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BEYOND PHRASEOLOGY: THE PAREMIOLOGICAL UNIT AS AN AUTONOMOUS LINGUO-SEMIOTIC CATEGORY – IDENTIFICATION CRITERIA TESTED ON THE OGHUZ DIALECTS OF KHOREZM

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Abstract. This paper investigates the position of the paremiological unit within the language system and argues for treating it as a linguo-semiotic category in its own right. Four criteria are put forward for setting the proverb apart both from the phraseological unit and from the free word combination, namely generalised meaning, syntactic self-sufficiency, stability (fixedness) and cognitive-cultural load. The validity of these criteria is verified against data drawn from the Oghuz dialects spoken in the Khorezm region. The empirical basis of the study is a dialect corpus comprising 969 units, and the illustrative material selected from it reveals the scope as well as the limits within which each criterion operates. In addition, the paper addresses the interplay of the propositional, pragmatic and cultural layers that jointly constitute the proverb.

Keywords: paremiology, paremiological unit, proverb, saying, phraseological unit, generalised meaning, dialect paremiology, Khorezm Oghuz dialects.

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Introduction. The leading position that the anthropocentric paradigm has gained in present-day linguistics has brought fixed (stable) language units to the very centre of scholarly attention. Among these units, the linguistic embodiments of folk wisdom – proverbs, sayings and aphorisms that have acquired proverbial status – make up the most firmly established stratum. Nevertheless, the question of where exactly this stratum belongs within the language system has not, to date, received a conclusive answer.

The essence of the problem lies not in terminological inconsistency but in the way the linguistic nature of these units is assessed. Is the paremia merely one of the varieties of the phraseological unit, or does it represent an independent category? The answer given to this question determines the entire methodology of research: under the former view, the paremia is to be examined with the tools of phraseology, whereas under the latter it calls for an analytical apparatus of its own. In the present article the question is resolved on the basis of dialect data. The reasoning behind this choice is that the corpus of the literary language, having passed through codification, tends to obscure borderline cases, whereas dialect material leaves such cases open to observation.

The empirical source of the research is a corpus of 969 paremiological units collected from the Oghuz dialects of Khorezm. The corpus draws on four sources: Volume XI of the series «Xorazm folklori» (Khorezm Folklore), the materials recorded by H. Vámbéry in the nineteenth century, Komil Avaz's collection «Mo'jaz maqollar va naqllar» (Concise Proverbs and Sayings), and an explanatory dictionary of the proverbs of the Khorezm dialects.

The term and its historical development. The term *paremiology* is a compound formed from the Greek *paroimia*, denoting a wise saying or proverb, and *logos*, meaning a teaching or doctrine. Originally it was employed within the practice of

interpreting religious and moral texts; it was only from the nineteenth century onwards that it became firmly established as a term of folkloristics and linguistics.

The pace at which the term entered scholarly usage differed from one national tradition to another. In Russian linguistics, the decisive contribution came from G.L. Permyakov's work on structural paremiology: describing proverbs as a system of clichéd signs, the scholar substantiated the view that universal logical schemata underlie them[1]. In the Western tradition, W. Mieder's comprehensive handbook played an important role in shaping paremiology into an autonomous field of study[2].

In Uzbek linguistics, by contrast, paremiological material was for a long time regarded as lying within the province of folkloristics. The study of proverbs as an object of linguistic analysis began with the syntactic investigations of X. Abdurahmonov and was later complemented by research carried out along semantic and linguoculturological lines.

For a considerable period, traditional linguistics interpreted paremias as a branch of phraseology. The Russian phraseological school that took shape under the guidance of V.V. Vinogradov regarded proverbs as an extended type of phraseological unit[3]. This approach rests on the features shared by the two kinds of units: stability, reproducibility, imagery and fixation in dictionaries.

[1] Permyakov G.L. Osnovy strukturnoy paremiologii [Foundations of structural paremiology]. – Moscow: Nauka, 1988. – 236 p.

[2] Mieder W. Proverbs: A Handbook. – Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004. – 304 p.

[3] Vinogradov V.V. Ob osnovnykh tipakh frazeologicheskikh edinits v russkom yazyke [On the main types of phraseological units in the Russian language] // Vinogradov V.V. Izbrannye trudy. Leksikologiya i leksikografiya [Selected works. Lexicology and lexicography]. – Moscow: Nauka, 1977.

The distinctive features, however, are far more pronounced. A phraseological unit performs a nominative function: it names a concept and enters a sentence as one of its constituents. A paremia, on the other hand, is a communicative unit: it conveys a complete judgement by itself and possesses the status of a text. Analysing the cultural connotation of the phraseological unit, V.N. Teliya stresses that its semantic structure is close to that of a lexical unit[4], whereas the semantics of a paremia is formed at the level of the proposition.

Dialect data offer clear confirmation of this distinction. The phraseological expression *Og'zi qulog'ida* (lit. 'his mouth is at his ears', i.e. 'beaming with joy') functions as the predicate of a sentence and is never used independently. The proverb *Bir qoltìqqa ičči tarvuz sìymas* ('Two watermelons will not fit under one arm'), by contrast, carries a communicative load of its own in discourse: it is used in isolation as a reply, an evaluation or a warning and requires no embedding into a wider context[5]. The syntactic behaviour of the two units differs radically, and it is precisely this difference that prevents them from being merged into a single category.

Delimitation criteria and their operation in dialect material

Generalised semantics. Every paremia expresses a regularity rather than an isolated event. The proverb *Bir gűŋä höčiz ölmäs, iči gűŋä ägäsi bärmäs* ('The ox will not die from a single day, yet for two days its owner will not lend it') does not concern

[4] Teliya V.N. Russkaya frazeologiya: semanticheskiy, pragmaticheskiy i lingvokul'turologicheskiy aspekty [Russian phraseology: semantic, pragmatic and linguoculturological aspects]. – Moscow: Shkola «Yazyki russkoy kul'tury», 1996. – 288 p.

[5] Xorazm folklori [Khorezm folklore]. Vol. XI / Compiled by S. Ro'zimboyev. – Urgench, 2021. – P. 30.

any particular ox or any particular owner[6]; instead, it supplies a general model of the relationship between borrowing and lending. The image originates in the practice of hiring out: help rendered for one day stays within the bounds of courtesy, whereas expecting such help on a permanent basis is inappropriate. This is how the shift from the denotative to the significative layer takes place.

The boundaries within which this criterion operates emerge even more distinctly in the unit *Lajgä taš atsaŋ, jűziŋä sačrajdì* ('If you throw a stone into the mud, it splashes onto your face')[7]. Viewed from the outside, the unit depicts a concrete situation involving mud and a stone; in reality, however, it applies to any unworthy confrontation: a person who enters into an argument with someone of low standing ends up harming himself. The degree of generalisation is measured by the very distance separating these two layers.

Syntactic completeness. A paremia does not become a constituent of a sentence; rather, it functions as a complete sentence in its own right. X. Abdurahmonov, who undertook a dedicated study of the syntactic structure of Uzbek folk proverbs, demonstrated that most of them are built on the pattern of a simple unextended sentence or of a compound sentence[8]. The Khorezm data bear out this conclusion: a large share of the units in the corpus have a two-part structure in which the second part stands to the first in a relation of consequence, contrast or comparison. In the unit *Taš izlägän*

[6] Ibid.

[7] Norboyeva Sh., Sa'dullayeva N., Ataboyeva M. Xorazm shevalaridagi maqol va iboralarning qisqacha izohli lug'ati [A concise explanatory dictionary of proverbs and idioms in the Khorezm dialects]. – Urgench, 2022. – P. 85.

[8] Abdurahmonov X. O'zbek xalq maqollarining sintaktik xususiyatlari [Syntactic features of Uzbek folk proverbs]: Abstract of the Dissertation for the Degree of Candidate of Philological Sciences. – Tashkent, 1964.

taš tapadì, aš izlägän aš tapadì ('He who seeks a stone finds a stone; he who seeks food finds food'), two parallel parts reproduce one and the same logical model twice – the direction of one's striving determines the outcome[9].

Stability and reproducibility. A paremia is not created afresh each time it occurs in speech; it is retrieved from memory as a ready-made formula. How stability is to be measured constitutes a separate problem in paremiology. Introducing the notion of the paremiological minimum, G.L. Permyakov sought to establish experimentally the range of units that the majority of native speakers know and actively use[10]. Under dialectal conditions this criterion operates in a specific way: the attestation of a unit in several independent sources indicates its standing within the paremiological stock. In the research corpus, the unit *Qošnìŋ gör bosa, čöziŋni görkä tut* ('If your neighbour is blind, make your own eye blind as well') is attested in a nineteenth-century record as *Joldašìŋ gör bolsa, čöziŋni qìsìb tut* ('If your companion is blind, keep your eye narrowed')[11]; the difference between the two variants lies not in the logical model but exclusively in the lexical filling.

Cognitive-cultural load. A paremia acts as a linguistic mechanism by which cultural experience is stored and handed down. This function also leaves its mark on the lexical composition of the unit. The proverb *Bägara barsam ätär, iγränsäm gűnim ötär* ('If I go off as a hired labourer, it will suffice; if I spin yarn, my days will pass') has retained the words *begora*, i.e. going to a distant place to work as a day labourer,

[9] Komil Avaz. Mo'jaz maqollar va naqllar [Concise proverbs and sayings]. – Urgench, 2005. – P. 39.

[10] Permyakov G.L. Osnovy strukturnoy paremiologii. – Moscow: Nauka, 1988.

[11] Xorazm folklori. Vol. XI. – P. 33.

and *igranmoq*, i.e. spinning thread[12]. These lexemes are no longer in use in the speech of the present-day younger generation; they have dropped out of the language together with the economic practices they denoted, yet they have survived as part of the paremia. In this sense, the proverb serves as a linguistic trace of a way of life that has since disappeared.

The internal layers of the paremia

Characterising paremias as an integral linguistic phenomenon, V.A. Maslova shows that three layers are fused in them: propositional content, pragmatic orientation and cultural connotation[13]. The interaction of these three layers can be observed in the Khorezm material.

The propositional content of the unit *Majdalanmagan taš baš jaradì* is simple: a stone that has not been broken up will crack one's head[14]. Its pragmatic orientation is that of a warning: a situation left unchecked brings about harm. Its cultural layer, for its part, goes back to the practice of crushing stone – in building and road work, stone that had not been broken into smaller pieces was unfit for use. Removing any one of the three layers renders the unit incomprehensible.

Cognitive linguistics enriches this structure with the concept of the frame. According to the frame semantics developed by Ch. Fillmore, the meaning of a linguistic unit relies on a structured domain of knowledge in the mind[15]. When a

[12] Xorazm folklori. Vol. XI. – P. 30.

[13] Maslova V.A. Lingvokul'turologiya: ucheb. posobie dlya stud. vyssh. ucheb. zavedeniy [Linguoculturology: a textbook for students of higher educational institutions]. – Moscow: Akademiya, 2001. – 208 p.

[14] Komil Avaz. Mo'jaz maqollar va naqllar. – P. 34.

[15] Fillmore Ch.J. Frame Semantics // Linguistics in the Morning Calm. – Seoul: Hanshin, 1982. – P. 111–137.

paremia is used in discourse, an entire situational model is activated in the listener's consciousness. The theory of conceptual metaphor, substantiated by G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, in turn explains why most proverbs render the experience of one domain through phenomena belonging to another[16]: in the unit *Ustì jaltìraq deši qaltìraq* ('Glittering on top, quivering underneath'), the contrast between outward appearance and inner essence is entrusted entirely to the image, and no explicit moral instruction is given[17].

Conclusion. The analysis performed leads to the following conclusions. First, the paremiological unit is not a subtype of the phraseological unit but an independent linguo-semiotic category. The decisive feature that distinguishes it is communicative autonomy: a phraseological unit is introduced into the context as a constituent of a sentence, whereas a paremia possesses the status of a text by itself.

Second, the four delimitation criteria – generalised semantics, syntactic completeness, stability and cognitive-cultural load – do not manifest themselves simultaneously or with equal force. In some units imagery prevails, while in others the didactic orientation is expressed overtly. Consequently, the criteria ought to be applied as a set, and the membership of a unit in the category ought to be established on the basis of their aggregate.

Third, dialect material provides a more reliable foundation for resolving the problem of delimitation than the corpus of the literary language does. Since dialect units have not undergone codification, the natural structure of the paremia is preserved in them in full. The material of the Khorezm Oghuz dialects illustrates the criterion of

[16] Lakoff G., Johnson M. Metaphors We Live By. – Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. – 242 p.

[17] Xorazm folklori. Vol. XI. – P. 33.

cognitive-cultural load with particular clarity, largely owing to units that retain archaic occupational and household vocabulary.

Fourth, the three layers of the paremia – propositional, pragmatic and cultural – form an inseparable unity. Restricting the analysis to a single layer does not disclose the linguistic nature of the unit in its entirety; for this reason, paremiological research requires a comprehensive methodology.

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