

RUSSIAN PROVERBS ABOUT LOVE AND THEIR PAREMIOLOGICAL REFLECTION IN BULGARIAN AND POLISH CULTURES

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Abstract. This tri-lingual Russian-Bulgarian-Polish research, based on the Russian paremiological minimum, is looking into paremiological units in relation to Love and the ways people of different but yet similar cultures express their feelings through proverbs. The source of the current research is the Russian-Slavonic Dictionary of proverbs published in 2000 by M. Yu. Kotova .

The actuality of all the proverbs in the research is reviewed and cross-checked against the results of the sociolinguistic paremiological experiment conducted in 2003 – *Handbooks of a Paremiographer: Issue 1: Bulgarian paremiological parallels of the Russian paremiological minimum (2013) and Issue 6: Polish paremiological parallels of the Russian paremiological minimum (2019)*. The author offers literal translations of all of the proverbs selected for this research.

The aim of this paper is to uncover possible lacunarities and culturally-tied expressions in the corpora of European cultural memory, particularly in Russian, Bulgarian and Polish. While targeting proverbs of related Slavic languages, this study is approaching the proverbs from an imagology angle targeting culture-specific lacunae and investigating close relationships within the languages of the Slavic group.

Keywords: Russian; Bulgarian; Polish; proverbs; love; lacunarity; paremiology

1. Introduction

Proverbs are reflections of important aspects of human life, related to both internal and external worlds. Love as a feeling is a display of the internal world of a person (E. Korol, 2015). The feeling itself has many grades and variations, the object of it can be another human, a relative or a friend, it can be an animal or even something inanimate like a trinket, a flower or a place. The topic of the proverbs in this research is Love between a man and a woman in the perspective of Russian culture.

There is a total of 30 Russian proverbs that has been extracted from the RSPAS (Russian-Slavonic Dictionary of Proverbs with English Parallels),

along with their Bulgarian and Polish parallels and variants (if such exist). In RSSPAS the proverbs are further divided by 8 sub-topics: mutual love, non-mutual love, love – indifference, love – hate, lack of choice, a result of a love drama, love at an older age, wedding. Some proverbs, for example *Любовь горы свернёт* [lit. *Love can move mountains*] and *Стерпится – слюбится* [lit. *Once endured – will become love*], have been mentioned under more than one topic.

The comparison of two languages, or, in a broader perspective, two cultures, allows for determining both similarities and differences. The latter are most discernible in the case of cross-linguistic gaps, created by units in Russian with zero equivalents in the target language of this research, Bulgarian. The term stems from the Latin word *lacuna* meaning ‘gap’ or ‘lake’. The notion of lacunae was first suggested with reference to the gaps in a text, represented by non-equivalent lexical units and other culture-bound items, in the French-Canadian School (Vinay and Darbelnet, 1958).

The main goal of this paper – paremiological lacunarity – is an aspect of paremiology, which is not widely spread in paremiological research. We can mention the studies of the Russian researchers E. S. Abramova, T. G. Nikitina, M. Y. Kotova and the works of the Polish researcher Joanna Szerszunowicz.

The terminology, as introduced by Prof. M. Yu. Kotova, the current research recognises **Complete lacunarity** as a gap of a proverbial parallel to a foreign proverb, as a sign of a situation, that is **unique** for one culture and has no proverbial parallels in one other language.

Strong fragmental lacunarity is a specific characteristic of a proverb, as a sign of a situation, that **does** have paremiological parallels in another language, but has a **unique** inner form. **Weak fragmental lacunarity** is a specific characteristic of a proverb, as a sign of a situation, that **does** have paremiological parallels with **similar inner form or/and imagery**.

Comparing proverbial parallels across all three languages would show a wider picture of cultural ties and connections, uncover and point to lacunae in individual linguo-culturological environments.

The concept of this research is heavily relying on Russian paremiological core in the sense of the theory of G. L. Permyakov (1988). More recent studies based on this theory have resulted in a publication of the Russian-Slavonic Dictionary of Proverbs with English Parallels (RSSPAS) by M. Y. Kotova in St. Petersburg in 2000. In this current research I am looking at one section of the dictionary including proverbs on the subject of Love. It is important also to point out that the actuality of the proverbs in this research has also been taken into account. The usage in living language in our time and age is one of the components of this study: by employing Internet as a source of modern language, the research produced recent examples of usage.

1. Russian/Bulgarian/Polish parallels – weak and strong fragmental lacunarity

The similarities in Slavic cultures, in this research specifically of Russian, Bulgarian and Polish languages, have been identified by 14 paremiological parallels. These are the Russian proverbs that have parallels in both target languages with various levels of fragmental lacunarity.

A strong cultural connection could be seen in parallels like: *На безрыбье и рак рыба/Когато няма риба, и ракът е риба/Na bezrybiu i rak ryba* [lit. *When there is no fish, even a crayfish is a fish*]; *Клин клином вышибают/Клин клин избива/Klin klinem wybijaq* [lit. *Spike beats a spike*] or *Любовь слепа/Любовта е слъпа/Miłość jest ślepa* [lit. *Love is blind*]. The proverbs in these parallels in all 3 languages are practically identical and pose no danger for interpreters as they hold no hidden meaning.

A few of the proverbs that form tri-lingual parallels appear to have imagological differences while carrying the same meaning:

Rus. **Седина в голову, бес в ребро** [lit. *Grey in the head, Devil to the rib*] // Bulg. Брадата му побелява, а той с какво се занимава [lit. *His beard has gone grey, but what he is preoccupied with*] // Pol. W brodzie siwizna, a diabeł w sercu [lit. *Grey in the beard, Devil in the heart*]

In all three languages this proverb carries the same meaning: it is said about an older man who despite his age shows a lot of interest in amorous activities. The age of the person is identified by the gray hair on the head/beard and the wickedness is evidently in the chest area – rib/heart. The images in Polish proverb bring it closer to the Russian proverb, while the Bulgarian parallel appears to have less significant imagery in the second half of the proverb. Unfortunately, the result of the sociolinguistic paremiological experiment has shown that these proverbs are no longer in use in either language.

A fair few tri-lingual parallels show significant differences in the imagery indicating stronger/weaker connections between the cultures:

Rus. **Для милого дружка и (хоть) серёжку из ушка** [lit. *For the dear friend even an earring from an ear*] Bulg. За приятел и ризата от гърба си ще даде [lit. *For a friend will give even a shirt from his back*] Pol. Dla ciebie wszystko [lit. *For you - everything*]

This Russian proverb has very strong imagery: *an earring from an ear*. The imagery of the Bulgarian proverb follows the lead with *a shirt from his back*. In both languages the proverb carries the importance of the sacrifice – it's the most personal possession someone could give up for the loved one. The Bulgarian proverb has been recognised by over 60% of informants, however they offered 20 variants of this proverb, neither of which could be found in any online sources. In this group of parallels, the Polish proverb has a more general meaning and is showing strong lacunarity - this proverb was recognised by 12 out of 100 informants which suggests some modern use.

Rus. **Любовь зла – полюбишь и козла** [*lit. Love is evil – you'll fall in love with a goat*] Bulg. **Любов хубост не гледа** [*lit. Love doesn't look at beauty*] Pol. **Każda potwora znajdzie swojego amatora** [*lit. Every creature will find a lover*]

This is another example of strong lacunarity – the Russian proverb uses the image of a ‘goat’ as an example of Love’s indifference to looks. The same general idea is pursued in the Bulgarian parallel, while the Polish proverb structurally is completely different. The Polish proverb has been recognised by 95 informants; on the contrary only 2 Bulgarian informants knew the Bulgarian proverb – the online search identified some modern use of the proverbs in both languages.

The overview of all 14 tri-lingual parallels shows a slightly stronger connections between Russian and Bulgarian languages – there is a higher number of Polish proverbs with strong lacunarity within the parallels.

2. Russian/Bulgarian parallels – Polish lacunarity

The research identified 6 Russian paremias that have parallels in Bulgarian language only; they don’t appear to have equivalents in Polish culture. Some of these proverbs show clear connection between the two cultures, when the structure and the imagery of the proverbs are almost identical. For example:

Rus. **Насильно мил не будешь** [*lit. By force a dear you won't be*] // Bulg. **Насила хубост не става** [*lit. By force good doesn't happen*]

According to this proverb, it is impossible to force someone to love against their will.

In this parallel both proverbs indicate the inability of love to be forced upon someone; in Russian it’s impossible to make someone ‘loved’, while in Bulgarian the noun ‘хубост’ means both ‘beauty’ and ‘something good’. The images used in both languages are not too dissimilar and the structure of the proverbs are identical which identifies weak fragmental lacunarity. The popularity of this proverb is clear in the result of the sociolinguistic paremiological experiment – 95% of Bulgarian informants identified this proverb.

Despite the structural difference, due to the strong common meaning, some paremiological parallels could be an example of a weak lacunarity:

Rus. **Третий – лишний** [*lit. The third is extra*] // Bulg. **Любовта трети не търпи** [*lit. Love doesn't tolerate the third*]

It is said to justify the need in intimacy between a couple and could also be said in general situation when a 3rd person is not welcome.

In this parallel, while the Russian proverb is simply stating the fact that the third person is unwelcome, the Bulgarian proverb is personifying Love as something that “doesn’t tolerate”. 28 Bulgarian informants indicated that this proverb is familiar to them by providing 9 variants of this proverb; the proverb *Любовта трети не търпи* was mentioned by 11 informants. To contradict the findings of the

sociolinguistic experiment that show popularity of the Bulgarian proverb, there are no online examples of usage.

Another parallel shows similarities of the two cultures:

Rus. **Не спится, не лежится, всё про милого грустится** [*lit. You can't sleep, you can't rest, you are always sorrowing for the dear one.*]

Bulg. **Сън не я лови, за любимия тъгува** [*lit. She can't sleep, yearning for the beloved*]

This proverb on the topic of Mutual Love shows that a woman's yearning for her loved one, both Russian and Bulgarian proverbs give the same example of how a usual regime of everyday life can be disturbed by the inability of the one in love to sleep or think about anything else but the subject of her feelings. Again, the image of the object of love being male in both languages, we can say that the proverbs documented such behaviour being common in young girls in love. This goes in hand with the wide tradition of fortune telling and divination rituals that were part of Russian culture.

According to the result of the sociolinguistic paremiological experiment, only 3 out of 100 Bulgarian informants are aware of this proverb (all offered different variants) – which would suggest that this proverb is no longer in use; no examples have been found online. However, there are examples of usage of this proverb in online sources which prove that the Russian proverb is alive in modern language.

In comparison to this example, the following parallels show variety of imagery while sharing the structural identity:

Rus. **С милым хоть на край света** [*lit. With the beloved be it to the end of the earth.*] // Bulg. **С любимия през огън и вода** [*lit. With the beloved through fire and water*]

This proverb is an example of how a powerful feeling of love can turn personal sacrifices into easy decisions. In Russian, the loved one is to be followed to 'the end of the earth' while in Bulgarian being with the loved one would mean going through 'fire and water' with him. Interestingly, judging by the subject of both the Russian and the Bulgarian proverbs being male ('мил', 'любимия'), it is easy to suggest that in the patriarchal society it would be the woman's role to make sacrifices for her man.

Out of 100 Bulgarian informants only 24 have heard of this proverb and offered a total of 13 variants. The suggested variants included such images as 'water', 'hell' and 'ten rivers', the most variants had image 'fire' (13 informants).

Some paremiological parallels show cultural differences and indicate strong lacunarity within a parallel – these examples would pose the most difficulty for translators and interpreters:

Rus. **Иссушила молодца чужая девичья краса** [*lit. The young man has shrunk with a girl's beauty*] // Bulg. **Да вехнеш по някого** [*lit. You are shrinking for nobody*]

It is said about a young man in love who is losing weight because of his unsettled feelings (can also mean emotional emptiness as a result of unanswered love). As you can see, the Bulgarian proverb has no indication of the sex of the object, while the Russian proverb clearly indicates that it is said about a male, not female. The strong lacunarity of this parallel would prevent the pair from being universal for use in translation.

It was not possible to find any modern examples of usage of this proverb in either language which would suggest it is no longer in use - old imagery gives away the age of the proverb.

Here is another example of a similar case:

Rus. **Суженого и на коне не объедешь** [*lit. You can't ride a horse past the intended*] // Bulg. **Не можеш да избягаш от съдбата си** [*lit. You can't avoid your own fate*]

The belief is that the fate decides whom one should marry and it is inevitable.

The Russian proverb, as an example of a strong fragmental lacunarity is offering culturally significant image of a horse rider and pictures love as something one can't avoid. The so called “суженый”, literally ‘intended’, indicates the choice made by fate (A. Alioshin, 2010) and is also a male form of the noun which would suggest the subject of this wisdom is a woman in love.

In this parallel the general thought of “fatality of love” is plainly given in the Bulgarian proverb, literally translated as “You can't escape your fate”.

Interestingly, a similar proverb exists in Russian – **От судьбы не уйдёшь** [*lit. From fate you won't walk away*]. In Russian, however, this proverb is not necessarily associated with love; the author of RSSPAS categorised it under the topic Fate/God.

The result of the sociolinguistic paremiological experiment showed that this proverb is known in Bulgaria, however only one informant mentioned image ‘късмет’ [luck] as equivalent of ‘съдбата’ [fate].

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to uncover possible lacunarity and culturally-tied expressions in the corpora of European cultural memory, particularly in Russian, Bulgarian and Polish languages. The research identified the following: there are 7 exclusive Russian proverbs that found no equivalents in Bulgarian and Polish cultures; only 14 out of 30 of selected Russian proverbs have parallels in both Bulgarian and Polish languages while 20 of these Russian proverbs have Bulgarian paremiological parallels with various levels of fragmental lacunarity. There are only 3 Russian proverbs on the subject of Love that are exclusively reflected in Polish culture (Bulgarian lacunarity) and 6 Russian proverbs that have Bulgarian parallels only (Polish lacunarity). This simple comparison indicates stronger connection between Russian and Bulgarian cultures.

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