

## PROVERBS AND SAYINGS AS AN INEXHAUSTIBLE SOURCE OF FOLK WISDOM IN PRIMARY LEVEL LITERATURE EDUCATION

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**Abstract:** The present study examines proverbs and sayings as culturally and pedagogically significant elements within primary level literature education, focusing on their capacity to transmit folk wisdom and moral orientations in literary form. Rather than approaching these short folkloric genres solely through their historical origin or formal characteristics, the article emphasises their role as carriers of value-laden meanings that remain relevant in contemporary educational contexts. Proverbs and sayings are viewed as expressive linguistic structures through which collective experience, ethical norms, and social attitudes are preserved and communicated across generations. The analysis highlights the distinctive features that differentiate proverbs and sayings while also revealing their shared educational function as instruments for moral reflection and value formation. Attention is given to their thematic diversity, figurative language, and syntactic construction, which contribute to their effectiveness in literary instruction at primary school level. Within this framework, proverbs and sayings are interpreted not only as elements of folklore heritage but as pedagogical resources capable of stimulating interpretation, dialogue, and personal evaluation. From a modern pedagogical perspective, their educational potential is realised when pupils are encouraged to engage actively with the moral situations implied in these texts. As contemporary research suggests, moral meanings embedded in short folkloric forms are most effectively internalised through guided interpretation and reflective discussion rather than through direct moral instruction. In this sense, proverbs and sayings function as situational moral models that support the gradual construction of ethical judgments based on experience, comparison, and contextual understanding

**Keywords:** proverbs, sayings, classification, specifics, similarities, differences.

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### Introduction

The terms "proverb" and "saying" were borrowed from Russian during the Bulgarian National Revival, more precisely in the 19th century. In Bulgarian, they did not have their own names, and the people referred to them as "old stories" or "wise words." Historically, the term "parable" has been preserved, more commonly known in some regions of the country as "prishi," with which people referred to proverbs. It is believed that this word entered our language through Church Slavonic literature.

Several prominent figures of the Bulgarian National Revival focused their attention on proverbs and used them in their works, while at the same time researching, studying, and collecting them – G. S. Rakovski in his memoirs and in the poem "Forest Traveler," P. R. Slaveykov, the Miladinov brothers, V. Drumev, R. Zhinzifov, and others. Regardless of the name under which they are circulated – whether as "old tales," "wise words," or in a descriptive manner – "As it is said," "Where there is a word," etc. – proverbs retain their primary purpose, namely – to educate and instruct, to enrich speech, making it more lively and emotionally charged. With this aim, many authors used them in their works during the Revival, while the people used them in everyday conversation. In contemporary literature, proverbs and sayings are

mainly found in children's literature – in both authorized and some authorial fairy tales, as well as in fables [1]; [2].

### Exposition

The long historical evolution of proverbs and sayings has not fundamentally changed their core genre characteristics. For example, a proverb, both in ancient times and today, always represents a syntactic whole, a complete thought, through which something is affirmed or denied, and an evaluation is given through constructed images, distinguished by its uniqueness and originality. According to Tsvetana Romanska, proverbs are short, often two-part sentences that convey deep thoughts and broad generalizations from observations of life in a concise and emotional form. They are also used in everyday speech to deepen its meaning and provide more expressiveness and effectiveness, often replacing long and abstract reasoning [3].

Mikhail Arnaudov claims that the proverb has the dimensions of a syntactic whole, of a sentence that necessarily includes some kind of image capable of being perceived in a figurative sense, such as: "One swallow does not make a spring" [4], while Tsv. Minkov sees the proverb as a short two-part sentence that expresses a substantive thought in a figurative-

emotional form, for example: "He who chases two rabbits catches neither."

Researchers of the proverb as a folkloric genre mainly emphasize its brevity and conciseness, its rich ideological-emotional subtext, and its instructive character as a means of educating and instilling moral values in young people [5]. The instructive and value-forming potential of proverbs and sayings in primary level literature education cannot be reduced solely to their linguistic conciseness or stylistic expressiveness. Their educational significance becomes evident when these short folkloric forms are approached as condensed moral situations that invite interpretation, evaluation, and personal positioning. In this sense, the proverb does not function merely as a finished moral statement, but as a stimulus for moral reflection. As Abner emphasises, moral meanings embedded in short folkloric and literary texts are internalised by pupils through guided interpretation and dialogic engagement rather than through direct explanation. According to him, pupils gradually construct ethical judgments by comparing actions, motives, and consequences implied in the text and by relating the generalised folk wisdom to concrete human behaviour within a secure educational context. This process allows proverbs and sayings to operate as situational moral models that support the formation of values such as responsibility, justice, and solidarity through experience and reflection, which confirms their lasting pedagogical relevance in primary school literary education [6]. The saying is often fully equated with the proverb, and indeed—proverbs and sayings share a number of common features, yet they also have differences, mainly expressed in their substantive essence, their syntactic structure, their logical density, and the independence of their usage. Tsvetana Romanska notes that a saying is usually a stable and perfectly short sentence, which appears as a kind of conclusion from a single observation about life and most often expresses some comic situation, such as: "Chasing the wind," "Send him for green caviar," "Tell me straight out" and others [3]. The saying, compared to the proverb, is less significant, cannot be used independently, but rather within the flow of speech in a particular situation, as it lacks reasoning, because it is actually not a complete thought as a proverb is, which can synthesize the content of an entire work—a story, novel, or fairy tale—into one sentence and exist as a syntactic and logical whole with figurative and emotional coloring [7]; [8]. Proverbs are usually two-part sentences, while sayings consist of a single sentence or expression, sometimes even without a verb: 'After rain – a hood,' 'From a thorn – to a hawthorn,' and so on. Tsvetana Romanska divides proverbs and sayings into two groups depending on whether they have a literal meaning or a figurative, allegorical meaning, in which case, besides allegory, metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and others are widely used [3]. The first group includes proverbs such as: 'No effort, no success,' 'Do good to find good,' while the second group includes proverbs and sayings of the type: 'Still waters run deep,' 'He who sows storms reaps tempests,' 'Entwined the threads,' and so on.

In addition to content, Tsvetana Romanska suggests that proverbs and sayings be conditionally divided into three groups, both according to their origin and the way they were created, namely:

- Proverbs and sayings that arose as general judgments and conclusions from people's observations of life, daily routines, work activities, etc., such as: "You reap what

you sow," "A thick shadow – a hungry mouth," and others.

- Proverbs and sayings that were created as concise and synthesized conclusions or characteristic sentences from other folklore works (mainly fairy tales and anecdotes) – "An unhealthy person carries health," "A bad wound heals, a bad word is not forgotten," "One who is wet from the rain does not fear it," and others.
- Proverbs and sayings that gradually moved from literature into folklore, from written sources into folklore, such as: "Knock and it will be opened for you, ask and it will be given to you," "God gave, God took," and so on [3].

Romanska also offers another classification of the two short folkloric genres – depending on the scope of the area in which they are known, dividing them into two groups based on this criterion:

- Proverbs and sayings that are common and widespread throughout the country – most of them can be included here.
- Proverbs and sayings that are local and known only in a specific place or region – most often originated in connection with some event, action, or statement of a person popular in that area: "Dorde se Kanine nakania, Rupchine izruchaa." (Kanine and Rupchine are surnames in Bansko) [3].

There are also other classifications of proverbs and sayings based on different criteria. For example, according to their content, they are divided into three main groups:

- Of a historical-political nature - these are proverbs and sayings that emerged as a reflection of the historical development of the Bulgarian people - 'The outlaw is not fed by his mother,' 'They attacked like brigands,' 'A loyal company is a strong fortress,' and so on, and they also served as a kind of means of resistance against tyranny and oppression.
- With a social-class character – these folk sayings primarily reflect social conflicts and class stratification in society – "Hunger is worse than plague," "While one does not pull, another does not prosper," "The rich eat when they can, the poor when they find food," etc.
- With everyday life themes – this type of proverbs and sayings affirm the moral and aesthetic values of the people or condemn human flaws and vices – "Stingy with the bran, cheap with the flour," "Blood is not water," "Don't work in vain, don't stay idle in vain," "Labor is for a person's health and life," etc.

It should be noted that this classification of proverbs and sayings is conditional, as some of them can be associated with either one or the other of these three groups due to the presence of elements in their content, their thematic diversity, and the mutual blending of themes, images, and ideas [9]. In turn, in his study "Bulgarian Folk Proverbs," Mihail Arnaudov opposes any attempts to classify proverbs and sayings based on content, idea, or trend at all,

because the themes and issues they address are multifaceted, often intertwine, and this further complicates attempts to group them in one way or another [10]. Regarding the language and style of proverbs and sayings, there is also a noticeable diversity of artistic techniques and devices used - metaphors, similes, epithets, metonymies, synecdoches, and others. Another characteristic feature of folk paremias is their dialectal coloring due to their origin in a specific speech environment, in a particular dialect region, as well as the presence of specific vocabulary - some Turkish and Greek words that entered during Ottoman and Greek rule. A number of Old Bulgarian words have also been preserved, as well as archaic verb forms - "Bosa hodva, horoto vodva" [11]; [12]. As for the construction of proverbs and sayings, as noted above, they are built as simple sentences or individual expressions (sayings) or as complex compound, complex composite, or complex mixed sentences - "Like the pear - so is the pumpkin," "The godmother didn't want it, but she licked the bowl," and so on. There are also uniform constructions of the type: "Good morning to money, good evening to money." Very often, proverbs exhibit syntactic parallelism, corresponding to the stress and the number of syllables - "Deep water has no ford, a beautiful girl has no kin," and sometimes they consist of two independent sentences in the form of a dialogue, which logically form a single unit: "They asked the wolf: why do you have a thick neck? He replied: because I do my own work."

Besides being simple or compound, complex or mixed sentences, a proverb often also consists of one or more elliptical sentences, in which omitting the verb achieves greater conciseness and a higher degree of emotional impact, for example: "Money - strong queen," "With a little flour - a small loaf," "From one tree both knife and shovel," and so on. It is not uncommon to also find proverbs and sayings that rhyme, which gives a special rhythm and melody to their sound, with the rhyme possibly occurring in the middle or at the end of the proverb, and it may even cover all the words in it - "The girl got married, so she wouldn't stay at home," "Son-in-law - honey, son - wormwood," etc. Proverbs and sayings are figurative in nature - they build the images of 'characters' and word-images with a metaphorical and metonymic character. Due to the broad generalization they contain, proverbs usually typify the phenomena and events in the lives of ordinary people, imposing typical images such as that of the poor man, the priest, the moneylender, the landowner, the miser, the lazy person, and others.

Although in most cases the 'heroes' in proverbs and sayings do not have names or individual characteristics, exceptions are made for those with historical themes, where the figure of Kral Marko and the people's attitude toward him stand out, for example: 'If your cart gets stuck, don't wait for Kral Marko to pull it out for you' or 'It's hard for Marko to witness good in evil,' as well as proverbs featuring Hitar Petar - a beloved character from the anecdotes created by Bulgarians - 'Hitar Petar beat the old ox.' The same is true for some proverbs that are part of folk songs - 'While Indzhe was a young bachelor, the forest was lively; once he married, the forest became desolate'.

## Conclusion

Proverbs and sayings occupy a lasting and meaningful place within the cultural memory of the Bulgarian people, yet their significance extends far beyond their role as elements of folklore heritage. Within the context of primary level literature education, these short literary forms demonstrate a unique capacity to convey complex moral, social, and value-oriented meanings through

concise and expressive language. Their durability over time is not accidental, but rather a result of their ability to adapt to different historical and educational contexts while preserving their core ethical messages. In contemporary educational practice, the relevance of proverbs and sayings lies in their potential to foster reflection, interpretation, and value awareness among pupils. When approached as texts that invite discussion and personal engagement, they encourage learners to relate generalised folk wisdom to concrete situations from everyday life. This process supports the development of moral sensitivity, critical thinking, and cultural awareness, which are essential components of literary and moral education in the primary stage. The present study confirms that proverbs and sayings continue to function as effective pedagogical resources when integrated thoughtfully into literature instruction. Their educational value emerges not through passive memorisation, but through active interpretation and guided dialogue, which allow pupils to explore meanings, attitudes, and ethical positions embedded in the text. In this way, proverbs and sayings remain a living source of wisdom, capable of connecting tradition with contemporary educational aims and contributing to the formation of culturally informed and morally responsible individuals.

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