

<https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.41.1.519>

Original scientific paper

Received on 29 January 2024

Accepted for publication on 25 April 2024

GEORGIOS TSERPES

PROVERBS IN COMPARISON AND CONTACT: EXAMPLES FROM THE PROVERBIAL DISCOURSE OF THE BALKANS

Abstract: Comparison is an inherent process in folkloristics. The inclusion of paremiology in folklore studies and the concept of proverb being a folklore genre allows the comparison of proverbs too, which are most suitable for a study of this kind. However, what needs to be defined is what comparison consists of and how it differs from other approaches like those of contrast and typology. In this paper we will try to highlight this concept and see how it is related to variation, a key feature to folklore, using examples from the proverbial discourse of the Balkan peoples. The methodology employed in this study revolves around establishing specific criteria for determining comparability among proverbs, while the examples mentioned are taking into account both the etic and the emic view regarding the interpretation of the proverbial material. The examples selected illustrate proverbs that are either directly comparable or perceived as equivalents by the folk themselves, evident in their integration into daily discourse.

Keywords: proverbs, folklore, comparison, contrast, typology, variation

1. Introductory remarks

A very popular view among folklorists since the beginning of the discipline is that a folklore phenomenon is not unique to the specific sociocultural context in which it is traced. It is generally accepted that analogies exist within cultures, something that in-

evitably leads to comparisons, and as Alan Dundes argues “one cannot know a priori what is or is not unique to a culture without seeking possible cognate phenomena in adjacent or historically related cultures” (Dundes 1986: 138).

Thus, comparison is an inherent process in folklore studies. But what does comparison in folklore studies consist of? How does it relate to the concept of variation, which is central to folklore theory, and how does it differ from contrast and typology? We will attempt to answer these questions using examples from the proverbial discourse of the Balkans. This approach aims to reveal both the etic and the emic views regarding this phenomenon: initially through the comparison a folklorist would make, and subsequently from the point of view of the *folk*, by revealing their own perception of comparison and contact of proverbs. This may even lead to the combination of proverbial material from different languages.

2. Theoretical framework: Comparison and Variation

The principles of comparatism may be based on the finding that similar folklore phenomena may exist in different cultures, but cross-cultural comparisons constitute only one side of the comparative approach to folklore studies. According to Robert Georges,

...no one can be a folklorist without also being a comparatist, for finding phenomena to study and identifying those phenomena as examples of folklore or, more specifically, as examples of folk-songs, folktales, folk games, folk costumes, folk art and objects, etc., require one to make numerous comparisons whatever identifying criteria one employ or whatever ordering system one utilizes – whether by genre, type, informant, informant’s ethnic or occupational group, or fieldworker, for instance – comparison is required. (Georges 1986: 3-4)

Multiple existence and variation are the two main characteristics of folklore (Dundes 1999: vii-viii). The concept of variation is particularly central to folklore theory. This fact, combined with the inherent comparative dimension of folklore studies, calls for the creation of a theoretical scheme that will combine the con-

cepts of variation and comparison. Such a theory was formulated by Lauri Honko, which we believe can also be applied to proverbs.

Honko speaks of a three-dimensional comparative model under the perspectives of tradition phenomenology, tradition ecology and tradition history (Honko 1986: 111).

Regarding tradition – phenomenological comparisons, he thinks that “...this type of comparison reveals global categories characteristic of human culture, i.e., if they occur in different cultures in different parts of the world and are not derived from any particular historical genetic traditional basis” (Honko 1986: 111).

What these kinds of approaches point out are phenomenological categories. Such categories are the very genres of folklore. The proverb as a genre of folk speech is one such category, and this kind of comparisons are about whether it is a cross-cultural universal genre. Cross-cultural types of genres are usually a topic of academic debate. This fact concerns the etic approach to the issue. However, scholars need to be familiar with both etic and emic conceptualizations (Granbom – Herranen 2016: 324-325).

Pekka Hakamies proceeded with such a phenomenological comparison, trying to establish whether the type of proverb exists in different peoples and cultures, concluding that the conditions may exist to accept the view that there is an analytical-ideal type for the proverb in global scale (Hakamies 2016: 314).

Of course, in this case the concept of variation is linked to the phenomenon examined (proverbs in our case) and we should always remember that:

A phenomenological category must therefore provide for the possibility of unknown future manifestations of the phenomenon that may affect the category in question. The manifestations of a phenomenon may be singled out and compared with each other or with manifestations of other phenomena, but the phenomenon as such only lends itself to an approximative, temporary definition. (Honko 1986: 113)

In the framework of tradition-ecological dimension of comparison, attention shifts, according to Honko, to three factors: the

tradition itself, the community maintaining it, and the natural environment embracing them both (Honko 1986: 116). In this case

the variants stand in “live” relation to each other; they may be considered as being in contact with each other or dependent upon each other in the sense that they are governed by similar conditions and rules within the system. This approach tends to emphasize the importance of individuals and communities, because it is in the minds of individuals and in the values and norms of communities that systems of tradition exist. (Honko 1986: 119)

This kind of variation is extremely important because it brings to the fore the concept of communication and the perception of folklore as a communicative process (Ben-Amos 1971: 13), where the products of tradition are used in specific contexts, while at the same time highlighting the spaces of their social circulation.

The proverb genre is a representative example of this kind of variation because proverbs are used in certain contexts where morphological variation may be minimal due to their brevity, but contextual variation is observed because of the situational character of communication, and thus meaning-making may vary.

Finally, as far as the tradition-historical dimension of comparison is concerned, Lauri Honko argues that,

Tradition-historical comparisons readily speak of culture loans, justifying this by saying that a foreign counterpart can be found for a given phenomenon. The only discussion is then of the direction of the borrowing. But this method of research is neither satisfactory nor sufficient. It is also necessary to study the nature of the loan and the use of the borrowed element in the receiving culture [...] The history of tradition must be viewed as a series of expansions and regressions by populations, cultural institutions, forms of tradition, and so forth, and the accompanying assimilation. (Honko 1986: 120-121)

This kind of comparison highlight the historical dimension of the whole issue, as well as the criteria of comparability. It is not feasible to compare everything without predetermined criteria, making it essential to distinguish between comparison, contrast, and typology.

3. Comparison – Contrast – Typology: Issues of terminology

For a comparison to be successful, one must always clarify *what* is being compared and *how* the comparison is made. In linguistics, in addition to the term *comparison*, the term *contrast* is used, which may refer to different approaches. In a ‘narrower’ sense the term *contrastive* “implies a truly systematic comparison between two or more languages, on the basis of all their differences and similarities. Finally, a more restricted interpretation of ‘contrastive’ is also possible, in which only the differences between languages are taken into account” (Colson 2008: 194). This is the case especially in linguistics, where contrastive analysis is used mainly in tracing the differences among languages (James 1985: 2). This dual approach is why students are often asked to “compare and contrast” (Dundes 1986: 135), as comparison refers to similarities and contrast to differences.

However, as far as paremiology and paremiography are concerned, there is no clear distinction between the two terms while, at the same time, it is argued that comparison is mostly linked with diachronicity, a view shared by several scholars (Marti Solano & Rondinelli 2021). This means that contrast usually refers to the synchronic study of language or proverbs, while comparison is interested in their diachronic research, “... which takes into account the evolution of a text, or the chronological change of some aspects of a proverb text or group/class of proverbs” (Petrova 2015: 244).

This fact is extremely important regarding folkloristic comparison, because emphasis is also laid on the historical factor in folklore phenomena, that is the fact that they take place in a place and time historically defined (Meraklis 2004: 15). Such an approach also highlights the fact that while contrast may not presuppose specific criteria, this is not the case for comparison, especially when it comes to folklore phenomena (proverbs included), since the phenomena being compared must be comparable to each other in order to draw safe conclusions.

In the cases of comparative and cross-cultural approaches in particular, one must be careful not to compare for comparison sake. This means that the phenomena that are compared to each other must have some relevance, and be based on some historical

basis, especially if it comes to comparisons concerning European peoples. If the above conditions are not met, we should probably talk about typology and not comparison, in the sense that typology is more about a theoretical and abstract level of interpretation that is not determined by spatio-temporal factors and leads to simplifications (Puchner 2009: 235-236). Typology is more related to contrast since it does not necessarily presupposes the establishment of specific criteria, as it moves mainly at the synchronic level.

Therefore, to conduct a comparative study, it is necessary to define comparable concepts, sufficiently defined so that comparison is possible. One good example for this kind of comparison for Greek folkloristics is the folklore of the Balkan peoples, because of the historical and geographical conditions that allow such a comparison (Antoniadis – Bibicou 1996; Antonijević 1996), as the Balkans constitute an ethnographic area, something that is related to the so-called areal model, where the emphasis shifts on neighbouring people, but not necessarily linguistically related (Honko 1986: 110). This is something common regarding Europe as regional proverbs¹ emerge, more precisely: Balkan, East-European, Italo-Franco-Iberian, Nordic, Scottish-Gaelic-Irish-Welsh etc. (Paczolay 1997: 15). And of course, in typology research the whole continent is considered as a common linguistic area (Pirainen 2008b: 244).

Thus, comparison and typology are not mutually excluded. According to Walter Puchner:

In the scales and gradations between typology and comparison there are also cases that allow both approaches, e.g. in proverbs: In the Greek tradition, their diachronicity is due to the written tradition, which at times fed back to the oral tradition· while on a Balkan scale the similarity of the proverbs can be perfectly due to dissemination, the partial similarity on a global scale, however, belongs to typology, that is, parallel situations of human life lead to similar sayings.² (Puchner 2011: 130)

¹ Several such studies have been conducted so far regarding paremiography. Some of the most important are the following: Bilgrav 1985; Kuusi et al. 1985; Gheorghie 1986; Grigas 1987; Paczolay 1987.

² Such proverbs to be found universally are: “There is no fire without smoke”, “Con-

Of course, we must always keep in mind that typology may have to do with wider geographic areas, however—and especially in more recent periods—common proverbs and widespread idioms on a European scale or even worldwide may be due to “textual dependence” (Piiirainen 2008b: 253), meaning wide knowledge of common texts. From a folkloristic point of view, in this case the process of dissemination must be examined as well. So, the folklorist again must work comparatively across time and space, taking also into account the media and the ways of transmission.

4. Methodology issues: Conditions and criteria of comparability

Given that a comparison of the proverbs of the Balkan peoples is possible,³ as there is a historical basis for such a thing, what needs to be determined are the criteria of comparison. For a comparison to be successful there must be a *comparans*, a *comparandum* and a *tertium comparationis* (Grzybek 1998: 263). In this case, Greek proverbs will be used as a *comparans* and the proverbs of the other Balkan peoples as a *comparandum*. However, the determination of the *tertium comparationis* requires considering several factors. In particular, the fact that the comparison attempted here is a folkloristic one, means that proverbs are understood as cultural expressions, as cultural texts, which implies that they express attitudes towards values (Petrova 2003: 339).

Thus, as Petrova argues, several factors could be determined as a *tertium comparationis* such as the thought/idea of the proverbs, a logical type, a syntactic structure, a selected topic or theme, an image, a value, an anti-value, a general concept, some human characteristics etc. (Petrova 2015: 249-250). However, before defining the *tertium comparationis* several characteristics of this folklore genre should be considered.

The most important characteristic of proverbs when treated as a folklore genre is that of traditionality. Traditionality has to

stant dropping wears away a stone”, “Walls have ears” etc. (Paczolay 1997: 16).

³ Already several attempts concerning the comparison of the Balkan peoples have been made. The pioneer in this field was the Bulgarian scholar Nikolaj Ikonomov (1968), while other studies concerning this field are the ones from L. Djamo – Djaconita (1968), Michael Meraklis (2007), Georgios Tserpes (2019).

do with the age and the currency of a proverb (Mieder 1993: 6), something that cannot be recognized by the text itself, since collections or dictionaries of proverbs are static. Thus, the researcher is led into a process of selecting or hiding meanings. But even in this case, the problem still exists as the content of the meanings cannot be fully explored since the textual situations described in the proverbs do not find fully equivalent extratextual situations (Krikmann 1974: 866-867).

In an ideal situation, the semantic analysis of proverbs should initially involve studying their meanings as texts, that is, to go through a process of potential interpretation of the proverb. This means finding parallels across as many times and places as possible (Taylor 1968: 238), followed by a process of semantic interpretation in all possible real situations of proverb usage (Krikmann 1984: 51).

According to Matti Kuusi, the components that shape a proverb are an idea, a structure, and a kernel (Grigas 2005: 266). However, due to the fact that proverbs usually “tend to belong to the figurative type, i.e. they have less obvious, implicit, idiomatic, or metaphorical meanings” (Petrova 2015: 248), some other characteristics⁴ often arise in proverbial discourse such as image and metaphor (Meraklis 2007: 10; Doulaveras 2010: 92, 94). When these features are used in proverbial discourse, proverbs function as cultural expressions using signs in a way that their primary content is denoted to another content (Piiirainen 2018a: 211).

That is why in our attempt to find equivalents among the proverbs of the Balkan peoples, image and metaphor will be used as *tertium comparationis* so that similarities and differences are traced.

5. Proverbs from the Balkans compared. The etic and the emic view

When discussing the proverbs of the Balkan peoples, we refer to thousands of proverbs. So, in order to limit the material, three

⁴ For a thorough analysis of the characteristics and how they function within the concept of “proverbiality”, see: Arora 1984 and Doulaveras 2010: 75-96.

categories were examined:⁵ family relations, wealth, and poverty. The preference for these categories stems from the fact of the coexistence of the Balkan peoples in the region for several centuries, which has resulted in the existence of strong similarities that are also related to the past (Šubert 1990: 87). At the same time, the fact that “family as an institution cannot be cut off from the rest of human experience and is determined, among other things, by economic factors” (Tserpes 2018b: 186) leads to the conclusion that these three categories are interrelated (see also Tserpes 2020).

Because of the folkloristic nature of the research, we also took in account the popularity and currency of the proverbs since, if the comparison is not based on empirically documented material, it can at best provide hypothetical results (Grzybek 1998: 271). To ensure empirical accuracy, we conducted interviews with focus groups using questionnaires. Only proverbs that were known by at least 50% of the respondents were included in the study.⁶

At the first level, this study attempts to present semantic equivalents of proverbs from the Balkans. Of course, this is an easy task if the proverbs compared use the same linguistic equipment such as vocabulary. However, this task could be proved quite difficult if different vocabulary is used, different images and different metaphors. In this case, the scholar should be aware of some kind of sameness among proverbs (Petrova 2014: 247). In such cases, scholars like Matti Kuusi and Alan Dundes “suggested that equivalence should be sought in proverbs which employ different images while putting across the same message” (Petrova 2014: 254).

⁵ The examination of these three categories refers to the writer’s doctoral dissertation defended in 2019. In the research conducted for the purpose of the dissertation, 5,294 proverbs from the Balkans (Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Türkiye) were examined.

⁶ For more details regarding the empirical research see: Tserpes 2018b: 186-191 and Tserpes 2019: 154-163. As far as the proverbs presented in this paper is concerned, apart from those that the qualitative research showed that are known and current and were used during the interviews with informants, also others are presented which someone may consider as obsolete. However, they are included so that different proverb types are presented.

In the case of the proverb “Blood is thicker than water” (Tserpes 2018a) the sameness is obvious as this proverb exists in all the studied languages with the same vocabulary:

Albanian: *Gjaku ujë s' bëhet*

Bulgarian: *Кръвта вода не става*

Greek: *Το αίμα νερό δεν γίνεται*

Romanian: *Sângele apă nu se face*

Serbian: *Крв није вода*

This proverb has proven to be extremely popular among the Balkan peoples and the empirical research showed that it is widely known.⁷

So, there is no problem for the researcher to trace the equivalents in the case of this proverb. At the same time, proverbs provide interesting information about values and acceptable behaviour in a certain society/culture (Piirainen 2008a: 212). However, “what matters here is that some such knowledge is actually *accessed*: the type of explanation offered is an instance of interpretation, or reconstruction, from the (changing) present perspective, based on some knowledge of cultural history, or, more precisely, on what speakers consider to be relevant facts of cultural history” (Sabban 2008: 235).

This is quite important to folkloristics because it highlights the *folk* and not only the *lore*. This way, the folk could interpret the meaning of the proverb. If this is not possible during the actual interaction, the *hypothetical situation technique* (Herskovits 1950) can be used, and thus *oral literary criticism* (Dundes 1966) is revealed. In an ideal situation where the researcher may have the opportunity to record the use of proverbs in real interaction, what is of extreme importance is the meaning-making at that exact moment, as according to Honko:

a meaning does not have to last very long from the point of view of ongoing action; it is normally superseded by other meanings. [...]

⁷ According to the qualitative research conducted for the writer’s doctoral dissertation, the percentage of knowledge of the proverb is the following: Greeks: 80%, Albanians: 90%, Bulgarians, Romanians, Serbians: 100% (Tserpes 2019). Of course, these results are related to specific focus groups and their informants.

A folklore text, be it a proverb that can be reproduced in exactly the same form or a free narrative that is recreated on the basis of plot scheme and key lines, is in its latent, inactive state in the human mind void of meaning, open or empty. On the other hand, the situation in which a folklore text is recalled, actualized, produced and performed is full of meaning. The presence of people, their mutual relations, previous events, future hopes and fears, expectations concerning actual event, expressions and reactions create a field of forces where meanings are continuously born and messages conveyed. (Honko 1985: 38,39)

The oral literary criticism approach and the folk commentaries showed among others that this proverb (“Blood is thicker than water”) is

also related to the affinity patrilineal system. Patriarchy emerges as a key element of the Balkan family and seems to impose a strict hierarchical structure among its members [...] However, apart from these observations, it is worth noting that our informants can make various projections on the way they use the proverb, and it is thus very important to show the adaptation of folklore to every occasion and to each present, which makes it up to date and necessary for the *folk*. (Tserpes 2018a: 338)

This is especially evident in various uses of the proverb. Using the Hellenic National Corpus (H.N.C.)⁸ for Greek language, an online platform, we detected several uses of the proverb:⁹

- (1) *Σε κάθε περίπτωση, οι εκλεκτικές πολιτικές συγγένειες δεν κρύβονται και το (πολιτικό) αίμα, νερό δε γίνεται* (In any case, selective political affinities are not hidden and (political) blood is thicker than water).
- (2) *Μπορεί να κράτησε αποστάσεις η ΑΝΤΑΡΣΥΑ από τον ΣΥΡΙΖΑ, αλλά το ομορτουριστικό αίμα νερό δεν γίνεται*

⁸ https://hnc.ilsp.gr/index.php?current_page=main&lang=en (accessed on 18 April 2024).

⁹ According to the Hellenic National Corpus the first three examples were drawn from texts published between 2021 and 2023. For the last one no data are available regarding the year of publication.

(ANTARSYA may have kept its distance from SYRIZA¹⁰, but opportunistic blood is thicker than water).

- (3) *Άλλωστε είσαι και ανεψιός μου και πώς να το κάνουμε, το αίμα νερό δεν γίνεται* (After all, you are also my nephew and whatever we do, blood is thicker than water).
- (4) *Ας μου επιτραπεί μια συμπληρωματική ευχή στο ιδιαίτερα προσφιλές μου Γραφείο Τεκμηρίωσης, στο οποίο πέρασα πάνω από 30 χρόνια της επαγγελματικής μου ζωής (το αίμα νερό δεν γίνεται...). ΝΑ ΜΑΚΡΟΗΜΕΡΕΥΕΙ, πάντα με δημιουργικότητα, κέφι και δυναμισμό!* (May I be allowed a complementary wish to my very beloved Documentation Office, in which I spent more than 30 years of my professional life (blood is thicker than water...). TO PROSPER, always with creativity, fun and dynamism!).

The above examples highlight the use of the proverb in a variety of contexts. Of particular interest are those coming from the field of politics or professional life. Politics, professional life and affinity intertwine and while the proverb refers to blood affinity, the various contexts in which the proverb is used show that affinity does not have to do only with kinship but also with other groups of human life in which the person shares common characteristics, such as colleagues, like-minded people in politics etc. In fact, in the examples drawn from the field of politics, the adjectives that precede the word blood are of interest, shifting the proverb from the semantic field of kinship/family to that of politics, presenting an analogy between the two and confirming the proverb's popularity and currency even today.

Even though this proverb is widely known and used in the Balkans, this does not seem to be the case elsewhere in Europe. For example, the German variant (*Blut ist dicker als Wasser*), is known in the German space only in a percentage of 10%, so is this proverb “German”? (Grzybek 1998: 271-272).¹¹ On the other hand, the distribution of the proverb, according to dictionaries, is wide throughout Europe and in North America (USA and

¹⁰ ANTARSYA and SYRIZA are Greek political parties.

¹¹ For the distribution of the proverb in Germanic languages, see also Franck 1896 and Hartmann 1896.

Canada) as well, where it is also very popular (Grzybek 1998: 271). So, in this case the similarity is obvious since the proverb has been recorded in 43 European languages (Paczolay 1997: 233-235), but the popularity and currency may differ because of many factors. As Honko puts it:

Although the comparison may be concerned more with cultural elements than with tradition communities, the changes taking place within these elements are nevertheless regarded as related to changes affecting the entire community. Demographic factors, the mobility of the population and communication, natural ecological aspects, technical innovations, political and cultural hegemonies (e.g., linguistic and religious) are hardly ever the primary objects of ethnological or folkloristic research, yet both the ethnologists and the folklorists gladly refer to them in constructing explanations, in the interpretation of similarities and divergences alike. (Honko 1986: 110)

Things are different, though, when different images are used.¹² For example, in the Balkans, there are proverbs for men who are not married or, in any case, do not have the companionship of a woman:

- (5) *Burri pa grua – si shkopi në furrë* (Albanian)
A man without a woman – like a branch in the oven.
- (6) *Мъж без жена е като гърне без ръчка* (Bulgarian)
A man without a woman is like a pot without a handle.
- (7) *Ἄνδρας χωρίς γυναίκα, είναι ἄλογο χωρίς χαλινάρι*
(Greek)
A man without a woman is like a horse without a bridle.

The same stands for the coveted birth of boys:

- (8) *Ku len djalë, gëzohet gjeth'e bar* (Albanian)
When a boy is born, leaves and grasses are happy.

¹² The proverbs presented in the paper derive from various collections: Albanian proverbs (Panajoti & Xhangolli 1983), Bulgarian proverbs (Grigorov & Kacarov 1986), Greek proverbs (Kapsalis 2005), Romanian proverbs (Botezate & Hincu 2001), Serbian proverbs (Karadžić 1969).

- (9) *Όταν γεννιέται αρσενικό, γελούνε και τα κεραμίδια*
(Greek)

When a male is born, even the roof tiles are laughing.

Another phenomenon that is presented in proverbs is the relationship between a child and its mother:

- (10) *I ngian mazi pelës* (Albanian)
The foal resembles to the mare.
(11) *Всяка крава телето си ближе* (Bulgarian)
Every cow licks her calf.
(12) *Κείθε που πηδά η γίδα, πηδάει και το κατσικάκι* (Greek)
Where the goat jumps, the kid jumps also.

The following examples refer to happiness and unhappiness, honesty and dishonesty regarding wealth and poverty:

- (13) *Ma mirë i vorfën e i knaqun se i pasun e i mjerë* (Albanian)
It's better to be poor and happy than rich and unhappy.
(14) *Κάλλιο φτωχός κι ευχαριστημένος, παρά πλούσιος αρρωστιάρης* (Greek)
It's better to be poor and happy than rich and sick.
(15) *Mai bine sărac și curat, decât bogat și pătat* (Romanian)
It's better to be poor and clean (honest) than rich and stained/dirty (dishonest)

In the above examples, on a semantic level, one could argue that these proverbs are equivalents as they express the same idea. In this case, we speak of semantic equivalence, a term that suggests “a kind of sameness that very significantly differs from the much more obvious type of lexical equivalence of two or more words, or string of words, in different languages, which have the same denotational, or dictionary meanings” (Petrova 2014: 248).

So, despite the lack of unity at the level of the image, there is unity at the level of the ideas expressed. This is very natural within the framework of various languages, where reality is often perceived in different ways. However, the same phenomenon

of different images expressing the same idea may occur within the same language:

- (16) *Sa ka peshk pa hale, aq ka sthëpi pa fjalë* (Albanian)
There is not a fish without fishbones and a house without words (fighting)
- (17) *Shtëpi pa sherr e garth pa ferrë nuk gjen* (Albanian)
You cannot find a house without quarrel and a fence without thorn.

The same stands for also in the following examples depicting the relationships between the rich and the poor:

- (18) *Atllarët përlahen e magarët hanë shqeoma* (Albanian)
Horses fight and the donkeys get kicked.
- (19) *Lëvrihen byejtë, shçypen zhabat* (Albanian)
The cuttle plow and the frogs are being trampled.

In the framework of one language, it could be argued that these two proverbs express the same idea. However, the fact that different images are used, means that we speak of two different proverb types.¹³

Furthermore, the role of oral literary criticism mentioned above—about how the folk comments on an item of folklore—is also crucial to comparison in the sense that a folk view regarding the equivalent proverbs in two languages and their use emerges.

In a manuscript found in the proverb archive of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre dated 1900,¹⁴ which contains proverbs from the city of Sozopol in Bulgaria, a proverb is included which has a very interesting characteristic: it is bilingual. The proverb is the following:

¹³ Proverb type is “a set of national variants (on an international scale – multilingual equivalents) of a separate proverb” (Grigas 2005: 265 and 278).

¹⁴ The manuscript contains proverbs from the city of Sozopoli (today belonging to Bulgaria) and was sent partially to Nikolaos Politis (founder of the Folklore Archive in 1918) from 1899 to 1900, by Konstantinos Papaioannides. The proverb referred here was sent in 1900.

- (20) *Τόπο δὴν οργή και затυρι вратама*
(Give) place in the rage (you feel) and close the door.

The fascinating fact about this proverb is that it is a combination of a Greek¹⁵ and a Bulgarian proverb,¹⁶ which, according to the collector, was in use only in Sozopoli.¹⁷ More specifically, the collector of the proverb mentions that the Bulgarian part has the exact same meaning as the Greek proverb alone. Finally, the collector argues that the Greek population of the city often used only the Greek part; however, though rare, this half-and-half proverb was in use.

This is a typical example of an emic approach to proverbs in terms of collecting the material and in terms of a process of mixing, connecting, joining, or blending of proverbs,¹⁸ in the sense that two proverbs are articulated together. The Greek part is *τόπο δὴν οργή* and literally means: (give) place to the rage (you feel), while the Bulgarian part is *затυρι вратама* and literally means: close the door.

Both proverbs may have different metaphorical images, however, they express the same idea: even though you may be right you should not be angry or, to put it more simply, avoid quarrels. The interaction between Greeks and Bulgarians in Sozopoli naturally lead to the interaction of languages and cultures. The populations of the town found the two equivalent proverbs and combined them into one.

We consider this an important fact in the sense that the folk themselves, through comparison, found the equivalent proverbs and used them simultaneously in the form of one proverb. And while the different images may refer to different types, the conflation of the two proverbs since they express the same idea is

¹⁵ The Greek proverbial type is found at Paul the Apostle's epistle to the Romans. His advice to them was to put aside their anger and personal differences and not take revenge on each other so that they can live in peace (Kouvelas 2018: 650).

¹⁶ Here the term proverb is used without making any differentiations between proverbs and proverbial expressions, following the collector's view on the subject.

¹⁷ This information is very important as it reveals the social space of circulation of the proverb, while the fact that it was in use only in Sozopoli shows that it was an element of local folklore of the town.

¹⁸ For the term "blending", see Litovkina et al. 2021: 121-140.

acceptable. So, what is highlighted here is that the bearers of folklore are mostly interested in meanings (Honko 1985: 39). The text, although different, is not an obstacle for the message conveyed. On the contrary, the identity in meaning of the two proverbs led to their conflation in order to enhance the meaning of the two proverbs by their combination into one.

This view is also strengthened by the fact that the two proverbs may function in a complementary way. The Greek proverbial type means, as mentioned above, to avoid quarrel even if you are right. But the Bulgarian type of closing the door seems to function in a more definite way, meaning probably closing the door to your rage (anger) so that there is no possibility for it to be manifested. So, apart from the fact that languages are in contact, something that shows the equivalent meanings, the proverb types also complement each other reinforcing these meanings.

6. Conclusions

Considering that the Balkan peninsula constitutes an ethnographic area, it is obvious that the proverbs, from a phenomenological point of view, exist in the region as a folklore genre shared by all Balkan peoples. Thus, from a generic aspect, comparison is possible since there seems to be mutual acceptance as far as what constitutes a proverb.

As far as the traditional and ecological dimension of comparison is concerned, variation is obvious due to different contexts and due to different images and metaphors. However, these variations often express the same underlying idea. This reveals the communicative aspect of folklore and, at the same time, allows informants to evaluate what a proverb means.

Finally, tradition–historical dimension allows for comparison in the case of the Balkans, since the diachronicity and dissemination of proverbs can be traced due to historical factors that lead to cultural loans etc. This might also apply to other regions of Europe or even the whole continent.

However, how receiving cultures use these proverbs should be studied. For the proverb “*Blood is thicker than water*” for example, empirical research has shown different levels of knowledge and use across Europe, despite it being considered a com-

mon and well-known European proverb. Of course, the similarities among proverbs often concern specific regions, that is why we may speak of regional proverbs (i.e., in the Balkans). Broader dissemination may be due to typology or textual dependence.

Different kinds of variation can be traced: those observed only by scholars that pertain to the folklore genre itself (proverb), the meaning-making and situational use of proverbs, and the manner in which proverbs are received in each culture in the case of borrowing.

At the same time, the emic comparisons taking place in bilingual or multilingual communities are of particular interest. In this case, the folk themselves may proceed with the combination of comparable elements (in our case proverbs) which may be equivalent and, at the same, time complementary, revealing that meaning is of high importance for folklore performers. This is because meaning is connected with social life and everyday situations, leading to the use of folklore to deal with them. As a result, several variations, contextual mainly, are created to suit specific situations.

This fact proves that, from a folkloristic point of view, research should always consider the *folk*, the people using items of folklore, not only in terms of knowledge (what and how much they know) but also in terms of use and meaning-making, which mainly has to do with the current use of proverbs. The current use of proverbs, along with the examination of the context and general communicative circumstances in which the proverbs are used, reveals potential shifts in their meaning to different semantic fields. These shifts satisfy the communicative needs of the performers. Therefore, we must always distinguish between what a proverb literally means (out of context), the extent to which the proverb is known (popularity and currency), and, finally, if the *folk* thinks that a proverb applies to the present, applies in a different way compared to the past, or that it does not apply to the present at all (considered obsolete and for that reason inappropriate for use).

This process highlights that folklore is not a sterile remnant of the past, but a living process of adaptation, evolution, and transformation.

References

- Antoniadis – Bibicou, Héléne. “Conditions historiques de la formation du commun et du différent dans les cultures des pays balkaniques”. *Études Balkaniques, Cahiers Pierre Belon*, vol. 3, 1996, pp. 15-37.
- Antonijević, Dragoslav. “Unity and Diversity of the Folk Cultures of South-eastern Europe until the late 19th century”. *Études Balkaniques, Cahiers Pierre Belon*, vol. 3, 1996, pp. 39-57.
- Arora, Shirley. “The Perception of Proverbiality”. *Proverbium*, vol. 1, 1984, pp. 1 – 38.
- Ben-Amos, Dan. “Toward a Definition of Folklore in Context”. *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 84, No. 331, 1971, pp. 3-15.
- Bilgrav, Stabell Jens Aa. *20.000 Proverbs in English, German, French, Swedish and Danish [1039 proverb types]*. Copenhagen: Hans Heide, 1985.
- Botezatu, Grigore, and Hîncu, Andrei. *Dicționar de proverb și zicători românești*. București: Litera Internațional, 2001.
- Colson, Jean-Pierre. “Cross-Linguistic phraseological studies: An overview”. *Phraseology: An interdisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Sylviane Granger, and Fanny Meunier, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008, pp. 191-206.
- Djamo-Diaconiță, L. “Contributions a la Paremiologie Balkanique”. *Actes Du Premier Congrès International des Études Balkaniques et Sud-Est Europeennes (Sofia, 26 Août – 1 Septembre 1966)*, VI Linguistique, Sofia: Editions de l’ Academie Bulgare des Sciences, 1968, pp. 277-292.
- Doulaveras, Aristeides, N. *Νεοελληνικός Παροιμιακός Λόγος [Modern Greek Proverbial Discourse]*. Thessaloniki: Ant. Stamoulis Publications, 2010.
- Dundes, Alan. “Metafolklore and oral literary criticism”. *The Monist*, vol. 50, no. 4, 1966, pp. 505-516.
- Dundes, Alan. “The Anthropologist and the Comparative Method in Folklore”. *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2/3, 1986, pp. 125-146.
- Dundes, Alan. “Preface”. *International Folkloristics: Classic Contributions by the Founders of Folklore*, edited by Alan Dundes, Lanham: Rowman and Littlewood Publishers. INC, 1999, pp. vii-x.
- Franck, J. “Blut ist dicker als Wasser”. *Preußische Jahrbücher*, Vol. 85, 1896, pp. 584-594.
- Georges, Robert. “The Folklorist as a Comparatist”. *Western Folklore*, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1986, pp. 1-20.
- Gheorghe, Gabriel, *Proverbe romanesti si proverbele lumii romanice. Studiu comparative [360 proverb types]*. Bucuresti: Albatros, 1986.

- Granbom Herranen, Liisa. "The Proverb Genre. A Relic or Very Much Alive?". *Genre – Text – Interpretation. Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Folklore and Beyond*, edited by Frog, Kaarina Koski, and Ulla Savolainen, Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2016, pp. 317-339.
- Grigas, Kazys. *Patarliu paralelės. Lietuviu patarlės su latviu, baltarusiu, rusu, lenku, vokieciu, anglu, lotynu, prancuzu, ispanu atitikmenimis*. Vilnius: Vaga, 1987.
- Grigas, Kazys "Problems of the type in the comparative study of proverbs". *Folklore. Critical concepts in literary and cultural studies*, Volume IV, edited by Alan Dundes, London and New York: Routledge 2005, p. 265-281 [first publication: *Journal of the Baltic Institute of Folklore*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1996, pp. 106-116).
- Grigorov, Milko and Kostadin Kacarov. *Bălgarski posloviči i pogovorki*. Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1986.
- Grzybek, Peter. "Komparative und interkulturell Parömiologie – Methodologische Bemerkungen und empirische Befunde". *Europhras* 95, 1998, pp. 263-282.
- Hakamies, Pekka. "Proverbs – A Universal Genre?". *Genre – Text – Interpretation. Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Folklore and Beyond*, edited by Frog, Kaarina Koski, and Ulla Savolainen, Helsinki: Finnish Literature Society, 2016, pp. 299-316.
- Hartmann, Martin. "Blut ist dicker als Wasser". *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde*, Vol. 6, 1896, pp. 442-443.
- Herskovits, Melville, J. "The hypothetical situation: A technique of field research". *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 6, No 1, 1950, pp. 32-40.
- Honko, Lauri. "Empty Texts, Full Meanings: On Transformal Meaning in Folklore". *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1985, pp. 37-44.
- Honko, Lauri. "Types of Comparison and Forms of Variation". *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 23, No. 2/3, 1986, pp. 105-124.
- Ikonomov, Nikolaj. *Balkanska narodna mādrost. Usporediči na bălgarski, srbski, turski, rumanski, grăčki i albanski posloviči i pogovorki*. Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bălgarskata akademija na naukite, 1968.
- James, Carl. *Contrastive Analysis*. Singapore: Longman, 1985.
- Kapsalis, Georgios D., *Οι παροιμίες του Θεσπρωτού λόγιου Κώστα Αθ. Μιχαηλίδη. 6121 χειρόγραφες παροιμίες σε αλφαβητική και λημματοθετική κατάταξη. Συγκριτική Μελέτη – Ευρετήριο* [Proverbs by the scholar from Thesprotia Kostas Ath. Mihailides. 6121 handwritten proverbs in alphabetical and by lemma classification. Comparative Study – Index]. Athens: Gutenberg, 2005.

- Karadžić, Vuk Stef., *Srpske narodne poslovice*. Beograd: Prosveta, 1969.
- Kouvelas, Alexis, Dem. *Παροιμίες και παροιμιώδεις φράσεις του Ελληνισμού*. Τόμος Α΄ [Proverbs and proverbial phrases of Hellenism. Volume A΄]. Thessaloniki: Private Publication, 2018.
- Krikmann, Arvo. “Some difficulties arising at semantic classifying of proverbs”. *Proverbium Finnoise*, vol. 23, 1974, pp. 865-879.
- Krikmann, Arvo. “On Denotative Indefiniteness of Proverbs”. *Proverbium*, Vol. 1, 1984, pp. 47-91.
- Kuusi, Matti, Marje Joalaid, Elsa Kokare, Arvo Krikmann, Kari Laukkanen, Pentti Leino, Vaina Mälk, and Ingrid Sarv. *Proverbia septentrionalia. 900 Balto-Finnic Proverb Types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian Parallels*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatamia, 1985.
- T. Litovkina, Anna, Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Péter Barta, Katalin Vargha, and Wolfgang Mieder. *Anti-Proverbs in Five Languages: Structural Features and Verbal Humor Devices*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
- Marti Solano, Ramon, and Rondinelli, Paolo. “‘Comparisons are odious’: how comparable are equivalent proverbs across languages?”, 2021, hal-03504178. <https://hal.science/hal-03504178/>, retrieved on 27 September 2023.
- Meraklis, Michael, G. *Λαογραφικά Ζητήματα* [Folklore Issues]. Athens: Diaton & Kastaniotis Publications, 2004 [first edition 1989].
- Meraklis, Michael, G. *Παροιμίες ελληνικές και των άλλων βαλκανικών λαών (συγκριτική εξέταση)* [Proverbs from Greece and of the other Balkan peoples (comparative examination)]. Athens: Patakis Publications, 2007 [first edition 1985].
- Mieder, Wolfgang, “‘The Wit of One, and the Wisdom of Many’”. General thoughts on the nature of the proverb”. *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season. Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 3-17.
- Paczolay, Guyla. *A Comparative Dictionary of Hungarian, Estonian, German, English, Finnish and Latin Proverbs with an Appendix in Cheremis and Zyryan [624 proverb types]*., Veszprém: Veszprémi Akadémiai Bizottsága, 1987.
- Paczolay, Guyla. *European Proverbs: in 55 languages, with equivalents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese*. Veszprém: Veszprémi Nyomda, 1997.
- Panajoti, Jorgo, and Agron Xhangolli. *Fjalë të urta të popullit Shqiptar*. Tiranë: Academia e Shkencave, 1983.

- Petrova, Roumyana. "Comparing proverbs as cultural texts". *Proverbium*, Vol. 20, 2003, pp. 331-344.
- Petrova, Roumyana. "Contrastive Study of Proverbs". *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*, edited by Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, and Melita Aleksa Varga, Warsaw, Poland: De Gruyter Open Poland, 2015, pp. 243-261. <https://doi.org/10.2478/9783110410167.11>, retrieved on 27 September 2023.
- Piirainen, Elisabeth. "Figurative phraseology and culture". *Phraseology: An interdisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Sylviane Granger, and Fanny Meunier, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008a, pp. 207-228.
- Piirainen, Elisabeth. "Phraseology in a European framework. A cross-linguistic and cross-cultural research project on widespread idioms". *Phraseology: An interdisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Sylviane Granger, and Fanny Meunier, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008b, pp. 243-258.
- Puchner, Walter. *Θεωρητική Λαογραφία. Έννοιες – Μέθοδοι - Θεματικές* [Theoretical Folkloristics. Concepts – Methods - Themes]. Athens: Armos Publications, 2009.
- Puchner, Walter. "Θεωρητικές διαστάσεις της συγκριτικής μεθόδολογίας στην εθνολογική και λαογραφική έρευνα. Βαθμίδες συγκρισιμότητας και κλίμακες τυπολογιών" [Theoretical dimensions of comparative methodology in ethnological and folklore research. Degrees of comparability and scales of typologies]. *Δοκίμια λαογραφικής θεωρίας* [Essays on the theory of folklore]. Athens: Gutenberg, 2011, pp. 109-136.
- Sabban, Annette. "Critical observations on the culture-boundness of phraseology". *Phraseology: An interdisciplinary Perspective*, edited by Sylviane Granger, and Fanny Meunier, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008, pp. 229-241.
- Šubert, Gabriela. "Kām 'Balkanizma' v poslovičite na Balgarskite narodi" [Towards 'Balkanism' in the proverbs of the Bulgarian people]. *Bălgarski Folklor*, Vol. 1, 1990, pp. 84-89.
- Taylor, Archer. "Method in the History and Interpretation of a Proverb: 'A place for Everything and Everything in Its Place'. *Proverbium Finnoise*, vol. 10, 1968, pp. 235-238.
- Tserpes, George. "'Blood is thicker than water': When the *Folk* talk about its lore. Interpretations of the proverb in the Balkans". *Proverbium*, vol. 35, 2018a, pp. 331-341.
- Tserpes, George. "Comparing the Proverbs of the Balkan Peoples: Questions of Theory and Methodology". *11th Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Prov-*

erbs – Proceedings, edited by Outi Lauhakangas, and Rui JB Soares, Tavira: International Association of Paremiology (AIP-IAP), 2018b, pp. 181-194.

- Tserpes, Georgios, *Ο παροιματικός λόγος των Βαλκανικών λαών. Θεματικές – Χρήσεις -Ερμηνείες -Επικοινωνία. Συμβολή στο πεδίο της Συγκριτικής Λαογραφίας* [The proverbial discourse of the Balkan peoples. Themes-Uses-Interpretations-Communication. A contribution to Comparative Folkloristics]. Athens: National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Unpublished doctoral dissertation), 2019. <https://www.didaktorika.gr/eadd/handle/10442/45384>, retrieved on 27 September 2023.
- Tserpes, George. “‘Eat and drink with your relatives, do business with strangers’: The interconnection of family and economic relations in proverbs from the Balkans. A folkloristic approach”. *13th Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Proverbs – Proceedings*, edited by Outi Lauhakangas, and Rui JB Soares, Tavira: International Association of Paremiology (AIP-IAP), 2020, pp. 87-101.

Georgios (George) Tserpes
 Hellenic Folklore Research Centre,
 Academy of Athens,
 3 Ipitou str., - Athens 105 57, Greece
 E-mail: gtsperpes@academyofathens.gr

