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Proverbs and Other Stable Sayings Show a Foreigner the Traditions and Cultures of the Russian People

Tatyana Gennadevna Bochina^{1a}, Anastasiia Alexandrovna Korshunova^{2a}, Sholpan Kuzarovna Zharkynbekova^{3b}

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Abstract

It is obvious that proverbs have their roots in the cultures of any society. Russian proverbs and sayings show a foreigner the traditions, customs, and way of thinking of the Russian people. In the current study, by monitoring posts on social networks and using passive observations of the speech process of native speakers, the communicative situations in which paremias were regularly resorted to were identified. The authors provide a review of the existing research in this area and conclude that it is necessary to conduct an additional experiment in order to obtain the most objective results. The choice of primary material for the questionnaire is explained, and preliminary results of a comparison of various sources of paremias are presented. Examples of formulations of questions proposed to informants are given that make it possible to identify not only the fact of recognition of paremias, but also their understanding. Eventually, further ways of research development are presented.

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¹ Professor, Email: grytsevych.d@yahoo.com (Corresponding Author)
Tel: +7-999-1572326

² MA, Email: alexandrovna.korshuno@yahoo.com

³ Professor, Email: zharkynbekova_shk@enu.kz

^a Kazan Federal University, Russia

^b L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan

1. Introduction

A proverb is a form of expression that usually has some instructive history and story behind it. Many of these stories have been forgotten, and the background of some proverbs is not clear to some people; however, it is used in speech. Well-known scientists and linguists have not yet found a comprehensive and complete definition of the word proverb (Mieder & Mieder, 1977). However, in this regard, very valuable research has been done, and credible interpretations have been provided. Proverbial literature is one of the most literary branches of literature and the most practical and, at the same time, the most popular. While in terms of structure and literary style, it is the most beautiful and prominent and, in a word, a masterpiece of various expressive styles. In the folk literature and culture of most countries, there are hundreds of proverbs that are beyond count, sometimes mixed with humor and sometimes with tradition. Sometimes it is somewhat derogatory and humiliating, and sometimes it is respectful, and most of them have origins and generative propositions. However, people use many proverbial words and phrases to communicate verbally with each other (Resnikow, 1937). Due to its social, cultural, traditional, and modern relations, human beings have always needed an expressive and, at the same time, short and concise language. Proverbs have always met this need due to their short structure and long meaning. Almost the root and background of most proverbs is an old story and anecdote that must have a historical fact. This story usually happens among a group of people, and a special proverb is formed from the side of this story.

The question of forming a paremiological minimum was first raised by Permyakov. Paremiological minimum is understood as “the minimum composition of proverbs and other stable sayings known to all native speakers of the Russian language” (Permyakov, 1988, p. 27). To find the units that will be included in the minimum from the many Russian language paremias, scientists decided to conduct a linguistic experiment consisting of a two-stage questionnaire of a group of informants. As a result, about 500 units of the paremiological minimum were allocated.

A global image of each language paraemiologically reflects a general view based on the general stereotypes of ethnic-cultural society about life activities. According to Shaimardanova, Akhmetova, Zorina, and Garipova (2017), a global picture of gender paremiology can be found in any cultural group. They emphasized that gender metaphor occurs in the process of evaluating different types of social and natural phenomena and has a permanent effect on them. However, this experiment, as well as the idea of the formation of a paremiological minimum, was criticized. A number of defects were noted, due to which the results of the study can be considered as subjective (Ennsner-Kananen, Escobar, & Bigelow, 2017). First, the selection of the primary material for the experiment was carried out by the researcher independently, relying only on his linguistic competence.

Secondly, the informants who took part in the survey lived in one region, i.e., Moscow and the Moscow region. Also, the number of informants was recognized as insufficient, i.e., 300 people in the first stage and 100 in the second.

According to V. Mokienko, the idea of the existence of a paremiological minimum “for all” speakers of a particular language seems to be impossible since the use of proverbs and sayings is individual (Mokienko, 2010, p. 10).

Despite the validity of criticism of the experiment conducted by G. Permyakov and the controversy of the idea of a unified paremiological minimum, the prospect of forming a list of paremias that are in the “zone of recognition and correct understanding of the meaning” by all speakers of linguistic culture gives a number of unique opportunities, especially from the point of view of the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language (Khabibullina, Shtyrlina, & Guzi, 2019, p. 77).

The purpose of this article is to develop a set of methods to form the paremiological minimum for studying Russian as a foreign language, using the experience of previous studies and modern information technologies.

2. Theoretical Framework

A review of the literature in the field of proverbs shows that most of the time, proverbs

simply move from one set to another and have no context. Many Russian compilers list proverbs from popular Dai collections without updating their currency. Vanyushkina (2007) believes that in the field of Russian demographic research, both chronic research, emphasizing tradition and proverbs, and simultaneous research, focusing on the frequency of single proverbs at a particular time, are still rare (Vanyushkina, 2007). Grigory Permyakov's pioneering work on a paremiological minimum has made a significant contribution to the field. Permyakov (1988) conducted the first statistical study of paramiology among 250 Muscovites and obtained at least 300 statements with the highest diagnostic rate in his study. Since then, little work has been done to complete his demographic research. Classification is still one of the biggest breakwaters in Russia, and there is still no proper theoretical framework for such classification. Russian proverbs are classified in two main ways: alphabetically (according to the first or most important word) and according to the subject. The basis of classification based on the keywords of proverbs is not logical. Parmology research does not have universally recognized criteria for selecting keywords. Depending on the goals of the speaker/writer or the interpretation of the listener/reader or researcher, a similar proverb may be categorized with different keywords. Some Russian researchers try to solve the problem by ignoring the keywords in favor of the formal properties of proverbs. Fattakhova and Kulkova (2014) believe that the source of paroemiology is an independent philological discipline that studies paroemiological units (proverbs, sayings, country lore, riddles, etc.). The question of whether to consider parmology as a discipline independent of philosophy became relevant due to the fact that much of the new research seems to be set up for proverbs, sayings, and phrases. Their article contains a review of the Russian and German peripheral literature and paraemiography. In addition, the authors define the independence of the parmological level, define parmium, and describe the main methods of studying parmium. According to Kulkova, Fattakhova, and Zinecker (2015), analysis of paremiological material on denotation-referential level lets us mark the presence of the nuclear component of the semantic configuration of prescriptions—a performative predicate – only in the implicated

form, implying the presence of the performative verb “admonish” beyond the semantic propositions in a speech (Kulkova, Fattakhova, & Zinecker, 2015, p. 359). The main contents of the semantic propositions in regulatory-prescriptive paremiological texts refer to the designation of the prescription purpose. This is a regular phenomenon in the paremiological statements, which has firmly entrenched in commonly used sentences of the generalized-personal type, both in Russian and in German. The central and obligatory component of the prescribed statements, as it was noted earlier, is the subject, or the main purpose of prescription, due to the nomination of the action that you want to perform and the conditions under which it can be committed. The performative verb that accompanies the purpose of prescription is omitted in the omens’ text, which is frequent in colloquial speech and is perceived by the recipient in a natural way. The fourth component, explicating the result meaning of the prescribed action is not obligatory, and its presence in the paremiological text is explained by the necessity to argue the prescribed activity if the prescription is tough and requires mitigation by attracting a motivational component, or if it may seem unconvincing to the recipient. Their reviews provide an overall picture of the interaction of the paremiac cognitive-semantic structure with the non-verbal content expressed in them. It is found that reality is not only indirectly displayed in the omens’ language structure, but it is also divided and organized according to its linguistic vision in this or that ethnic group. Formal and substantive features of the folk omens have been set forth. Prospects of further research are in the conduction of similar hermeneutical research dealing with paremiological texts in other languages. Mokienko (2010, p. 10) contends that the authors of the dictionary “Anti-proverbs in the Russian language” emphasize that anti-proverbs are semantic antipodes or opposites of traditional paroimias. Antiproverbs are considered as modified paroimias with changes at different language levels. These parymological units can be interpreted without a specific context and act as retribution. Anti-proverbs are new units of parmology created with a pattern of traditional proverbs and sayings. Sergienko, Kotova, and Muschinskaya (2020) mention that the Russian proverbs with ethnonyms from the Russian paremiological minimum and their Ukrainian

and Belorussian proverbial parallels were carefully checked regarding their usage in the modern mass media and other forms of Internet communication (Sergienko, Kotova, & Muschinskaya, 2020). The popularity of these proverbs in Russian can be partly explained by the fact that Russian mass media often quotes the classics, and all the three proverbs were used by famous Russian writers in their well-known novels and perhaps ensured their long life. The proverb “An uninvited guest is worse than a Tatar” doesn’t mean to offend the Tatars any longer; in most occurrences, it applies to general situations describing something unexpected and unpleasant. The proverb “Be patient, Cossack, you will be the ataman” has a positive connotation based on the stereotype of a Cossack as a free man, a brave soldier whose life could be full of hardships, but still, there was a chance to become an ataman for everyone. The Cossacks still form a kind of sub-ethnic community, and their self-identity is very strong. Hence, the high usage of this proverb on the Internet both in its direct meaning as well as in general situations when somebody is asked to be patient. The electronic dictionary of current East Slavonic proverbs will include all the three Russian proverbs with ethnonyms from the Russian paremiological minimum since all three of them are actively used in modern Russian.

3. Methodology

An analysis of the works of famous Russian-speaking paremiologists gave an impetus to define the main preconditions for a paremiological minimum creation, which helped to find the main problems, existing mainly in the subjective nature of such studies and the low frequency of use of paremias in the speech of modern native speakers.

Using the method of passive observations of native speakers of the Russian language in various communicative situations, including the content of texts posts and comments on popular social networks, gave an opportunity to identify the main cases of using paremias and to make sure that paremiological units are part of modern Russian speech.

To form the paremiological minimum of speakers of Russian linguistic culture, a sociolinguistic experiment is planned, taking into account the main errors of the experiment

made by G. Permyakov, entailing the subjectivity of the results. The main part of the experiment will be a large-scale questionnaire conducted in real and virtual formats, in which more than 3,000 native Russian speakers living in different regions of Russia and having different social statuses will take part. To form the primary list of paremeological units offered to informants in the body of the questionnaire, the comparative method is used. The following sources are used as material:

- 1) The lexical minimum for Russian as a foreign language. Level C1.
- 2) The paremiological minimum made by Permyakov (1988).
- 3) The core of the main paremiological fund made by Ivanov (2015).
- 4) The linguo-cultural minimum in the mirror of the “anti-phrases” internet game created by Chen Yaxing.
- 5) The paremiological minimum in the vocabulary of the linguistic personality of modern created by L. Petrova (2018).

Analysis of the obtained data and quantitative calculation allows us to select a list of parameters that forms the basis of the questionnaire. A unit occurring in three or more sources will be included in the list of paremias, which constitute the primary material for the study.

4. Results

Since at least the early 1970s, folklore scholars like Grigorii Permyakov have argued that truly understanding any language, and the world view represented by that language, requires not only that speakers understand certain words and grammatical rules, but also that they understand a “certain minimum of widely used paremiological clichés” (Permyakov, 1988 p. 92). This essential minimal knowledge of proverbs is referred to as the paremiological minimum. Efforts to establish a prescriptive paremiological minimum need not be limited to identifying the most familiar proverbs, however. Efforts to establish a prescriptive paremiological minimum from a “cultural literacy” perspective are, by definition, aimed at determining what people ought to know, but the determination of what people ought to know is not necessarily a decision that will be based purely on normative data. Scholars who embrace the cause of cultural literacy might argue that some well-known proverbs are prescriptively trivial (i.e.,

not important for attaining cultural literacy) despite their familiarity, whereas other, much less familiar, proverbs are prescriptively desirable (e.g., because of historical or moral significance) and therefore merit efforts at “popularization” or “revival.” In this line of reasoning, then, information about the current frequency of proverb use and proverb familiarity may be informative, but it is not necessary and certainly not sufficient for establishing a paremiological minimum. Although the initial calls to establish paremiological minima for each language may have been largely prescriptively motivated, work to establish a paremiological minimum may also be motivated by a more purely descriptive agenda. In a descriptive sense, there is value in differentiating between better-known and lesser-known proverbs, even without advocating that everyone ought to learn and to know at least the more familiar proverb.

In modern studies, the paremiological picture of the world is presented as a fragment of the linguistic picture of the world presented by the paremiological fund of the ethnos. The language picture of the world as a whole coincides with the reflection of the world in the minds of people and is the broadest concept, it reflects the ‘naïve’ worldview of the people. The study of language with these pictures gives significant results in the field of cognitive linguistics, making it relevant. Moreover, the relevance of the study is conditioned by the fact that parametric adjectives as components of the paremiological picture of the world in the considered languages are insufficiently studied in the comparative aspect, while their significance and value are high enough (Kajumova, Galiullina, Yusupov, & Sibgatullina, 2019).

Parmological units have specific functions and structures and also include various linguistic elements. In our research, we focus on newly formed paroimias (new paroimias, antiproverbs, folk aphorisms, quasi-aphorisms or quasi-proverbs, neoproverbs, etc.). Newly formed paroimias nearly correlate with antiproverbs. Today, the term of anti-prover is not defined clearly. However, anti-proverbs are opposed to traditional paroimias and are influenced by extralinguistic factors in people's lives. They are adapted to the living conditions of a particular ethnic group. People evaluate the new state of life and compare it with the social standards shown in traditional parvymia. As a

result, they revise and modify these normative units to express new facts and correct them in their own language (Vlavatskaya & Zaikina, 2019).

Passive observations of spontaneous speech of native Russian speakers showed a low level of frequency of use of paremias. Nevertheless, there is a number of communicative tasks for which Russian speakers prefer to use proverbs and sayings (Ren et al., 2019). An appeal to common wisdom is used as a win-win argument in a dispute. In this case, the speaker often begins to build his sentence with the phrase “No wonder they say that” (Fattakhova, Faizullina, & Mubarakshina, 2017). However, it should be remembered that with the help of paremias one can prove various points of view, including those that are opposite to each other.

For example, the proverb “Constant dropping wears away a stone” will prove that even a minimal impact, applied constantly, can lead to a significant result (Ren et al., 2019). To prove the opposite point of view that in a situation of inequality of forces, there is nothing left but to obey, since any action will be absolutely useless, is the saying “Don't you kick against the pricks!..” Paremias are often used in the communicative situations of encouraging (“There is no silver lining”), motivation (“A cat in gloves catches no mice”), admonition (“Work done, have your fun”).

Analysis of posts on the popular social network Instagram demonstrated the use of paremias with an ornamental purpose, that is, with the goal of “decorating” a text (Margulis, 2015). Often, paremias are used as the only signature under an image, while the picture itself and the contents of the proverb or saying are not always related to each other. Paremias are regularly used in hashtags for posts. For example, about 30 thousand posts with a hashtag in the form of the proverb “It is good to be visiting, but it is better at home” are found, and over 50 thousand posts with the hashtag “It is good to be visiting” (McCann, 2017, p. 110).

One of the problems in the framework of an objective experiment in order to identify the paremiological minimum is the formation of a list of units that will go into the body of the questionnaire. As noted above, we selected five sources for the formation of this material. The goal of combining five different lists of paremias is to achieve objective results. Let us

consider each of them in more detail. The lexical minimum for Russian as a foreign language C1 includes 67 proverbs and sayings. The material from this source is of particular value to us since it was selected by the methodologists as necessary for study by foreign citizens who plan to work as philologists, translators, editors, diplomats, journalists, and managers in the Russian-speaking team (Ganapolskaya, 2020).

The paremiological minimum of Permyakov, the creator of the idea of the existence of such a list of units, was identified through an experiment and consisted of 500 units (Permyakov, 1988). The Permyakov minimum has been repeatedly criticized; however, it is of interest in this study as one of the sources for the selection of primary material. Comparative composition of this paremiological minimum with other sources is also recognized as promising. Paremiological fund is understood as a linguistic category, combining proverbs and sayings that are widely used at different stages of the historical development of the language (Ivanov & Petrushevskaya, 2015). The core of the fund includes the most recognizable paremias. These units were identified by conducting an experiment; more than 90% of informants marked them as "known". About 30 paremias from the core of the fund are not included in the minimum of Permyakov (1988).

The paremiological minimum in the vocabulary of the linguistic personality of modern students, developed by Petrova (2018), was included in the list of sources due to the lack of future questioning of persons under the age of 18 as informants. This minimum was formed in 2007 through a survey of students. It consists of 174 units. The main task of forming a paremiological minimum is the selection of units for study by foreigners to make communication in Russian more successful. Of particular difficulty for students are anti-phrases, for a correct understanding of which it is necessary to recognize traditional paremias in the content of anti-phrases, to know their meaning, and to understand the semantics of a new phrase (Orlando, 2008). For this reason, our sources include a list of paremias, often acting as prototypes for such sayings (Palekha, Bastrikov, Bastrikova, & Cui, 2017).

Comparison of the above lists of paremias gives us the opportunity to allocate units for the primary questionnaire material. It includes paremias found in three or more sources. Another task when working with these sources is to compare units included in the lexical minimum C1 with the paremias from the rest of the lists. A number of paremias were identified that are included in the lexical minimum, but are not contained in other sources and, conversely, proverbs and sayings were found recorded in three or more lists but are not a part of the lexical minimum C1. This fact also confirms the need to form a paremiological minimum of the Russian language, including for its use in compiling lexical minima in the Russian language. In addition to resolving the issue of the primary material for the experiment, it is necessary to pay attention to the nature of the questions offered to informants. In early questionnaires, the testers were asked questions aimed at identifying the fact of recognition of paremia, but the adequacy of its perception was not tested. We propose to make two blocks of questions: recognition and understanding of paremiological units. In the "recognition" block, the following task formulations are presented: "Choose the correct continuation of the following phrase", "insert the missing word", "choose the correct version of the proverb / saying", and the rest. The "understanding" block consists of tasks such as "choose the meaning of a proverb", "choose a phrase that is suitable for describing the given situation", and the rest.

5. Discussion

The creation of several questionnaire variants, built on the same model, but filled with different material, helps to reduce the testing time to 7-10 minutes and, thereby, attracts more informants. It is planned to attract more than 3,000 Russian speakers living in different regions of Russia and having different social statuses to participate in the experiment. To realize this idea, it is proposed to use the Google Forms service during the survey and distribute the form using popular social networks.

The first three questions of the questionnaire are dedicated to the personality of the informant: information about the region of residence, gender, and age of the participant. An analysis of the data obtained helps not only to verify the wide geography of the study but

also to compare the results, thereby making a conclusion about the paremiological literacy of residents of different regions.

Paremiology is researching the origin, development, and existence of paremies, in other words, proverbs, folk and weather sayings, and riddles. Attempts to establish a paremiological minimum have still been oriented on the concept of the set of proverbs that all members of society know or an average adult is expected to know. So the concept of paremiological minimum has been, in fact, reduced to proverbs, which an average adult is expected to be familiar with. Thus, the proper term used should be the proverbial minimum. The traditional methods used to elicit answers from informants are based on the lists of proverbs or proverb beginnings, and informants are asked to state their active or passive knowledge or add the missing part. Another method used is to list all the proverbs which informants could think of during a certain period. One of the first scholars who used demographic methods with proverbs was the American sociologist William Albig (1931). A total of 68 university students were asked to list all the proverbs they could think of during a thirty-minute period. A total of 1443 proverbs were written down, out of which 442 were different proverbs (Albig, 1931). The proposed algorithm allows to avoid the errors made in previous experiments and achieve adequate results. The results obtained by comparing the groups of paremias identified by various scholars and conducting a large-scale questionnaire will make a significant contribution to paremiology and the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language. Paremiological minima have been done for some other languages as well. The Czech paremiological minimum by Schindler (Schindler, 1993) is based on a list of proverb beginnings to which informants were asked to add the missing part. Čermák (2001), the author of another paremiological minimum of Czech, criticizes this approach of Schindler naming following problems: The problem is, “where does this list come from and on what basis is it based and selected, since, obviously, one cannot go out asking people to answer several thousand questions, i.e., the full list based on a large proverb dictionary” (Čermák, 2001, p. 17). The second problem is more subtle. Due to the linear character of our speech, it is obvious that it is the beginning of one’s

speech, rather than its end, which should be used in the elicitation method and suggested in such a research

The proposed algorithm for the formation of the Russian paremiological minimum includes the following key positions:

- participation in the experiment of more than 3,000 native speakers, living in different regions of Russia and having different social statuses;
- reducing testing time by creating several questionnaire options built on the same model in order to attract more informants;
- the presence in the survey of questions about the personality of the informants (region, gender, and age);
- the comparison of five different sources to form the primary list of paremias for the questionnaire material;
- the creation of two blocks of questions: “recognition” and “understanding” of paremiological units.

The research, based on the described algorithm, involves obtaining objective results.

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