

ASPECTS OF SPANISH PAREMIOLOGY

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Abstract

Each community has its own paremiological treasure. Considered "true gems of thought" by the Romanian writer Mihai Eminescu (1989: 8), proverbs represent a product of folklore, but also a speech act (Danilov, 1995: 9), so, in other words, proverbs are the exponential potential of a certain language and of a given culture. The Hispanic culture has an important place in the universal paremiology, Miguel de Cervantes being considered one of the first theoreticians, by most of the paremiologists: Cezar Tabarcea (1982), Constantin Negreanu (1983), Wolfgang Mider (2004), etc. This study focuses on presenting some aspects of Spanish paremiology: origins, features and taxonomies, pointing out the uniqueness of these proverbs. Origins revealed the universal character of the Spanish proverbs (the biblical and Latin cultural sources), but also the cultural specificity – history (*No se ganó Zamora en una hora*) and customs (*Buenas son mangas después de Pascuas*). Regarding the linguistic features, María Josefa Canellada (2001: 429-434) mentioned that Spanish proverbs have a tendency of suppressing elements (verbs and articles), converting the unit into a nominal phrase. At the same time, Spanish proverbs present specific prosodic peculiarities and a simple vocabulary, based on common words. The possibilities of classifying of Spanish proverbs that we approached include a syntactical and thematic criteria (Sevilla, 2000) and philosophical principles (Tabanera, 1954).

Keywords: Spanish paremiology, cultural specificity, nominal phrase, lexicon field, categories.

Résumé

Chaque communauté a son propre trésor parémiologique. Considéré comme «authentique joyaux de la pensée», qui viens de l'écrivain roumain Mihai Eminescu (1989: 8), les proverbes symbolise un produit du folklore, mais aussi un acte de parole (Danilov, 1995: 9), en d'autres termes, les proverbes montrent l'exposant d'une certaine langue et d'une culture donnée. La culture hispanique centralise une place très importante en ce qui concerne la

parémiologie universelle, Miguel de Cervantes étant considéré comme l'un des premiers théoriciens, par la plupart des paremiologues comme Cezar Tabarcea (1982), Constantin Negreanu (1983), Wolfgang Mider (2004), etc. Cette étude se concentre sur la présentation de certains aspects de la parémiologie espagnole: les origines, les caractéristiques et taxonomies, soulignant le caractère unique de ces proverbes. Les origines ont été révélés le caractère universel des proverbes espagnols (les sources bibliques et la culture latine), mais aussi la spécificité culturelle - l'histoire (*No se ganó Zamora en una hora*) et les coutumes (*Buenas son mangas después de Pascuas*). En ce qui concerne les caractéristiques linguistiques, María Josefa Canellada (2001: 429-434) a mentionné que les proverbes espagnols ont une affinité pour supprimer des éléments (verbes et articles), la conversion de l'unité dans une phrase nominale, exposent une particularité prosodiques spécifiques et un vocabulaire simple, basé sur les mots communs. Les moyens de classification que nous approchons comprennent un critère syntaxiques et thématiques (Sevilla, 2000) et les éléments philosophiques (Tabanera, 1954).

Mots-clés: Parémiologie espagnol, spécificité culturelle, la phrase nominale, champ lexical, les catégories.

1. Introduction

Spanish culture has a considerable number of collections and dictionaries of proverbs. These units have been included in the works of remarkable authors like Fernando de Rojas or Miguel de Cervantes. The memorable character, Don Quixote, confesses three important aspects of proverbs in general: origin, axiomatic value and brevity: *no hay refrán que no sea verdadero, porque todos son sentencias breves sacadas de la misma experiencia, madre de las ciencias todas* (Cervantes, 1991: 258). Despite this theoretical framework, Spanish paremiology¹ started to be tackled in 1993, when *Paremia* was published, a Hispanic correspondent to the American scientific journal of paremiology, *Proverbium*. José Manuel Gómez Tabanera (1954), Julia Sevilla Munoz (2000), María Josefa Canellada (2001), Inmaculada Penadés Martínez (2008) are among the most important paremiologists that have investigated different aspects of the Spanish proverbs.

This paper is structured in three sections, our main purpose being to highlight three important viewpoints of the Spanish proverbs: origins, features and taxonomies, searching for the elements that individualize

¹ I. C. Chițimia (1985: 6) made an important distinction between *paremiology* and *paremiography*. He pointed out that the first term designates a science that studies proverbs (origins, definitions, classifications, features) and the second one represents the process of gathering proverbs in collections and dictionaries.

Spanish paremiology from other collections of proverbs, from a cultural and linguistic point of view.

2. Origins

Most investigators (Tabarcea, 1982), Danilov (1997), Negreanu (1983) Coşbuc (1986) mention that proverbs were born in immemorial times, highlighting that proverbs are part of folklore and for this reason, these units appeared where there was a human community (Tabarcea, 1982: 13), proverbs being a result of a process of abstraction and generalization of the experience of the individuals (Danilov, 1997: 97). So, basically, life is the main origin of proverbs, the most important source of knowledge. However, Wolfgang Mieder (2004), a prolific paremiologist, emphasizes that there are other important sources as the Bible, the Greek and Latin Antiquity or modern culture. In addition, Coşbuc thinks that there are other important elements that represent the genesis of proverbs such as: the social, cultural, political, historical and geographical aspects of a nation, tracing in proverbs the cultural specificity of a community. Gathering all these theories, it is obvious that the structures that we are analyzing may have a universal feature, common at least for the Europeans, but also a cultural mark, each nation having its own paremiological treasure based on the aspects identified by Coşbuc.

Regarding the Spanish framework, many proverbs have a biblical origin, since in the most important book of Christianity there are sayings with teachings upon life. Some Spanish proverbs have the genesis in the gospels of The New Testament as: *A quien se humilla, Dios le ensalza* from Luke's Gospel (14, 11); *No se mueve la hoja en el árbol sin la voluntad de Dios* from Mathew's Gospel (10, 29), and others in the writings of The Old Testament: *Dios que da la llaga, da la medicina*, originated in Book of Job (5, 18); *El principio de la sabiduría, el temor a Dios*, from Book of Proverbs (1, 7).

Latin origins can be depicted in the Spanish paremiology. Gerónimo Martín Caro y Cejudo (1792) investigated the sources of some Spanish proverbs and pointed out that *Buen corazón quebranta mala ventura* is a Spanish form of one of Plautus's saying: *Bonus animus in re mala dimidium mali* (Caro y Cejudo: 50). The Latin dictum *Bis dat qui cito dat* is the origin of the Spanish saying: *el que luego da, da dos veces*, and for many other European proverbs, according to Concise Dictionary of European Proverbs (Strauss, 2013: 253). Another relevant example of Latin sources in Hispanic paremiology is *una golondrina sola no hace verano*. In his study upon this particular proverb, Fernando García Moreno (2008) revealed that its origin is in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Wolfgang Mieder (2000) added that

this proverb - one swallow does not make summer – has an equivalent in almost each European language.

Apart from the universal nature of Spanish proverbs, we would also consider the national-cultural specificity that distinguishes the Spanish paremiology from other proverbs. It is the case of a proverb used by Fernando de Rojas in *La Celestina* and by Miguel de Cervantes in *Don Quijote de la Mancha* – *No se ganó Zamora en una hora* – a proverb that expresses the need of time and perseverance in order to achieve great things (Jimenez, 1828: 117). This paremiological unit represents an instance of the cultural-historical aspect of Spanish proverbs, because it is a synthesis of an event in the history of Spain. In 1072, the city of Zamora was besieged for seven months by Sancho el Bravo, who was trying to wrest it from his sister, doña Urraca.

Cultural particularities concerning celebrations can be traced through Spanish proverbs. It is the case of an ancient proverb *Buenas son mangas después de Pascuas*, used also Cervantes's masterpiece to express that good things or presents are always welcomed. Salvador Muñoz Iglesias (1989) investigated the source of this proverb and revealed that it is a cultural proverb, specific for Cervantes's times. It seems that on Easter people used to wear new clothes that were received as gifts, consisting in a new pair of sleeves (mangas). Being so busy in those times, tailors hadn't much time to cope with all orders, so the presents frequently arrived after the celebration. It was considered impolite to refuse a gift, people saying that a new pair of sleeves is always seasonable, converting it into a proverb.

3. Features

The main features of proverbs interested all paremiologists: Mieder (2004), Tabarcea (1982), Barsanti Vigo (2003), etc., each of them emphasizing aspects such as: metaphorical and allegorical character, traditionalism, prosody, fixed and laconic form and didactical-pedagogical tone. Spanish paremiology develops the same type of particularities, so that it would be redundant to tackle them. For this reason, the next section relies more on a linguistic perspective.

Mario García Page (1990: 500-509) studied the phonetic features of the Spanish proverbs and underlined that most of them have a prosodic character. Analyzing the same character, Ramón Almela Pérez and Julia Sevilla Muñoz (2000: 35) indicated that Spanish proverbs may have alliteration (*A gran subida, gran caída*), and other types of rhyme as well:

- a. Assonant rhyme with the stress on the final syllable: *A las diez, en la cama estás;*

- b. Assonant rhyme with the stress on the second-to-last syllable: *A quien mal obra, la luz estorba; A muertos y a idos no hay amigos;*
- c. Consonant rhyme with the stress on the final syllable: *A tal señor, tal honor;*
- d. Consonant rhyme with the stress on the second-to-last syllable: *Comida acabada, amistad terminada; A lo hecho, pecho.*

Being laconic as all universal paremiological units, Spanish proverbs reveal some morphological adaptations in order to achieve it; they have the tendency to be nominal phrases – *frase nominal* – whereas, most of them are composed of nouns, often suppressing definite and indefinite articles and, even more important, verbs, an idea developed by Tabanera (1954) and Canellada (2001).

A verb can be completely eliminated as in *Iglesia, mar, o casa real*, or it can be positioned at the end of the structure: *La mujer que mucho mira, poco hila*. If the verb is in the final position there will be mostly a gnomic present proverb to emphasize the validity of the past, present or future. It should be noted that the presence of this gnomic tense is specific to universal proverbs, not just Hispanic. Equally, but rarely, there may not be an elliptical verb, or a verbal constituent at the end of a paremiological unit, but, in this case, there will be an imperative verb at the level of the phrase instead: *Dime de qué presumes y te diré de qué careces*. Moreover, to increase the expressiveness of a saying and to maintain this feature of the verb, in this Iberian paremiology one can notice the presence of participles that, next to a noun, become adjectives: *A dineros cobrados, brazos quebrados, La doncella honrada, la pierna quebrada y en casa*. Other moods used are the infinitive (*Ir a por lana y volver trasquilado*) and the gerund *A Dios rogando y con el manso dando*.

Penadés Martínez (2008) and Canellada (2001) expressed that the use of the preposition *a* (to) is a specific mark of the Spanish language and paremiology, which in the composition of a proverb can suggest or establish different meanings. Proverbs have a binary structure and in the case of the given language, the preposition is used to outline a relationship of correspondence: *A mal tiempo, buena cara*. The preposition can also express a solution or cure in a certain situation as in: *A falta de pan, buenas son tortas, A poco pan, tomar primero* or a clearing relationship (*A calzas rotas, agujetas largas*).

At the syntactic level, there are no specific features for Spanish proverbs; they do not differ from universal proverbs, following primarily the traditional model of a simple sentence: *El tiempo es oro*. However, more frequently, a phrase composed of a main and a subordinate sentence is used. These complex sentences are often introduced by a relative pronoun (*el que*,

quien), suggesting a subjective proposition: *Quien calla, otorga, Quien mal anda, mal acaba, El que no llora, no ama*. There may appear a coordination between two sentences: *Por delante acato y por detrás al rey mato*. In Cervantes' culture, there is a pattern of syntactic construction given by *más vale... que...* (*Más vale al que Dios ayuda, que al que mucho madruga*).

From a lexical point of view, Penadés Martínez (2008: 90) thinks that in the Spanish paremiology occur common words, a lexis taken from the daily activities, from a colloquial level of speech, such as: water (*agua*) - *Agua que has de beber, déjala correr*; mouth (*boca*) - *En boca cerrada, no entran moscas, El que tiene boca, se equivoca*; house (*casa*) - *En casa del herrero, cuchillo de palo*. In the same area of proverbs from the immediate reality, it is important to mention proverbs with nominal constituents from a gastronomic lexicon field. Many paremiological units contain words referring to food: garlic, onion, chocolate, bread and wine (*ajo, cebolla, chocolate, pan, vino*) - *El que se pica, ajos come; Las cosas claras y el chocolate espeso; Contigo pan y cebolla; Al pan pan y al vino vino*.

Penadés Martínez (2008) adds that the Hispanic folklore includes a great number of paremiological structures with words expressing body parts: tooth, hand, heart, eyes, face (*diente, mano, corazón, ojo, cara*) - *Ojo por ojo y diente por diente; Ojos que no ven, corazón que no se siente; Más vale pájaro en mano que cien volando; A mal tiempo, buena cara*. Timetables, seasons, months represent another lexicon field of many proverbs from Spain, especially terms such as the months of the year, March, April, May (*año, marzo, abril, mayo*): *Año de nieves, año de bienes; De noche todos los gatos son pardos; En abril, aguas mil; Hasta el cuarenta de mayo, no te quites el sayo; Marzo airoso y abril lluvioso hacen a mayo florido y hermoso; A mal tiempo, buena cara*.

The great Catholic spirit of the Spaniards and one of the most important origins of proverbs in general, the Bible, is reflected on the large number of sayings that contain words referring to the divinity: *A quien madruga, Dios le ayuda; Dios aprieta, pero no ahorca*. Furthermore, within the same spiritual dimension, in the Hispanic paremiology there are proverbs that highlight the opposition between good and bad: *Haz bien y no mires a quién; No hay mal que por bien no venga*.

Since proverbs are the expression of people's wisdom, a legacy of the previous generations, Penadés Martínez (2008) and Canellada (2001) discussed that Spanish proverbs present two variations of the same proverb. In this case, the distinction between the two is the use of an archaism, as in the case of the proverb: *A caballo regalado, no le mires el diente* that may use for *diente* an ancient form *dentado*: *A caballo regalado no le mires el dentado*. In terms of lexical features, it is common for the Spanish paremiology to use derivation, especially the suffixes: *ero, -ina, -ea*. (*Amor*

primero, no es olvidadero, La mujer y la gallina, caserina, Cuando el invierno primaverea, la primavera invernea).

4. Taxonomies

Following a syntactical and thematic criteria, Ramón Almela Pérez and Julia Sevilla Muñoz (2000: 16) asserted that Spanish proverbs can be divided into:

- a. Moral proverbs: *Más vale pájaro en mano que ciento volando; A caballo regalado, no le mires el diente; Dime con quién andas y te diré quién eres;*
- b. Geographic proverbs: *Quien no ha visto Sevilla, no ha visto maravilla;*
- c. Meteorological and/ or temporal proverbs: *En abril, aguas mil; Por San Blás, cigüeña versa;*
- d. Proverbs concerning work: *Cuando canta la abubilla, deja el buey y toma la gavilla, Quien poda en hoja, su viña remoja;*
- e. Proverbs concerning superstitions: *En martes, ni te cases, ni te embarques;*
- f. Dialogued proverbs: *Nunca digas: «De esta agua no beberé».*

Wanting to classify Spanish proverbs, José Manuel Gómez Tabanera (1954: 11) refers to the wisdom of the people, applying three philosophical areas:

- a. An active synthesis, having as main themes war, agriculture, industry and sub-themes such as work, jobs, wealth: *En martes ni te cases, ni te embarques, A su tiempo maduran las uvas, Si marzo truena, cosecha buena;*
- b. An affective synthesis, including family, religion and morality as main themes and sub-themes as love , marriage , death , house, goods , local holidays , miracles , rights, duties: *Quien canta sus males espanta, Quien bien te quiere te hará llorar, Dios aprieta, pero no ahorca, Oye misa, y o cuides si el tiene camisa, A pecado nuevo, penitencia nueva;*
- c. A speculative synthesis covering topics such as science, philosophy, the union between practice and theory and sub meteorology, history, evolution, determination: *Tiempo ido, tiempo perdido, Sufro y callo, por el tiempo en que me hallo, A mal tiempo, buena cara, Quien las cosas mucho apura, no tiene la vida segura.*

5. Conclusion

Proverbs are, in the same extension, a result of folklore and language. The origins revealed that proverbs are a way of concentrating the mind, experience, historical and cultural peculiarities of a region. In fact, in the genesis of proverbs it can be found the uniqueness of the Spanish paremiology, the cultural specificity. Nevertheless, at the same time, proverbs are a synthesis of phonological, lexical, morphological and syntactical particularities of the Spanish language. Canellada (2001) noticed that Spanish paremiology has specific linguistic features such as: the elimination of articles, verbs and the use of the preposition *a*. The lexicon field is based on constituents from immediate reality such as: timetable, body parts, food, but also the most profound elements from the Spanish life – the religious proverbs. Also, it is important to highlight the specific rhyme (assonant and consonant) of the Spanish proverbs and the diverse themes that cover every aspect of life.

The richness of a language consists of these immutable units that comprise the intelligence and the experience of a nation, on the one hand, and the grammatical and lexical peculiarities of a language, on the other hand. The formal features stated previously customize the Spanish language in the area of the paremiology, confirming that proverbs have both universal and endemic values.

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