

## Proverbs and Sayings as Reflection of the English Culture

### Cultura engleză prezentată prin prisma proverbelor și zicătorilor

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#### Abstract

Being an integral component of spiritual culture, the proverbs amaze by their proximity to the views of life, accuracy, intuition and wisdom. Knowing the mentality and culture of the English people offers the most accurate understanding of reality, mentality, history and not least of the target culture. The present article studies the proverbs as an instrument in understanding, decoding the English culture from a historical point of view, but also revealing its diversity. The main background of the proverbs is indigenous folk art, which reflects the structure of people's lives, the national culture. In close unity, the ethical, religious, moral, artistic, magical, logical and spiritual aspects of popular consciousness are represented in them.

**Keywords:** proverbs and sayings, the English culture, the origin of proverbs, spiritual culture, national culture.

#### Rezumat

Fiind o componentă integrantă a culturii spirituale, proverbele uimesc prin apropierea lor de

variatele aspecte ale vieții, acuratețe, intuiție și înțelepciune. Cunoașterea mentalității și culturii poporului englez oferă o înțelegere mai exactă a realității, mentalității, istoriei și, nu în ultimul rând, a culturii poporului limba căruia o învățăm.

În acest articol ne-am propus să studiem proverbele în calitate de instrument în înțelegerea, decodificarea din punct de vedere istoric a diversității culturii engleze. Proverbele sunt de sorginte populară, reflectând structura vieții oamenilor și cultura națională. În ele, sunt prezentate în strânsă unitate aspectele etice, religioase, morale, artistice, magice, logice și spirituale ale conștiinței populare.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** proverbe și zicători, cultura engleză, originea proverbelor, cultura spirituală, cultură națională.

Sayings and proverbs are the most important material for the study of historical events, life, spiritual culture, worldview of the people and their mentality. Having passed the assessment of time, they organically mixed with speech, constantly adorn it with wit, the ability to accurately and accurately characterize all the various manifestations of life.

The study of proverbs and sayings is closely connected with the study of the history of the people. Scientists believe that the first proverbs were associated with the need to strengthen in the human mind some unwritten advice, customs, rules, laws. They represent linguistic material that allows you to evaluate

the present and past, human relations in various situations in life [3, p. 75].

The main fund of sayings and proverbs is indigenous folk art, which reflects the structure of people's lives, national culture. In close unity, the ethical, religious, moral, artistic, magical, logical and spiritual aspects of popular consciousness are represented in them.

Extremely many proverbs were born as a result of conclusions from human observations of life as echoes of a historical event, but a lot of proverbs at the genetic level are associated with other genres of oral folk art or writing. Lau, K.J in his book *Lectures on the Theory of Literature* gave a few examples of the origin of proverbs from a parable, fable, satirical or moralizing fairy tale. Proverbs are often a kind of conclusion from the whole story, the ending that sums up the fable or even some kind of statement that conveys the essential meaning of the story [1, p. 7].

Sources of the origin of sayings and proverbs are very diverse. To become a proverb, a saying has to be learned and accepted by ordinary people. Moreover, the original source of the saying is often forgotten. Having become a proverb, it becomes a part of social consciousness; to the one who pronounces the proverb, it does not matter who composed it. It can be assumed that every proverb was formed by an individual in the circumstances, however, for most old proverbs, the source of their occurrence is completely lost. For this reason, it would be more accurate

to say that sayings and proverbs arose among the people, that their primary origin is located in the public mind of the people. In most of the sayings that summarize everyday experience, the meaning of words, in all likelihood, developed into a proverbial form little by little, without any obvious announcement.

Consider how English proverbs and sayings reflect the spiritual culture of the British people. For example, the expression *Make hay while the sun shines*, which originates from the practice of field work, is an example of such a proverb. Each farmer feels the correctness of this thought, not necessarily formulated precisely by these words. But after many people expressed this thought in a variety of ways, after many mistakes and trials, this thought won, in the end, its unforgettable form and began to be used as a proverb. Similarly, the saying *Don't put all your eggs in one basket* appeared due to the practical experience of trade relations [1, p. 6].

On the other hand, most of the proverbs were formulated by quite intelligent people. If this happened to wise people verbally, then, of course, no confirming entries were saved, but if this happened to an intelligent person who used to write down his own thoughts, in some cases there is a chance to find out the primary source of the proverb. Generally, it will be fair to hypothesize that most of the theoretical proverbs were formed in this way. For example, *The end justifies the means*, which derives from the theological doctrine of the

seventeenth century, or the golden thought *The wish is father to the thought*, which was first uttered by Julius Caesar, or the saying *A soft answer turns away wrath*, which was undoubtedly borrowed in its finished form from the Bible. But who is able to say that these proverbs did not become part of the oral traditions long before they acquired their written form.

The use of proverbs flourished during the Shakespeare period, and it is more than possible that most of them, which are attributed to Shakespeare, had existed even earlier, albeit in the least memorable form.

As a result of the spread of the printed word, the sayings of rational people, more and more often began to meet ordinary people who, if they liked those thoughts, they turned them into proverbs. Here again the question arises about the reliability of the original source. If a proverb before becoming English was in Latin, Spanish or French, then there is no certainty that it had not been taken from any other language before. It is likely that it was originally English, but was not recorded.

Some borrowed proverbs were completely assimilated in the speech of the British, and today it is difficult to determine their historical roots. We should not think about what proverb in Latin lies at the base, for example, *He gives twice who gives quickly*. Nevertheless, the proverb *Through hard ship to the stars* is heard somehow foreign and least similar to the proverb than the Latin expression

*Per aspera ad astra*. Many borrowed proverbs remain in the original. Among them: *Noblesse oblige*. *In vino veritas* [4, p. 55].

Proverbs that are taken from the Bible are another type of loan, because The Bible was translated from Hebrew, and its clever sayings reflect the mind of Hebrew society. In ancient times, the Bible was read extremely widely, for this reason many of its sayings became part of social consciousness. Most English proverbs are completely taken from the Holy Scriptures, for example: *You can not serve God and mammon*, *The spirit is willing, but the flesh his weak*. There are proverbs in the structure of which there were changes: *Spare the rod and spoil the child*; *You can non make bricks without straw*.

Shakespeare is on second place after the Bible in the number of quotes that are used as English proverbs. However, no one can be sure which of the proverbs attributed to Shakespeare are truly his creations, and which are taken in that or another form of oral tradition. Until now, scientists continue to search for proverbs that existed before Shakespeare, which then became the lines of his works. Most of the „Shakespearean” proverbs in the English language have left their original form, in particular: *Brevity is the soul of wit*, *Sweet are the uses of adversity*. Others are an adaptation of his sayings, in particular: *A rose by any other name would smell as sweet*.

Most sayings from literary works are sometimes used as proverbs, but are never made by them, or remain halfway between the proverb and the quote. These include, for example, the following: *The wages of sin is death* (Romans); *No man but a blockhead ever wrote except for money* (Samuel Johnson). Consequently, proverbs have mobility and are in constant motion. Often used idiomatic expression, which are similar to proverbs, should be separated from the proverbs themselves. *To cry for the moon* represents one of these revolutions. On his own, he does not give any advice and does not cover warnings, for this reason he is not a proverb. But it can be freely turned into a proverb, giving the appearance of advice, for example: *Don't cry for the moon* or *Only fools cry for the moon* [2, p. 71].

Taking into account the culture of the people, one should not forget about the influence of mentality on the creation of proverbs. According to Mieder, W., mentality develops with the help of culture. The worldview of the people is actively influencing the further formation of its culture. These are two interacting and interdependent categories, the question of the primacy of one of them can hardly be considered correct from a scientific point of view. In addition, the mentality is also due to natural factors, external conditions of life of the people and is not limited to the cultural framework [4, p. 51].

Proverbs as linguacultural texts consist of culturally-labeled units and generate in the minds of native speakers a certain body of knowledge, which, on the one hand, establishes their logical structure, and on the other hand, defines the boundaries of the application of this statement, its style, connection with specific situations in life, the phenomena of culture and history of the people. The totality of this knowledge forms the cultural and historical atmosphere of proverbs.

Among the culturally significant aspects of the proverbial foundation of the English language, several can be distinguished, each of which deserves a separate, more in-depth consideration.

Finding out significant components of the phraseology fund, sayings and proverbs at a substantial level supplement the overall linguistic picture of the English-speaking world. They store and record, passing from generation to generation, a fairly large part of information about the surrounding reality, while the individual facts, realities and events that formed the basis of one or another saying (proverb) are not displayed in the English dictionary system.

In this regard, for English philology, it is of particular interest to solve the following question: what part of the unbiased knowledge of a characteristic representative of English society is stored and fixed in his memory in the form of freely reproduced, stable, expressive

and concise phraseological units, for example, in the form of sayings and proverbs? The classification and analysis of extra-linguistic information, which is contained in the sayings and proverbs of a particular thematic group, can significantly enrich our knowledge about the corresponding area of British life [5, p. 70].

The English's special desire to use sayings and proverbs in speech allows us to make the assumption that similar features of these phraseological units as didacticity, expressiveness, metaphoricity, inspire representatives of this nationality due to the specifics of the traditional English worldview and mentality.

Consequently, a cultural analysis of English sayings and proverbs also provides direct information about the native speakers themselves. As a result of didacticity inherent in proverbs and the evaluative nature of proverbs, the proverbial foundation is a kind of collection of moral values and moral foundations of the English [1, p. 12]:

- optimism: *Never say never; never say die; It is a poor heart that never rejoices;*
- patriotism: *East or West, home is best; There's no place like home;*
- honesty: *Honesty is the best policy; A good conscience is a good pillow; Better speak truth rudely than lie covertly, etc.*

The analysis of the comparative choice by the British of specific thematic groups of sayings and proverbs also allows us to discover the relevant moral priorities of this society, such as:

- restraint, good-manners: *Manners and money make a gentleman; The king can make a knight but not a gentleman; All doors open to courtesy;*
- competence, education: *Practice makes perfect; It is never too late to learn; Money spent on brain is never spent in vain; Business before pleasure.*

As we know, sayings and proverbs usually arise in folklore within the process of linguistic cognitive activity of members of this language collective, motivated on a symbolic and figurative basis. Thus, the proverb *Good wine needs no bush* could arise and take its rightful place only in the national English proverbial fund, because the motivating element of the internal appearance of this phraseology (bush) hides a rare regional geographical circumstance from the history of Great Britain, and is clear only to those who are informed about the ancient habit of English innkeepers to hang out an ivy branch as a sign that they have wine [1, p. 14].

In the same way, the proverb *School keeper experience keeps a dear school* gains special significance only in view of the fact that it linguistically indirectly reflects the

system of private schools in the British Isles, the tuition for which was extremely high.

Unconditional national specificity is possessed by a system of symbols and images used in sayings and proverbs when designating situations and phenomena similar to various peoples. This is the most striking example of the ethnic identity of the phraseological nomination, when the same denotation takes on different linguistic (figurative) design from various peoples due to national signs of their creativity and life.

The relationship of national culture with English proverbs can be traced based on some details of customs and everyday life. Thus, in the analyzed English proverbs, one can often find proverbs about the superiority of Great Britain and England:

*England is the ringing island;  
With all the world have war, but with England  
do not jar;  
All countries stand in need of Britain, and  
Britain of none;  
There are more good victuals in England, than  
in seven other kingdoms.  
When a man is tired of London, he is tired of  
life;*

In these proverbs, a comparison of England with other counties is used in order to increase the superiority of England, and to show the positive relationship of the people to it. There are also proverbs in which there is a negative connection to England: *England is a little garden full of very sour grapes.*

A connection with the cultural heritage is revealed when reading English proverbs:

*Oxford is the home of lost causes.*

*London Bridge was made for wise men to go over, and fools to go under;*

*If London Bridge had fewer eyes, it would see better;*

The national-cultural component can also be observed in English proverbs that reflect the character traits of the British, both negative and positive. The proverb *An Englishman's word is his bond* represents the Englishman as a person who knows how to keep his word, who is responsible and a person who has a highly developed sense of duty. *One Englishman can beat three Frenchmen* portrays an Englishman as a person who imagines a lot about himself, an overly proud and arrogant person. English proverb: *It is an Englishman's privilege to grumble* exposes the English as boring, grouchy people.

Among the characteristic features of the English proverb: *The Peerage is the Englishman's Bible*; *An English loves a lord* mean respect for authority.

Sayings and proverbs, being the creations of the people, are not able to bypass the spiritual culture as a significant element of human life. In this group it is legitimate to single out proverbs with sayings that are related to the history of the people, their writing, as well as traditions and rituals [1, p. 17].

The English proverb *When Adam delved and Eve span who was then the gentleman?* appeared as a result of certain



historical events. Phraseological vocabulary reports that this language unit is used in a caustic sense in relation to a person who is important with his genealogy. The motivation of a proverb is made clear only when referring to its spiritual form.

Its prototype is the slogan of the war of peasants under the leadership of W. Tyler (XIV century), which is attributed to the monk John Ball [5, p. 34]. This slogan becomes clear in the process of addressing the reasons for the rebellion, which is as follows: in England there was a strong difference between the common people, who worked for the rich before fatigue, but earned almost nothing from their own efforts to know. 1380 -1381gg. were years of economic deprivation, which became even more acute at the time when King Richard II introduced a poll tax on residents over 15 years old. The impossibility of a simple human life led to the fact that the people no longer wanted to endure humiliation and began to think about their common genesis from the only mother and father, Eve and Adam. These hopes of the people were succinctly and vividly shown in their moralizing by the Kent priest John Ball. One of his sayings and fit into English phraseology. The historical importance of the case of 1381 made this proverb slogan totally famous.

The mind of a Romanian person understands the concept of „gentleman” as a person with good habits. For the British, on the other hand (at the time of fixing this linguistic

unit in the language), this is a man of good education and upbringing, who belongs only to the nobility. If we analyze the concept of „gentleman” from the position of the English people, then the meaning of the proverb becomes clear: all people are equal from birth, and the principles of inequality (for example, difference in origin) were invented by the people themselves. Sayings are also interesting, which represent both conceptually and lexically different executions of one concept.

For example, the English tradition, according to which godparents gave a silver spoon to a newborn from a wealthy family as a sign of future well-being, served as a prototype of the metaphoric saying *To be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth* . Thus, the uniqueness of proverbs and sayings, which include any of the criteria of reality, lies in the fact that national features of the worldview are reflected mainly in the meaning of reality, which affects the integrity of the meaning of the texts themselves. National-cultural spirituality is clearly visible due to its uniqueness [5, p. 36].

When learning any foreign language, there is a clash with the history and culture of the people, which are expressed through proverbs and sayings. They are characterized by imagery, emotionality, figurative shades of meaning. Being an integral component of spiritual culture, proverbs and sayings amaze with the closeness of life's views, accuracy,

insight and wisdom of expressions. Knowledge of the mentality and culture of the people of the studied language gives the probability of the most accurate translation and understanding of the realities, which was presented on the example of English proverbs and sayings. In these proverbs and sayings, one can observe the display of the English mentality and English culture.

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