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Russian Anti-Proverbs of the 21st Century: A Sociolinguistic Dictionary. By Andrey Reznikov. Burlington, Vermont: “Proverbium” in cooperation with the Department of German and Russian, University of Vermont, 2012. Pp. 337.

One expects a proverb to be cited in its traditional form; indeed, its authority derives in large part from its fixed, “handed-down” nature. Nonetheless, the structure and phrasing of a given proverb is by no means inviolable; these expressions are more fluid than once assumed, and intentional variation has always been a part of their use and function, in both written and oral speech. Particularly in this age of the Internet and information overload, with its accompanying pursuit of ever more attention-grabbing headlines, the retrieval and repurposing of familiar proverbs has become a regular feature of the digital landscape. Playing with traditional proverbs—deliberately manipulating the formulaic phrases for satirical, political, or commercial purposes—allows the user to twist the generalized wisdom contained in a proverb to fit a unique modern situation. In the three decades since Wolfgang Mieder and Lutz Röhrich applied the term *Antisprichtwort* to these parodies and perversions of proverbs (1977), modern anti-proverbs have presented paremiologists with a fertile field of investigation. Lists of recent anti-proverbs have been compiled in language traditions ranging from the Anglo-American to the Yoruban, with collections in various languages appearing every few years. The Russian language, which is particularly rich in proverbial lore, has alone produced two such collections in the last decade, compiled by the team of Harry Walter and Valerii Mokiienko (2002, 2005). Andrey Reznikov’s new collection, *Russian Anti-Proverbs of the 21st Century: A Sociolinguistic Dictionary*, offers a small but significant contribution to this emerging pool of anti-proverbial scholarship. But in the face of such a surge of interest in this field, what can a new dictionary add to what is already known about the state of Russian proverbial wisdom?

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As Reznikov points out, the older collections of Russian anti-proverbs presented lists of amusing new coinages, culled from websites that solicited users' versions of traditional proverbs. These updatings, while often witty, were artificially created for the sole sake of wordplay, and never used in authentic speech and writing. As such, they did not illuminate "the real state of proverbial wisdom in modern-day Russian language and culture" (Reznikov vii). In contrast to those earlier compendia, Reznikov's presents modern manipulations of Russian proverbs actually used in real language. His examples were collected from the contemporary mass media (web-based newspaper and magazine articles), and are all based on proverbs actively used in contemporary Russian speech. In addition, Reznikov provides analysis, interpreting the use and function of each family of phrases he includes, commenting particularly on the anti-proverbs' semantic connection to the message of the original proverb, and clarifying some of the cultural context or linguistic features of the Russian coinages (internal rhymes or verbal associations) for a non-native audience. Finally, the collection provides English translations and analysis of its proverbs, making the material accessible to an international arena of scholars, educators, and students of Russian.

Each of the nearly two-hundred entries begins with a common Russian proverb (with literal English translation) and a brief summary of its meaning (along with an English equivalent, if available). This is followed by a list of anti-proverbs, each accompanied by an English translation, contextualizing information, information on any language mechanisms used in creating the anti-proverb (such as hidden rhyme, antonymy, or extension), and a URL address for the source. Each entry concludes with a brief section of commentary, presenting a broad analysis of the entire group of anti-proverbs. Finally, the entire collection is capped by an appendix, presenting a concise and lucid discussion of the typical phonetic, morphological, and lexical mechanisms used to create anti-proverbs; this section is intended to make the preceding entries more accessible to readers without formal language training.

An examination of several entries will illustrate Mr. Reznikov's methodology, as well as some of the range he encountered in terms of creativity, productivity and fidelity to the source proverb's message. Some traditional proverbs yield exceptionally clever or politi-

cally pointed coinages in the contemporary press: “Волки боятся – в лес не ходить” (“If you are afraid of wolves, don’t go into the forest”) leads to “Путина боятся – в сортир не ходить” (“If you are afraid of Putin, don’t go into the outhouse,” an allusion to Putin’s famous 1999 promise to “whack terrorists everywhere, including outhouses”) and “Взрыва боятся – в метро не ходить” (“If you are afraid of bombs, don’t go into the metro”), a reference to the 2010 explosions in the Moscow metro (41-43). Many of the proverbs presented here appear to be alive and well, generating crowds of recognizable offspring in today’s press. For instance, “Баба с возу – кобыле легче” (“It’s easier for the mare when the woman gets off the cart,” used when someone declines an offer of help) yields seventeen modern-day iterations, all of which preserve both the syntax and the basic moral of the original, with new lexical content linking it to situations as diverse as Vladimir Putin’s political future (“Премьер с возу – режиму легче,” or “It is easier for the regime with the Prime-minister off the cart”) and cutting literature requirements in Russian secondary schools (“Наташа Ростова с возу – выпускнику легче?” or “Is it easier for high school graduates with Natasha Rostova [from War and Peace] off the cart?”) (5-9). Another venerable Russian proverb, “Первый блин комом” (“The first pancake is a flop,” or the first attempt is usually unsuccessful), leads to a syntactically uniform list of headlines with new lexical content applying to topics as diverse as college-entrance exams, rockets, mushroom poisoning, and soccer anthems (“Первый гимн комом,” or “The first hymn [near-rhyme with pancake] is a flop”) (23-25). Other anti-proverbs appear to have lost any meaningful association with the original proverb. For instance, “На ловца и зверь бежит” (“Wild animals run into the hunter”) produces anti-proverbs that employ hidden rhyme to create an acoustic association with the original proverb (“hunter” is replaced variously by “plaintiff,” “swimmer,” and “fighter”), without retaining the original meaning of a chance encounter (175-178). Likewise, “Работа дураков любит” (“Work loves a fool”) seems to have lost the original association with unnecessary busy-work in headlines like “Work loves a general manager,” for an article on the workload of CEOs. Reznikov suggests that the fundamental message of such proverbs may be lost in contemporary Russian speech (240-241).

Overall, Mr. Reznikov’s collection presents a welcome and important addition to the growing field of (anti-)paremiology. It offers

a variety of potential uses, both pedagogical and scholarly, and deserves to find an audience among specialists and non-specialists alike. There are only two minor suggestions I would offer: first, because these entries are so contingent upon their historical and cultural context, and given the impermanent nature of URLs, it might have been useful to include dates and sources (in addition to URL) for each entry. Secondly, I would have appreciated a summarizing analysis of the phenomenon of anti-proverbs in contemporary Russia, as it illuminates and comments on the current state of proverbial language and wisdom. Perhaps such analysis does not belong in a dictionary; still, the serious paremiologist might be rewarded by reading the present volume alongside Mr. Reznikov's 2009 publication *Old Wine in New Bottles: Modern Russian Anti-Proverbs*, in which the author undertakes a fuller discussion of language mechanisms at work in the formation of contemporary proverbs, as well as a broad analysis of the genre. In general, this fresh collection of anti-proverbs makes available to both native- and non-native audiences alike a snapshot of both the incredible creative possibilities of the contemporary Russian language, as well as the status of the vigorous and adaptable Russian proverb in current usage.

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