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TITLE The life cycle of a proverb

YEAR 2023

VERSION Author accepted manuscript

CITATION Granbom-Herranen, L. 2023. The life cycle of a proverb. In Soares, R. & Lauhakangas, O. (eds) 16th Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Proverbs, Proceedings. ACTAS ICP22 Proceedings. Tavira: AIP-IAP, pp. 73-78.
<https://www.folklore.ee/ri/fo/koostoo/tavira/proceedings.htm>

O CICLO DE VIDA DE UM PROVÉRBIO

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Resumo

O público muitas vezes está ciente da origem de uma expressão que se torna uma frase anónima, depois um *clichê* ou um ditado popular e depois um provérbio. Por exemplo, os provérbios tradicionais finlandeses incluem alguns que têm a sua origem na poesia bastante recente. No entanto, não é aqui que o ciclo de vida de um provérbio começa. Para viver, um provérbio tem que ser usado. Para Lauri Honko e Gerard Rooijackers, o início do ciclo de vida de um produto folclórico está no passado natural, quase imperceptível (Honko 2013, 39). É um palco caracterizado pela autenticidade (Rooijackers 1998, 183). Esta fase poderia ser chamada de vida quotidiana normal. Ao pensar em provérbios como artefatos, eles não diferem de outros produtos folclóricos como artefatos imateriais.

Palavras-chave: produtos folclóricos, paremiografia, paremiologia, provérbio como símbolo.

Curriculum Vitæ

Liisa Granbom-Herranen concentra a sua investigação atual na paremiologia folclórica na Universidade de Turku, Departamento de Folclore. Obteve o segundo doutoramento em estudos folclóricos e o primeiro é PhD em Educação. Tem o título de docente (professor associado) em estudos folclóricos na Universidade de Turku e em educação na Universidade de Jyväskylä na Finlândia. Os seus estudos são multidisciplinares, pois o seu principal interesse nos estudos folclóricos está relacionado com os provérbios, com o conceito de metáfora na filosofia, bem como as questões de poder, autoridade e autonomia em educação. Entre outras atividades académicas, é membro da International Association of Paremiology (AIP-IAP) e da European Society of Phraseology. Compilei com a Dr. Outi Lauhakangas uma base de dados de reposição dos artigos dos ICPs publicados a partir de 2008 (http://www.folklore.ec/rl/fo/koostoo/tavira/index_e.html)

THE LIFE CYCLE OF A PROVERB

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Abstract

The public is often aware of the origin of an expression that becomes an anonymous sentence, then a cliché or a saying and then a proverb. For example, Finnish traditional proverbs include some that originate in fairly recent poetry. However, this is not where the life cycle of a proverb begins. In order to live, a proverb has to be used. For Lauri Honko and Gerard Rooijackers, the start of the life cycle of a folklore product is in the natural, almost imperceptible past (Honko 2013, 39). It is a stage characterised by authenticity (Rooijackers 1998, 183). This stage could be called normal everyday life. When thinking about proverbs as artefacts, they do not actually differ from other folklore products as immaterial artefacts.

Key-words: folklore products, paremiography, paremiology, proverb as a symbol

Introduction

The article will discuss the life of proverbs, looking at the different stages of their life cycle. The starting point is in the folkloristic paremiology. I have combined the views of two former researchers on the life cycle of proverbs and of them formed the one presented in this article. The final viewpoint on the life cycle of proverbs is in line with how Lauri Honko (2013) and Gerard Rooijakkers (1998) have treated the issue.

Proverbs are artefacts, in other words folklore products, in which both skills (tekhne) and knowledge (episteme) are present. Knowledge and know-how are combined to form an artefact in some socio-cultural framework. A proverb can be seen as this kind of folklore product. Proverbs come from the past (even if the past is not in ancient times) which in turn is a combination of social, economic, geographical, and other cultural environments. Next to the past, the present is a unique creation of those past tracks. In the course of time the future will be the present and today's present will be past.

Cultural artefacts are public property and so also folklore products are public property. No permissions are needed when oral folklore products as proverbs are used. They are not owned by some special person, the group of people or any institution so any copyrights on them are not asked. This enables them being used in collections, media and in varying artistic connections. However, because proverbs are rooted in a combination of social, economic, geographical as well as other cultural factors, they are expressions that are expected to be recognized and understood in some cultural area.

As all life and research, also paremiologic research has been (and will be) done in some socio-cultural framework. Political and philosophical ideologies occur with the varying degrees of emphasis and in various circumstances. However, every era has its own understanding what publicity means, what is the expected audience. It is to say, also all the paremiologic research has been (and will be) done in some socio-cultural framework. Political and philosophical ideologies occur with various emphasis in different circumstances. For example, all this (and a lot more) is included in the connection between proverbs and publicity. To understand proverb material that exists either in proverb collections or archives, it is necessary to remain aware how the material has ended up there. However, this is not where the life cycle of a proverb begins. A proverb is an expression that is accepted as a part of daily language in a certain society, and it lives if it passes social censorship. Researchers should be aware who the proverb users are or what is their socio-economic milieu or world view. What comes for example to the history of Finland (see more Granbom-Herranen 2021), paremiography has played an important

role in the process of nation-building. A lot of Finnish paremiographic work has been done during critical periods in Finnish history. No doubt, Finland is not an exception among nations. All this makes it necessary to take up questions as **“Why and for which purpose was the data collected?”**, **“Who collected it?”**, **“How?”**, **“When?”**, **“Where?”**.

Proverbs in use, the beginning of a life cycle

It is said proverbs are anonymous statements, sentences. However, the origin of a proverb may have been commonly known at some point but has been forgotten over time. Any proverb has been invented by someone who first has the idea of putting it in a statement (Taylor 1931). Even if we know something about the background of a traditional proverb, its origin is not known in most cases.¹

Today's circumstances have altered the idea of historically anonymous expression: due to fast communication, it is possible to identify the first user of a proverb in many cases. Modern proverbs² might be different. Their origin is not necessarily unknown, and they are not always from the distant past. Today the public is often aware of the origin of an expression that becomes an anonymous sentence, then a cliché or a saying and then a proverb. For example, Finnish traditional proverbs include some that originate in quite new poetry.

To live, a proverb must be used. For Honko and Rooijackers, the start of the life cycle of a folklore product is in the natural, sometimes almost imperceptible past (Honko 2013). It is a stage characterized by authenticity (Rooijackers 1998). This stage is the normal **everyday life**. When thinking about proverbs as artefacts, they do not actually differ from other folklore products as immaterial artefacts. Today, this stage could include contemporary daily routines connected with proverbs in the vernacular and everyday use.

At this stage, proverbs are collected and documented. Proverb collections are published, giving the impression of a living tradition. However, in this phase, a part of the tradition is committed to archives and museums to await use. This is not an everyday practice but conserving something for the future (see Honko 2013; Rooijackers 1998). The result is that we, as collectors of proverbs (paremiography) or researchers of proverbs (paremiology) or as to proverbs devoted collectors of the tradition in our home region or just for some reason having a special interest in proverbs **“We ask and get what we ask”**.

Proverbs in collections and archives, used in research

After these immaterial artefacts, proverbs, have been noticed outside their normal living context, they begin a new life phase. They are noticed since their existence might be

endangered, or we suppose the existence might be endangered. Artefacts, such as proverbs might be threatened with extinction (Rooijakkers 1998).

At this stage, there has already been a basis for defining the starting point for existing knowledge, compiled proverbs. Proverbs are getting a special status as a part of national memory. As a matter of fact, especially as researchers **“we ask more about what we have got and understood”**.

Selected proverbs in collections for public

After proverb sentences are collected and documented, and they have been stored in the national archives they have often got the status as national heritage. From these archives, proverbs are now and then taken out. Proverb collections are published, giving the impression of a living tradition. In the published collections proverbs might be with interpretations given by the author.

However, in this phase, a part of the tradition is committed to archives and museums to await use. This is not an everyday practice but conserving something for the future (see Honko 2013; Rooijakkers 1998). In archives and publications, proverbs obtain a new life. Proverbs are taken from books and archives by two types of users: people who want to use them and people who want to study them. Still, plenty of proverbs have been left outside as **“We focus on what we study”**.

Public and further researchers read, use and implement proverbs.

The use of proverbs has many purposes, from political speeches and advertisements to folklore performances (Honko 2013; Rooijakkers 1998). This refers to the use of proverbs in the past but, at the same time, gives new meaning to them. This is the phase where ideologies might step in, the past being a good basis to build national heritage upon. Proverbs are looked up when needed.

This might initiate a new life cycle where proverbs are seen, heard, and used. However, it is not what the use of proverbs was in the beginning. If nothing else has changed, the context has changed – and context provides a proverb with meaning. Thus, even if the form of a proverb is unchanged, its meaning or interpretation change. This could be considered a new life cycle. However, the problem (or the challenge) is that **“We study what we have got and the way we have understood it”**.

Conclusions

Considering the familiarity and frequency of proverbs, before been collected and archived proverbs might have been widely known for a long time or just for some decades or even only for some years and in a small area. It might have happened that a person or a small group of people, such as a family, moved a proverb from place to place. It might also be that the interest of the proverb collectors might simply have happened to fall on a specific time and area. The possibilities for speculation are endless.

The following examples deal with one proverb which in Finnish occurs both as a traditional proverb and a modern one. The first example is about the time from 80 years ago, the two other ones are from 2006.

- (1) When talking about the neighbours my parents pointed out that all people, both richer than we and more in needy than we, duller by nature or more communicative, all they were in some way good people. They wanted to find out something valuable of the blameworthy person. Just as a throwaway remark and by using some proper proverb they often ended with the saying:
– *Tuumoo kahesti, ennen kun tuomihet* [Think twice before you judge], or
– *Huonokii mehtä vastaa niin ku ite huuvat* [Even a bad forest answers as you shout towards] (PE85, man, born 1914)
- (2) Anyway, I have got along with the townspeople very well. *Kummottos mettä huutta, simmot se vasta*. [The way you shout towards a forest, that is the way it answers] – a local resident (SSS, sent 19. 8. 2006)
- (3) It was nice when we got a new school there every teacher has own laptop and many other fine things. Art was bought with 9000 euros. Now we have to save money. – *sitä saa mitä tilaa* [you get what you order] (SSS, sent 18. 8. 2006)

To use a proverb is a performance which has a target bound with the event and used words. The performance includes both the verbal expressions and the behaviour by which the message comes over. The proverb performance often aims at an authentic and one-off event. Performer and the audience are to share some common knowledge about the past to be able to connect the message with the ongoing activity, but it is to be accepted that there are always listeners and readers who are not capable understanding and/or interpreting proverbs.

A successful proverb performance can sum up the whole situation and it can function as a full stop. In everyday use, the speaker does not plan how to use the proverb (when, where, in what form, and to whom). Evidently, this happens in the same way as in a colloquial written language. When making a pause in the discourse, the use of a proverb as a violating element brings in some new aspect. In any case, the use of a proverb or a proverb itself adds a value to the speech event. The proverb's true and natural surroundings are in everyday life.

Endnotes

1. Traditional and modern proverb in Finnish context, see Granbom-Herranen 2018.
2. "Modern proverb" is also a context bound concept. As I know in USA paremiologists talk about modern proverbs if they are from 19th century. In Finland, the turning point is somewhere in the middle of the 20th century.

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Abbreviations:

SSS = *Salon Seudun Sanomat* [Salo District Newspaper], a regional Finnish daily newspaper.

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Curriculum vitae

Liisa Granbom-Herranen. My current research focuses on folkloristic paremiology. I gained my second PhD in folkloristics, and the first one is in PhD (education). I have the title of docent (adjunct professor) at University of Turku, Department of Folkloristics, where my specific field is paremiology I have the title of docent (adjunct professor) in education at University of Jyväskylä in Finland, specific field in informal education. My studies are multidisciplinary as the main interest in folkloristic studies is related to the proverbs, the concept of metaphor in philosophy as well as the questions of power, authority, and autonomy in education. I am a member of the International Association of Paremiology (AIP-IAP).

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