasi kanë tentuar të korruptojnë efektivët për të shmanqur gjobën. Në pranga kanë rënë S.B 20 vjeç dhe O.D, 40 vjeç të cilët në momentin që janë kapur në shkelje, pa vendosur rripin e sigurisë dhe nën ndikimin e alkoolit, u kanë ofruar efektivëve para për t’i shpëtuar ndëshkimit me gjobë. Në total numri i të arrestuarve që janë kapur në tentativë për të korruptuar efektivët e policisë ka shkuar në 38.

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<sup>3</sup> SPAK stands for Struktura e Posaçme Anti-Korrupsion “Special Anti-Corruption Structure”.

*Rasti i parë:*

*Shoferi: Nuk jam i pirë (i ofron 50 euro efektivit)*

*Polici: Ky është korruption*

*Rasti tjetër:*

*Shoferi: Më ndihmo me gjobat të lutem (ofron 1 mijë lekë)*

*Policja: Nuk ka lidhje kjo, unë nuk kërkova këto*

“This is corruption, I didn’t ask for this” – They tried to bribe the police to avoid getting a fine, and two people were arrested. Two drivers have been arrested by the traffic police, during the last 24 hours, after they tried to bribe the officers to avoid the fine. SB, 20 years old, and OD, 40 years old, who, at the moment they were caught in the act, without wearing a safety belt and under the influence of alcohol, offered money to the officers to avoid being punished with a fine. In total, the number of those caught trying to bribe police officers has reached 38.

First case:

Driver: I’m not drunk (offers 50 euros to the officer)

Policeman: This is corruption

Next case:

Driver: Help me with the fines, please (offers 1,000 ALL)

Policewoman: It’s not related, I didn’t ask for these” (*our translation*).

The frame evoking lexeme is *ryshfet*, the analysis shows that some frame elements are lexically encoded while others remain covert:

AGENT: *policëve, efektivët*

CLIENT: *Dy shoferë automjetesh, S.B., O.D.*

SERVICE\_FOR\_CLIENT: *ryshfet, para, 50 euro, 1 mijë lekë*

SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT: *për të mos marrë gjobë, për të shhangur gjobën*

PRINCIPAL, RULES, EVALUATION: Ø

Following the same methodological approach, we identify the frame elements of corruption in ten news articles (detailed in the paper’s reference section).

## 7.2. The Results

For want of space, we cannot discuss every article in detail. For the complete list with the frame elements we refer to the appendix. Four

texts contain information about the PRINCIPAL (names of institutions as AKU Tirana ‘National Food Authority’ in text 4). This suggests that the focus is more on other frame elements such as the CLIENT and AGENT. Also, the Content for the exchange is quite emphasized; e.g. as SERVICE FOR AGENT in text 4 *20.000 ALL* and in text 5 *Një automjet mercedes benz* ‘A Mercedes Benz vehicle; SERVICE FOR CLIENT: *zhllokim aktiviteti* ‘unblocking its activity’ and *devijimi i hetimit të vrasjes* ‘Diversion of the murder investigation’. This reflects the specific perspective on how corruption cases are reported and discussed in the media. We find quite striking the fact that the news articles we analyzed show a lack of moral evaluation. The newspaper articles have almost a similar structure presenting the corruption through the interaction partners participating in the exchange, almost always providing information about the CONTENT FOR THE EXCHANGE, where the most common service for an agent is money and service for the client is *avoidance of punishment* in form of a fine, activity blockage or legal consequences.

There are two peculiarities worth noting: first, in many cases, the articles contain direct press releases from the police or SPAK or seem to be some sort of paraphrasing of such a release; this holds for example for Article No 6. Second, many articles disclose quite a lot of personal information about the AGENTS and CLIENTS. Often their names are in the full form or as initials); cf. text 9 AGENT: *shtetasit Çelnik Toska dhe Sefer Shuka në detyrën e Oficerit të Policisë Gjyqësore pranë Drejtorisë Vendore të Policisë Elbasan* ‘the citizens Çelnik Toska and Sefer Shuka in the position of Judicial Police Officer at the Elbasan Local Police Directorate’; and the CLIENT: *shtetasve Zenel Taragjini dhe Lirian Taragjini* ‘citizens Zenel Taragjini and Lirian Taragjini’. Sometimes their age is disclosed as in text 10 *dy shtetas 48 dhe 49 vjeç nga Fieri* ‘two 48- and 49-year-old citizens from Fieri’. The sample texts represented in the table in the appendix indicate that either implicitly or explicitly attention is paid to the frame of the rules that were broken, mostly in the form of Law or civil servant duties that were infringed.

In contrast to the dictionary entries, we examined in the sections above, the PRINCIPAL component is sometimes present. There are two ways of interpreting the possible absence. Firstly, the

Principal is implicitly stated, as all the AGENTS participating in the exchanges are government officials. So, their corresponding principal is logically known but not referred to in the text as responsible for the interaction. A frame element completely missing in the newspaper articles of our corpora is moral EVALUATION. One could reason that the news nowadays tends to be short and moral evaluations would be beyond what readers expect to find in terms of information. Yet choosing a neutral lexicon to inform on a corruption case is quite striking. It might imply the commonness of the phenomenon, the neutrality, or even indifference of the journalists toward the petty corruption cases.

From a perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, what texts leave out should not be considered as insignificant, nor as arbitrary, thus in our case, the lack of the moral EVALUATION frame element needs to be explained. T. van Leeuwen (2018), when discussing moral evaluation in terms of critical discourse analysis highlights that moral evaluation is 'a key aspect of the way discursive practices legitimize social practices – or delegitimize them, critique them' (p. 8). Thus, a lack of moral evaluation frames signifies the lack of over (discursive) critique toward the corruption phenomenon. Yet, this is not relevant to all media discourse on corruption.

To our understanding, open-eds on corruption, especially those on grand corruption cases, tend to activate the EVALUATION frame element more frequently. A possible reason for that could be attributed to the fact that grand corruption cases implicate high-profile politicians and political forces either in power or aiming for power. So, corruption seems to be framed more as a political issue rather than a social, economic, and/or moral issue. Indeed, as Lü (2020, p. 5) notes, corruption is a politically sensitive subject in all societies.

## **8. Discussion of the data and outlook**

In this paper, we have addressed two research questions: 1) How is corruption represented in the lexicon and language use in Albanian? 2) How do Albanian media frame corruption, and which linguistic

elements are emphasized or omitted? We proposed a lexico-semantic approach to the language of corruption based on concepts from the social and political sciences. Further, we have delivered the first inventorisation of the Albanian lexicon of corruption as reflected in lexicography. For a couple of lexemes, we carried out a corpus linguistic study which shows the frequency of the individual lexemes. Among the most frequent lexemes are the derivates of the morpheme *korrup-* and the nouns denoting the SERVICE\_FOR\_AGENT *ryshfet* and *mitë*. Interestingly, the lexemes denoting the AGENT or the CLIENT are listed in some dictionaries but, as our corpus data show are not in use. A second finding is the invisibility of the PRINCIPAL in the lexicographic definitions.

Our pilot study conducted on a selection of newspaper articles on cases of petty corruption, published on major news portals, shows how the individual elements forming the corruption frame are expressed on the linguistic surface. One interesting finding in these texts is the lack of any negative EVALUATION. This also indicates that the phenomenon of corruption is perceived by the audience as a common phenomenon, but not with any obvious negative connotation. The PRINCIPAL in many cases is omitted. This contrasts sharply with the detailed personal information about the CLIENTS and AGENTS.

Based on our frame semantic approach we would like to propose future studies on the language of corruption in Albanian. It would be fruitful to study colloquial language use in much more detail. Possible sources could be user-generated content in social media or op-eds. For a more comprehensive inventory of the lexicon of corruption, we could use the thesaurus function of SketchEngine to detect lexemes used in similar contexts. A further field of research concerns metaphors used in news articles dealing with grand corruption which could be compared with other European languages (see Bratu & Kažoka 2016, 2018). For example, the metaphor CORRUPTION IS DIRT shows up when the fight against corruption is conceptualized as a cleansing act, as in:

(7) [...] *Shqipëria duhet pastruar edhe nga korrupsiioni [...] (Patozi 2015).*

“Albania must also be cleansed of corruption.”

Finally, we would like to emphasize that studies comparing the language use about corruption in Albania and Kosova would be desirable.

## **Conflict of interest**

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

## **AI Use statement**

AI was not used in the paper.

## **Statement of Contributions**

The authors contributed equally to the preparation of the manuscript.

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## Appendix

### Texts for the frame semantic analysis

- (1) “Ky është korruption, nuk kërkova këto” – Tentuan t'u japid ryshfet policëve për të mos marrë gjobë, arrestohet dy persona (GT) 9/04/2024
- (2) Mori ryshfet për të mbuluar shkeljet e kompanisë minerale, arrestohet drejtori i IKMT Dibër (GT) 10/09/2021
- (3) U arrestua për korruption, lihet në “arrest shtëpie” mjeku – Kronika (GT) 26/09/2022
- (4) Arrestohet për korruption Etrit B.... – Kronika (GT) 15/11/2016
- (5) Në burg për korruption, Leonard Palushi depoziton rekurs në Gjykatën e Lartë – Kronika 10/12/2023 (GT)
- (6) Korruption dhe shpërdorim detyre, SPAK iu vendos prangat 4 zyrtarëve bashkiakë – Kronika 14/02/2024
- (7) Akuzohen për korruption, SPAK çon për gjykim tre zyrtarë, mes tyre vëllai i ish-Presidentit – Gazeta Dita 12/02/2024
- (8) Arrestohet avokati Petraq Semani, i akuzuar për korruption – Gazeta Dita 20/02/2024
- (9) Korruption me prerjen e paligjshme të druve, SPAK çon për gjykim ish-efektivët e policisë së Elbasanit – Gazeta Dita 13/11/2023
- (10) Nën hetim për korruption edhe disa efektivë të policisë kufitare në Kakavijë – Gazeta Dita 26/12/2023

The frame semantic analysis

No.	Article with frame evokin g lexeme s	Interaction partners participating in the exchange		Content for the exchange		Rules	Evaluation	
		PRINCIPAL	AGENT	CLIENT	SERVICE FOR AGENT	SERVICE FOR CLIENT	(NEX US OF CONT RACT S) Regula tions, laws, contrac ts of emplo yment, duties of civil servant s etc.	Moral evaluati on (i.e. immora l, wrongd oing, abuse)
1	GT (8/02/2024)  Ky është korrup sion/ tentuan të japin rryshfet  'This is corruption/ they tried to bribe'	Ø	Policët efektivët  The police officers	dy persona  Dy shoferë automje tesh  Two persons Two car drivers	Mon ey  (50 eur/ 1000 lekë)	mos marrë gjobë  për t'i shpëtua r ndëshki mit me gjobë  Avoidi ng the fine	Ø	Ø +

	GT (10 /09/ 2021)  Mori ryshfet për të mbulu ar shkelje t e kompa nisë minera le  Took bribe to hide the violations of the mineral company (without Njoftimi i policisë)	IKMT	Drejtori i IKMT- së në Dibër  Director of IKMT )	Adminis tratori i një kompan ie private  The administrator of a private company	500 mijë lekë të vjetra  Para 500 000 (old) ALL	Në këmbim të parave  In exchange for money  nuk do të fillonte proced urat për shkeljet e konstat uara would not start the procedures for the detected violations			
3	GT (26 /09/20 22)  U arrestua per korrup sion  Arrested for corruption	Spital it  'hosp ital'	Mjeku Fitim Marku Anestezi st kolege infermje rja  Doctor MF, Anesthesiologist; colleagues, the nurse	pacientë /agjentë të infiltruar si pacientë  Patients/ (infiltr ed agents disguise d as	ryshf et/ bribe	Ø	Ø	Mjeku në pranga - pamjet u kritikuan nga përfaqësues të komunitetit të mjekëve	+

				patients)				Footage of the handcuffed doctor was criticised by representatives of the medical community	
4	GT (15/11/ 2016)  Arrest ohet për korrup sion  Under arrest for corrupt ion “Korru psionit pasiv të person ave që ushtroj në funksi one publik e” Passiv e corrupt ion of public official s	Regio nal Direc torate of AKU Tiran a (Nati onal Food Auth ority)	Etrit Berisha, një inspekto r i AKU- s  An Inspecto r of The National Food Agency	Një subjekt privat  Private subject	20.0 00 lekek  20.0 00 ALL	zhbllok im aktivite ti  unbloc king its activity	Ø	Ø	+

5	GT (10/12/ 2023) Në burg për korrup sion  In jail for corrupt ion	Ø	Ish-shefi i hetimit të krimeve në Elbasan Leonard Palushi  former head of the crime investiga tion in Elbasan, Leonard Palushi,	Erion Alibej	Një auto mjet merc edes benz  A Mer cede s Benz vehi cle	Në këmbi m/ in exchan ge  Deviji mi i hetimit të vrasjes  Diversi on of the murder investi gation	Ø	Ø	+
6	GT (14/02/ 2024)  Korrup sion dhe shpërd orim detyre Corrup tion and power abuse  “Korru psioni pasiv i person ave që ushtroj në funksi one publik e”  Passiv e	Ø	6 persona, 4 prej tyre zyrtarë të Bashkisë së Dimalit, një ekonomi st (menaxh er i një shoqërie tregtare) 6 people, 4 of them officials of the Municip ality of Dimal, an economi st (manag er of a commer	Ø	Ø	Ø	exercis ing public functio ns	Ø	+

	corruption of persons exercising public functions		cial company ) and an engineer at a commercial company						
7	GD (12/02/2024) Akuzohen përkorrupzion Accused of corruption	Ø	Tre inspekto rë të Ministrisë së Mjedisit Ilir Nishani, Genci Hicka dhe Gersion Tafa  Three inspectors of the Ministry of Environment,  Three officials tre zyrtarë vëllai i ish-Presidentit Bujar Nishani.  the brother of former President Bujar	dy mjekët Konstan din Balloma dhe Besim Boçi, Konstan din Balloma and Besim Boïi	Mon ey  30 000 ALL  30 000 ALL	të mos i gjobisnin përmungesën e trajtimit të mbetjeve spitalore.  Avoid the fine for the lack of treatment of hospital waste.	të mos i gjobisnin përmungesën e trajtimit të mbetjeve spitalore.  Avoid the fine for the lack of treatment of hospital waste.	exercising public functions	Ø +

			Nishani.						
8	GD (20/02/ 2024)  Arrest ohet avokati , i akuzua r për korrup sion  The lawyer accuse d of corrup tion, under arrest	të afërm të perso nit të dënuar  Relati ves of the convi cted perso n	Gjykatës  court	avokati Petraq Semani  të afërm të personit të dënuar  Relative s of the convicte d person	mori 25 mijë euro  2500 0 euro  2500 0 Eur	me pretend imin se do të ulte dënimini  the pretensi e that he would reduce the sentenc e for a man accuse d of murder	funksi one publik e Public functio n	Ø	+
9	GD (13/11/ 2023)  Korrup sion me prerjen e paligj hme të druve  Corrup tion throug h illegal loggin g		shtetasit Çelnik Toska dhe Sefer Shuka në detyrën e Oficerit të Policisë Gjyqësor e pranë Drejtoris ë Vendore të Policisë Elbasan,  the citizens Çelnik Toska and	shtetasv e Zenel Taragjin i dhe Lirian Taragjin i  citizens Zenel Taragjin i and Lirian Taragjin i  Sekser realtor	30 000 lekë  30 000 ALL  Përfi time mon etare dhe përfi time mate riale  Irreg ular mon etary bene	Ndërh yje pë lirimin e makinë s me dru  Interve ne to release the truck with illegal logging	Ø	Ø	+

			Sefer Shuka in the position of Judicial Police Officer at the Elbasan Local Police Directorate		fits and material benefits				
10	GD (23/12/2023) Nën hetim për korruption Under investigation for corruption	Ø	Border police officers Customs officers efektivë të policisë kufitare Punonjësit e doganës	dy shtetas 48 dhe 49 vjeç nga Fieri two 48- and 49-year-old citizens from Fieri	Ø	Shman gjë e e procedurave doganore përmallra/ të imëta Avoiding the customs procedure Smuggling (goods, animals )	Ø	Ø	+