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SOMALI PAREMIAS AND THEIR RUSSIAN EQUIVALENTS

Abstract: It has long been noticed that paremias (proverbs, sayings etc., with all the differences of languages and cultures of the peoples who created them, are alike. This is due to the nature of paremias. As Russian folklorist G. L. Permyakov established, “they are signs and models of certain situations or certain relations between objects.” And since the situations that people encounter are the same everywhere, the paremias, invented by them to describe these situations, coincide in meaning. This fully applies to Somali and Russian proverbs and sayings. Some of them coincide almost textually, some others differ in the images used in them.

Proverbial sentences can be closed (proverbial class) and open (proverbial phrases class). At the same time, depending on the type of the motivation of their general meaning (transferred, direct or not immediate), they are divided into six subclasses: proverbs proper, folk aphorisms, non-divided sentences, proverbial phrases proper, by-words and non-divided phrases.

In addition, proverbial sentences can be simple and complex (syntactically), they have different “goals of utterance” (that is, they can be affirmative or negative), they have a modality (they can be narrative, hortatory and interrogative). Thus, the Somali and Russian paremias, which coincide in meaning, may differ not only in the images used in them, but also in their linguistic and paremiological structures.

Of the three main structures of all proverbs and sayings – linguistic (and compositional) structure, logical (and semiotic) structure and object-image structure, the coincidence in their logical structure and in the types of things opposed in them, i.e, the coincidence in their meaning, is crucial for determining their similarity.

Keywords: Somalia, Russia, paremia, equivalent, sign, logical-semiotic classification

It has long been noticed that paremias (proverbs, sayings etc.) show great similarities despite significant differences in the languages and cultures of the peoples who created them. This is due

to the nature of paremias. As Russian folklorist G. L. Permyakov has established, they are “signs and models of certain situations or certain relations between objects.”¹ And since the situations that people encounter bear similarities, the paremias they invent to describe these situations, typically coincide in meaning.

This description applies to such widely separated cases as Somali and Russian proverbs and sayings. Some of them almost coincide textually: *A drenched man is not afraid of water* (Somali) and *A drenched man is not afraid of rain* (Russian), *A fly will not get into a closed mouth* (Somali) and *Even a fly will not get into a locked mouth* (Russian). Other proverbs which look alike, differ in the images used: *A leopard’s cubs are also spotted* (Somali) and *A pig’s piglets are also striped* (Russian), *All camels were two-year-old* (Somali) and *Every bull was a calf* (Russian).

Proverbial sentences can be closed (proverbial class) and open (proverbial phrases class).² At the same time, depending on the type of the motivation of their general meaning (transferred, direct or not immediate), they may be divided into six subclasses: 1) proverbs proper (*A barking hyena is better than one which keeps silent*); 2) folk aphorisms (*Tell lies, but let your lies resemble the truth*); 3) non-divided sentences (*There is not yet a fire for the last dates*, i.e. until one job is completed one should not start another one. This refers to a story about a man who was given some dates, and not knowing that they are eaten raw decided to fry them; before he had had time to kindle the fire he was given another handful of dates, and he said these words); 4) proverbial phrases proper (*When all the people sing for camels he sings for donkeys*, i.e. not to the point); 5) by-words (*With your obstinacy you can lose a basin of food*, i.e. with such a bad character as yours you can harm yourself) and 6) non-divided phrases (*I should have said “Whoa!”*). This refers to a story about a herdsman whose animals strayed into a forest while he was asleep, and all were killed by wild beasts. When he awoke to realize what had happened, he grieved for a long time, admitting to himself “I should have said “Whoa!” i.e., I should have stopped the herd ahead of time)

In addition, proverbial sentences can be simple and complex (syntactically); have different “goals of utterance” (can be affirmative or negative) or have a modality (can be narrative, hortatory and interrogative). The Somali and Russian paremias, whose meanings coincide, may differ not only in the images used, but in

their linguistic and paremiological structures as well. For example, compare the following pairs of paremias, which are recognized as equivalents: *Where you see a stature do not look for mind* (a Somali proverb) – *His stature is that of yours, but his mind is that of a calf* (a Russian byword); *If a woman helps a man in the fight against drought, he will win* (Somali, a compound sentence) – *With a good wife grief is only half grief* (Russian, a simple sentence); *God does not offend a brave man* (Somali, a negative sentence) – *God accompanies a daring man* (Russian – an affirmative sentence), etc.

Of the three main structures of all proverbs and sayings – linguistic (and compositional) structure, logical (and semiotic) structure and object-image structure – the coincidence in their logical structure and in the types of things opposed in them, (i.e., the coincidence in their meaning), is crucial for determining similarities.

As evident from the body of scholarship by G. L. Permyakov, devoted to the semantic structure of paremias, the theme of a proverb or a saying is the invariant pair of opposing entities, embracing the meaning of images used in this proverb or saying. Thus, the theme of the Somali proverb *If you want to receive a kid, ask for a calf* is the thematic pair *Big – Small*. The thematic group with the same name includes proverbs and sayings about large and small things, significance and insignificance in general, including significant and insignificant events and actions, as well as significant (outstanding) and insignificant people. There are approximately one hundred thematic groups (*Good – Bad, Old – Young, Action – Reaction, Generative – Generated, etc.*) The members of the invariant thematic pairs (in real adages they are usually represented by pairs of concrete things (such as the goat and the calf in the above-mentioned proverb) establish different relationships with each other.

For instance, *Straight and Crooked* (i.e. straight and crooked things, truth and falsehood, honest and dishonest people, justice and injustice) can form relations of *Compatibility – Non-Compatibility* (*Straightforwardness and slyness cannot enter one and the same place*), relations of *Qualitative Correspondence – Non-Correspondence* (*A false speech is listened to by a false ear*), relations of *Qualitative Superiority – Inferiority* (*A stolen she-camel does not give birth to legitimate colts*) and so on. The number of

relation types established by the members of thematic proverbial pairs is twenty-eight. The logical-semiotic classification of paremias collected in accordance with these types of relations are called formative groups.

Every proverb in each usage can express only one type of relation between things (opposite entities) mentioned in it, and therefore can be attributed to only one formative group. But a proverb can have one, two, three or even more thematic pairs (or not have any). Thus, some proverbs can be attributed to one, two, three or more thematic groups (or to none of them). In proverbs with more than one invariant thematic pair, one pair can obviously prevail over the others. For example, the Somali proverb *The tribe of the straight chieftain is straight and that of the crooked chieftain is crooked* belongs to the thematic group III5. Heading – Headed (the thematic pair ‘chieftain’ and ‘tribe’ is main and the pair of ‘straightness’ and ‘crookedness’ is additional). The corresponding Russian proverb *Like priest, like people* contains only one thematic pair. These Somali and Russian proverbs belong to the formative group 15. Qualitative Correspondence – Non-Correspondence of the Heading and the Headed and their actions.

The exact meaning of any paremia lies at the intersection of the thematic group in which it is included, and the formative group that demonstrates the type of logical connection between the members of the thematic pair existing in this paremia.³ It follows that semantic equivalents are such Somali and Russian paremias, whose place in the system of logical-semiotic classification completely coincides.

Here are some examples:

1. Boqorba wax baa la sii baraa

Even a chieftain is to be taught

Thematic group IIc4. Knowledge – Ignorance

Formative group 3. Limitedness – Non-Limitedness of Knowledge and Ignorance

Russian equivalent: *Live and learn*

Thematic group IIc4. Knowledge – Ignorance

Formative group 3. Limitedness – Non-Limitedness of Knowledge and Ignorance

2. Calool dheregsani calool baahan kama naxdo

A filled stomach does not sympathize with an empty one

Thematic group IIa14. Fed – Hungry

Formative group 9. Friendliness – Hostility of Fed and Hungry

Russian equivalent: *The fed does not understand the hungry*

Thematic group IIa14. Fed – Hungry

Formative group 9. Friendliness – Hostility of Fed and Hungry

3. Af aadan lahayn lama aammusiyo

One cannot force somebody else's mouth to keep silent

Thematic group IIb2. One's Own – Somebody Else's x⁴: IIc1. Word – Silence

Formative group 5. Non-Feasibility – Feasibility of Actions with One's Own and Somebody Else's

Russian equivalent: *You won't throw a handkerchief on someone else's mouth*

Thematic group IIb2. One's Own – Somebody Else's x: IIc1. Word – Silence

Formative group 5. Non-Feasibility – Feasibility of Actions with One's Own and Somebody Else's

4. Nin tuur lihi isagaa kaa yaqaan siduu u seexdo

A hunchback knows better than you how he should sleep [i.e. everybody knows better than you what he needs]

Thematic group IIb8. Oneself – Others x: IIb11 Straight - Crooked

Formative group 22. Qualitative Superiority – Inferiority of Oneself and Other

Russian equivalent: *Do not teach the lame to hobble*

Thematic group IIb8. Oneself – Others x: IIb7 Healthy – Sick

Formative group 22. Qualitative Superiority – Inferiority of One-self and Other

5. Sidaan kuugu lisay iiguma hambaynin

I had milked for you much milk but you have left me only a little⁵

Thematic group III1 Action – Reaction x: III14 To Give – To Take

Formative group 17. Quantitative Correspondence – Non-Correspondence of Action and Reaction

Russian equivalent: *You say to him ‘We shall eat it seven together’ and he says to you ‘I shall eat it myself’*

Thematic group III1 Action – Reaction x: IIb8. Oneself – Others

Formative group 17. Quantitative Correspondence – Non-Correspondence of Action and Reaction

It is hardly possible to find the exact Russian correspondences for all Somali paremias, but almost always the similar ones can be found. We are talking, firstly, about such pairs of adages, one of which contains one thematic pair, and the other one includes two pairs or more. For example, in the Somali proverb *Together ants can carry even a lizard* there are two thematic pairs: IIc2. Unity - Disunity (main) and IIa1. Big - Small (additional), but in the similar Russian paremia, (*When people act together nothing is heavy* there is only the first one.

Secondly, the Somali and Russian paremias may include different, but close in meaning, thematic pairs or may contain the same thematic pairs, the logical connection between the members of which, however, refer to different (albeit close) formative groups: Thus the Somali proverb *A little raven won't peck his mother's eye out* belongs to the thematic group III2. Generating – Generated and the Russian proverb *A raven won't peck another raven's eye out* refers to the thematic group IIb4. Similar – Unlike, whereas the formative group in both of them is the same – 9. Friendliness – Hostility.

There are, finally, paremias belonging to different thematic and formative groups, but, nevertheless, similar to each other. Here is an example: in the Somali proverb *The jackal has changed its step but still does not walk like the Prophet* [i.e. one cannot change oneself] the main thematic pair is I1. Content – Form and

the formative group is 2. Invariability – Variability of Content and/or Form of things. The Russian adage *A cuckoo cannot become a falcon* lies at the intersection of the thematic group IIa10. Good – Bad and the formative group 11. Transformation – Non-Transformation of Good into Bad and Bad into Good. However, it is obviously impossible to deny the similarity of these two paremias. It is based on their common additional thematic pair IIa3. High – Low which is close in meaning to the pair of Good and Bad: the “bad” beast (jackal) cannot remake itself; the “bad” bird (cuckoo) cannot turn into a good one. Moreover, Invariability and Non-Transformation also have much in common.

The logical-semiotic classification of paremias is of universal character. This means that the observations and conclusions presented in this article are applicable to any bilingual collection of proverbs and sayings.

Notes

¹ G. L. Permyakov. Proverbs and sayings of the peoples of the East. Moscow. 2012, p. 17.

² Hereinafter we are dealing with one-phrase paremiological clichés. The Somali paremiological stock also includes adages consisting of two or more sentences, as well as dialogue clichés and so-called “numeral” proverbs. Most of them are polysemantic, which makes it difficult or even impossible to find their Russian equivalents.

³ If one of these members is not represented explicitly, it is implied as, for example, in the Somali proverb A fool cannot justify himself [and a clever man can].

⁴ The intersection mark x is followed by the index and the decoding of the additional invariant thematic pair, which is present in a paremia (see G. L. Permyakov. Proverbs and sayings of the peoples of the East. Moscow. 2012, pp. 625-635).

⁵ According to Somali customs, a guest after having received some milk should leave a part of it to the host.

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