

TEACHING

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE THROUGH THE LEXICAL FEATURES OF RUSSIAN PROVERBS

ENSEÑANZA DE LA LENGUA Y LA CULTURA A TRAVÉS DE LAS CARACTERÍSTICAS LÉXICAS DE LOS PROVERBIOS RUSOS

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the educational value of Russian proverbs through the lens of their lexical features, aiming to highlight their potential role in language learning and cultural education. Proverbs, as a concise and rich form of folk wisdom, offer unique opportunities for enhancing linguistic competence and fostering cultural understanding in an educational context. The study seeks to identify the key lexical-semantic groups within proverbs and explore how they can be integrated into language curricula to enrich students' learning experiences. The research utilizes qualitative methods including lexical-semantic analysis, comparison, and generalization. The authors of the article come to the conclusion that in the context of proverbs, a lexical unit not only realizes the meaning recorded in the explanatory dictionary but develops a new one that is not recorded in the literature. A new generalized meaning is formed as a result of distancing from the specific lexical meaning given in the explanatory dictionary. It is the figurative, imaginary, generalized lexical meaning that occupies a special place among all other meanings.

Keywords: Proverb, Generalized lexical meaning, Semantic group, Proper names.

RESUMEN

Este estudio explora el valor educativo de los proverbios rusos a través de la lente de sus características léxicas, con el objetivo de destacar su papel potencial en el aprendizaje de idiomas y la educación cultural. Los proverbios, como una forma concisa y rica de sabiduría popular, ofrecen oportunidades únicas para mejorar la competencia lingüística y fomentar la comprensión cultural en un contexto educativo. El estudio busca identificar los grupos léxico-semánticos clave dentro de los proverbios y explorar cómo pueden integrarse en los programas de idiomas para enriquecer las experiencias de aprendizaje de los estudiantes. La investigación utiliza métodos cualitativos que incluyen análisis léxico-semántico, comparación y generalización. Los autores del artículo llegan a la conclusión de que, en el contexto de los proverbios, una unidad léxica no solo realiza el significado registrado en el diccionario explicativo, sino que desarrolla uno nuevo que no está registrado en la literatura. Un nuevo significado generalizado se forma como resultado del distanciamiento del significado léxico específico dado en el diccionario explicativo. Es el significado léxico figurativo,

imaginario y generalizado el que ocupa un lugar especial entre todos los demás significados.

Palabras clave: Proverbio, Significado léxico generalizado, Grupo semántico, Nombres propios.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, people store information and convey experiences in various ways: not only verbally or in writing, but also through audio or video. But earlier, our ancestors conveyed life experience through such genres of folklore as songs, epics, fairy tales, and proverbs. Proverbs and sayings are the most concise and informative genre (Petrova, 2024; Pogosyan, 2021ab; Van Vuuren, 2023;). It is no coincidence that proverbs of different nations have much in common, since they reflect folk wisdom, ethical principles of good and evil, and are also a means of cultivating spirituality and morality.

In addition, the proverbs of the people of the world have their own unique original peculiarities, their own centuries-old history, in them we can see the features of national culture and traditions (Akhmetshin et al., 2020; Dube et al., 2023; Dwomoh et al., 2023; Siphukhanyo & Olawale, 2024). Consequently, the language of proverbs serves as a way of understanding the world, expressed through views on it in artistic form. The value of a proverb is that it strives to reflect many aspects of reality due to the generalization of life and historical experience in a short and succinct form (Dube et al., 2023; Ladonina & Sytina, 2023).

Undoubtedly, it is lexical means that help convey all the richness and all the national slant. The peculiarity of the Russian proverb is the ability to capture the essence of a phenomenon, express it through an artistic image and lead to a conclusion without imposition. Thus, the lexical generality of a proverb is achieved as a result of the expression of a general thought based on life observations and historical experience (Makena, 2023; Masekela et al., 2024; Kokorina et al., 2023ab; Omodan & Addam, 2022; Panin, 2024).

The problem of this work is to identify the lexical features of proverbs of the Russian people. In this study, an attempt was made to analyze the main lexical-semantic groups, as well as to clarify the reasons for the use of some lexemes in a generalized meaning that is unusual for them.

Research questions

How does the vocabulary of proverbs reflect the life experience of the people? What lexical-semantic groups of words are used in proverbs? Why does a generalized lexical meaning of proverbs appear?

Purpose of the study

Determine the lexical features of proverbs, analyze the means of expressing the generality of proverbs, systematize the most common lexical-semantic groups of proverbs of the Russian people.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the process of work, the following methods and techniques were used: general scientific methods of analysis, observation, comparison, unselected sampling method, description, classification and generalization. The laws of related sciences (laws of philosophy on the relationship between language and thinking) and studies of such disciplines as oral folk art, cultural studies, literary studies, and history were also involved. These methods helped to analyze the material.

An important reference point in this study was the work of Russian linguists and literary scholars who studied the proverbs of the Russian people in a historical and cultural retrospective (Borovkova & Zyryanova, 2024; Siphukhanyo & Olawale, 2024), considered the lexical features of this genre (Adedokun & Oyetunde, 2024), used a structural approach, characterized the semantic mechanisms of proverbs, systematized figurative and expressive means, described the change and variation of proverbs, and also addressed the ethnocultural features of this genre (Nesterova, 2023; Stroilova, 2024; Yovanovich, 2024).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The conducted study of the proverbs of the Russian people from the collection of V. I. Dal allows us to come to the conclusion that their main lexical feature is the transition from concrete, personal, emotional perception to abstract, generalized, figurative thinking by means of reflection of proven life observations and historical experience of the people. Consequently, at the lexical level of language the generalization of lexical meaning is clearly visible. A proverb is a genre of oral folk art, just like a fairy tale, epic, or song. In linguistics and literary criticism one can find some differences between proverbs and sayings from popular expression and phraseological units.

Popular expressions have a literary source, although if it is forgotten, then these expressions can become proverbs. When comparing a proverb and a phraseological unit, it is clear that the phraseological unit has only a lexical meaning, but is not a complete judgment. It is noteworthy that a proverb may include such a lexical means of expressiveness as a phraseological unit, through which a high degree of figurative planning is achieved: “uphill” – a good life, “downhill” – a bad life, “lets things slide” – sloppily,

“will cast tears” – retribution (*Sheep's tears will be repaid to the wolf; A cheerful head lets things slide; Life does not go uphill, but downhill*).

The peculiarity of a proverb can be called the expression of a general opinion, the life observations of a people, that is, a proverb is only such a judgment that would be consistent with the opinion and lifestyle of many people, because proverbs simply deny something or affirm in full confidence that it is an indisputable truth: There is no escaping the proverb; The proverb is used like a broom for sweeping a hut with; It's not without reason that a proverb is said; You can't live without a proverb; Not every word is a proverb. Consequently, a proverb is a short, laconic saying of an instructive nature that appears among different peoples of the world in the course of generalizing historical and life experience and is expressed in a figurative, generalized artistic form using lexical and grammatical means.

To analyze the lexical features of proverbs, V.I. Dal's Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language was used, which contains more than 30 thousand sayings starting from the 17th century. The author takes a new approach to collecting proverbs: the sources were not just copies of previous collections, but the living speech of the Russian people. Thus, the work of V.I. Dal is valuable not only for researchers of oral folk art, but also for linguists, since proverbs reflect the living language of the people, and also briefly and figuratively summarize life observations and historical experience using lexical and grammatical means.

Let's consider the lexical features of Russian proverbs. First of all, it should be noted that the lexical meaning of a word is capable of expanding the semantic volume in the conditions of the peculiarities of the speech situation, the structure of the context, that is, words in a certain speech situation can not only realize the meanings given in the explanatory dictionary, but are also capable of developing new connotations that are missing in dictionaries.

Consequently, on the one hand, proverbs can represent a direct judgment (*An honest man will be ever remembered with respect*), where all words are used in their literal meaning; on the other hand, there is an allegory (*Don't count your chickens before they hatch*, that is, drawing conclusions based on the result), where the words have a figurative, generalized meaning. It can be noted that lexical generalization is achieved by transforming a specific situation into a generalized image that has arisen as a result of observation, work experience, and comparison of phenomena.

While doing the study, using the unselected sampling method, the main lexical-semantic groups of nouns in proverbs have been identified:

- 1) ethical concepts and human qualities,
- 2) somatisms,
- 3) terms of kinship,
- 4) names of persons by profession,
- 5) zoonyms,
- 6) phytonyms,
- 7) color characteristics.

Our objectives to take a closer look at these groups and the reasons for their use in proverbs.

A special lexical-semantic group consists of words that name such ethical concepts and qualities of a person as mercy, reasonableness, kindness, wisdom, since these lexemes give an idea of the features of moral education, therefore these judgments always have an edifying character: *Even mercy needs reasoning; Don't look for beauty, look for kindness; The wise man hears in a low voice.*

A characteristic feature of this lexical-semantic group is the use of antonyms (truth – lie, youth – old age, wisdom – stupidity, joy – sadness, wealth – poverty, live – die) when comparing ethical concepts and human qualities that are opposite in meaning to give contrast to the judgment. After all, a proverb needs to express everyday rules and folk wisdom: Handle a lie any way you want, but the truth has only one way: *Life is bitter, and death is not sweet either; Poverty cries, wealth gallops; You can't bring back youth, but you can't get rid of old age; Little wisdom, much stupidity; The curls curl in joy and split in sadness.*

In proverbs, ethical concepts and qualities of a person can receive the characteristics of living beings, that is, the widespread use of such a means of expression as personification. These judgments are particularly allegorical and instructive, and ethical concepts and qualities of a person through personification are transformed into visual emotional images understandable to all people: *Fortune favours the brave; The truth pulls out from the bottom of the sea; Trouble comes in pounds, and goes away in zolotnik; Wealth is water: it comes and goes.*

A significant lexical-semantic group includes somatisms – words denoting parts of the human body. The unselected sampling method showed that one of the most common somatisms is the lexeme “head” (more than 200 proverbs in the collection with this name): *For bad deeds even, your head will go off; A cheerful head lives carelessly.*

Other somatisms can be found in proverbs: *It fits in one ear and comes out of the other; Fear has big eyes; The heart is not a stone; Where you set your foot, grass does not grow. With sadness, the neck is equal to the shoulders. Somatisms can have the meaning of edification, advice: Keep your head bowed and your heart submissive; Choose your wife not with your eyes, but with your ears.*

There can be determined a characteristic feature of somatisms, which is defining of a person's qualities or functions through parts of the body, that is, according to the principle of contiguity – metonymy. So, the qualities of a person are replaced by the word's "head", "hands", "tongue": *One hundred heads – one hundred minds (head – rationality); In the hands of a skillful worker, work is done swimmingly (hands – work); Take your time with your tongue, and don't be lazy in your actions (tongue is talkativeness).*

In addition, somatisms can be used as a replacement for the concept of "person", that is, synecdoche is used – the expression of the whole through its part: *Only when one hand washes the other do, they both get clean* (the somatism "hand" names people doing unseemly things and helping each other); *A cheerful head lives* (we are talking about a cheerful person). In the vocabulary of proverbs of the Russian people, kinship terms are widely represented, denoting both close and distant relationships between people. A peculiarity of the use of these lexemes is their opposition to indicate the degree of closeness or certain qualities of people: *Cheese is whiter than kalach, and mother is better than stepmother; father hasn't taught, and uncle won't teach; A husband loves a healthy wife, and a brother loves a rich sister; A husband loves a rich wife and a generous mother-in-law; A lecherous mother-in-law doesn't believe even her daughter-in-law.*

Proverbs contain words that give names to people by their professions. Such lexemes in proverbs usually denote special skills and qualities characteristic of representatives of a certain career. A peculiarity of their use is an indication that any person is obliged to perform his or her duties well: *It is not the ax that adzes, but the carpenter; A good tailor will cut everything out perfectly; The hammer does not forge iron, but the blacksmith forges.*

A special lexical-semantic group consists of zoonyms – words naming the world of animals: beasts, fish, birds. The most common words in proverbs that denote animals are: *Even a dog remembers who feeds it; For a mouse the cat is a beast; In the forest the bear is an archimandrite; To be afraid of wolves is to be without mushrooms; An old horse won't ruin the furrow.*

In the language of proverbs, a recipient can also find the names of birds and insects: *Even a bee flies to a red flower;*

Even mosquitoes bite for some time; The bumblebee will slip through, but the fly will get stuck; The old raven will not croak in vain; The eagle doesn't catch flies; Spoken words are like flown sparrows: neither can be recalled.

The names of fish are used less often: *Do not threaten the pike with the sea, and the naked with grief.*

A special feature of zoonyms is the ability to denote such qualities of people as cunning: *The fox can cheat seven wolves*; fidelity: *And the dog remembers good old attitude*; cowardice: *A thief is like a hare – even their shadow makes them feel frightened*; talkativeness: *Every magpie perishes by its own tongue*; clumsiness: *Even the bear can be taught to dance.* These examples show that a generalized meaning arises as a result of transfer by similarity of features, that is, in proverbs such a means of expressiveness as metaphor is widely used.

A positive or negative additional connotative meaning appears on the basis of a hidden comparison: in the minds of the Russian people, such a quality as cunning has always been attributed to the fox, and clumsiness – to the bear. Consequently, the new meaning of the word (flattering or clumsy person) arises on the basis of an additional connotation. An interesting lexical feature of the Russian proverbs is the development of connotative shades in zoonyms. Let us consider this phenomenon using the example of the lexeme "wolf".

Most often, this word denotes a person who has gained experience in a certain sphere (*This is not the first winter for a wolf to survive*).

In addition, the lexeme can be associated with fear (*I would say a word, but the wolf is not far away*), theft (*A wolf is a thief by its nature, but a man is due to their envy*), inconstancy (*Happiness is a mother, happiness is a stepmother, happiness is a mad wolf*), truth (*Accusing of the wolf, judge by the wolf*).

Another lexical feature of proverbs can be called the use of zoonyms as a simile – a means of expression built on the comparison of objects. By means of simile, various generalizations receive a figuratively concrete form. Unlike the modern Russian language, the simile occurs not on the basis of comparative conjunctions "as", "as if", "like", but through the Russian conjunction "chto" (*Bogatyj silen, chto medved*, which is *The rich are as strong as a bear; Denezhki, chto golubi: gde obzhivutsya, tam i povedutsya*, which is *Money is like pigeons: where it settles down, there it will stay*) or through negative construction (*Happiness is not a horse: it does not lead along a straight road; Work is not a bear, it will not flee into the forest*).

In the vocabulary of proverbs there are phytonyms – words denoting the plant world. These lexemes can be understood broadly, and sometimes even have an analogy with certain concepts: for the Russian people, a pine tree represents their native land (*Every pine tree makes noise in its own forest*, which means *A birthplace determines a walk of life*). Also, phytonyms can express contradictions and indicate non-existent connections between phenomena. Such proverbs speak of the impossibility of something, since people were able to test the unreality of some phenomena in practice: *The willow will not bear pears*.

Our further point is to consider the lexical-semantic group which includes words denoting colors. Thanks to the unselected sampling method, it is possible to identify the frequency of certain colors that prevail in the Russian proverbs. In Dal's dictionary there are a few examples naming colors, such as "blue", "yellow", "gray": *U serogo armyaka kazna tolsta, a sinij armyak mot* (which is *A gray caftan has a rich treasury, but a blue caftan is a spendthrift*). This proverb is about difference between essence and appearance).

The colors "green" and "red" are often used, because "red" is associated with good quality, holiday, and "green" is associated with the color of plants, but it can also indicate inexperience and immaturity: *Even a bee flies towards a red flower; One feels lazy to spin on a red day; If there is green grass the water is not far away; Youth is green, old age is rotten*.

The colors "white" and "black" are contrasted in the proverbs of the Russian people: "white" has a positive connotation (the color of faith, freedom, purity), and "black" has a negative connotation (the color of grief, anger, deception): *The shirt is white, but the soul is black*.

In the language of proverbs of the Russian people, it is interesting to conduct a lexical-semantic analysis of proper names that acquire in judgments a figurative, imaginative or generalized meaning. In language, proper names are usually used to name individual objects of a certain class, but in proverbs, proper names, which name people, designate an abstract person, as the proverb is not used in the logical environment, in which it arose, that is, the personal name becomes a conventional sign. However, often proper names in proverbs can convey the qualities of a person, since before being used in a proverb, a proper name finds a general connotative connotation based on comparison with the object and becomes abstract or allegorical, that is, the technique of allusion is actively used – a hint at a historical, literary, mythological fact, perpetuated in culture or speech.

As a result of the analysis of the Russian proverbs by origin, we can distinguish several groups of proper names that refer to people:

1. Names used in rituals, customs of the Russian people, as well as associated with their signs: *He will tell the truth only on Saint Kasyan's day; No matter what you look at on Kasyan's day, everything withers* (the Russian people were wary of this name, the name was considered unkind, perhaps because Kasyan's day is February 29th); *Boris and Gleb sow grain* (it was on the day of Boris and Gleb (May 2nd /15th) that it was customary to sow different seeds); *The Prophet Nahum will guide the mind* (on Nahum's day (December 1st/14th) children were sent to school).

2. Names used in the texts of Holy Scripture: *Adam endowed with flesh, Eve with sin; Adam is seduced by a wife, and the wife by a snake* (names of biblical origin, hinting at an Old Testament story, report the actions of Adam and Eve); *Bread and chaff – Samson's strength* (the proverb indicates a biblical hero who possessed supernatural strength); *By his beard – Abraham, and by his deeds – Ham* (an allusion to the biblical characters: Abraham is a noble man, and Ham is his son, he did not respect his father, so he was punished; it is noteworthy that in Russian the name "Ham" has become a common noun, denoting an arrogant and rude person).

3. Names of historical figures: *The way Marina started, the way you have to manage it* (a reference to Marina Mnishek, who actively participated in the main events of the Time of Troubles); *Minin's beard, but his conscience is made of clay* (an allusion to Kuzma Minin, who heroically participated in the liberation of the Russian land from invaders); *You are not Stenka: you can't sail along the Volga on a carpet* (indication of the Cossack Stenka Razin, the leader of a major uprising).

4. The names of heroes of oral folk art, known for their qualities. These names often came from Russian folk tales, where the heroes were endowed with certain properties: Ivan and Emelya are stupid, Kuzma is unhappy, Marko is rich: *Our Ivan has no luck; Bitter Kuzenka has a bitter fate*.

5. Names of people used in the proverb for rhyme: Martyn – altyn (which is a kind of money), Roman – karman (which is a pocket), Savva – slava (which is a glory): *Good is Martyn, if he has is an altyn; Poor is Roman, if poor is his karman; What Savva is like, such is his glory*. In a proverb, such names of people can be used similarly with other names (Andrey – Avdey), if they rhyme: *Our Andrey is not a villain to anyone – Our Avdey is not a villain to anyone*. In addition, people's names can be used in parallel with common nouns (Pashka – ptashka, which is a birdie) provided they rhyme: *Every Pashka has his own zamashka*.

– *Every ptashka has its own zamashka* (which is a habit). In such proverbs, proper names only appear to have signs of figurative, imaginary meaning.

Using the example of analysis and comparison of lexical-semantic groups, we can conclude that proverbs can have both literal and figurative meaning, this is where folk wisdom and value lie, because one sentence can be used in many similar phenomena: *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*. There is no doubt that an apple does not roll back far, just as children do not differ in their behavior from their parents.

People do not use proverbs without a reason; only in communication in different speech situations can one understand the true essence of a judgment. A proverb could only become a statement verified by many years of people's experience and applicable to many life phenomena.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it can be noted that proverbs have the ability to express general views about human qualities, relationships, and the world as a whole through specific images given in the lexical-semantic groups we have described.

As a result of the analysis of lexical-semantic groups, one can see that although proverbs use lexemes with specific meanings, not any words can be used in statements, but only those in which there are special logical relations of analogy, consequence, and cause-effect relations.

In proverbs of the Russian people, an abstract idea can be conveyed by means of such lexical impressive means as metaphor, metonymy, personification, comparison, synecdoche, allusion.

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