JOURNAL OF ADVANCED LINGUISTIC STUDIES
VOL. 13, NO. 2, JUL-DEC 2026 – PART 2 (ISSN 2231-4075)

Semantic Variation of Nouns in Russian and Uzbek Proverbs

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ABSTRACT

The article is dedicated to the semantic variation of nouns within Russian and Uzbek proverbs. Based on the material of paremiological collections, four types of changes in the semantic volume of a component noun have been identified: two-dimensional with the preservation of object meaning, metaphorical-symbolic, generalized-abstract, and evaluative-connotative. It is shown that in both languages, variation is primarily determined by the genre orientation of the proverb toward generalization and instruction, while discrepancies are caused by differences in the figurative system, everyday life, and cultural symbolism. Three degrees of figurative equivalence of Russian and Uzbek paremias have been identified. The results can be used in comparative paremiology and in teaching Russian to Uzbek audiences.

Keywords: Proverb, paremiology, noun, semantic variation, image, Russian language, Uzbek language, comparative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

A proverb is one of the most stable genres of oral folk art, and it is precisely for this reason that it clearly shows how the vocabulary changes its content under the pressure of the genre. A noun taken from everyday vocabulary – “bread,” “house,” “word,” “wolf” – ceases to be a simple object name once it finds itself within a paremia. It becomes an element of a generalized model that can be applied to an unlimited number of life situations [2; 3]. We call such a shift in the scope and nature of meaning semantic variation.

The problem has received diverse coverage. G. L. Permyakov described the proverb as a sign of a typical situation rather than a statement about a single fact [2]. V. P. Zhukov linked the specificity of the meaning of stable expressions to the ratio of literal and figurative planes [3]. In the linguoculturological tradition represented by the works of V. N. Telia, N. D. Harutyunova & A. Vezhbitskaya, emphasis is placed on cultural connotations and evaluation, which are attached to the word within the fund of national phraseology [4; 5; 7]. The cognitive approach, which dates back to the conceptual metaphor theory of J. Lakoff & M. Johnson, explains why some figurative models – body, food, path – prove more productive than others [6]. For Uzbek paremiology, the dictionary descriptions provided by Sh. Shomaqsudov and Sh. Shorahmedov are significant [10]. Comparative Slavic and Turkic material is generally studied within the framework of phraseology as a whole [8], while the variation of the semantics of specific noun components of proverbs in Russian-Uzbek comparison remains, in our view, fragmentary.

The relevance of a topic is determined by several circumstances. Firstly, in the context of active Russian-Uzbek bilingualism, paremias remain one of the most important channels for conveying national experience, and their inaccurate understanding leads to communication disruptions. Secondly, the lexical composition of a proverb is significantly less studied than its structure and subject matter: the noun is usually considered a "building material" of the image, rather than an independent object of semantic analysis. Thirdly, the results of such a comparison are directly applicable in the methodology of teaching Russian as a non-native language, where proverbs serve as a means of communicating with culture.

The purpose of this work is to identify the types of semantic variation of nouns in Russian and Uzbek proverbs and to describe the common and specific features of this process. To achieve the goal, the following tasks are addressed: clarifying the content of the concept of "semantic variation" in relation to paremias; identifying and characterizing variation types; comparing Russian and Uzbek material; and determining the

factors influencing the choice and comprehension of a noun in a proverb.

METHODS

Materials were taken from proverbs taken from V. I. Dahl's collection [1] (Russian corpus) and from Uzbek collections and dictionaries [9] (Uzbek corpus). The selection was conducted based on lexical characteristics: the sample included paremias containing nouns from the basic thematic groups – "dwelling" (house, house – house), "food" (bread – bread), "man and body" (hand – hand, head – head), "speech" (word – word), "animals" (wolf, dog – it). These groups were chosen because they are frequent in both traditions and possess a pronounced figurative load.

Descriptive method, component analysis of meaning, contextual analysis, comparative method, and elements of linguoculturological commentary were applied. For each noun, it was recorded whether its objective meaning is preserved, whether it is reinterpreted metaphorically or symbolically, whether it is generalized to abstraction, and whether it acquires a stable evaluation. The component analysis relied on the principles of describing lexical meaning outlined by A. A. Ufimtseva [12]. Uzbek examples are provided in the original with a translation into Russian. The work is qualitative in nature: its objective is to identify types and patterns, rather than providing a statistical assessment of frequency.

It is necessary to specify in what sense the term "variation" is used here. We do not consider the variation of the proverbs themselves, i.e., the existence of several editions of a single paremia recorded, in particular, in the collection by V. I. Dahl [1]. The subject of the analysis is the change in the semantics of a noun as a component in different paremias and in different languages: from direct nominative meaning to figurative, symbolic, and evaluative. It is precisely this understanding that allows for the comparison of Russian and Uzbek materials on a single basis.

RESULTS

Analysis of the material allowed for the identification of four types of semantic variation of noun components. They differ in the degree of deviation from the objective meaning of the word.

In a significant portion of paremias, a noun retains its direct meaning but simultaneously serves as a support for the second, generalized plane. The Russian proverb "Not a red hut with its corners, but a red hut with its pies" refers to a specific hut and specific pies, but its entire meaning lies in the contrast between form and content: hospitality is valued above architecture. The Uzbek proverb *Suvichganquduqqatupurma* ("Don't spit into the well from which you drank water") is also structured in this way: *quduq* and *suv* remain real objects, but the well becomes an image of a benefactor or a native environment. Variation here is minimal and reduces to an overlay over the direct value.

It is important to note that in this type, the noun is not neutral. Choosing specifically the “house” rather than “the palace,” and specifically “the pies” rather than “the food,” establishes a specific social register: we are dealing with a peasant lifestyle in which value is measured simply and tangibly. Similarly, “the well” in the Uzbek proverb refers to the experience of a community for which a water source was a vital common property. The object meaning is thus preserved, but acquires a cultural coloring.

The actual variation begins where the subject plan is erased. A pair of paremias about indifference toward ill-wishers is instructive: "The dog barks – the wind carries it" and *Ithurr, karvono'tar* ("The dog barks – the caravan goes"). The first noun in both languages coincides: dog/*it* serves as a symbol of idle malice unable to influence the matter. The second component is distinguished. The Russian paremia chooses “wind” – the image of an element that carries away empty words; the Uzbek paremia chooses *karvon*, the image of persistent movement that does not cease. The same content is conveyed through two images: "the words disappear" and "the matter continues." This variation is not in the nomination, but in the semantic orientation of the image.

Strength symbolism is constructed in a similar manner. The Russian expression *Gory svrnyot* and the Uzbek proverb *Toğni*

ursa, talqonqiladi ("If it strikes the mountain, it will turn it into flour") use the image of the mountain as a limiting obstacle. But the Uzbek variant adds a second noun, *talqon* (talqon, a traditional flour dish), thereby transferring the hyperbole into a domestic, food-related context. In the Russian example, there is no such completion. Both images express a superior degree of power, but they do so through different lexical means.

The most noticeable departure from the object meaning is manifested in nouns, which in the proverb no longer denote a thing, but a category. These include the word *word*. In the Russian proverb "A word is not a sparrow, it will fly away and you won't catch it," it is understood as something irreversible: what is said cannot be returned, just as one cannot catch a bird that has flown away. The Uzbek proverb *Yakhshiso'z – jono'ziği, yomonso'z – bosh qoziği* ("A good word is food for the soul, a bad word is a peg for the head") constructs a different image: a word affects a person, either nourishing or wounding. In both cases, responsibility for what is said is spoken of, but the figurative models are different – "a slipping object" and "a nourishing or destroying substance." It is also noteworthy that the pair *o'ziği – qoziği* was created for the sake of rhyme.

The fourth type is associated with the attachment of a stable evaluation to a noun. Thus, in the Russian proverb "Bread is the head of everything," “bread” occupies the top of the hierarchy of goods: the metaphor of the head transforms household products into the primary condition of life. In Uzbek cultural tradition, *non* (bread) also holds a special, almost sacred place, and this anchors a stable positive evaluation of the word that goes beyond its nutritional significance. The coincidence of the evaluative sign when the everyday background (“caraway” and “flatbread”) is different shows that the variation concerns not only the meaning but also its emotional-value halo [4; 5].

The comparison of Russian and Uzbek paremias reveals three degrees of figurative equivalence. Complete equivalence, where both concept and image coincide, is found where the image is based on universal experience: cf. "Don't spit in the well: water will come in handy for drinking" and *Suvichganquduqqatupurma*. Partial equivalence assumes the

coincidence of one component while the other diverges (“dog” – *it*, but “wind” – *karvon*). Finally, conceptual equivalence signifies the identity of meaning despite the complete divergence of images, as in the pair "One in the field is not a warrior" and *Bir qoldansadochiqmas* ("One hand will not make a sound").

DISCUSSION

The results obtained show that the semantic variation of nouns in proverbs is not reduced to simple transfer of meaning. It is composed of several interacting factors.

The first factor is genre. The proverb generalizes [2], so the noun naturally loses its singularity and becomes a "type": not this house, but a house in general, not this word, but a word as such. The second factor is cognitive. The choice of image seems to follow models in which the abstract is understood through the experience of the body, food, and movement [6]. This is evident in the Uzbek pair *jonoziği – bosh qoziği*, as well as in the Russian metaphor "bread – head." The third factor is cultural: the set of accessible images is determined by daily life, the landscape, and the value hierarchy of the community [7; 11]. Caravan and steppe grass *ulan* are natural for Uzbek tradition, while Russian paremias more often refer to a yurt, field, or forest. These differences are not differences in meaning, but differences in the "material" of the image.

The fourth factor – formal – deserves special attention. The choice of a noun is often determined by rhythm and rhyme. In the *o'ziği – qoziği* pair, sound harmony is likely no less important than the semantic opposition "to feed – to wound"; the parallel verbs *hurar – otar* in the proverb about the dog and the caravan serve the same purpose. In the Russian pair "*laet – nosit*," the same logic of brief rhythmic parallelism operates. Consequently, part of the variation is explained by the requirements of small-form poetics, which aligns with the notion of a proverb as a text where form and meaning are mutually determined [2].

Comparing variation types allows for the proposal of a general scale. At one pole, there are nouns with minimal deviations from their literal meaning (“well,” “house”), while at

the other, there are words that in a proverb turn into almost abstract categories (“word”). Between them are symbolic images (“dog,” “mountain,” “caravan”) and evaluative-loaded lexemes (“bread,” “bread”). Such gradation shows that a proverb does not simply "use" a noun, but restructures its semantic structure in accordance with the communicative task of teaching, warning, and evaluating. This idea aligns with the general conclusion that the meaning of a word in a stable expression is formed not by summation, but by the interaction of components [3; 8].

The practical significance of the results is linked to the teaching of the Russian language in Uzbek audiences. The three degrees of equivalence provide a natural order for working with material: proverbs with full equivalence are most easily assimilated and can serve as a support, while paremias with conceptual equivalence require special commentary, as a familiar word individually can lead to an incorrect interpretation of the whole. The limitation of the study remains its qualitative nature and thematically narrow selection; it appears promising to turn to corpus methods, which will allow for the verification of identified patterns on a larger volume of material.

Semantic variation of nouns in Russian and Uzbek proverbs manifests in four main types: ambiguity with preservation of subject meaning, metaphorical-symbolic, generalized-abstract, and evaluative-connotative variation. A common basis for both languages is the genre nature of the proverb, which transforms a noun from an object's name into a carrier of generalized meaning.

The differences between Russian and Uzbek paremiology lie not in the plane of meaning, but in the plane of image: with identical concepts (gratitude, unity, responsibility for the word), languages choose images from different spheres of experience. The identified three levels of equivalence – full, partial, and conceptual – can serve as a basis for further comparative descriptions and for the methodology of teaching Russian as a non-native language.

The prospects of the research are related to expanding the material through other thematic groups of nouns (names of kinship, time, tools), involving data from modern corpora, and verifying how stable the identified variation types are in living

speech, where proverbs are often transformed and reworked. Such a check would clarify the boundary between a stable paremiological meaning and its occasional variants.

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