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Preprint 1

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**ON DENOTATIVE
INDEFINITENESS
OF PROVERBS**



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Remarks on proverb semantics 1

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1. Three possible approaches

It seems to be reasonable to divide all so far used or imaginable approaches to the semantics of proverbs into three basic modes which differ in the nature of the initial information, in the ways of manipulating this information and in the character (scope, reliability) of obtainable descriptions.

(1) The "purely semantical" (virtual, context-free) mode.

We use mere proverb texts (without regard to any direct comments on their meaning and usage) as initial information and attempt to interpret them, proceeding from our personal knowledge and notions of (a) what interrelations hold between things in extralingual reality, i.e. those between objects of every sort and kind, e.g. physical, biological, psychical, social, cultural, etc., (b) what are literal, non-poetic meanings of words appearing in proverb texts, and (c) what proverbs themselves as such are, what universal semantic rules govern constructing and understanding them and in which settings it would be appropriate to use this or that proverb. This method, as maximally context-free,¹ is maximally accessible at the same time, but it has, on the other hand, the essential fault that it provides us only with hypothetical results, i.e. it assigns to each proverb (text) only a supposed "semantic potential", and it would be, in most cases, difficult, if not impossible, to verify the validity of our interpretations, in particular if we have to do with materials remote from our own culture or with international materials that descend from many different cultures.

(2) The "pragmatico-semantical" (actual, context-bound) mode.

We take proverb texts for utterances (versus sentences) and consider them only in their actualizations, i.e. in connection with concrete verbal and/or material contexts which have ever provoked uttering any of them, in the limits of fixed time, space, language, social sphere, etc. Respectively, we regard as relevant information only those records which

contain authentic data in such kind of circumstances. This approach would provide us, in the limits noticed, with an entirely reliable set of real meanings of each proverb, but its practical applicability appears to be utterly questionable because paremiologists have hopelessly little information of such kind at their disposal. The last deficiency is global and nowadays, evidently, already incompensable, because of the continuing regression of proverbial tradition itself and the fact that "hunting" for proverbial actualizations, e.g., in such a way as Mathilde Hain (1951) has done, is an ultimately troublesome, unprofitable and thankless enterprise, however important and desirable its results for paremiological research were.

(3) The "syntactico-semantic" mode. For the representatives of this mode could be taken all particular approaches where the problems of semantical comparing and the interrelations of proverbs are involved, in addition to those of interpreting (resp. using) and semantical describing each of them separately. In the ideal case, the syntactico-semantic approach can aim at presenting a semantic description of the whole proverbial repertoire of a certain nation or even a larger international stock, in the form of unified classification or typology. The need for such classifications and their scientific value, provided they are constructed with sufficient strictness and accuracy, hardly calls for a special argumentation. On the other hand, it is equally plausible that everyone who ventures at making attempts in this area will encounter with many serious complications, both theoretical and methodical. A more detailed observation of difficulties mentioned would be a matter for a special issue, but it must be emphasized here that a successful output can be gained only if we are able to find metalingual devices for making the semantic relations of each single proverb with all other proverbs explicit, including the relations between the so-called synonymous proverbs. The latter, in turn, assumes

explorations on the connotative level of proverbs in order to fix the distinctions of semantically similar proverbs in terms more clearcut than their usual labellings with the aid of words such as 'nuance', 'shade', 'tint', etc. Briefly, our intentions here are somewhat similar to these of transformational grammar in linguistics, namely, "to relate superficially distinct sentences and distinguish superficially identical sentences" (Chomsky 1957:26). And last not least: the necessity for strictness and unambiguity of the meta-language falls here into a particularly acute opposition with the multilevel semantic indefiniteness of proverbs. A combined mode, applicable practically for every kind of investigations in proverb semantics, including their semantical classifying, should be regarded as the best. This mode would accept all available direct data about these topics, as well as our own more general knowledge and perceptions. But there is likely no good reason to prefer or reject one or the other approach on principle: they all have the pros and cons and, in the so-called natural systems, it is sometimes rather difficult to distinguish the "purely semantical" aspects from the syntactical and pragmatico-functional ones.

2. The indefiniteness of denotation. Some problems connected with the proverbial trope

As mentioned, the meaning of a proverb as a single (virtual or written) text is, for a user or researcher, a mere semantic potential. The final and maximally definite meanings of a certain text manifest themselves only in concrete actualizations of this text. We have to do, thus, with two different phenomena: (a) the "absolute sum" of all possible meanings of a given text, i.e. its potential of interpretability, and (b) the sum of its real meanings manifested in all its actualizations up to the present moment. As we know, in a general case, too little or nothing

about the traditional circumstances of using the proverb under discussion, we may fail, in all probability, to formulate its potential as exactly adequate (both in logical and "material" sense) to the set of its real meanings in oral tradition, i.e. we are sure to make some of the mistakes listed below:

(1) we interpret the text too loosely, i.e. give its description in too general terms; though our description will include all real "sub-meanings" of the text, it will also include a number of unreal ones;

(2) we give a too narrow interpretation, which leaves out a part of real meanings;

(3) both (1) and (2) together: the description introduces some unreal meanings and neglects a part of real ones;

(4) the interpretation fails entirely and the formulation of the potential does not include real meanings at all.²

Let us try, for example, to observe the meanings of the Estonian proverb Tühi kott ei seisa püsti (literally: An empty sack cannot stand upright). We can give it a rather narrow and concrete meaning which would be quite acceptable to the majority of contemporaries, and namely: 'a stupid or inefficient person cannot retain too long a position (e.g., hold a high office, have a good reputation) he has obtained accidentally or thanks to someone's favour'. But the description can also be formulated in an utterly abstract language, if we reason roughly in such a manner:

(1) sack - i.e. 'some object';

(2) empty - i.e. 'does not contain or possess anything the objects of such kind can, on principle, contain or possess';

(3) to stand upright - i.e. 'to be actually, during some time, in immobile state in relation to some other object (background), this state being considered as qualitatively higher or more "negentropic" than the background's state, owing to that the possibility exists that this state will be replaced by some other, less negentropic one, and some supplementary conditions are necessary so that this state could be

preserved';

(4) if we interpret both "emptiness" and "not-standing" as actual states of the object, then "emptiness" can be considered as the cause of "not-standing" and, respectively, "not-standing" as the effect of the "emptiness";

(5) similarly, only the "emptiness" can be considered as the actual state, so that as to the aspect of "steadiness" both alternatives ("standing" and "not-standing") are possible, but the first would be a real, probable possibility, and the second merely a formal, improbable one;

(6) the "emptiness" can be interpreted as an internal feature intrinsically proper to the object, and "not-standing" as an external manifestation of this feature;

(7) the "emptiness" may also be conceived as intrinsically not characteristic of the object but only as marking its extrinsic, casual state, etc., etc.

Correspondingly, the semantic description of the sentence may be formulated in several different ways, e.g.:

(8) 'if the cause exists, it brings about a certain effect(s)';

(9) 'if real possibilities for happening of some event are lacking, this event will not happen indeed';

(10) 'if the object has an internal characteristic, the existence of this feature must reflect itself in something external as well';

(11) 'the behaviour of the object depends on its state';

(12) the description might be presented somehow more "disjunctively" as well, e.g.: 'the object which, in virtue of its intrinsic properties or some extrinsic or occasional circumstances, has no (or too small) possibilities to rise into a qualitatively higher or more negentropic state cannot actually reach this state, at least until the factors excluding or minimizing this possibility are in force (if they are not intrinsic); and if it even has reached this state owing to some external or accidental circumstances, it cannot retain

this state if these accidental factors have ceased to operate';

(13) the concept of 'non-containable' could be as well displayed more concretely, e.g.: 'an object (system) which does not contain a sufficient quantity of a substance and/or energy and/or information cannot rise from its existent state into a more negentropic one, or it will fall into a more entropic one if the influx of the substance and/or energy and/or information has ceased or fallen below the critical level', or in some other way.

Descriptions of such kind, however, as applied to proverb texts, seem to be rather inexpedient for several reasons:

(a) they reflect, above all, the peculiarities of the describer's own world view or consciousness rather than the properties of the object being described; (b) by using such descriptions it is next to impossible to distinguish one proverb from another; (c) obviously, the proverb text turns out to be an indefinite "potential" not only with respect to its particular meanings in its concrete applications, but also with respect to its conceivable semantic descriptions of utterly abstract and general character, i.e., we can assign a number of different descriptions to the proverb text, no one of them being exhaustive and, at the same time, we have no good reason to prefer any of them to others.

Consequently, we must introduce some restrictions. As the proverb reveals a specific "humanocentric" tendency, i.e. a notable bias to deal, above all, with ethical and social problems, we may suppose: this saying ought to be interpreted as concerning human relations as well. Then, the attribute empty might be conceived as characterizing some state, enterprise, performance or statement of some individual or a group, more exactly, the devoidance of various physico-biological, intellectual, ethical, material or other goods and values, or the senselessness or wrongness of someone's statements or undertakings, e.g.: (a) 'feeble'; (b) 'sick'; (c) 'hungry';

(d) 'stupid'; (e) 'evil'; (f) 'poor'; (g) 'idle work or other senseless undertaking'; (h) '"empty" talk (lie, boast, gossip)', etc. The syntagm cannot stand upright can be interpreted in the same manner: (i) 'falls down'; (j) 'falls ill'; (k) 'loses physical abilities (strength, capacity for work)'; (l) 'dies'; (m) forfeits the reputation (favour, love, credit)'; (n) 'loses the position (role, office)'; (o) 'loses the property'; (p) 'does not succeed in his work'; (q) 'one's lie, gossip, etc., proves to be void, comes to light', and so on. If we try, then, to combine the particular "antecedents" (a)...(h) with the particular "consequents" (i)...(q), a part of combinations received will already fall out on the level of common sense, but a number of possible combinations will remain, e.g. ai ('a feeble man falls down'), bk ('a sick man cannot work'), cl ('a hungry man will die'), dm ('a fool forfeits his reputation'), do ('a fool sustains material losses'), also aj, am, an, bi, bl, bm, bn, ci, cj, ck, dn, em, fm, fn, gp, hm, hq and others.

Further, we shall find ourselves unable to bear any telling argument for the existence or absence, frequency or rarity of any particular combination in real oral currency. Fortunately, Estonian recorders have commented on this proverb rather numerously (there are about 30 explanations at our disposal), and it appears that the majority of them present the manifestations of only two combinations, namely ck ('a hungry man cannot work') and hq ('a lie or groundless praise or boast comes to light'), and, on the other hand, the combinations dm ('a fool forfeits the reputation') and dn ('a fool loses the position'), however natural and expectable they seem nowadays, do not occur at all. Moreover, one of the collectors has explained that this proverb hints at the fragility of unrequited friendship or brevity of unilateral good deeds. Thus, we find no appropriate column to file this case and have every reason to ask whether our list of possibilities is exhaustive enough, or whether overlapping of its

particular members is precluded. If we take into account that there is, after all, a comment which permits this proverb to mean also 'an ill-fed domestic animal is not capable of work or he is of less use', then even our hypothesis about the "humanocentricity" of this proverb appears to be inaccurate.

Let us give another analogous example. Suppose we have come across the saying which advises to cure an injury resulting from the bite of a dog with the hair of the dog that has bitten. This sentence is likely to evoke in our mind some perceptions of the following kind: (1) the dog bit - i.e. 'something or somebody has harmed somebody'; (2) the hair of the dog - i.e. 'something or somebody that belongs to the person or thing that has harmed'; (3) to cure with the hair - i.e. 'to compensate, restore' (alludes to the well-known magic treatment in folk medicine). Further, it is rather difficult to imagine this general framework filled with some more concrete content. The harming may be divided into particular cases, e.g.: (a) 'to wound physically, to cause pain or sickness'; (b) to harm morally (insult, slander, etc.); (c) 'to cause pecuniary loss (steal, damage some work or undertaking, break or spoil or soil some thing, etc.)'. Whichever of these cases we might take, it remains hard to find a fully suitable interpretation of the curing with the hair which suggests the restriction 'must be performed by the same person who had been harmed'. And without any direct preliminary knowledge we could scarcely guess that the primary and most widespread meaning of this sentence is quite concrete and narrow, namely, it is used as a facetious comment in the case of taking a drop for a hang-over, and so in several languages, e.g., in English, German, Danish (see Taylor 1931:131-132, Koskenjaakko 1909:8), Estonian and, probably, in many others as well. The last interpretation puts every component of the metaphor to its place very exactly and spectacularly. However, the whole semantic compass of this proverb is not yet exhausted thereby, and again, we ought

likely to know by immediate sources that the saying can, also, occur as a direct magico-medical instruction in its purely literal sense, e.g. in Russian (cf. Yermolov 1905:171), and after all, that a "little transfer" is possible where the saying does not exceed the limits of the magico-medical region, but need not be bound just to the dog and the hair as such (see Koskenjaakko 1909:7).

The cases above and a great number of others confirm the well-known paremiological standpoint that the semantic indeterminacy of proverbs springs first and foremost from the ambiguity of proverbial tropes (metaphors, allegories, etc.). As the problems of tropicalization exhibit some interesting sub-aspects of semantic indefiniteness of lexical elements of the proverb text and as the whole scope of the proverbs' semantic indefiniteness is not limited to the tropical image solely, some further remarks on these topics might be permissible.

On principle, two diametrical approaches to the "lingual" homo-/heterogeneity of the proverb text and to the poeticalness/non-poeticalness of its lexical elements are possible.

(1) We treat the proverb text as internally heterogeneous and try to divide its lexical components into "content elements" (c-elements) and "formal elements" (f-elements). The total of the latter could be constituted, then, from (a) the so-called relational words of every kind, e.g., those used in verbal interpretations of logical operations, quantifiers, etc., as is, not, and, or, every, all, some, sometimes, never, etc.; (b) may-be, also the words marking various modalities, e.g., good, bad; must, may, cannot, etc.; (c) all kinds of interrogative words; (d) the members of specific word-pairs marking the so-called syntactic figures or syntactic formulae of proverb texts, e.g., Who...that...; If...then...; Where...there...; Every...has his...; Better...than..., etc., etc. The rest of the words would belong to c-elements and might, in turn, be divided into semantically "literal" (c₁-)elements

and "transferred" (c_2 -)elements. Of course, the dividing need not proceed exactly in the way described,³ but the essence of this approach is that it does not assign poeticalness to the proverb text as a whole - poeticalness is assigned only to some elements of it, e.g., to c-elements, or, even more restrictedly, to c_2 -elements merely. (This interpretation permits, incidentally, the existence of entirely apoetical proverbs, at least on principle.) This point of view in its various modifications is very widespread and generally accepted (properly, autocratically governing) in paremiology.

(2) The proverb text is treated as internally homogeneous, totally poetical. Anyhow, its elements can be divided, but as to their lingual origins everyone of them is to be considered as belonging to the "secondary", poetical (P-)language and must be strictly distinguished from all (in particular from homonymous) elements of the "primary" language, i.e. ordinary non-poetic (L-)language, and from all elements of the "tertiary" metalanguage (M-language) used for describing the content of proverb texts. A strict separation of the L- and M-lingual locutions is required as well.⁴

Though the latter interpretation, as applied to proverbs, must be treated with reservation in some points, it has some momentous advantages in comparison with the first, the usual conception. They are as follows.

1. First of all, there are many instances where the f-elements (relational words, members of the "syntactic formulae", even particular morphems) perform semantic operations very similar to those appearing at the tropicalization. For example, in the text СКОЛЬКО МУДРЕЦОВ, СТОЛЬКО И МНЕНИЙ, repeatedly referred to by G. L. Permyakov (e.g. 1968a:9-10, 1970:12) as a specimen of a completely literal proverb, the f-element столько is undoubtedly of tropical quality: when столько in its literal sense stresses (exact or approximate) equality, while remaining indifferent to the dimension of

comparable quantities, then, in the present context, it acquires a more indefinite meaning, namely an augmentative one. It constitutes here a sort of "syntactic hyperbole" which springs up roughly in such a way: on the one hand, our intuitive expectations at this input are based on the "empiric law" which prescribes that if the number of opiners is great enough, then, very probably, the number of different opinions would be considerably smaller than the number of opiners themselves; on the other hand, this proverb, obviously, just gains its aim and efficacy if we presuppose that the number of opiners is great indeed - consequently, the "empiric law" mentioned has been violated here.

A quite regular feature is the participation of f-elements in constituting a set of phenomena we could denominate commonly as the cases of modal metaphor, e.g., (a) the rhetorical question which, in proverbs, is to be regularly interpreted as negation; (b) a variety of ironical images where the implied axiologic (and often also propositional) negation is formally expressed as affirmation; (c) other cases where the formally indicative mood, due to the content of concrete c-elements and/or contextual circumstances, gets the meaning of some other modality (deontic, epistemic, etc.). Some instances of the last case will be briefly discussed in the next part of this paper.

2. As Jakobson (1961:400) suggests, just the very effects of contrast and symmetry that inevitably occur with various devices of parallelism must be regarded as very important symptoms of poeticalness. If we distinguish three aspects in the poetical structure of the proverb (text) - (a) euphonical, (b) syntactical, and (c) tropico-lexical, the interrelations between the euphonics and tropics can be depicted roughly as follows:

(1) the unity on the "material level" of the text: the euphonic "ornamentation" of the text cannot be executed otherwise than by means of selecting and repeating the word

forms and/or combining their arrangement;

(2) the opposition at creating the text: one has to reveal the poetical ingenuity to some extent to avoid the destructing or "blunting" the tropical image on account of "introducing" euphonisms;

(3) the mutual compensation at the reception of the (new-born) text: to be acceptable and viable enough and to force its way into the oral tradition and survive in it, the text need not display notable appeal in all possible aspects of (aesthetic and pragmatic) evaluation; among these, it need not convey remarkable values both in its euphonics and its tropics, but can confine itself to being attractive either with its sound or metaphor (or with something else having to do with neither sound nor metaphor).⁵

The devices belonging to the poetic syntax of the proverb, in contrary, seem to act as compensators both on the creation and reception levels. For example, the above-mentioned device of syntactic symmetry can, on the one hand, call into being some spontaneous germs of euphony, e.g., the so-called paradigmatical or grammatical (incl. inflection) rhyme, "natural" rhythm patterns, etc.; on the other hand, it serves directly semantical purposes: it "organizes" the content of the text, indicates the connections between the c-elements (affirms and negates, concludes and concedes, includes and excludes, and so on). Here a special mention must be made of the fact that syntactic symmetry brings about the effect of "semantic symmetry", i.e., as any other kind of parallelism, it establishes a set of non-lineal relationships between the c-elements, fixes a number of paradigms of secondary (poetical) stage and manifests both (all) members of these paradigms overtly in the surface structure of the text. Such paradigms, admittedly, often rest upon the ordinary L-lingual synonyms and antonyms, but they also enable to consider as oppositional, on the poetical level, the relations of a great number of such words which on the level of the L-language would be entirely

disparate, e.g., those of the words седина and бес in the Russian proverb Седина в бороду - бес в ребро or of собака and ветер in the text Собака лает - ветер носит or of tuul (wind) and sant (beggar) in the Estonian proverb Mis tuul kivist saab või sant saunanurgast (literally: What can the wind get from a stone, or the beggar from a cot corner), or of kuld (gold) and tsirk (bird) in the South-Estonian proverb Kuld kuninga pungan, tsirk saksa kõtun (The gold /is/ in the king's purse, the bird /is/ in the toff's (gentleman's) belly), and an infinite number of others.

3. The approach under discussion does not oblige us to make sharp and rigid "bivalent" distinction between the f- and c-elements on the one hand, and between the c₁- and c₂-elements, on the other hand. This is to be considered as an advantage, whereas the borderlines mentioned do not really exist, and can be drawn only at the cost of a good deal of arbitrariness. The situations in both these aspects can be depicted, rather, as sequences of a great number of "shades of grey" (darkening or brightening) on some long scale. In the case of the c/f-distinction, at one end of this scale might lie, then, such most typical f-elements as listed on page 11, and at the other end, may-be, some words with ultimately complicated semantic structure, manifold connotative "overtones", and so on.⁷ Equally problematic is the distinction of c₁- and c₂-elements. First of all, two different concepts are not to be confused here, namely, (a) transferrability of words that purely depends on their linguistico-semantic properties, and (b) transferredness that can be judged of only by the circumstances concerning this or that concrete actualization of some text. So far, to our knowledge, nobody has attempted to clear up which semantic features a word must have to be more liable or more resistant to tropicalization. On the one hand, as we saw, even the f-elements are not deprived of chances to perform tropical duties, on the other hand, however, it is quite obvious that, in general, the "contentlessness"

(or formality) and the "intransferrability" of a word tend to be positively correlated. The transfers of the f-elements, in particular, are limited to a few single kinds of tropes; the possibilities of the words denoting various kinds of very generalized and abstract objects (e.g., philosophical, logical, ethical, psychical, etc.) are, in this respect, quite restricted as well.

Though we cannot put forward any a priori lexicological criteria to decide firmly which function - either a "formal" or a "content" one - a word can fulfil in a proverb text, or whether a word can be received in the proverbial context only "literally" or "transferredly" as well, and which concrete transfers it enables, we might still try to delineate at least hypothetically some notes about the criteria and rules governing the semantical operations at "deciphering" the proverbial trope and understanding the proverb text as a whole.

1. We might, for convenience, begin by stating that here the need for "deciphering" (or interpretation, or "translation") exists indeed. This has to do just with Taylor's (1931:3) famous "incommunicable quality" that "tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not". Although there have been some proposals, e.g., by G.B. Milner (1969a, 1969b), paremiologists in general have revealed little or no interest in clearing up the nature and sources of this incommunicable quality. If we should venture, for our part, to enumerate some factors that can occasion us to take a certain sentence from the spoken chain for the proverb and to subject it to some semantic alterations to make it meaningful and acceptable in a given setting, among these factors might be, eventually, e.g., the following ones:

(1) the text does not fit in with the situative and/or verbal context: it has an incorrect "quantifier" (of generality) and its literal content is incompatible with the context or consituation;

(2) the statement presented by the text feels to be too

self-evident and trivial in its literal sense;

(3) either the literal statement in the text seems to be incorrect, or the literal prescription (advice, interdiction) seems to be unreasonable;

(4) taken literally, the text seems to be nonsensical: the semantic incompatibility between the components of the text is perceptible;

(5) the text is too regular and ornamental (syntactic symmetry, euphonisms).

2. As to our present concern, points (2)...(4) are of most interest. Above all, it must be emphasized there are no clearcut borderlines between the proverbs with "too obviously" true, platitudinous content and those with undoubtedly wrong literal content, on the one hand, and between the proverbs with wrong literal statement (or "wrong" literal prescription) and these with contradictory or nonsensical literal content, on the other hand, at least in so far as we observe texts apart from their (real or imaginable) contexts. In recent years several authors have discussed the matters of distinguishing metaphorical expressions from non-metaphorical ones and meaningful expressions from meaningless ones, and have put forward roughly the following, full of suggestions, to our mind, opinions:

(1) the metaphor cannot be explained simply as violating the a priori imposed universal rules for "normal" connecting of words (e.g. the so-called selection restrictions, etc.): not all metaphors result from rule violations and not all rule violations result in metaphors;

(2) expressions are semantically correct or incorrect, meaningful or meaningless not per se, but only with respect to this or that concrete verbal and/or situative context where they have been actualized;

(3) there are no clear boundaries (a) between the "normal" polysemy of words and their metaphorical use, (b) between the lingual (lexical, dead) and poetical ("fresh", original) meta-

phor, and (c) between the metaphorical and nonsensical word-combination.⁸

3. If we accept the postulates above, at least two further conclusions can be made at once. First, the context-free approach deprives us of the main criterion to decide which operations are necessary to transcode this or that literal meaning into one or the other "factual" meaning (cf. points (1) and (2) above). Secondly (cf. point (3) above), the tropes of folklore (incl. phraseology) and those of "literary" poetry occupy different stages on the scale 'polysemy' → 'lingual metaphor' → 'poetical metaphor' → 'nonsense'. Written poetry, especially modern one, strives to minimize the redundancy between the elements of the poetic text, hence just such metaphor, which "вне данного поэтического контекста равняется бессмыслице" (Lotman 1970b:250), and which gets its sense through complicated and indeterminate associations even in the context, is received here as true and valuable. The tropes of folklore and phraseology (incl. the proverbial ones), on the contrary, are traditional, stereotypical, already met and known previously, as a rule, and automatically interpretable.⁹

4. As to the lexical composition of proverbial tropes, they are quite stereotypical and humdrum already. There is a number of semantic fields that lend their stocks quite readily to proverbial images: among such vocabulary we find, e.g., names of various animals and plants; names of terrain elements, natural phenomena and "elemental forces"; toponyms and ethnonyms; somatic vocabulary; numerals; vocabulary connected with commodities, housekeeping, various kinds of work and fare; words denoting various human categories (relatives, social states and functions, etc.).¹⁰

5. As to the above-mentioned impossibility to appeal to actual contexts of proverbs, we can still construct a kind of, say, "virtual" context to "decipher" them, utilizing our more general knowledge and imaginations (a) about the extralingual

reality; (b) about the ordinary, L-lingual meanings of words, appearing in proverb texts; (c) about universal rules of proverb-making (or -shaping). Though the analysis of particular cases may offer manifold difficulties, there appear to be some general principles, according to which proverbial tropes are constructed (in the direction: idea → text) and which are working in the contrary direction (text → meaning) also at understanding them.

6. The proverbial trope is mostly paradigmatic, i.e. metaphorical.¹¹ To be more exact, proverbial transfers seem to be not simply transfers "from the left to the right" or vice versa, but specifically directed and orientated. The proverb tends, very predominantly, to explain the more complicated through the more simple, the less known through the better known; it usually presents, for example, the mental through the physical, the ideal through the material, the social through the biological, the abstract through the concrete, etc. The oppositions 'non-human' ↔ 'human' and 'natural' ↔ 'cultural' seem to play leading role in these alterations or transcodings.

7. Most frequently the proverbial trope presents itself in the shape of allegory running through all the c-elements of the text, "elemental forces", inanimate natural objects, things, plants, animals, etc., signifying human beings, human actions, goals and products of human activities, etc.¹² Such allegorical texts are mostly internally "redundant" or include semantically compatible elements, and they should be "translated" in corpore, the f-elements belonging to the impersonal "informer" and representing the indicative mood; i.e. the minimum of the participation of man in the literal content of the proverb. The further "invasion" of man into this literal content can proceed in two different ways: (a) through the f-elements (in the case of the imperative mood) - there appears an impersonal "you" (the addressee) to whom the proverb directs its orders, advices, interdictions, warnings, etc.; (b) through the

c-elements - man begins to act directly in the literal content of the text or his presence is presupposed. Even if the human being already participates in the literal content of the proverb text, abundant chances for making transfers "from the lower to the higher" (i.e. for expressing the higher through the lower) will survive.¹³

8. At "unriddling" the proverbial allegory one ought necessarily to take into account both syntagmatic and paradigmatic factors. The substantival "apices" of allegory - though they are the points where the transfer is maximally evident and clearcut ('meteorological phenomenon' pro 'human emotion', 'plant' pro 'human being', 'animal' pro 'human being', 'thing' pro 'human being', etc.) - can seldom express something particularly essential and determining about the factual (either traditional or conceivable) theme and idea of the proverbial sentence.¹⁴ On the other hand, each single word belonging to the tropical image carries into the proverb all the associations and connotations, emotive "nuances" and "shades" connected with its literal meaning. However refractory these connotative features are to semantical description, they ought not to be neglected, nor their significance denied.¹⁵

9. There is a number of "semi-formal" words (mainly verbs, adjectives and adverbs) that act as a kind of "clues" at deciphering the allegorical chain. These words are notably more "contentful" than the ordinary f-elements, but they are connectable with a great number of concrete substantival referents. Besides, they were transferred to various abstract and ideal objects so long ago that we scarcely perceive any more metaphoricality in them.¹⁶ These words constitute certain "weak links" in the allegorical chain and facilitate interpreting the substantival "trope apices", since they need not be conceptually altered immediately, as the "apices" mentioned must. On the other hand, the existence of this phenomenon makes it impossible to show strictly where the proverbs with "throughout transferred meaning" turn into the proverbs in which all

c-elements are tropical and in which, besides the c-elements, some f-elements occur, which cannot yet demolish the imagination of the "general transferredness" of the meaning, and, further, where the last condition, in turn, alters into such one where the trope, without doubt, embraces only a part of all c-elements of the sentence.

10. In the case of total allegory, the excessive triviality, insufficient pragmatical load of its literal meaning (provided the approach is context-free) are usually the factors impelling us to reinterpret the text. In the case of the "partially tropical" text, on the contrary, we necessarily have to do with some internal contradiction or incompatibility between the syntagms and single elements of the text itself (taken literally). In the texts of this kind the operations on the syntagmatic (metonymic) axis prevail and transfers can be made in the direction contrary to the usual one, e.g. when characterizing the non-human (inorganic, vegetable or animal) through the human, the biological and the physical through the social and psychical, and so on.¹⁷ There is a number of words the appearance of which in the proverb text is quite reliably symptomatic of that the trope embraces only a part of the c-elements or is broken; these words have rather restricted possibilities for tropicalization, not because they are highly abstract (though some of them are indeed), but rather because they are innately connected just with those semantic regions that serve as targets at which the proverb most often aims its figurative statements and prescriptions - i.e., they are linked with the psychical, ethical and social aspects of the human.¹⁸

11. The ambiguity of the trope is not the sole source of the denotative indefiniteness of the proverb. If a text does not include any words expressing whatever physical reality at all, we have no ground to speak of the trope as such. There are many proverbs that consist, practically, of the f-elements and "semi-formal" words merely, operating with very abstract

and generalized concepts on the level of their literal meanings already, and reminding of metalingual descriptions rather than of poetic texts.¹⁹ The domain of the applicability of such proverbs often seems to be all but universal, as they can impose very few restrictions on their thematic (denotative) scope. Evidently, this universality is still only apparent: if we were informed better than we are, it would, very probably, turn out that the field of their traditional usage is actually much more narrow than it looks.²⁰

Notes

1. Even this approach can be taken for context-free only relatively. The researcher's preliminary knowledge and imagination mentioned constitute here something similar to what J. Lyons (1971:419) has termed restricted context, i.e. "the more general beliefs, conventions and pre-suppositions governing the particular 'universe of discourse'". Considering the proverbs directly, G.L. Permyakov (1968a:44) has called the set of analogical preliminary information the logical context (логический контекст), equivalent or similar to M. Cherkasskij's (1968:477) term semiotic background (семиотический фон).
2. It is necessary to make to excursive remarks in connection with what was said.
 - (1) When we considered some relations between proverb texts and their semantic descriptions as mistakes, it does not imply that those shortcomings might be contrasted with some "absolutely adequate" or "absolutely faultless" descriptions. The maximally exact description of the semantic potential of a proverb text is the same proverb text itself; any other description can depict its meaning only approximately. The description is inevitably poorer than the proverb text, when substituting connotation-free words of the non-poetic

metalanguage for the associative, saturated with connotations words of the poetic object language; if the elements of the metalanguage are not required to be connotation-free, the description will also involve the noise, i.e. such information that the object text does not contain; any description that is different from the object text itself, will deform the structure of the object text, and so on. Some years ago O.S. Axmanova (1971:19-20) noticed in brief of the difficulties linked with semantical describing of phraseological units. She made an entirely tenable critical remark that explaining paraphrases employed in phraseological dictionaries, etc., are hopelessly inadequate and incapable of reflecting the richness, expressiveness and compactness of the underlying sayings, but, unfortunately, she did not put forward any constructive suggestions on her own part either.

(2) Sufficient knowledge of actual using circumstances of proverbs would avoid the danger of misunderstanding proverb texts, but the problems of unified describing the "sum of actual meanings" of this or that proverb text would still survive to the full extent. We should come across serious complications already at trying to divide this sum (or to unite the meanings of the text in each single actualization) to more or less clearcut subclasses or partial meanings, i.e. at trying to find out the uses of the proverb, if we may transfer B.J. Gorodetskij's (1969:174ff.) term concerning the polysemy of words to the matters of the polysemy of proverbs.

3. For instance, M. Kuusi (1963:340; 1966:98) differentiates in the proverb text, in addition to f-elements (Formelelemente, formulaelementit), kernel elements (Kernelemente, ydinelementit), filling elements (Füllelemente, täyte-elementit), extending elements (Fortsetzungselemente, jatke-elementit) and repetition elements (Parallelelemente, kerrannais-elementit).
4. Partisans of this interpretation might find theoretical

support, for example, from R. Jakobson's (1961; cf. also 1960:375ff.) well-known conception that a poetic text is poetical in its entirety; all its elements and structures, incl. grammatical ones, are put to serve poetical purposes. This thesis has been emphasized and somewhat altered by J.M. Lotman (e.g. 1964:64,123ff.; 1970b:17-19,25,26): the elements and structures under discussion are not only poetical, but also semantically "loaded"; roughly speaking, they all are components of the unified total structure of the poetic item, this total structure being, in its essence, the content structure.

The interrelations of the F-language with the L- and M-languages would represent the two opposite modifications of the so-called metasemiotic relationship, which R. Barthes (1969:89ff.) terms connotation (here L → P) and denotation (here P → M).

5. Occurrences of the compensation between different stylistic levels of folklore pieces have been noticed already by B.J. Yarho: the rhyming verses of Russian chastooshkas turned out to be bound with repetition figures more rarely than the not-rhyming ones, and the chastooshkas concerning social and political matters revealed less frequent appearance of repetition figures than those concerning love themes (see Gasparov 1969:509). As to proverbs, B. Holbek (1970:56) has supposed that such stylistic features, as alliteration, rhyme, rhythm patterns, etc., appear more frequently in the non-metaphorical than in the metaphorical texts.
6. The affairs mentioned make it questionable how promising the attempts to study the "logical" or syntactic structure of proverbs per se, irrespectively of the content of concrete c-elements, might be. An attempt in this direction has been made, for example, by V.S. Bayevskij (1970). He aims at constructing a generative model of a class of proverbs, this class being defined roughly as follows: the proverbs included into the class must have an "implicative" sym-

metrical structure; both halves of the text (the "antecedent" and the "consequent") must consist of one f-element and one verb; the verbs must be antonyms and belong to the native vocabulary, etc. - e.g., proverbs Что посеешь, то пожнешь, Где пьют, там и льют, etc. Just the precondition of antonymity of the verbs is, to our mind, the essential weak link in the procedure: therefore the set of the verb pairs involved comes to be limited (and, on the other hand, extended) to a certain number of "ordinary", L-lingual antonyms on the special list. The participation of properly semantical criteria themselves remains limited to the precondition mentioned, all the following procedure of generating having degenerated to quite trivial operations of selecting the verb pairs corresponding to the preconditions set, and those of syntactico-morphological coordinating the selected verb pairs with the set of possible pairs of f-elements, according to the features, such as number, person, transitivity / intransitivity, animatedness / inanimatedness, etc. If we have got, in this way, a number of "synthetic proverbs", we are still deprived of any reliable criterion to decide which of the result sentences are grammatically correct and also paremically acceptable, and which are, on the other hand, incompatible with proverbial poetical patterns, though grammatically correct. Evidently, much more interesting results might be gained, if we (a) proceeded from an entirely "blind", semantically, structure, e.g., $(f_1verb_1) \rightarrow (f_2verb_2)$, or something similar to this; (b) provided ourselves with a possibly great number of real proverb texts, corresponding to this formal structure; (c) examined carefully which semantic properties and interrelations the opposed verbs actually reveal (the opposition of "ordinary", L-lingual antonyms may be merely a particular case among all the possible relationships); (d) formulated the semantic rules enabling us to generate just the set of the real proverb

texts; (e) tried to clear up which "synthetic" proverbs can be generated with the aid of the same set of rules, in addition to the really existent ones; (f) removed some restrictions and considered which new sentences could be added, and so forth.

Equally misleading is to conceive that the c-elements can be equated with the variables in logical expressions (cf. G.L. Permyakov's (1970:19) point of view: "... пословицу делают не реалии, а логическая конструкция, реалии же выступают лишь в качестве "строительного материала".") The logical semantics is interested only in the truth-value of the variables, not in their concrete content, and the possibilities of varying logical expressions also depend on only their truth-value and the relationships of the logical operations, set axiomatically. The real, traditional transformations of proverb texts (i.e. proverbial variants), on the contrary, are fully dependent on the content of the concrete c- and f-elements, and even if we do not study the actual transforms of proverb texts, but the possibilities of transforming them (e.g. a "fillability" of a certain f-framework with various different c-constructions, or, reversedly, the compatibility of a certain c-construction with different f-patterns), the semantical control of the acceptability of the results must be permanently maintained. For example, it is misleading to conceive that the proverbs as Enough is enough, Business is business, Boys will be boys, etc., which have outwardly a tautological form, are tautological indeed and can be mapped by the formulae, as $A = a$, $x^A = x^A$, etc. (cf. Köngäs & Maranda 1971:80). Maybe, such proverbs constitute a kind of proverbs with definite information-bearing structure. However that may be, every occurrence of the repeated words, e.g. boys, must necessarily have a meaning, different from that of the other occurrence: the first boys refers, supposedly, to some actual boy (or boys) being talked about, while the second

boys implies the class of boys, emphasizing, presupposedly, just some negatively valued features boys tend to have (e.g. naughtiness, bellicosity, etc.).

7. Contemporary semantics has a rather vague idea of how to tax the stages of semantic complexity of words more exactly. In principle, it is conceived to depend on the number of so-called elementary predicates (or semes) we need to represent the semantic structure of the word, and on the interrelations of these predicates in the semantic representation of the word. On the other hand, the number of hitherto postulated elementary predicates is obviously insufficient to describe any more extensive part of a vocabulary, and only a quite petty fraction of the vocabularies of quite few languages has hitherto received its semantic description.

It is also questionable whether the rate of the semantic complexity of words can be expressed by some quantitative parameters. We may conceive, for example, that the number showing in how many different proverbs a certain word (or word-pair, or -combination) appears, might serve as an indirect indicator of the degree of formality or "contentlessness" of this word, at least in the limits of the proverbial area. However, if we should compile a frequency word-index of that kind, the distribution obtained would take the shape corresponding to the so-called Zipf's rule, as it happens in frequency word-indexes based on any natural texts in general, i.e. at one end of the scale a comparatively small number of "f-words" (-pairs) would converge, each recurring a great many times, and at the other end a great number of different "super-contentful" words (-pairs), each appearing only once. Thus, for the most part of the vocabulary this yardstick would not fit, after all.

Supposedly, an attempt could also be made to correlate the c/f-distinction with the distinctions between the parts of

speech or with the distinction between the so-called lexical and grammatical meaning, e.g. applying the "closed or open set"-criterion, put forward by A. Martinet, M. Halliday, etc. (see, e.g., Lyons 1971:436). Nevertheless, here will also remain some quite serious cons, as this mode extends the set of f-elements to include not only certain words, but also some morphemes signifying grammatical categories, and it is, on the other hand, quite doubtful, to what extent we can take into account the morphological data in the semantic analysis of a proverb text.

8. See, e.g., Bickerton 1969, Reddy 1969, Uspenskij 1969 and 1970, Kaplinski 1972:13ff. D. Bickerton (1969:48) presents the following classification of expressions: "(i) 'literal' expressions (iron bar, black cat, etc.); (ii) 'permanent' assignments (iron discipline, yellow rat, etc.); (iii) 'temporary' assignments (green thought, steel couch, etc.); (iv) 'meaningless' expressions (steel-mine, procrastination drinks quadruplicity, etc.)". This classification permits stepped shifting of phrases, in the direction (iv) → (iii) → ..., from one class to the another, and, therefore, abrogates clearcut, excluding distinctions between the purely lingual polysemy and lingual (lexical, "dead") metaphor, between the "stale" (lingual) and "fresh" (poetic) metaphor, and between the extravagant metaphor and nonsense. However, this view is not shared generally. For example, J. Pelc (1961:331-334) has argued that the "ordinary" polysemy is strictly distinguishable from the metaphor, and J.M. Lotman (1970b:250) has emphasized that the lingual metaphor is to be clearly distinguished from the poetic metaphor.
9. We do not find it expedient to discuss here in more detail the problems of why proverbs have still kept safe their poetic attraction for the circles using them, why, despite of all that, people have still taken the trouble

to retain these apparently "dull", utterly "hackneyed" clichés during millennia, and why they reproduce them in their speech. Let us only call attention to J.M. Lotman's highly interesting conception on the fundamental difference between folklore as the "aesthetics of sameness" ("эстетика тождества") and the modern literature as the "aesthetics of opposition" ("эстетика противопоставления") (1964:172-183), and on the folklore communication as a specific kind of the auto-communication (1970a).

10. Some of the semantic fields mentioned have been noted by J.V. Rozhdestvenskij (1970:228).
11. For the connection between the metaphor and paradigmatics (system), and between the metonymy and syntagmatics, also for the relativity of their difference, see, e.g., in Jakobson 1956:81 and Barthes 1969:60. Barthes has ibidem noticed that the aphoristic types of discourse constitute one of the areas where the metaphor predominates over the metonymy.
12. Let us present, for example, some possibilities of transferring some words and word groups.
 - (1) Stone can be linked to man through the physical and pragmatical features of its ordinary referent, such as 'hard', 'cold', 'inedible', 'infertile', etc. Quite frequently stone is conceived in folklore as a negatively valued poetic substitute for the heart, the bread and the earth. The images connected, e.g., with the heart, eating and sowing are, in turn, quite liable to transference from the physical and biological universe to the mental and social ones: thus, we can signify, by means of stone, emotional stiffness, hardheartedness or sexual frigidity; by extending the feature 'inedibility' to 'unacceptability' or 'non-introducibility' or 'uselessness', stone can be applied to various moral and social contexts; sowing on the stone also lets to interpret itself through the

transferring the concepts, as 'soil', 'sowing', 'seed', 'reaping', 'yield', etc., to the mental and social referents, coming to mean, e.g., implanting the wisdom, information, ideas, norms, etc. into innately infertile or intentionally recalcitrant brains.

(2) Sea can be transferred to the phenomena of human life which have the features as 'changeable', 'fickle', 'moody', 'dangerous', 'vast', 'deep', or which can be associated with the images of billowing, sailing, harbour, coast, etc., which, in turn, are very suitable for metaphorical transferring (sailing = 'the course of human life in general'; to reach the coast (harbour) = 'to die' or 'to get married', etc.). The features 'vast' and 'endless' bring about the pragmatic implications of inexhaustibility and unaffability (e.g. imaginations of drinking the sea dry in several folklore genres, incl. the image of the dog licking the sea in proverbs).

(3) Proverbs make use of the most part of the vocabulary marking meteorologic and astronomic phenomena: human relations are expressed through natural relations, social situations and psychical states of the human being are signified through physical states of the nature, the stages of the annual cycle are transferred to mean the stages of the human life. So, sun and clouds can mean being in good resp. low spirits, or refer to the alternation of good and ill luck or joy and sorrow in the human life; storm can mean social disturbances or other impetuous movements in social life, or psychical or moral trials the man as a "traveller" or "sailor" has to meet, or affective states of the human soul; spring and autumn can refer to the ages of man, his green years and old age resp., and so on.

(4) Images coming from the vegetable kingdom are also quite frequent, though the characteristics of particular plant species are considerably less elaborated than those of

animals. On the other hand, the biological structure of the plant and its nexus with the environment differ greatly from those of the human being (while the human being and the animal are, in this respect, much more comparable): therefore some good devices were found. Let us give some examples of tropicalization of words signifying the "parts" of the tree. Root enables to express the state of being permanently settled or getting acclimatized to a spatial or social environment, e.g. cutting through the roots as severing the organic tie of a botanic individual with its environment can be interpreted as breaking the tie between a human individual and human environment, or vanishing someone's life perspectives. Top (of a tree, as well as that of a hill) as 'the upper end' or 'the highest part' can be made to mean the head of man with corresponding metonymic associations, or a certain social position. Bud, shoot, apple, cone, etc., as the "mediators" or products of the generative performance of the plant can be applied to mark, e.g., corresponding products of the sexual performance of the human, i.e. children, but, being extended (on the basis of the features 'generatable' or 'producable'), they can mean other mental or social "shoots" or "fruits" as well; in connection with tree, fruit can also mean some overt indication of hidden specific properties, etc. Kernel and shell are proved to be suitable to denote whatever boon and a factor that hinders reaching this boon, respectively.

(3) A very abundant representation in proverbial allegories and other tropes have animals, at the cattle-breeding peoples domestic ones in particular. But the beasts and birds of prey - wolf, jackal, crocodile, raven, etc., - have also, since Adam was a boy, served as the signifiers of the human (social or psycical) evil. It is also common to symbolize stupidity and obtuse stubbornness

with ass and wether. And so on, and so forth.

Of course, these and other images, well-known to each paremiologist, constitute no purely proverbial private property. The proverb shares the most part of its tropes with many other folklore and literary genres, particularly with proverbial phrases and fables. I. Sarv (1964:327-400) has demonstrated that the traditional characteristics of animals in Estonian folklore are, as a rule, considerably similar in several different genres.

13. E.g., the words denoting bodily defects and injuries (sick, blind, deaf, lame, humpbacked, etc.) can acquire the meanings of various intellectual defects or moral vices; states of physiological insufficiency or satiety (hunger, thirst, full stomach) can be extended to mean mental and social ones; psychical or moral detriments, pecuniary losses, mental and social states of emergency, etc., can be expressed through physical injuries and states of emergency (blow, stroke, wound, drowning). Actions of self-realization, also social actions, interactions, movements and processes, etc., can be signified with physical aspirations, activities, etc. (climbing, creeping, kneeling, falling and rising, travel, hunting, scrap, fleecing, sucking, milking). Cognition as such in general can be represented through sensual apprehension (seeing, hearing, touching). As mentioned, representatives of the somatic vocabulary very frequently perform tropical duties, both in metaphorical and metonymical connections: head symbolizes thinking, intellectual capability, also the functions of social government and leadership; eye and ear imply seeing resp. hearing, but also immediate resp. indirect cognition in general; nose conveys interesting possibilities for hinting at the intuition, wit, the "sixth sense"; due to the physical salience of the basic referent of nose, and since this referent is known as the "acquainting organ" of some animals, this word also

enables to refer to curiosity, meddling, obtrusiveness, etc.; hand expresses actions, manipulations or skills of any kind, foot and leg any moving or leaning or being based or supported, incl. in the social sense. And so forth. This type of transfer might be illustrated with proverbs, as The blind man eats many a fly; Look before you leap; Don't bite the hand that feeds you; Every man must skin his own skunk; Don't cut off your nose to spit your face; Strike while the iron is hot; You made your bed, now lie in it.

14. The proverbial characteristics of animals, for example, are, as a rule, not so clear and determined as those of the ass. If we know that a proverb text includes the word dog, we know almost nothing about the content of this proverb. If we were told, in addition, that the word master also occurs in this text, we might already suppose that there some relation of social subjection or dependence is implied. Simultaneous occurrence of the words dog and cat in the text allows of assuming that the reference has been made to some prolonged antagonism or squabbling (particularly between married people). The co-occurrence of the word dog with wolf impels us to expect that we have here to do with an opposition, e.g. 'felon' \longleftrightarrow 'victim' or 'tracker' \longleftrightarrow 'fugitive', or that the contrast 'wild' \longleftrightarrow 'tame' might be emphasized. If dog is related with bone, we have all ground to think that the general relationship 'actor' \longleftrightarrow 'goal' is involved here, more exactly, may-be, 'destroyer' \longleftrightarrow 'destroyable' or 'desirer' \longleftrightarrow 'desirable'. And so forth.
15. B.A. Uspenskij's (1970:126) general standpoint might be remembered here: "...смысл слова в его поэтическом употреблении, с одной стороны, задается общим (парадигматическим) значением соответствующего слова, а с другой стороны, - создается контекстом". Concerning the proverbs specifically, N. Barley (1972:744) has recently noted: "If

the use of distinctive features for contradiction is impossible, they can still be used for connotation. There is, after all, all the difference in the world between calling someone's friends 'Bees round a rose' and 'Flies round a dung-heap'." In the same paper, Barley makes a very essential suggestion that the structural descriptions of proverbs should be complemented with the so-called relevance restrictions that would specify the scope of applicability of each proverb, just dependently on the L-lingual, literal meanings of its c-elements. The need for such kind of restrictions becomes particularly evident if we are concerned with distinguishing the so-called synonymous proverbs in a semantical proverb classification.

16. To such "semi-formal" words might belong, e.g., the words marking various kinds of spatial and temporal relations (great and little; long and short; thick and thin; wide and narrow; deep and shallow; high and low; upper and nether; far and near; within and without; together and apart; beginning and end; old and new; early and late; yesterday, today and tomorrow; swift and slow; seldom and often); but also the words expressing various other relations, quantities and qualities, movements, processes, actions, etc., etc. (many and few; more and less; first and last; one and the other; heavy and light; difficult and easy; strong and weak; full and empty; black and white; still and loud; hard and soft; fair and vague; close and open; fall and rise; put and take; give and take; give and receive; grow and lessen; hold and lack; gain and lose; lose and find; keep and break; injure and improve; stand and go; go and come; show and hide; reveal and conceal; turn and remain; gather; change; know; feel; want; need; make; step; fit; bind; bring, etc., etc.). Here are some text examples (the "semi-formal words being underlined): The higher the ape goes, the more he shows

his tail; Old birds are not caught with chaff; The chain is no stronger than its weakest link; Cross the stream where it is shallowest; The leopard cannot change its spots; Oaks may fall when reeds stand the storm; The hasty bitch bears blind whelps; A cock is mighty on his own dunghill; Still waters run deep.

17. The "partially tropical" texts, displaying transfers in the "inversed" direction, often occur just in the so-called weather proverbs. Let us give some examples from the Estonian tradition (the tropicalized elements being underlined): Kevadel vesi tark, sügisel loll (literally: In spring water is wise, in autumn - stupid); Hundile on udu onu, vihm veli ja kaste kaelalõikaja (literally: The fog is uncle for the wolf, the rain is his brother, but the dew is his cutthroat); Loodetuul läheb õhtuks naise juurde (literally: The northwesterly wind goes to the wife by the evening (i.e. calms)); Vihma latse ikeva, põua latse naarava (literally: The rain's children are crying, the drought's children are laughing); Heinamaa on põllu ema (literally: The hay-field is the corn-field's mother).

18. Some examples of the "human-bound" words: work; diligence and laziness; care and carelessness; wisdom and stupidity; tongue, word, talk; thought; joy and sorrow; luck and adversity; love and hatred; honesty and dishonesty; boldness and cowardice; generosity, stinginess and greed; haughtiness and humility, etc. Some sentence examples (the "human-bound" words being underlined): Misery loves company; Necessity knows no law; Lies have short legs; Love is blind; Hope is a good breakfast, but a bad supper; After-wit is dear bought; Pleasure has a sting in its tail; Money is a good servant, but a bad master.

Though, may-be, of bookish origin (cf. Taylor 1931:146ff.), but nowadays still quite wide-spread at many peoples, seems to be the personification pattern, connecting two ethical

or some other abstract terms with the words marking kinship relations ('A is the mother (daughter, brother,) of B'): Experience is the mother of wisdom; The thought is father to the deed; Ingratitude is the daughter of pride; Disuse is sister to abuse; Pity is akin to love.

19. Some examples: There is a place for everything and everything in its place; To know everything is to know nothing; Extremes meet; The exception proves the rule; Opinions differ; Mistakes will happen; All is well that ends well; A good beginning makes a good ending; Never too much of a good thing; Nothing so bad, as not to be good for something; Better early than late; Better late than never; Never do things by halves; Live and learn; Do as you would done by.

20. The borderlines between the "figurative" and "non-figurative" proverbs, as well as many other boundaries in paremiology, are quite indeterminate. Nevertheless, attempts at distinguishing them terminologically have been made throughout the history of paremiology. As a result, just the non-figurative proverb turns out to be christened with many different names. Let us give a few examples:

	figurative	non-figurative
(1) V. Dal' (1957:18,19)	пословица	пословичное изречение
(2) A. Taylor (1931:5-15)	(metaphorical) proverb	(proverbial) apothegm
(3) G.L. Permyakov (1968a:9-13)	пословица	афоризм
(4) N.Barley (1972:738ff.)	proverb	maxim

Distinctions of this kind are useful, on principle, in calling attention to the phenomenon as such, but a more extensive repertoire as a whole could hardly be divided,

on the ground of this criterion, into two clearly distinct classes, e.g., into the proverbs "с образной мотивировкой общего значения" and into those "с прямой мотивировкой общего значения", as suggested by G.L. Permyakov (1968a:9-14). Due to the "humanocentric" nature of proverbial world-picture, the "symmetrical" model proposed by N. Barley (1972:738ff.) might be regarded as inadequate as well. Barley asserts that the metaphorical proverb operates on one and the same degree of generality, apparently both "from the left to the right" and vice versa (i.e. substituting the non-human for the human or vice versa, the cultural for the natural or vice versa, the animate for the inanimate or vice versa, etc.), while the non-metaphorical maxim works on the vertical axis (more exactly, "downwards"), applying the general statement given in the text to many different particular situations. This model feels to be arguable in two mutually related points. (1) It rests on the preconception that the binary oppositions used when describing the semantical mechanism of the metaphor can be easily set into a hierarchic arrangement. D. Bickerton (1969:44ff.), on the other hand, has referred to some serious difficulties that arise at constructing tree-formed classifications of binary oppositions. (2) The "traffic" of transferences between the poles of the binary oppositions under discussion is not balancedly bilateral, as might be conceived. As mentioned (cf. p. 19), it is much more vivid in some certain directions than in others; some theoretically possible cases are actualized very rarely, some are practically precluded.

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Резюме.

1. Три возможных подхода. При исследовании содержания пословиц можно исходить из трех принципиально отличающихся подходов.

(1) "Чисто-семантический" (виртуальный, внеконтекстный) подход. Исходной информацией служат сами тексты пословиц. Исследователь не пользуется никакими непосредственными данными об их значении, а при интерпретации текстов пословиц опирается на собственные знания и представления о том, (а) какими являются соотношения вещей в жизни; (б) какое значение имеют встречающиеся в пословицах слова в обычном, т.е. непоэтическом языке и (в) чем являются пословицы, какими семантическими правилами определяется их порождение и понимание. Этот способ является предельно удобным, но дает лишь гипотетические результаты, т.е. приписывает каждому тексту предполагаемый семантический потенциал, состоятельность которого трудно проверить.

(2) "Семантико-прагматический" (актуальный, контекстный) подход. Исследователь наблюдает тексты пословиц исключительно в их актуализациях, т.е. в связи с их словесными и/или материальными контекстами, которые обусловили актуализацию этих текстов в пределах определенного времени, места, языка, социальной среды и т.п. Этот способ мог бы в принципе дать максимально достоверное представление о значении (значениях) исследуемых пословиц. Однако, практически его применить очень трудно, так как в распоряжении паремистов имеется безнадежно малое количество прямых данных о значениях и употреблении пословиц и в настоящее время этот пробел трудно восполнить.

(3) "Семантико-синтаксический" подход. Он представлен подходами, которые кроме интерпретации (употреблении) каждой отдельной пословицы и вопросов семантического описания, включают проблемы семантических отношений между пословицами, их содержательное сравнение. В идеальном случае этот

способ стремится к экспликации семантического описания некоторого более обширного репертуара в целом (в форме единой классификации или типологии). Научная ценность таких классификаций была бы неоценимой. Однако, с другой стороны, попытки создания таких классификаций неизбежно наталкиваются на ряд серьезных трудностей. Удачный результат предполагает наличие определенного метаязыка для эксплицитного выражения отношений между пословицами, включая различия между т.н. синонимными пословицами. Последнее, в свою очередь, предполагает исследование коннотативного плана содержания пословиц. Требование однозначности метаязыка оказывается при этом в противоречии с хорошо известной многозначностью самих пословиц, т.е. их многоаспектной семантической неопределенностью.

Практически более реальным мог бы быть некоторый комбинированный способ, в котором использовались бы все прямые данные о значениях пословиц и который дал бы исследователю возможность оперировать также собственными знаниями и представлениями.

2. Неопределенность денотации. Некоторые проблемы, связанные с пословичными тропами. Итак, при анализе текстов пословиц мы имеем дело с двумя разными понятиями: (а) "абсолютной суммой" всех его возможных значений, составляющих его интерпретационный потенциал, и (б) суммой всех его действительных значений, которые манифестировались в его прежних актуализациях. К сожалению, в большинстве случаев нам не удается сформулировать потенциал значения пословицы таким образом, чтобы он был адекватным сумме его действительных значений, т.е. мы приписывем пословице кроме действительных значений еще и несуществующие, или часть действительных значений оставляем вне рассмотрения. Иногда обе эти ошибки допускаются одновременно или же действительные значения пословицы не улавливаются вовсе.

(В качестве иллюстрации рассматриваются возможности интерпретации эстонских пословиц "Tühi kott ei seisa püsti"

и "Selle koera karvadega tuleb suitsutada, kes hammustas".)

Семантическая неопределенность пословиц проявляется прежде всего как многозначность пословичных тропов, однако, этим она не ограничивается.

О природе языковой гомо/гетерогенности текста пословицы и поэтичности/непоэтичности его лексических элементов в принципе возможны две противоположных точки зрения. (1) Текст пословицы рассматривается как внутренне гетерогенный и его словесные элементы подразделяются на "элементы содержания" (с-элементы) и "элементы формы" (ф-элементы). К последним относятся, например, т.н. реляционные и кванторные слова, слова, указывающие модальность, вопросительные слова, компоненты т.н. синтаксической формулы и т.п. С-элементы в свою очередь можно разделить по значению на прямые (с₁-элементы) и переносные (с₂-элементы). Поэтичность присваивается не целому тексту пословицы, а только, например, с-элементам или еще более узко - только с₂-элементам. (2) Текст пословицы рассматривается как внутренне гомогенный, полностью поэтический. Каждый из его элементов принадлежит "вторичному", поэтическому (П-)языку и он строго отделен от своих возможных омонимов в "первичном", т.е. обычном, непоэтическом (Л-)языке и языке третьего порядка - метаязыке описывающем содержание пословицы (М-языке).

Представляется, что последний подход имеет некоторые существенные преимущества.

1. Встречается много случаев, когда ф-элементы выполняют в пословицах семантические функции, близкие функциям тропов. (В качестве примера рассматривается тропическое качество ф-элемента "столько" в анализе Г.Л. Пермякова "Сколько мудрецов, столько и мнений"). Довольно регулярным является участие ф-элементов в явлениях, которые можно бы назвать модальной метафорой, и в число которых входили бы например: (а) риторический вопрос, который регулярно следует осмыслять как отрицание; (б) всякого рода иронические образы, в которых мыслимое аксиологическое (иногда также и пропозициональ-

ное) отрицание выражено утверждением; (в) другие случаи, в которых формы изъявительного наклонения получают некоторое другое значение модальности (деонтическое, эпистемическое) под влиянием конкретных с-элементов и/или конкретного контекста.

2. Существенными симптомами поэтичности можно считать разного рода эффекты контраста и симметрии, возникающие в параллелизме. Если различать в поэтической структуре пословицы три аспекта - эвфонический, синтаксический и тропо-лексический, то отношения эвфоники и тропики характеризуются следующим образом: (1) единство в "материальном плане" текста; (2) противоположность в момент создания текста; (3) взаимная компенсация при восприятии текста. Однако, средства, входящие в поэтический синтаксис пословиц, действуют как компенсаторы как в плане порождения, так и в плане восприятия. Так, свойственная пословице синтаксическая симметрия может вызывать, с одной стороны, некоторые спонтанные проявления эвфоники (явления т.н. грамматической рифмы, возникновение ритма и т.п.), с другой же стороны, - служит непосредственно семантическим целям: организует содержание текста и указывает на связи с-элементов (утверждает и отрицает, соединяет и исключает и т.д.). Особенно существенно то, что синтаксическая симметрия вызывает своеобразный эффект "семантической симметрии", т.к. устанавливает между с-элементами текста множество нелинейных отношений, образует множество парадигм поэтического порядка и манифестирует оба (все) члена этих парадигм непосредственно в тексте. Такие парадигмы часто опираются на синонимы и антонимы обычного языка, но синтаксическая симметрия дает возможность рассматривать на уровне поэтики оппозиционными и большое количество отношений таких слов, которые на уровне Л-языка были бы совершенно несравнимыми, например, отношение слов "седина" и "бес" в пословице "Седина в бороду - бес в ребро" или же отношение слов "собака" и "ветер" в тексте "Собака лает - ветер носит" и т.д. и т.п.

3. Рассматриваемая точка зрения не обязывает нас установить четкие "2-валентные" границы (а) между ϕ -элементами и с-элементами, и (б) между c_1 - и c_2 -элементами. Это оказывается удобным потому, что таких границ в действительности не существует и они могут быть установлены лишь относительно условно. (В работе мы показываем более конкретно те трудности, которые возникают при оценке возможностей тропизации слов, указываем на корреляцию между "бессодержательностью" слова и "непереносимостью" его значения.)

Далее дается краткая общая характеристика семантических механизмов пословичного тропа в следующих аспектах:

1. Паремологи пока мало интересовались тем, какие факторы вообще побуждают нас некоторое предложение потока речи идентифицировать как пословицу и обуславливают потребность в его семантическом видоизменении для того, чтобы оно стало в данном контексте осмысленным и приемлемым. Предположительно в число этих факторов входят, например, следующие: (1) своим непосредственным значением текст не соответствует ситуативному и/или речевому контексту; (2) в своем непосредственном значении он представляется слишком очевидным для понимания и тривиальным, или (3) неправильным, или (4) бессмысленным; (5) он является по форме слишком упорядоченным и орнаментальным.

2. Кажется, что нет четкой границы между (а) пословицами со "слишком тривиальным" прямым значением и пословицами с бесспорно неправильным значением и (б) между пословицами с неправильным прямым значением и пословицами с противоречивым или бессмысленным непосредственным содержанием. В последние годы многие авторы (Б. Успенский, Д. Бикертон и др.) высказывали мнения, что выражения являются семантически правильными или неправильными, осмысленными или бессмысленными не сами по себе, а лишь в связи с конкретным контекстом, в котором они являются актуализированными, и что нет четких границ (а) между "нормальной" полисемией слов и их метафорическим употреблением, (б) между языковой ("мертвой") и поэтической ("свежей") метафо-

рой и (в) между метафорой и бессмысленной комбинацией слов.

3. С другой стороны понятно, что на шкале 'полисемия → языковая метафора → поэтическая метафора → нонсенс' фольклорные (включая фразеологические) тропы находятся на разной ступени, по сравнению с тропами поэзии. Если поэзия стремится к возможно свежим, неизбыточным тропам, то тропы фразеологии и фольклора являются стереотипными, традиционными, как правило, известными и автоматически осмысляемыми.

4. Тропы пословиц являются стереотипными и стертыми уже по своему лексическому составу. Существует ряд семантических полей, словарным составом которых пословица охотно оперирует: названия животных, растений, элементов природы, "стихий"; топонимы и этнонимы; соматическая лексика; лексика, связанная с бытом, трудом и питанием; слова, обозначающие разные человеческие категории и т.д.

5. Представляется, что существуют некоторые общие принципы, на основе которых конструируются тропы пословиц (в направлении идея → текст) и которые действуют в противоположном направлении (текст → значение) при их осмыслении.

6. Тропы пословицы являются, в основном, парадигматическими (метафорическими), при этом они направленно-ориентированы: они выражают более сложное через более простое, менее известное через более известное (например, духовное через физическое, идеальное через материальное, абстрактное через конкретное). В этих видоизменениях ведущую роль играют оппозиции 'нечеловеческое : человеческое' и 'природное : культурное'.

7. Чаще всего пословичный троп выступает как аллегория, пронизывающая все с-элементы текста, так что "стихии", неодушевленные объекты природы, вещи, растения, животные обозначают человеческие существа, человеческие действия, объекты и продукты человеческой деятельности. Такие тексты являются уже на уровне прямого значения внутренне непротиворечивыми, и их следует "переводить" в целом. Если наклонение

в этих текстах является изъяснительным, то они выражают минимум участия человека в прямом значении пословицы. И если участие человека имплицировано непосредственно в буквальном содержании текста пословицы, то сохраняются богатые возможности для перенесения "с более низкого на более высокое", выражая, например, социальное и этическое через биологическое или механическое, или другим путем.

8. При осмысливании аллегорий пословиц следует учитывать как синтагматические, так и парадигматические факторы. Номинальные "пики" аллегорий, в которых очевидность переноса является максимальной, вне конкретной синтагматической связанности часто могут не сообщать ничего определяющего об идее и теме пословицы. С другой стороны, каждое слово в образном употреблении привносит в пословицу все свои коннотативные "нюансы", связанные с прямым значением.

9. Имеется ряд "полуформальных" слов, которые являются своего рода слабыми звеньями в цепи аллегории и облегчают осмысление субстанциональных пиков тропов. С другой стороны, эти слова не дают возможности показать, где пословицы с "полностью переносным значением" видоизменяются в такие, где тропы охватывают только часть с-элементов.

10. В последнем типе пословиц мы имеем дело с противоречивостью или несовместимостью внутри самого текста между его синтагмами или единичными элементами. При понимании таких текстов доминируют операции на синтагматической (метонимической) оси, и переносы можно делать в противоположном обычному направлении, т.е. характеризовать нечеловеческое через человеческое, биологическое и физическое через социальное и психическое и т.д. Существует ряд слов, связанных с психическими, этическими и социальными аспектами человека, наличие которых в пословице является верным сигналом о том, что троп охватывает в тексте только часть с-элементов или является сломанным.

11. Не только многозначность тропа является источником денотативной неопределенности пословицы. Им может служить и

полное отсутствие тропа: существует большое количество пословиц, которые в действительности состоят только из ф-элементов и полужормальных слов и которые скорее напоминают метаязыковые объяснения содержания, а не собственно поэтические тексты. Сфера их реального функционирования может оказываться более узкой, чем это можно было бы предположить на основе их интерпретационного потенциала.

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