THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSYS OF THE AGING PROCESS PROVERBS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

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Lucrarea propune o temă de interes pentru cercetarea lingvistică, actualitatea faptelor de limbă având un caracter împletit în contextul sociocultural şi cu o determinare complexă datorită unei multitudini de factori extralingvistici. Scopul acestui studiu constă în elaborarea unui studiu contrastiv al proverbelor referitoare la conceptul de vârstă în limbile engleză și română care să servească drept suport pentru analiza puterii limbajului proverbelor, dar și a valorilor, tradițiilor promovate de acestea.

Language is both an individual and a social possession. It is said to serve interactive and integrative functions. Proverbs are fixed phrases or sentences that give advice or say something that is generally true; they represent an essential part of daily speech in all societies. Since almost all proverbs use metaphorical language, their meaning may not be detected from their constituent words. Proverbs have two levels of comprehension, namely, the literal/denotative and figurative/conotative ones. Some of the proverbs have both of these levels of understanding; proverbs that have a similar meaning in English and Romanian are considered to be semantically equal (synonymous) as having the same referential meaning (i.e. life experience = wisdom) [1, p. 188].

Stereotypes are generalizations made about individuals on the basis of their membership in a particular group. They exist for almost any characteristics that is used to distinguish groups of people from one another – gender, race, religion, vocation, physical appearance, and *age*.

As a linguistic entity, proverbs are a complex combination of intentions, meanings and functions, which, from a pragmatic perspective, distance the speaker from the message conveyed, thereby requiring the listener to contribute much in order to decode the precise meaning of the proverb, thus removing the speaker from any liability for the message. Proverbs regarding the aging process and intergenerational relations can be related to: the aging process itself, views about elderly/young people and communication between people of different generations. Each part includes particular proverbs and their explanations. In the first part, proverbs reflecting the world of childhood and youth have been collected and classified according to different semantic groups, emotions and spiritual states, such as love, recklessness, warning about future life, promising future, playfulness and enjoyment, punishment as education, respect and care, inexperience, obedience, patience, optimism, hope, ignorance, tolerance and happiness. The second section comprises proverbs reflecting the old age; again the proverbs have been divided according to the main attitude expressed. The third part includes proverbs depicting the family world. These expressions have been classified into semantic groups according to family relations, children and their relations with parents, behaviour/conduct and human nature as well as family resemblance, family unity and family misunderstandings.

The total amount of the collected proverbs is 186 examples. Proverbs expressing the world of childhood and youth constitute 71 cases. The biggest number of these proverbs describes the recklessness of the younger generation, i.e. 16 cases. It is interesting that in the Moldovan culture the young are taught to be obedient towards the elder (10 cases of proverbs suggesting obedience to the young) for example: *Tinerii, înaintea bătrânilor, să aibă urechi, nu gură*; while in the English culture no such proverbs were found. Proverbs reflecting the old age amount to 79 examples. The largest number of proverbs about the elder age expresses the idea of sickness and incapacity, for example: *If the devil can't come himself, he sends an old woman. Old people can dye their hair, but they can't change their backs* and some Romanian equivalents: *Nici o boală nu-i mai grea ca boala bătrîneţelor. Orice armăsar ajunge gloabă*. This category amounts to 31 cases together in Romanian and English. Proverbs reflecting family relationships constitute 36 instances. The biggest number of cases has been found of proverbs denoting family likeness: *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree / Aşchia nu sare departe de trunchi*. *He that would the daughter win must with the mother first begin / Vezi mama, apoi fata*, etc.

It appears from the investigation of the usage of proverbs in English and Moldovan culture that both societies emphasise the importance of disciplining children at a young age and treating the elderly parents and members of family with great consideration, e.g. *Spare the rod and spoil the*

child / Cine nu se îndură de vargă pierde copilul. A pitiful mother makes a scabby daughter / Copilul nepedepsit ajunge neprocopsit. Bate copilul cât îi de-a lungul patului, căci apoi va fi de nici un folos. However, due to the collective nature of Romanian society, Romanian proverbs show that these relationships are closer and tighter than those in the English culture; they appear in reality to be more individualistic than their proverbs suggest.

The largest number of proverbs about the elder age expresses the idea of sickness and incapacity. Second by the number of recurrence are the set of proverbs having a positive attitude towards the elder, according to them elder people have a rich life experience, and thus are wiser and more skilful e.g. *With age comes wisdom. Dă-mi, Doamne, puterea tânărului şi mintea bătrânului. Age deserves honour*. Characterizations of the elderly and the aging process are rich and varied and draw upon a wide range of metaphors, including those tied to the natural environment, animals, and food [2, p.11]. There is a juxtaposition of sayings that reflect positive as well as negative views toward the elderly.

The attitude to love in old age reflected in the paremiology of both languages seemed remarkable. In the Moldovan culture it is condemned by society, it is considered sinful, even though the English state that the old man can love more than the young for example: *Bătrânul amorezat e ca piroşca cu păsat. There is nothing worse than an old lover. An old man who takes a young wife invites Death to the wedding. A young woman with an old husband is a wife by day and a widow by night*.

In both cultures there is a call to respect the elders; it is justified by the fact that all people grow old. For women, age-related changes are unbearable, so they hide their age [4, p.256]. And so the English and Moldovans believe that the old woman becomes grumpy.

Intergenerational communication can be harmonious as well as challenging. We are all familiar with the phrase *"generation gap",* which suggests that there are great difficulties in store for those who attempt to communicate with people of different generations. Given that people of various generations grow up under different conditions, naturally different life experiences arise between generations to a certain extent, which gives rise to different opinions, attitudes, norms and values [3, p.152]. There can often be misunderstandings and conflicts between them and proverbs are a clear reflection of these conflicts: *A young person talking to an older adult is like a chicken talking to a duck. Youth will never agree and Age will never accept. Un părinte pe toţi copiii îi hrăneşte, iar copiii toţi p-un părinte nu-l pot hrăni / One father can support ten children, ten children cannot support one father. Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are a tempest and hail storm / Soacra cu nora ca pisica cu şoarecele.*

The value of disciplining children at a young age is common for both cultures, next comes the positive attitude towards the elder and the attitude to love in old age. The differences in cultural values of English and Moldovan people can be found in making the young to obey the old in Moldovan mentality and no such value has been noticed in the English culture.

References:

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