

Proverbs in Arabic: Definition, Classification, Outlook Reflection¹

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Abstract

Socially significant life situations and certain patterns of human behavior reflect the national hierarchy of values. Understanding the phenomenon of culture as a specific form of existence of man and society in the world through the prism of proverbs becomes particularly relevant. The purpose of the article is to define the concept of a "proverb" in Arabic linguistics and the criteria for their classification, to identify the national-specific meaning of Arabic proverbs in the context of the relationship of language and culture. The article provides definitions of proverbs on the basis of the opinions of authoritative philologists, presents the classification of Arabic proverbs. The features of the worldview of the Arabs, manifested in them, are examined too. The materials of the article can be useful in teaching modern Arabic, linguoculturology, cross-cultural communication and also special courses on language and culture. The applied value of the article is determined also by a possibility to use practical material while writing textbooks, manuals and Arabic dictionaries.

Keywords: Linguistics; Arabic; Proverb; Cultural Fund; Literature.

1. Introduction

The Arabic language belongs to the group of Semitic languages and is the official language of more than twenty countries of the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa and the Middle East. Each country has its own unique characteristics: economy, state structure, geography, history, culture, education, national traditions, dialects, etc.

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Arabic, like other languages of the world, is rich in proverbs and sayings, which are treasury of human thought and experience. They, being used at the same time in literal and figurative sense or only in figurative, transfer popular wisdom from one generation to another, views on various aspects of life, approve some qualities of people and condemn others, make the language more accurate, more expressive and figurative (Polikanov, 2005).

Proverbs and sayings are considered in indissoluble unity with phraseological units by some scientists. We fully agree with Soboleva N. P., who writes: «Phraseology is a special area of linguistics within which language, culture, history and world view of a particular ethnic group are most closely intertwined» (Soboleva, 2017). Thus, we can say that proverbs and sayings, as well as phraseological units, appeared as a result of historical development. Nevertheless, they are widely used nowadays too. « ... however, the most widespread subclasses are the catchy words and proverbs which can be explained by the factor of common knowledge and easier perception by a recipient» (Soboleva et al., 2015).

When considering the history of the study of Arabic proverbs, first of all, we should acknowledge the contributions of the following scholars: Ar-raghib al-Asfahani, Ibrahim al-Nazzam, Ibn Abdu Rabu al-Farabi, Ibn Salam al-Azdi, Saty al-Husri, Emilianov, E. V. Kukhareva, etc., in solving problems of structure, semantics and functioning of proverbs. In Arabic sources the word *mathal* "proverb" is defined as "laconic, widely used phrases that convey meaning. These phrases are transmitted from generation to generation and are characterized by brevity, correctness of meanings, linguistic accessibility and tone beauty" (Yaquub, 2004).

According to scientists, Arabic proverbs are characterized by such features as conciseness, clarity, ideal form of language, tone beauty. "Proverbs are wisdom of Arabs", transferred from generation to generation, regulating and organizing both everyday life of the Arabs, and contributing to the development of art, poetry, philosophy, logic.

The common roots of geographical, social, ideological origin and historical experience, as the common Arabic language spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa, were the basis for the formation of the fund of proverbs that reflected the common moral and aesthetic views of the Arabs who settled in different countries (Kuhareva, 2008). This fund is conveyed by the proverbs and aphorisms in the literary language which exist in pre-Islamic poetry, the Koran, hadiths and literature. The lexical and semantic analysis of Koranic paremias allows to claim that they basically are generally instructive judgments and instructions (Ushakov, 1996). As for the national variants of the general fund of Arabic proverbs conveyed by dialect forms, they differ in phonetic and lexical terms and are similar in meaning. Formation of the Arabic proverbs is widely presented in Arabic stylistics. Use of an antithesis, speech comparison, rhymed prose, literariness of the speech, homonymy, citing, allegory,

metaphor and metonymy are peculiar to proverbs of Arabic. In addition, Arabic proverbs are laconic and are used in literary and oratorical styles of speech.

The materials of the study were taken from the Arabic paremiological collections of the following compilers: Ahmad al-Maydani, Muhammad Ismail Sinia, Nasif Mustafa Abdel-Aziz, Abdul-Kadiyrah Saleh, Imil Yakub, Imil Nasif, E. V. Kukhareva, V. F. Polikanova etc. Continuous sampling method was used while searching examples.

2. Methods

The main method of investigation is the method of semantic analysis: component and definition analysis, analysis of semantic fields, which make it possible to identify the typological features of the language. The method of statistics is also used in the article.

3. Results

The famous Arab scholar Ar-Rahib al-Asfahani defined Arabic proverbs as follows: "The proverb is the statement, similar to other statement or an event which is compared to it and explaining it" (Al-Isfahani, 1998). Ibrahim Al-Nazzam, who called the proverbs "the pinnacle of the style of the Arabic language", believes that Arabic proverbs are characterized by: "brevity of the statement, clarity of meaning, the ideal of comparison and high quality of writing» (Sieny, 1996). The essential criterion for these scientists when determining proverbs is the structural-stylistic criterion.

Al-Farabi considers proverbs as expressions that satisfy all groups of the society both in verbal and semantic terms. People like proverbs so much that they use them in their speech being in joy and in grief (Suyūṭī, 1982).

The Russian modern paremiologist of the Arabic language E.V. Kukhareva concludes that "such an extensive lexico-semantic number of certain linguistic formations, clichés, means that the Arabs do not see differences between phraseological and aphoristic-*paremistic* expressions and phrases» (Kuhareva, 2008). In this case we do not agree with this statement as the concepts "phraseological units" and "set expressions" are in most cases designated in the Arabic stylistics as AT-TA'BI'R Ā T AL-ISTIL Ā HIYYA.

It should be noted that in the "Arabic-Russian dictionary" of H.K. Baranov, Arabic word MATHAL means: 1) example, sample; ideal; 2) similarity; 3) proverb, saying; 4) fable, parable (Baranov, 1994). In Arabic sources the proverbs are denoted by this term. It is not accidental because often examples and instructions on how to behave are given in Arabic proverbs; also one can see conformations and comparisons (for example, comparisons of people with animals). Examples, instructions and comparative images can often be found in proverbs of other languages too. As for various parables, stories and legends on which the Arabic proverbs are based on, their

variety and variability are quite impressive. For example, the Arabic proverb LAQAD UKILTU YAWMA UKILA ATH-THAWRU-L-ABYAD which means "I was eaten on the day the white bull was eaten" is based on the following parable: Once there lived three bulls in the wild forest – white, black and red. The lion lived next door to the bulls and tried to attack them, but without any success. The bulls stood up for each other and the proverb "one for all and all for one" was their motto. The lion decided to cheat and once told black and red bulls: "We are similar in color, and the white bull differs from us, and its color can draw attention of hunters, and then all of us will die. It is very dangerous for us, let me eat it". The black and red bulls answered: "Eat!" and they did not stand up for the white bull when the lion attacked him. After a while the lion approached the red bull with the same proposal, and the red bull listened to the lion and did not stand up for his brother – the black bull. Time passed, and the lion said to the red bull: "Now I'll eat you anyway." The red bull answered: "I was eaten on the day when the white bull was eaten". This parable deals with such human qualities as loyalty and betrayal. The moral of this proverb is that we mustn't betray our friends. The proverb is understood only by people who are familiar with this parable. Another example of the need for careful analysis and description of the proverbs of the Arabic language is the Algerian proverb: ĀSHA MĀ KASABA MĀTA MĀ KHALLA, literally: "Lived – Did Not Get, Died – Did Not Leave". At first sight, its meaning is obvious: if a person has not acquired any fortune in his life, then he, of course, did not leave anything. However, the true meaning of this proverb is much deeper: a person who has not acquired any fortune, does not leave problems associated with the division of inheritance (Kuhareva, 2007).

2. Since ancient times the Arabs registered their life experience and various philosophical statements in the form of proverbs. The Arab historian Al-Kalkashandi claims that proverbs were recorded at the same time with the first samples of the Arabic literature (Qalqashandī, 1913). The earliest collection of the Arabic proverbs which reached our days is the book «AMTHĀLU L-'ARAB» "Proverbs of the Arabs" (8th century), compiled by al-Mufaddal al-Dabbi. To date, many collections of the Arabic proverbs have been preserved. These include: «AL-AMTHĀL» «*Proverbs*», the compiler Abu Mufrih as-Sudusi; «JUMHŪRU L-AMTHĀL» "A collection of proverbs", compiled by al-Askari; «AL-MUSTAQSA FĪ AMTHĀLI L-'ARAB» "Selected from the proverbs of the Arabs," compiled by Al-Zamahshari and others. The most famous collection is considered to be «MAJMA'U L-AMTHĀL» "A collection of proverbs", compiled by the prominent Arab scholar Abu l-Fadlem Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Maydani. It contains more than 6000 proverbs. As for the collections of popular Arabic proverbs, as a rule, presented in dialect and colloquial forms, the most common among them are: «AL-AMTHĀLU SH-SHA'BIYYA FĪ QALBI JAZĪRATI L-'ARAB» "Traditional proverbs from the heart of the Arabian Peninsula", compiled by Abdul-Karim al-Zhahimani; «AL-AMTHĀLU SH-SHA'BIYYA FĪ L-MINTAQATI L-JANŪBIYYA» "Traditional proverbs of the

southern area", compiled by Yakhyaibrakhym al-Almai; «QĀLŪ FĪ L-AMTHĀL» "It is told in proverbs", compiled by ZhikhanAsadKhakym; «MU'JAMUL-AMTHĀLI L-'ĀMIYYA» "Dictionary of traditional proverbs", compiled by Muhammad ad-Daya, etc.

3. National proverbs of different peoples of the world (in particular, Arabic proverbs) not only fix the diversity of the surrounding reality, but also express their attitude to it. They are never (or almost never) indifferent, detached from those life events and facts to which they are devoted. According to the Arab scholar IbnQayyim in *Al-Jawziyya*, there are the following types of proverbs in the Arabic language:

1) Written proverbs that follow the rules of syntax, morphology and style of the Arabic literary language. This type of proverbs is usually written down by stylists, and they are written in descriptive style.

2) Traditional proverbs in which the above mentioned rules are partially not followed. These proverbs are usually told by poets of the people. They as well as the previous type of proverbs have a rhyme too. Poets sometimes ignore grammar rules, but always follow the rule of sound harmony.

3) Fabulous proverbs, which are based on stories, usually associated with narratives about animals, implying people. Such proverbs have either an instructive purpose or a satirical one (*Al-Jawziyya*, 2000).

Numerous proverbs about diligence and laziness of the person, about his kindness and conscientiousness, about insidiousness and malignancy, about cowardice, envy or flattery can be good examples (Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī, 1971). The attitude to all these and other aspects of life is stated in proverbs quite definitely and clearly: they approve high moral principles, inspire respect for the man of work, the masters of their craft. Carelessness and laziness, heavy consequences of indifference, callousness and ingratitude of people are criticized in proverbs. For example:

1. AN-NAQDU SAHL WA L-FANNU ṢA'B "Criticism is easy, and art is difficult". It is always easier to speak, than to do.

2. IKHTARI R-RAFĪQ QABLA T-TARĪQ "Choose the companion before the road". Choosing a worthy companion or partner before you travel or start a business can be much more important than the level of difficulty of the journey or business itself.

3. 'INDA SHADĀID TADHABU L-AHQĀD "When problems come, hatred goes away." If the conflicting sides suffer any common misfortune or natural disaster, they temporarily unite to solve a common problem.

4. HUBBUKA SH-SHAY Y'MĪ WA YUSIMMU "Love can make blind and deafen". People perceive reality not adequately, if he or she is in love with someone.

5. MAN JADDA WAJADA WA MAN ZARA'A HAṢADA "One who makes efforts, will find and one who will seed, will reap". If a person makes efforts to achieve something, he will sooner or later succeed.

Many proverbs are devoted to mental abilities of people. They glorify the mind and resourcefulness of man, his ability to find a way out of difficult situations, his desire to achieve a more dignified life, recognition of his real merits. Conceit, arrogance, inability or unwillingness of a person to remain himself, are criticized in proverbs. Pretentious people who try to play the roles, which are not quite corresponding to their real abilities and opportunities, are also mocked in proverbs with caustic irony and sarcasm. For example:

1. FADLU L-'ĀLIM 'ALĀ L-JĀHIL KAFADLI L-BADRI 'ALĀ SĀIRI N-NUJŪM
2. *"The advantage of the scientist over the ignorant is equal to the advantage of the full moon over the stars".*
3. 'ADUWW 'ĀQIL KHAYRUN MIN SADĪQ JĀHIL *"A clever enemy is better than a stupid friend."*
4. AL-HIKMATU DĀLLATU L-MUMIN *"Wisdom is the virtue of the believer."*
5. YADĪ'U L-IFTIKHĀR BAYNA L-MĀI WA T-TĪNI *"Pride is lost between water and clay."*

A significant group of Arabic proverbs glorify the desire for knowledge and great respect for teachers. For example:

1. UTLUBŪ L-'ILM MINA L-MAHDI ILĀ L-LAHDHI *"Seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave".*
2. AL-'ULAMĀU WARATHATU L-ANBIYĀI *"Scientists are successors of prophets".*
3. TA'ALLAM S-SIHR WA LĀ TA'MAL BIHI *"Study even witchcraft, but do not use it."* The meaning of this proverb is that one should strive to know as much as possible, but evil should not be practiced.
4. MAN 'ALLAMANI HARFAN FAŠIRTU LAHU 'ABDAN *"I become a slave to the one who taught me at least one letter".*

Arabic proverbs reflect the position of women in ancient Arab-Muslim society. In the course of study the above mentioned collections of Arabic proverbs we found out that 7% of proverbs are about elderly people, 6% of proverbs are about children, 12% of proverbs are about poets, 5% of proverbs are about stupid people, 17% of proverbs are about riders and warriors, 6% of proverbs are about birds, 10% of proverbs are about all kinds of animals, 7% of proverbs are about plants, 6% of proverbs are about supernatural images such as the beast, or Djinn, 23% of proverbs are about women. This statistics, certainly, indicates the high position of woman held in life of the Arab people. For example, here is the proverb, which is the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: AL-JANNATU TAHTA AQDĀMI L-UMMAHĀT «*Paradise under legs of mothers*».

Many Arabic proverbs are devoted to such ever-living topics as love and friendship, relationships in the family, with relatives and neighbors. The views of the people in these matters, as can be seen from the records, have not changed: the fundamental values are still mutual respect and love, the ability to live in peace and harmony, mutual assistance, kindness and tolerance. For example :

1. IDHĀ RAJA'TA MIN SAFAR FA AHDI LIAHLIKA WA LAW HAJAR
"If you come back from a travel, then bring at least a stone to your family members".
 This proverb urges to pay attention to the family.

2. QĪLA LIL-BAGHL MAN ABŪKA QĀLA KHĀLĪ L-FARAS *"Who is your father?" they asked the mule. He answered: "My mother's brother is a horse"*. It is known that the father of a mule is a donkey. The meaning of this proverb is that people tend to make public their advantages and hide their disadvantages.

3. INNA L-GHUṢŪNA IDHĀ QAWWAMTAHA I'TADALAT *"Indeed, if the branches are constantly straightened, they will become straight"*. This proverb implies the correct upbringing of children.

4. Discussions

The problem of studying of small genres of folklore in aspect of language and culture is not new. Nevertheless, there are not enough researches, which reveal ethno-cultural peculiarities of proverbs via internal form, reflecting outdated realities, symbols, customs and traditions. In addition, despite the existence of a number of monographic works (E. V. Kukhareva, V. D. Ushakov), these word combinations were not analysed from the point of view of modern aspects of linguistics in the Arabic language ; they are investigated either in the works on literary studies, sociology, sociopsychology (E. A. Revzin, M. A. Rodionov, V. E. Chagall, B. Ya. Shifter, etc.), either partially in the works of a linguistic character, often in the lexicographical aspect (Raghib al-Asfahani, Ibrahim an-Nazzam, Ibn Abdu Rabu, Ibn Salam al-Azdi, Imil Yakub, Abu Mufrih as-Sudusi, Ahmad al-Maydani, H. K. Baranov, I. A. Amirants, V. D. Ushakov, G. Sh. Sarbatov, E. V. Kukhareva, etc.). Thus, the relevance of the present work is determined by the necessity to fill the existing gap in the description of word combinations in the Arabic language, which have not yet been investigated from the point of view of the relation of language and culture.

5. Conclusion

Proverbs appear and exist in colloquial speech ; the collective experience of the people, their thoughts and feelings caused by different circumstances of life are established in them. In proverbs long and abstract issues are replaced by ready-made and short statements, in which some examples of this national experience are expressed laconically and life-tested observations are proposed. Therefore, proverbs

can be used by all groups of society. Proverbs decorate our speech, make it more expressive, but they are really effective and convincing when used in a proper time and place. In no other genre of folklore, national life is reflected so widely and fully, as in proverbs. It is quite possible to call them the encyclopedia of national life, the autobiography of people and reflection of their culture.

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