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## Research Article

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# Pastoral Worlds and Cultural Identity in Northern Albania through Language Memory and Social Practice

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### Abstract

This study examines the pastoral lexicon of northern Albania as a socially embedded system through which cultural identity, collective memory, and environmental ethics are articulated and sustained. Drawing on an ethnolinguistic corpus derived from Gjovalin Shkurtaĳ's lexicographic documentation of the Malësia e Madhe region, the research explores how language mediates relationships among landscape, livelihood, and social organization. Rather than treating pastoral vocabulary as a purely technical register, the study approaches it as a living archive in which lexical items encode moral values, customary law, and patterns of coexistence among humans, livestock, and the mountain environment.

Using a qualitative, interpretive methodology, the analysis focuses on lexical and phraseological units related to spatial orientation, mobility, herding practices, ritual temporality, and animal symbolism within their cultural contexts. The findings indicate that pastoral language reflects a collective worldview shaped by seasonal migration, communal governance of resources, and reciprocal human–nature relations. Expressions associated with grazing rights, shelters, livestock groupings, ritual departures, and euphemistic naming practices illustrate how social cohesion and ethical norms are linguistically constructed and transmitted across generations. By integrating linguistic evidence with anthropological and ecological perspectives, the study situates Albanian pastoral culture within broader European and Mediterranean traditions of mobile livelihoods. It argues that the preservation of pastoral vocabulary is not merely a matter of linguistic heritage but a crucial component of cultural continuity, identity formation, and sustainable relationships with the environment.

**Keywords:** Pastoral culture, cultural identity, collective memory, social organization, language and ecology.

## 1. Introduction

The study of the Albanian lexicon related to pastoral transhumance provides an essential perspective on the interdependence of language, ecology, and culture. In

the highlands of northern Albania, pastoral vocabulary encapsulates centuries of ecological adaptation, collective memory, and moral order. Drawn from Gjovalin Shkurtaĳ's *Fjalor leksiko-frazeologjik dhe etnolinguistik i Malësisë së Madhe* (2021), this corpus preserves linguistic traces of mobility, herding practices, and the intricate coexistence among humans, livestock, and the natural environment. Each lexical unit functions not merely as a signifier of terrain or activity but as a repository of ethnolinguistic knowledge, indexing social organization, environmental ethics, and seasonal temporality. This perspective aligns with previous research on Albanian phraseology, which demonstrates that language operates not only as a means of communication but also as a carrier of collective values, moral norms, and cultural identity transmitted through culturally embedded linguistic forms (Murati & Hysa, 2025). The purpose of this study is to examine this micro-lexicon as a repository of cultural ecology and to interpret how linguistic forms sustain collective understandings of landscape and livelihood in transhumant societies.

Pastoralism and transhumance represent among the most enduring adaptive systems in human history. As Dong et al. (2016) observe, pastoralism occupies nearly one quarter of the Earth's land surface and remains a vital livelihood for millions of people, particularly in mountainous and semi-arid regions where crop agriculture is constrained. Defined by cyclical mobility and ecological reciprocity, transhumance constitutes not only an economic practice but also a social ideology and a moral framework of environmental stewardship. In the Mediterranean and Balkan contexts, transhumance has historically functioned as a dynamic equilibrium between ecological necessity and collective identity (Fabre, 2002). As Porter (2012) notes in the Near Eastern context, this balance between nature and culture reflects "structures and practices of integration" through which mobile and sedentary communities maintained cohesion despite seasonal dispersal.

In northern Albania, these integrative structures are articulated through an elaborate pastoral lexicon that encodes both environmental and juridical relations. Shkurtaĳ's ethnolinguistic documentation reveals that terms such as *kujri* (shared pastures) and *pashtrak* (grazing tax) articulate customary systems of resource management grounded in collective governance. Expressions such as *me dalë n'bjeshkë* (to ascend to the mountains) and *me u ulë prej bjeshket* (to descend from the mountains) encapsulate a rhythm of movement embedded in both language and social practice. This observation corresponds with Ekvall's (1983) assertion that pastoral mobility generates "a culture composed of patterns both sedentary and nomadic", reflecting adaptation to high-altitude environments while preserving communal stability.

The ecological and symbolic dimensions of Albanian pastoralism are further illuminated by ethnographic studies such as Wolff (2024), whose research among shepherds in Kelmend demonstrates that transhumance constitutes not only an economic system but also a form of cultural resistance and self-definition. Shepherds describe their lives as inseparable from the mountains— "the shepherd makes the mountain, and the mountain makes the shepherd" a reciprocal ontology mirrored in the semantic structure of the pastoral lexicon. This ethnographic evidence reinforces

the view of language as a “living archive” of ecological knowledge and cultural continuity.

Across Europe, low-intensity pastoral systems have been shown to sustain both biodiversity and culturally shaped landscapes. As Bignal and McCracken (1994) argue, extensive grazing practices preserve habitats formed through centuries of human–animal interaction. The persistence of such systems in the Albanian Alps reflects a linguistic and ecological heritage that binds communities to place. The Albanian lexicon related to pastures, livestock, and seasonal migration preserves not only nomenclature but also a moral framework of coexistence—a pattern echoed in other pastoral societies documented by Salzman (2004), where equality and hierarchy coexist within adaptive systems of mobility and governance.

Viewed through this interdisciplinary framework, the pastoral lexicon represents more than a remnant of a former economic system; it constitutes an active meaning-making structure that links linguistic form with ecological function. As Porter (2012) emphasizes, mobile pastoralism must be understood as “an integrative force” shaping both social order and civilization. Similarly, contemporary analyses of transhumance as eco-cultural heritage (Wolff, 2024) underscore its continued relevance for sustainable development and identity preservation. By integrating linguistic evidence with ethnographic and ecological perspectives, this study situates the Albanian pastoral lexicon within a broader Mediterranean tradition in which language, mobility, and environment form a triadic system of mutual adaptation.

## **2. Literature Review**

Pastoralism and transhumance have long represented adaptive ecological systems and cultural structures that link human mobility with the sustainable use of natural resources. In the Mediterranean and Balkan contexts, these systems embody both ecological rationality and cultural continuity, intertwining human livelihoods with seasonal rhythms and environmental knowledge. As emphasized by Wolff (2024), transhumance in northern Albania constitutes “a way of being and thinking centred on a relationship to a territory,” in which shepherds and mountains mutually define one another. The practice thus remains both an economic necessity and a cultural symbol, expressing a collective identity grounded in ecological adaptation and resilience.

### **2.1 Historical and Anthropological Contexts**

Anthropological literature situates transhumance within a continuum of mobile pastoralism extending from prehistory to the present. Porter (2012) demonstrates that mobile pastoralism shaped the foundations of early civilizations, functioning as a dynamic force that connected sedentary and nomadic populations in the ancient Near East. Rather than constituting a marginal or peripheral way of life, pastoral mobility was central to “the organization and operation of government, religion, and exchange networks” (Porter, 2012). This perspective challenges the

dichotomy between mobility and statehood and underscores the political and social sophistication inherent in pastoral systems—a framework that also informs historical interpretations of transhumant networks in the Balkans.

In the Albanian Alps, Wolff (2024) characterizes transhumance as “a multi-millennial practice characterized by historic, linguistic, cultural and social specificity”. Shepherds in Kelmend conceptualize their activity not merely as subsistence but as identity, asserting that “no existence is possible outside the practice of transhumance” (Wolff, 2024). This perspective reflects what Schlee (1989) terms the “identity of mobility,” whereby clan organization and pastoral movement operate as mutually reinforcing social principles. Both authors emphasize that mobility functions as a cultural code binding kinship, language, and community cohesion to the cyclical rhythms of the landscape.

This understanding of mobility as a culturally meaningful system is further supported by linguistic evidence from Albanian phraseology, in which pastoral experience constitutes a primary source of figurative conceptualization. Recent research on Albanian animal-based phraseology demonstrates that figurative meanings are systematically structured by culturally embedded knowledge derived from pastoral life. In particular, the natural gender of animals operates as a key organizing principle through which idiomatic expressions encode social roles, moral evaluations, and culturally transmitted models of masculinity and femininity (Murati, 2025).

## **2.2 Pastoralism as a Social System**

From a sociological and ecological perspective, Salzman (2004) defines pastoral societies as systems of “agency and adaptation,” in which environmental uncertainty is managed through flexible social institutions. He cautions against essentialist interpretations that reduce pastoralism to ecological determinism, arguing instead that hierarchy and equality fluctuate according to herd size, territorial access, and patterns of seasonal cooperation. This analytical nuance aligns with Manger’s (1996) ethnographic study of the Hadendowa pastoralists of the Red Sea Hills, who sustain complex redistributive networks enabling survival “on meagre resources” through social reciprocity and adaptive grazing practices.

Similarly, Pratt et al. (1997) observe that pastoralism is “more than a system of livestock production: livestock are the currency of social cohesion as well as of subsistence and trade”. Their policy-oriented analysis underscores the role of pastoral institutions in maintaining both ecological equilibrium and community welfare insights that are directly relevant to the Albanian context, where transhumance continues to underpin collective social organization.

## **2.3 Cultural Landscapes and European Comparisons**

Within Europe, pastoralism has been recognized as a key force in shaping cultural landscapes. The proceedings of *Nature Conservation and Pastoralism in Europe* emphasize that “many of the wildest and most remote parts of Europe are in fact farmland,” where extensive grazing practices have produced “landscapes and semi-

natural habitats on which we now place high nature conservation value” (Bignal et al., 1994). This integration of ecological and cultural dimensions parallels Denis Buchs’s (2007) account of Swiss alpine traditions, in which the *Poya*—the ceremonial ascent to summer pastures—symbolizes collective identity and pastoral heritage. Both cases reveal a shared European ethos of seasonal mobility linking agricultural productivity with cultural expression.

In the Euro-Mediterranean sphere, Fabre (2002) conceptualizes transhumance as both “a relic of the past and a practice of the future,” highlighting its dual role as environmental management strategy and intangible cultural heritage. The transhumance systems of the Crau and Provence, much like those of the Albanian Alps, represent enduring ecocultural systems that reconcile human livelihood with biodiversity conservation. This comparative framework situates Albanian transhumance within a broader continuum of European pastoral traditions increasingly recognized by UNESCO as cultural heritage in need of safeguarding.

#### **2.4 Contemporary Transformations and Sustainability**

Contemporary analyses increasingly interpret pastoralism through the lens of sustainability and climate adaptation. Yanda and Mung’ong’o (2016) describe East African pastoral systems as “unique adaptive responses to climatic variability,” combining indigenous ecological knowledge with flexible mobility strategies (p. vii). Their emphasis on resilience—anchored in community agency and environmental ethics—finds clear parallels in the Albanian shepherds’ calls for UNESCO protection documented by Wolff (2024).

The erosion of transhumance in Kelmend, where the number of active pastoral families declined from approximately 150 in 2015 to fewer than 15 in 2023 (Wolff, 2024), illustrates the vulnerability of such adaptive systems under contemporary socio-economic pressures. Nevertheless, as Dupré (2015, as cited in Wolff, 2024) argues, “pastures can become a pathway to the future,” aligning with sustainability paradigms that view traditional practices as reservoirs of ecological knowledge rather than obsolete livelihoods.

Complementing this perspective, Fontefrancesco et al. (2023) introduce the concept of *foodscape* to analyze the intersection of food, culture, and landscape. In their Albanian case study, they identify traditional pastoral foods and associated vocabulary as key markers of cultural landscape continuity, arguing that “food is the result of networks of relationships that involve the management of environmental resources ... and the language of the local community”. This framework directly supports ethnolinguistic approaches that view pastoral lexicons as repositories of ecological memory and moral values.

#### **2.5 Synthesis**

Taken together, these studies demonstrate that transhumance is not a vestige of the past but an evolving cultural–ecological system encompassing economy, identity, and language. The Albanian lexical corpus associated with pastoral life must therefore be

interpreted within an interdisciplinary framework in which anthropology, ecology, and linguistics converge. As Wolff (2024) concludes, “the shepherd makes the mountain, and the mountain makes the shepherd” a formulation that encapsulates the reciprocal shaping of language, landscape, and identity central to the ethnolinguistic study of Albanian transhumance.

### 3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, lexicological, and ethnolinguistic methodology to examine the lexical field of Albanian transhumance in the Alpine region. The lexical data, drawn exclusively from *Fjalor leksiko-frazeologjik dhe etnolinguistik i Malësisë së Madhe* by Gjovalin Shkurtaj (2021), are treated not merely as dictionary entries but as cultural artefacts encoding social practice, ecological adaptation, and collective worldviews. Only lexical units directly connected to the pastoral triad—human, livestock, and nature—were selected, including terms denoting routes, temporary shelters, animal categories, tools, and idiomatic or proverbial expressions that reflect patterns of coexistence between humans and the environment.

The study proceeds through two analytical stages. First, all lexical and phraseological units are semantically classified according to referential domains, including movement and space, herding practices, and symbolic representations. This taxonomy follows the principle of contextual grouping in semantic field theory and ethnolinguistic typology. Second, each lexical item is interpreted ethnographically by linking meaning, usage, and ecological setting. This interpretive procedure parallels the ethnoarchaeological approach described by Chang (1993), in which mobility is conceptualized as a social ideology as much as an ecological adaptation.

The research design is inductive and interpretive rather than hypothesis driven. The analysis maps how meaning emerges from the corpus itself, revealing interactions among word formation, semantic change, and ecological experience. In keeping with ethnolinguistic methodology, linguistic data are interpreted within their cultural framework: proverbs and idioms are analyzed as reflections of environmental ethics, comparable to what Cella (2010) terms the “biocultural register” of pastoral discourse. Because the vocabulary of transhumance constitutes a living record of human–nature interdependence, the lexicon is examined as part of a coupled human–natural system (Dong et al., 2016). This analytical stance reflects Wolff’s (2024) observations in Kelmend, where shepherds articulate identity and resilience through vocabulary associated with movement and seasonal rhythm.

Field-based ethnographic research further informs interpretation. Wolff’s participant observation among more than 240 shepherds demonstrates that transhumance functions simultaneously as livelihood and cultural memory, while Manger (1996) highlights the socio-economic vulnerability of pastoralists and the adaptive knowledge embedded in oral terminology. Pratt et al. (1997) likewise emphasize that pastoralism extends beyond livestock production to encompass a social institution grounded in communal governance of natural resources. These comparative insights

support treating the Albanian lexical corpus as a reflection of ecological governance and moral order.

The analytical framework also draws on Salzman's (2004) conceptualization of pastoral lexicons as expressions of agency and adaptation, as well as on Porter's (2012) reconceptualization of mobility within broader structures of integration and differentiation that sustain social cohesion. From this perspective, phraseological forms such as *Bariu i mirë njihet në verë e dimër* ("A good shepherd proves himself in summer and winter") encode ethical norms comparable to what Galaty and Johnson (1990) identify as the universal tension between mobility, social order, and ecological balance in pastoral societies.

Finally, the interpretation is situated within European and Mediterranean heritage frameworks that conceptualize transhumance as both ecological practice and cultural landscape (Fabre, 2000; Bignal & McCracken, 1994). This methodological premise aligns with contemporary cultural landscape studies that treat local vocabulary as a repository of environmental knowledge and intangible heritage (Fontefrancesco et al., 2023). Through this approach, the pastoral lexicon is examined not only as a linguistic subsystem but also as evidence of a long-standing dialogue among humans, animals, and the high-mountain environment—a dialogue that continues to shape identity and sustainability in northern Albania.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Pastoral Space

This lexical corpus delineates the semantic field of pastoral space in northern Albanian, demonstrating how language encodes environmental, social, and juridical relations intrinsic to transhumant life. The central term *bjeshk(ë) / bieshk(ë)* denotes the alpine zone of summer pasturing—a landscape characterized by high-altitude meadows, fresh springs, and a cool climate. Within pastoral discourse, this term functions as both an ecological and cultural locus, marking the space to which herds are moved *me dalë n'bieshk* (to ascend for grazing) and from which they later return *me u ulë prej bjeshket* (to descend to the lowlands). Thus, *bjeshkë* encapsulates an entire cycle of seasonal movement, labor, and identity rather than a merely topographic reference.

A set of more specific lexical units—*lavërdâ*, *ledi:n(ë)*, *livad/livat*, *me:gj(ë)*, *ogra:j(ë)*, *okol*, and *ça:jr/e*—further subdivides grazing land according to form, enclosure, vegetation, and use. *Lavërdâ* refers to open, unenclosed meadows, whereas *me:gj(ë)* and *ogra:j(ë)* foreground boundaries that regulate access and ownership. The term *okol* introduces a perceptual and evaluative dimension of landscape, while *ça:jr/e*, derived from the Ottoman loan *çayır*, preserves linguistic traces of historical contact. The plural *livat* extends into idiomatic usage—*E ka kullo:t livadin e vet* (he has aged) and *Ia bân livat dikujt* (to improve someone's situation)—illustrating the metaphorical productivity of pastoral space in social discourse.

A distinct conceptual layer is represented by *merá* and *kujri:*, denoting communal

pastures belonging to the village or *bajrak*. These terms encode customary law and social equity, as grazing rights derive from collective membership rather than private ownership. As such, they function as linguistic repositories of traditional systems of common resource management embedded directly in the lexicon.

Finally, *bari:n(ë)* and *pashtrak/pashtrik* articulate the fiscal and normative dimensions of pastoral life. *Bari:n(ë)* denotes a grazing tax, while *pashtrak*, explicitly referenced in the *Kanun*, marks territorial exclusivity within the boundaries of a *flamur*. The explanatory statement *Mali belik kullotet pa pashtrik* (The common mountain is grazed without tax) highlights the legal distinction between communal and restricted pastures. Collectively, these terms integrate environmental description, social hierarchy, and legal order into a cohesive semantic system.

#### 4.2 Functional and Processual Dimensions

This lexical group foregrounds the functional and processual dimensions of pastoral life, illustrating how Albanian encodes labor division, mobility, and the temporality of herding practices. The semantic field extends from social roles to verbal and nominal forms describing cyclical movement and seasonal residence.

The term *bjeshkatar,-e* / *bieshkatar,-e* designates both a highland inhabitant and a seasonal pastoral worker, fusing dwelling and occupation into a single identity rooted in altitude and self-sufficiency. By contrast, *çoban* functions as a general term for herdsman, yet displays remarkable lexical productivity: *çoban dhê:sh*, *çoban berresh*, *çoban dhi:sh*, *çoban shtjerrash*, *çoban vjetash*, each specifying age, gender, or species of livestock. The proverb *Çobani i mirë i njeh llê:t e veta* (A good shepherd knows his sheep) extends pastoral expertise into a broader moral injunction concerning responsibility and social order.

The feminine form *çobane:sh(ë)* enriches this semantic field by marking gender differentiation and acknowledging women's participation in seasonal herding communities.

Verbal forms such as *bjeshkohem* / *bieshkohem*, *bjeshkoj* / *bieshkoj*, *çobanoj*, *veroj*, and *dimnoj* encode the cyclical rhythm of transhumance. *Bjeshkohem* denotes spending the summer in the high pastures, combining temporal duration with topographic movement, while *bjeshkoj* emphasizes intentional departure aligned with the pastoral calendar. The citation *Bagti:n e im e kem pa bjeshkua gjithmonë n'Kelmend* (We have always pastured our livestock in Kelmend) situates this practice within lineage and territorial continuity. *Çobanoj* underscores custodianship, whereas *veroj* and *dimnoj* linguistically mirror seasonal alternation.

Nominal and adverbial forms such as *çobani*: (shepherding; a group of shepherds) and *çobanisht* (in a shepherd-like manner; with whatever is available) articulate social organization and lifestyle. Together, these forms encode pastoralism as an integrated system of identity, labor, and ecological knowledge.

#### 4.3 Ritualized Temporality and Collective Ethos

This lexical group captures the ritualized temporality and collective ethos surrounding the annual transhumant migration between the lowlands (*vërrija*) and the high mountain

pastures (*bjeshkët*). The key term *ço:j(ë)* denotes the time of departure and signifies an institutionally regulated moment marking seasonal transition. The utterance *Ishim n'ço:j, se doshim me dalë n'bieshk* (We were in the time of departure, as we intended to go to the mountains) illustrates its function as both temporal marker and communal event. Ethnographic detail reveals that the timing of caravans was predetermined to ensure equitable access to pastures, embedding fairness and coordination within the concept of *çoja*. Preparations for departure—including livestock caravans and dairy-processing tools—added a performative dimension. Speech acts such as *Gati me u çua?! (Ready to set out?!)* and *Për hajr çoja! (May the departure bring good fortune!)* frame departure as ritual renewal.

The expression *Nâ:ta e ço:j(ë)s* (the night of departure) condenses the emotional and festive core of the ritual, marked by shared meals, dairy products, and symbolic drinking. Linguistically, *ço:j(ë)* becomes a metonym for collective mobility and moral order, reconstituting time, space, and community through movement.

#### 4.4 Livestock Groupings

This lexical corpus delineates typologies of livestock groupings, reflecting systems of ownership, cooperation, and moral economy. The term *bërzânuna* refers to livestock entrusted to herdsmen under contracts specifying dairy returns, revealing a pre-monetary exchange system grounded in trust and accountability.

*Bra:ve* denotes provisionally assembled livestock, reflecting subsistence pragmatism, while *grigj/e* (flock) carries strong metaphorical resonance, as in *Grigjen pa çoban e çart ujku* (A flock without a shepherd is attacked by the wolf), encoding principles of leadership and cohesion.

*Gjâ:* functions as a conceptual pivot, meaning livestock, wealth, and livelihood. Idioms such as *shpirt gjâjet* (the soul of the living herd) crystallize the moral bond between humans and animals. The term *luori,-ja* completes the taxonomy by denoting mixed cattle herds, collectively articulating an ethical ecology of coexistence.

#### 4.5 Spatial Typologies of Human and Animal Dwellings

This lexical group maps architectural forms and spatial organization within the pastoral landscape. Terms such as *bûn,-i* and *dban,-i* denote shepherds' dwellings, functioning as fixed reference points within mobile life. Collective forms (*dbana, bûnisht(ë), dbani:sht(ë)*) extend habitation into ecological systems that integrate waste recycling and subsistence.

Animal shelters—*gjie, koçak, gjâ:m/ën, mriz, dimni:sht(ë)*—encode age specificity, natural refuge, shade, and seasonal alternation. Together, these terms delineate a semiotic ecology linking dwelling, mobility, and sustainability.

#### 4.6 Pastoral Care

This lexical group documents the vocabulary of daily livestock management. Verbs such as *lshoj, mqesoj, niell, and mrizoj* articulate routines of release, guidance, recall, and rest, embedding care within ecological rhythms. The auditory lexemes

*hallaka:m(ë)* and *hallakatet* illustrate how voice operates as defense and coordination within pastoral soundscapes.

#### 4.7 Euphemistic Layer of Pastoral Language

This corpus highlights euphemistic avoidance strategies for naming dangerous animals. Euphemisms for snakes (*aj i dheut*, *aj i paëmni*, *nargurit*) and predators (*aj i malit*, *goylidhun*, *pagoj*) reflect beliefs in the performative power of language. Through indirection and personification, speech functions as a protective ritual, transforming fear into moral restraint.

Collectively, these euphemisms demonstrate how pastoral language operates simultaneously as ecological classification and ethical safeguard, sustaining a worldview in which words mediate the fragile balance between humans, animals, and the mountain environment.

#### 4.8 Ritualized Greetings of Shepherds

This lexical group encompasses the ritualized greetings used by Albanian shepherds, which express respect, solidarity, and collective well-wishing within the pastoral world. These expressions function not merely as conventional salutations but as performative speech acts that affirm shared identity and reinforce social cohesion among herders and travelers in the highlands.

The most frequent greeting, *Mir bar!* (Good grazing!), along with its emphatic variant *Mir bar, marshallah!* (Good grazing, may it be blessed!), is addressed to shepherds actively tending their flocks. This exchange performs social recognition of labor and prosperity, transforming routine encounters into acts of verbal blessing. Similarly, expressions such as *Baroshi mi:r(ë)!* and *Mos i pa:t syni i keq!* (May your flock be good! May the evil eye not see them!) combine admiration with apotropaic intent, invoking divine and communal protection over the animals.

When shepherds are observed setting out for the mountains, greetings such as *Bjeshkoshi shnosh!* or *Bjeshkoshi me t'shno:sht!* (May your mountain journey be safe!) ritualize the act of transhumance by embedding it within a moral framework of health, endurance, and safe return. These formulaic blessings elevate seasonal mobility into a shared rite of passage within the symbolic geography of the highlands.

Other greetings are context specific and correspond closely to the cyclical rhythms of pastoral labor. The expression *Mirë n'shtrü:g(ë)!* (Good milking!) accompanies the milking process, integrating practical activity with goodwill. Likewise, *Mi:r ën mriz!* or *Mir mriz!* (Good resting in the shade!) is addressed to shepherds sheltering with their flocks during midday heat, acknowledging rest as an integral component of pastoral order rather than an interruption of work.

Taken together, these expressions constitute a verbal code of mutual recognition and ethical alignment—a micro-ritual language in which labor, blessing, and community converge. Through such greetings, the pastoral lexicon preserves not only conventions of etiquette but also core values of care, solidarity, and harmonious coexistence with the natural environment.

## 5. Conclusion

The lexical and ethnolinguistic analysis of pastoral terminology confirms that language functions as a living archive of ecological knowledge, social relations, and symbolic thought linked to transhumance. The lexicon examined demonstrates that words encoding herd movement, pasture management, and moral norms of coexistence among humans, animals, and land constitute an integrated cultural system rather than a merely occupational vocabulary. Each lexical unit transmits knowledge about landscape, seasonal rhythms, and customary law, anchoring a worldview in which nature is not a passive resource but an active participant in social life.

This linguistic ecology resonates with broader anthropological interpretations of transhumance as both an adaptive strategy and an ethical order. As Wolff (2024) documents among the shepherds of Kelmend, transhumance represents “a civilisation of mobility rooted in historical, linguistic, and moral continuity”. It is not only a form of subsistence but also a marker of cultural identity and resilience, wherein “no existence is possible outside the practice of transhumance”. Such ethnographic insights align closely with the Albanian lexicon itself, where expressions such as *me dalë n’bjeshkë* (to ascend to the mountain pastures) and *me u ul prej bjeshke* (to descend) encode cyclical temporality and social reciprocity rather than simple spatial displacement.

Comparable ethnolinguistic and social dynamics are evident across pastoral societies. Schlee (1992) observes that among nomadic herders, “mobility is not chaos but a structured form of social organisation sustained by kinship and alliance”. Salzman (2004) similarly emphasizes that equality and hierarchy coexist in pastoral systems, producing what he terms a “flexible moral economy of autonomy and solidarity”. These theoretical perspectives clarify how the Albanian pastoral lexicon embodies both independence and interdependence: terms such as *kujri* (shared grazing rotation) and *merá* (commons) linguistically encode collective governance, while *pashtrak* marks the limits of individual use rights. This lexical dualism mirrors the balance between personal responsibility and communal stewardship that underpins transhumant societies.

From a comparative perspective, Galaty and Johnson (1990) define pastoralism as “an adaptive system linking mobility, labor, and land through reciprocal human–animal relations”. This triadic model closely parallels the Albanian conceptual framework of human–livestock–nature that structures the lexicon analyzed in this study. The Albanian case thus illustrates what Porter (2012) identifies in Near Eastern contexts as the integration of mobile and sedentary components within a single social and ideological fabric (p. 3), suggesting that mobility in pastoral societies functions not as a deviation from stability but as a complementary principle of cohesion.

At the same time, the vocabulary of transhumance in northern Albania reflects an indigenous ecological rationality consistent with sustainable land use. Lexical items such as *livade* and *bjeshkë* encode not only geographic zones but also time-bound

practices of rest, rotation, and renewal, aligning with conservationist understandings of low-intensity agriculture. As Bignal and McCracken (1994) note, traditional pastoral systems maintain biodiversity precisely through extensive and rotational management. In this sense, the pastoral lexicon serves as a repository of what Pratt et al. (1997) describe as customary natural resource management, in which herders act as custodians rather than exploiters of the land.

The symbolic dimension of this lexicon further reveals an environmental ethic grounded in coexistence. Proverbs and idiomatic expressions articulate a moral equilibrium among endurance, labor, and respect for ecological limits. This corresponds to what Cella (2010) characterizes as a shift from exploitation to stewardship in mature pastoral consciousness. In the Albanian context, however, this ethical orientation is not abstractly theorized but linguistically embedded: the grammar and semantics of pastoral speech themselves encode the interdependence of human vitality and environmental sustainability.

In conclusion, the lexicon of transhumance in northern Albania encapsulates a sustainable cultural logic in which economy, ecology, and identity converge. By integrating ethnolinguistic evidence with anthropological theory, this study demonstrates that pastoral language functions simultaneously as archive and blueprint—preserving inherited knowledge while actively shaping practices of mobility and reciprocity. The Albanian case thus shows that the preservation of traditional vocabulary is not merely a philological concern but a form of cultural and ecological continuity. Through its words, highland speech continues to articulate what Wolff (2024) aptly terms a “living grammar of balance” between people, animals, and the mountain landscapes that sustain them.

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