

PHRASEOLOGISMS WITH THE LEXEME ZVEZDA / LA STELLA IN SERBIAN AND ITALIAN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: This paper explores the phraseological significance of stars in Serbian and Italian idioms, highlighting their shared cultural and symbolic meanings across both languages. Drawing on historical and folk traditions, it examines the role of stars in shaping expressions related to fate, fame, and life experiences. In Serbian, idioms such as *roditi se pod srećnom zvezdom* ("to be born under a lucky star") and *zvezdani trenutak* ("the best moments") reflect the belief in celestial influence over human destiny. Similarly, in Italian, expressions like *nascere sotto una buona stella* and *vedere le stelle* ("to see stars") convey comparable notions of luck and sudden shock. The study identifies semantic parallels and structural differences in these idioms, offering insights into how both cultures interpret stars as symbols of guidance, fortune, and human significance. These linguistic expressions, rooted in shared astronomical observations, reveal cross-cultural similarities in the perception of stars as metaphors for life's highs and lows.

Key words: Serbian language, Italian language, phraseologisms, *stella*, *zvezda*

1. INTRODUCTION

Phraseology is a relatively young linguistic discipline that became independent from lexicology in the mid-20th century. It was first separated as a distinct area of lexicology by Charles Bally, who, in his famous work *French Stylistics* (1909), pointed out the existence of two types of syntagms: relatively free word combinations on one hand, and fixed and established combinations on the other.

Phraseology as an independent discipline was primarily developed within Russian linguistics, largely due to the work of Viktor Vinogradov. This author first laid the theoretical foundations of phraseology, defining and classifying phraseological units into three categories: 1. phraseological collocations, 2. phraseological units, and 3. phraseological combinations. This classification would later be modified and expanded by other authors and linguists [1].

Beliefs in stars are common to the Indo-European peoples. These elements come from Oriental astrology and magic. It has always been believed that when a child is born, they receive their star in the sky and that there are as many stars in the sky as there are people. Hence, phrases like "born under a lucky star" or "born under an unlucky star" have emerged [2].

Stars also held great significance in magic, particularly in love spells. The Serbs, Romans, and other ancient peoples did not know that the evening star and the morning star were the same star. In Serbian tradition, there is a strong interest in the star Danica – the morning star. It has always been a symbol of perfection and nobility and is often personified [2]. In Italian culture, this star is actually the planet Venus, which the Romans, in their pantheon modeled after the ancient Greek one, regarded as the goddess of love [3].

2. EXAMPLES OF PHRASEOLOGISMS IN SERBIAN AND ITALIAN LANGUAGE

2.1. Serbian phraseologisms

The Serbian corpus was formed based on material extracted from the *Frazeološki rečnik hrvatskog ili srpskog jezika* by Josip Matešić, the *Rečnik srpskohrvatskog književnog jezika* of the Matica Srpska, and the *Rečnik srpskohrvatskog književnog i narodnog jezika* of the SANU. In this paper 19 examples will be analyzed.

1. **brojati zvezde na nebu** – 'to idle, to waste time; to gaze aimlessly'

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2. **videti sve zvezde** – ‘to be stunned from a blow to the head’
3. **zvezda vodilja** – ‘that which guides someone in life’
4. **gasi se nečija zvezda** – ‘someone’s fame is fading or disappearing’
5. **do zvezde uznositi, podizati** – ‘to praise highly, to exalt, to glorify’
6. **zabosti nos u zvezde** – ‘to act important’
7. **za zvezdama** – ‘after death’
8. **zašle su nekome zvezde** – ‘someone has lost all hope’
9. **zvezdani trenutak** – ‘the best moments of someone or something’
10. **lajati na zvezde** – ‘to criticize, insult, disregarding others; to act arrogantly’
11. **od zvezda** – ‘from dawn, from early morning’
12. **od zvezde do zvezde** – ‘1) from dawn to dusk; 2) from evening to evening’
13. **pod zvezdama** – ‘under the open sky, outdoors’
14. **popeti se na zvezde** – ‘to achieve great fame, to become celebrated’
15. **poći u zvezde** – ‘to die’
16. **roditi se pod nesrećnom zvezdom** – ‘to be unlucky, to have an unfortunate life’
17. **roditi se pod srećnom zvezdom** – ‘to be lucky, to have a fortunate life’
18. **skidati sve zvezde s neba** – ‘1) to curse a lot, to swear; 2) to do the hardest things for someone, to indulge them excessively’
19. **u same zvezde** – ‘late in the evening, when the sky is full of stars’

2.2. Italian phraseologisms

Examples from the Italian language were extracted from the dictionary *Dizionario dei modi di dire della lingua italiana* by Paola Sorge, *Dizionario fraseologico italiano-bulgaro* by Ivan Tonkin, *Dizionario dei modi di dire, proverbi e locuzioni* by Giuseppe Pittano, and *Dizionario dei modi di dire della lingua italiana* by Monica Quartu and Elena Rossi. In this paper 13 examples will be analyzed.

1. **alle stelle** – ‘to the stars; when something is very high, great: prices, noise, fame, success, etc.’
2. **vedere le stelle** – ‘to see stars; to be stunned from a blow’
3. **dalle stelle alle stalle** – ‘(literally: from stars to stables); from wealth to poverty, a person who has faced two extremes’
4. **dormire sotto le stelle** – ‘(literally: to sleep under the stars); to have no roof over one’s head, to sleep outdoors’
5. **essere la buona stella di qualcuno** – ‘to be someone’s lucky star; to help someone’
6. **essere una stella** – ‘to be a star; to be an important, famous person’
7. **essere una stella di prima grandezza** – ‘to be a big star; a person of great and significant name’
8. **nascere sotto una buona stella** – ‘to be born under a lucky star; to have good fortune in life’
9. **nascere sotto una cattiva stella** – ‘to be born under an unlucky star; to have bad fortune in life’
10. **portare alle stelle** – ‘to praise someone highly; to exalt, praise, or exaggerate someone’
11. **salire alle stelle** – ‘(literally: to climb to the stars); to rise to great heights, to reach high positions’
12. **seguire la propria stella** – ‘to follow one’s star; to follow one’s destiny, as it was once believed that destiny was written in the stars’
13. **una stella è una stella** – ‘(literally: a star is a star); to be the best at something’

3. ANALYSIS OF PHRASEOLOGISMS IN BOTH LANGUAGES

There are several examples in the Serbian language with the meaning of temporal localization or quantification: **od zvezda** ('from dawn, from early morning'); **od zvezde do zvezde** ('1) from dawn to dusk; 2) from evening to evening'); **u same zvezde** ('late in the evening, when the sky is full of stars'). These expressions are based on the real concept of stars as celestial bodies that signal certain time periods. The expression **pod zvezdama** ('under the open sky, outdoors') has a spatial meaning, and a similar one exists in Italian: **dormire sotto le stelle** ('to sleep under the open sky; to have no roof over one's head, to sleep outdoors').

The expression **brojati zvezde na nebu** ('to idle, to waste time; to stare blankly') arises from semantic phraseologization, which is based on a metonymic change from a non-phraseological structure to a phraseological one. At the core of the idiom is the image of a person lying down, allowing them to look up at the sky and stars. This idiom specifically describes a lazy person. Someone who has time to count the stars in the sky means they have no meaningful work, as there are so many stars that it is impossible to count them. Although this expression exists, it was believed in folk tradition that counting stars is not a good idea, as it was thought to lead to bad consequences for the one who does it. It has always been considered that counting stars would result in the person developing warts on their hands and moles on their face. Furthermore, since it was believed that everyone has their own star, if someone sees their own star while counting the others, they will die immediately. Therefore, counting stars was strictly prohibited and foretold great misfortune for anyone engaging in it [4].

Many beliefs are connected with stars, and death is also linked to them. Specifically, there is a belief that a person turns into a star after death. This belief was known to the Sumerians, Babylonians, as well as the Greeks and Greek philosophy. From this, the expression **poći u zvezde** ('to die') originated [2]. These historical and cultural facts lead to the conclusion that when someone dies, they go to the stars or become a star. This is also how the euphemism for dying arose, which is commonly used among our people to soften the difficult moment of death. But the beliefs about life after death do not end there. There is another interesting view of stars. In our folk tradition, some believed that stars are holes through which one can look into paradise, and from paradise, all the inhabitants can see the earthly world.

In Serbian, there are several expressions where stars symbolize fame, greatness, and the measure of a person's value. From the very beginning, stars have been a great mystery to humans due to their numbers, brilliance, and various forms [2]. When observing old beliefs, rituals, and cultures, it becomes clear that for many peoples, the star represented something unreachable, something intangible and ungraspable, yet still influential to humans. If a star is perceived as something distant, infinite, eternal, and magnificent, it is not difficult to explain the origin of expressions emphasizing such symbolism of stars. One of the most common expressions is **popeti se na zvezde** ('to achieve great fame, to become celebrated'). Additionally, excessive praise is often expressed similarly: **do zvezda uznositi, podizati (u zvezde kovati)** ('to praise highly, to exalt, to glorify'). This example shows that the person being praised is certainly considered important and great by the one exalting them to the level of stars. A comparable expression in Italian is **portare alle stelle** ('to praise highly; to exalt, to overpraise'). The concept of reaching the stars in Italian can be interpreted in different ways: **alle stelle** ('to the stars; when something is very high, great: prices, noise, fame, success, etc. '); **salire alle stelle** ('to rise to the stars, to reach high positions; to become very expensive').

Stars, as living beings, sleep during the day and awaken at night. There was also an anecdote about a girl going to wake up the stars [4]. The idea of strong light, which has the power to illuminate the entire world and show the way in the darkness, led to the expression **zvezdani trenutak** ('the best moments of someone or something'). That moment when a star illuminates someone in the dark night is invaluable. A star can metaphorically be seen as brilliance, as the bright spot in everyone's life. In

contrast, there are expressions like **gasi se nečija zvezda** ('someone's fame is fading or disappearing') and **zašle su nekom sve zvezde** ('someone has lost all hope'). As already mentioned, stars are burning candles, and in Serbian, as in other traditions, light represents something positive, while darkness symbolizes something negative. Therefore, "eclipse" or the extinguishing of a star leads to a negative outcome. This can also be connected with the idea of darkness and the color black, which has always had a negative connotation and symbolism in many cultures, including Serbian.

The expression **zabosti nos u zvezde** ('to act important') needs to be understood differently, as it primarily focuses on the height at which stars are located. It is known that the conceptualization of arrogance is based on an orientational metaphor: **Pride, Arrogance is Up** (e.g., expressions like **dići nos, parati nosom oblake**). The same concept of height, where stars are situated and thus unreachable, is reflected in the expression **skidati sve zvezde s neba**, which, according to dictionaries, has two meanings: 1) 'to curse a lot, to swear' and 2) 'to do the hardest things for someone, to indulge them excessively,' though it is more frequently used in the second meaning. As can be observed, the primary meaning is negatively connoted in Serbian. This could be linked with the metaphor **Zvezda je život** ('A star is life'). So, if someone "removes" someone's stars, it means that they are ruining their life. On the other hand, there is also a secondary meaning pointing to excessive self-sacrifice, as it suggests an activity that is impossible to perform.

The expressions **videti (prebrojati) sve zvezde** ('to be stunned from a blow to the head') and **vedere le stelle** ('to see stars; to be stunned from a blow') have been identified as semantic equivalents in both Serbian and Italian. Everyone is familiar with the sensation of seeing "stars" before their eyes after receiving a strong blow. The term describes the real sensation of light flickering before the eyes, which often occurs when one experiences a sharp, sudden pain [5]. This expression is frequently used in spoken Serbian, and in Italian, it is encountered by many writers who describe how the expression is used. Minucci explained it: "Quando uno sente gran dolore – spiega il Minucci – si dice: Egli ha vedute le stelle, perché le lacrime, che vengono in su gli occhi pel dolore, fanno apparire colla rifrazione della luce, che vi batte, una cosa simile a gran quantità di minute stelle in cielo." ('When someone feels great pain – Minucci explains – it is said: "He has seen stars," because the tears that come into the eyes from pain cause something to appear when light refracts, resembling a great number of small stars in the sky.')

Returning to the previously mentioned idea that everyone has their lucky star upon birth, we come to the following expressions in Serbian: **roditi se pod nesrećnom zvezdom** ('to be unlucky, to have bad fortune in life') and **roditi se pod srećnom zvezdom** ('to be born under a lucky star; to have good fortune in life').

In Italian, there are the same idiomatic expressions that are semantically equivalent to the Serbian ones **"to be born under a lucky star"** and **"to be born under an unlucky star"**. The Italian expressions **nascere sotto una buona stella** ('to be born under a lucky star') and **nascere sotto una cattiva stella** ('to be born under an unlucky star') are used to refer to luck or misfortune in life, just like in Serbian. These expressions are linked to astrology, which claims that planetary conjunctions influence human destinies, and thus there are lucky and unlucky stars [5]. The same confirmation can be found in the **Dictionary of Symbols**, which also associates these phrases with popular astrology [6].

The only difference between the Serbian and Italian languages lies in the use of adjectives: while in Serbian the adjectives are **srećna/nesrećna** (lucky/unlucky), in Italian they are **buona/cattiva** (good/bad). This difference in terminology reflects the specific cultural contexts, but in essence, both languages use phrases that refer to fate being connected to stars.

In the Serbian folk tradition, there is a widespread belief in the connection between human life and a specific star. According to this belief, stars are "burning candles" and there are as many of them

as there are people in the world. When a child is born, it immediately gets its own star, and when it goes out, the person dies. It is believed that brighter stars are associated with rulers and the rich, while those that are somewhat "squinting" are associated with the poor. These beliefs have been known since ancient times, with Aristophanes distinguishing between the rich and the poor stars [2]. Stars, both in Serbian and in other cultures, have been considered living beings, and many authors have personified them. This motif is very old and is found in the mythologies of other nations, such as the Greek and Roman ones. Ovid has expressed this understanding in his work, saying that "no realm will be without lovers, for the stars and the gods hold the heavens" [2].

This view of stars as living beings leads to the idiom **zvezda vodilja** ('what guides someone in life'), which has a semantic equivalent in Italian as **seguire la propria stella** ('to follow one's star; to follow one's destiny, as it was once believed to be written in the stars'). Also, the expression **essere la buona stella di qualcuno** ('to be someone's lucky star; to help someone') refers to the help or fortune that one person brings to another.

If we consider that a star is seen as a living being, these idiomatic expressions become understandable. Namely, if a star truly has an active role in a person's life, it will guide them on the right path, just as it was believed that fate was written in the stars.

In the Italian language, one can also observe a conceptual connection between a famous, well-known, and respected person and a star. This is reflected in a group of idiomatic expressions such as **essere una stella** ('to be a star; to be an important, famous person'), **essere una stella di prima grandezza** ('to be a big star; a person of great and significant name'), and **una stella è una stella** ('to be the best at something'). If these three Italian idioms are considered in relation to the North Star, one could conclude why the expression "star" is used to symbolize perfection. The North Star plays an extraordinary role as the absolute center, with the celestial sphere revolving around it. The entire sky moves around this star, and everything is determined by its position [7]. Furthermore, a star is something brilliant, a bright point in the sky, so anyone compared to a star represents something great, significant, and important in human life. This is a person who is respected, loved, influential, and successful in what they do. Thus, they are at the center, like a shining point.

The expression **dalle stelle alle stalle** ('from the stars to the stables; from wealth to poverty, a person who has faced two extremes') is unique to Italian, but it also reflects the same type of conceptual connection. The expressive quality of the phrase is enhanced by the introduction of the lexical and conceptual component **stalle** (stables), which is in complete contrast to the metaphorical value of **stella** (star), while also achieving a certain phonetic resemblance. This example shows that great attention is paid in the Italian language to the sound experience associated with the words.

After the analysis, the following similarities in the phraseology of Italian and Serbian can be noted. The expressions **to be born under a (un)lucky star** and **nascere sotto una buona stella/nascere sotto una cattiva stella** can be interpreted as semantically equivalent, though there is a slight difference on the lexical level, i.e., in the use of adjectives: in Serbian, it is **srećna/nesrećna** (lucky/unlucky), while in Italian, it is **buona/cattiva** (good/bad).

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has provided a detailed analysis of phraseologisms involving stars in both Serbian and Italian, highlighting the deep cultural and linguistic connections between the two languages. These expressions, rich in metaphorical and symbolic meaning, reflect the shared human fascination with stars and their association with key life concepts such as fate, guidance, fame, and fortune. Despite differences in specific terminology, the phraseologisms explored in both languages often carry parallel meanings, illustrating a common cultural understanding of stars as symbols of destiny, greatness, and even misfortune. The study also revealed that while there are numerous similarities, subtle lexical and structural differences exist, reflecting the unique cultural perspectives

embedded in each language. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the importance of phraseologisms as windows into the cultural and historical contexts that shape them, enriching our understanding of language as both a linguistic and a cultural phenomenon. Through this comparative approach, we can better appreciate how deeply ingrained cultural beliefs and metaphors influence the way people conceptualize and express abstract ideas such as luck, success, and death in everyday language.

5. REFERENCES

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