

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SYNTAX OF THE SLOVAK PROVERBS

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Luță (Țiprișan), Marilena Felicia. 2022. „Considerations on the Syntax of the Slovak Proverbs.“ *Philologia* 32 (1): 159–167.

Abstrakt: Príslovia ako konvenčné, často metaforické „gnómické“ výpovede majú binárnu štruktúru pozostávajúcu z dvoch sémanticky podmienených prvkov, ktoré sú na syntaktickej úrovni vzájomne prepojené parataxou alebo hypotaxou. V našom článku analyzujeme hlavné typy syntaktických vzťahov, t. j. parataktické (syndetickú koordináciu a asyndetickú koordináciu) a hypotaktické. Vybraným prísloviám sa systematicky priradujú rumunské ekvivalenty, pričom niektoré z nich zdieľajú iba sémantické jadro a syntaktický paralelizmus.

Kľúčové slová: príslovia, parataxa, juxtaopozícia, hypotaxa, konjunkcie

Abstract: Proverbs as conventional, often metaphorical “gnomic” statements have a binary structure consisting of two semantically conditioned elements that are interconnected at the syntactic level by parataxis or hypotaxis. In this article I analyze the main types of syntactic relations, i.e. paratactic (syndetic coordination and asyndetic coordination) and hypotactic. The selected proverbs are systematically given the Romanian equivalents, some of them sharing only the semantic core and the syntactic parallelism.

Key words: proverbs, parataxis, juxtaposition, hypotaxis, conjunctions

INTRODUCTION

Phraseology may be considered as a volatile linguistic subdiscipline, which scope of research are, among others, proverbs sharing certain characteristics. They are plastic, expressive constructions, relatively stable from a formal

and semantic point of view, having a practical meaning from an axiological perspective and a certain emotional impact. Proverbs are interpretations of reality in a condensed, abbreviated form, being related to the ancestral sapiential experience or to the contact with other cultures (for example, the so-called *Europeanisms*). Proverbs reconstruct generally valid, cross-cultural truths, which makes it difficult to assign them a particular people. On the other hand, some proverbs are frequently used in one country and are not used at all in another one. Moreover, language as a living entity experiences a kind of paradoxical dynamics even when it comes to proverbs, despite their stable character. Proverbs as such no longer seem to be eternal since they, too, tend to adapt to time and usage, some of them even disappearing.

Slovak proverbs existed even before the codification of the standard Slovak language in 1843. They capture the ancestral wisdom, reflect the Slovak way of life, their conceptions, their worldview, their creative potential, and the socio-cultural circumstances that marked the development of the Slovak people, thus becoming a component of the linguistic and cultural heritage of Slovaks. Some old Slovak proverbs are based on religious symbolism and have their origins in the Bible. Over time, they lost their strictly religious meaning, but stayed alive in the language, being used in various stylistic registers. Latin sayings, too, played an important part. Over time, proverbs have been used for various purposes: in the Middle Ages, they facilitated the learning of classical languages, and in the Renaissance, they facilitated openness to the study of foreign languages.

The aim of the article is to identify the syntactic relationship between the components of the proverbs ensuring their binary structure, which is crucial from the translator's point of view since the semantic core and the syntactic parallelism may often be the only support when identifying proverbs' equivalents in other languages.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Proverbs as conventional, often metaphoric "gnomic" utterances (Mlacek 1984, 127) have a binary structure, consisting in two semantically conditioned elements that are interrelated at the syntactic level by parataxis or hypotaxis. In this article, I analyze the main types of parataxis (Oravec, Bajžíková 1986, 166-184) involving the preservation of the conjunction (syndetic coordination) and the elimination of the conjunction (asyndetic coordination), and hypotaxis.

In this paper I aim at the syntactic analysis of the Slovak proverbs in terms of types of syntactic relationships between the two mirroring parts of proverbs. The parallel structure of proverbs involves a tight relationship between the first

half of a proverb and the latter half. Parataxis and hypotaxis only underline that the nature of this relationship may differ from one proverb to another.

I selected the most common Slovak proverbs and I identified the equivalent Romanian constructions both in terms of content and form. Whenever this approach was not possible, I stuck to the content-related criterion. The selected proverbs were taken from Adolf Peter Zátorecký's *Slovenské príslovia, porekadlá a úslovia*. I chose the most used proverbs. As expected, some Slovak proverbs have an identical or almost identical equivalent in Romanian, for example: *Ako si ustelieš, tak budeš spať*. RO: *Cum îți așterni, așa dormi.*; *Kto, čo hladá, nájde*. RO: *Cine caută găsește.*; *Kto seje vietor, žne búrku*. RO: *Cine seamănă vânt culege furtună*. Other Slovak proverbs have quite different Romanian equivalents sharing just the semantic core and the syntactic parallelism: *Kto raz kradol, bude kradnúť ďalej*. RO: *Cine fură azi un ou mâine va fura un bou*.

A BIRD'S-EYE VIEW ON THE SLOVAK PROVERBS

In my interpretation, the proverb is a stable structure involving the tautological principle when rendering the meaning, as well as: general character, mnemonic mechanism, alliteration, rhyme, rhythmic pattern, parallelism and contrast (Holbek 1970, 470-472). Besides simplicity and syntactic uniformity, proverbs share the deictic character, concretized in words usually placed at the beginning of the proverb so as to give the interlocutor the opportunity to identify the key element for decoding the message from the very beginning. Among deictic indicators there are:

- adverbs (*teraz* „acum”, *potom* „apoi”, *včera* „ieri”, *dnes* „azi”, *zajtra* „mâine”, *ráno* „dimineață”, *najprv* „întâi”, for example: *Ranné vtáča ďalej kráča*. RO: *Cine se scoală de dimineață, departe ajunge*.)
- pronouns (*kto* „cine”, *čo* „ce”, *ten* „acesta”, *tu* „aici”, *tam* „acolo”, *všade* „pretutindeni”, *kde* „unde”, *kdekoľvek* „oriunde”, *nikdy* „niciodată”, *ako* „cum”, *tak* „așa”, *tak ako* „așa cum”, *koľko* „cât”, *nikto* „nimeni”, *nič* „nimic”, *niekto* „cineva”, *iný* „altul”, for example: *Povedz mi, s kým chodíš a ja ti poviem, kto si*. RO: *Spune-mi cu cine te împrietenești ca să-ți spun cine ești!*; *Kde obe strany nie sú v zhode, tam je tretí k ich škode*. RO: *Când doi se bat, al treilea câștigă.*; *Čo môžeš urobiť dnes, neodkladaj na zajtra*. RO: *Nu lăsa pe mâine ce poți face azi!*; *Ako si postelieš, tak budeš spať*. RO: *Cum îți așterni, așa dormi.*; *Ten sa smeje najlepšie, kto sa smeje naposledy*. RO: *Cine râde la urmă râde mai bine.*; *Každá vec má svoj čas*. RO: *Toate la timpul lor.*; *Učený nikto z neba nespadol*. RO: *Nimeni nu s-a născut învățat.*; *Iný kraj, iný mrav*. RO: *Câte bordeie, atâtea obicei.*)

- numerals (*jeden* „unul”, *druhý* „celălalt”, for example: *Jedna ruka nevie, čo robí druhá.* RO: *O mână nu știe ce face cealaltă.; Kde obe strany nie sú v zhode, tam je tretí ku ich škode.* RO: *Când doi se ceartă, al treilea câștigă.*)

Sometimes, the generic nouns *človek* „om” and *ľudia* „oameni” play the role of deictic indicators showing that the referent is an ordinary person and they could be any of us: *Človek sa učí na vlastných chybách.* RO: *Omul din greșeli învață.*

Slovak proverbs may reflect a generic truth, which is culturally assumed, although the proverb was only borrowed as such from another culture, for example: *Čas sú peniaze.* cf. *Time is money.* Being often used, such proverbs became stable thanks to their repetition over time, and they are nowadays almost perceived as being traditional.

More rarely do Slovak proverbs appear to contradict with one another like in these examples: *Čo oči nevidia, srdce nebolí.* RO: *Ce nu știi, nu te doare.* cf. *Čo oči vidia, to srdce uverí.* RO: *Omul până nu vede, nu crede.*

Analogy plays an important part in proverb interpretation. Every time a proverb is used, it addresses a number of referents to which elements of the proverb apply, hence the generic interpretation of the proverbs. We may therefore assume that proverbs like *Lepšie niekedy, ako nikdy.* RO: *Mai bine mai târziu decât niciodată.; Učený nikto z neba nepadol.* RO: *Nimeni nu s-a născut învățat.; Dobrý strom dobré ovocie nesie. / Dobrá krava dobré mlieko dáva.* RO: *Din omul bun, bun lucru iese./ Așchia nu sare departe de trunchi.; Aj z malej iskry veľký oheň býva.* RO: *Buturuga mică răstoarnă carul mare.; Bez vetra sa ani lístok na strome nepohne.* RO: *Până nu faci foc nu iese fum.* would have never existed unless the people using them had filtered and decanted these generic truths through their own wisdom.

Some proverbs are antithetical in many languages. For instance, the Slovak proverb *Šaty robia človeka* conveys the very opposite meaning of the Romanian proverb involving the same semantic configuration: *Nu haina îl face pe om.,* meaning *Nie šaty robia človeka.* Other Slovak proverbs such as *Krása do časa, čnosť na večnosť.* (in literal translation: *Beauty is temporary, virtue is eternal.*) are rendered into Romanian by a proverb, which keeps only the first element of the Slovak proverb while the second part is culturally, “adjusted”: *Frumusețea-i trecătoare, mîntea e folositoare.* (in literal translation: *Beauty is temporary, brain is useful.*).

TRANSLATION AND EQUIVALENCE OF PROVERBS

When rendering the meaning of proverbs in the target language, at the lexical level, there are two possibilities: either to translate inherited proverbs, or to find equivalent proverbs. Inherited proverbs already have a certain correspondent in traditional proverbs, for example: *O mŕtvych len dobre*. Lat.: *De mortibus nihil sine bene*. RO: *De morți, numai de bine*. On the other hand, an equivalent proverb is considered either in terms of content, or form. Or both, which is the happiest case. Yet, to coin an equivalent proverb, suffice is for either content or form to have a correspondent in the target language. Content equivalence is valid provided there is at least one lexical element in the proverb that has no correspondent in the target language, for example: *Na peniazoch čert sedí*. RO: *Banul e ochiul dracului*. Formal equivalence is valid provided there is a formal feature in the inherited proverb that is very important and removing it in the target language would therefore lead to the loss of the proverb's pun-upon-words. In this case, the stylistic effect shall be kept even if it may involve a change in content, for example: *Slepý sa temnému posmieva*. RO: *Râde ciob de oală spartă.; Krátke reči, dlhé klobásy*. RO: *Vorba lungă, sărăcia omului*. Equivalence in both content and form often results in an original proverb, for example: *Keď neprší, aspoň kvapká*. RO: *Dacă nu curge, pică.; Klín sa klincom vybíja*. RO: *Cui pe cui se scoate*. In this case, it is hardly possible to establish a relationship between the two proverbs, because the correspondence is almost perfect both in terms of content and form, and they have equivalent proverbs in other languages, as well. Otherwise, the other solution may entail the identification of a relationship between two different proverbs in two different languages and subsequently establish the equivalence, for example: *Kamaráti budme, dlhy si platme*. RO: *Frate, frate, dar brânza-i pe bani*. I may therefore derive three main types of relationships when translating the Slovak proverbs into Romanian: whole compliance of proverbs, partial compliance of proverbs, and incompatibility.

PROVERB SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS

One of the main features of the proverbs is the use of parallelisms (Coinnigh 2014: 112-132), by means of which two entities are either compared or contrasted. This feature is reflected by the binary structure of the proverb, in general, which involves a semantically reciprocal relationship, syntactically achieved by correlatives, for example: *Aká práca, taká pláca*. RO: *După faptă, și răsplată.; Aká bolesť, taká masť*. RO: *La boli grave, leacuri tari. / Cui pe cui se scoate. / Fiecare boală își are leacul ei pe lume.; Aké drevo, taký klin, aký otec*,

taký syn./ Aká matka, taká Katka. RO: *Așa tată, așa fiu.; Ako sa do hory volá, tak sa z hory ozýva.* RO: *La așa întrebare, așa răspuns.; Ako si postelieš, tak budeš spať.* RO: *Cum îți așterni, așa dormi. Aký išiel, taku našiel.* RO: *Și-a găsit tingirea capacul.*

Parallelisms implicitly involve the comparison between the two elements of the proverb's structure. In the Slovak proverb *Bohatí ľudia sa tešia peniazmi a chudobní detmi.* RO: *Bogații se laudă cu averea și săracii cu copiii.*, the first element is partially replicated in the second one, the predicate in the first part is implicitly present in the second part and it is therefore dropped out, and even the objects in Instrumental case mirror each other in a syntactically symmetrical structure. In other proverbs, parallelism involves two lexemes, the first element being fully replicated in the second one like in this example: *Ani z voza, ani na voz.* RO: *Nici în căruța, nici în teleguță.* The copulative conjunction *ani... ani* helps reaching an additive effect in a paradoxical way, by actually excluding both elements, and the prepositions *z* and *na* only enhance this disbalance between the cumulative information and the finite alternatives it brings. Certain Slovak proverbs consist of a parallelism between two clauses, related by the copulative conjunction *a*, for example: *Darmo slepému ukazuješ a hluchému vravíš.* RO: *Nu vorbi unde nu sunt urechi!* The two clauses generate the mirror effect thanks to the association between the two adjectives converted into nouns determining semantically parallel verbs. Sometimes, in addition to clause parallelism, there is also a rhyming pair of verbs in imperative form: *Dvakrát meraj a raz strihaj.* RO: *Măsoară de două ori și taie o dată!*

Most often, in the Slovak proverbs, there is a syndetic coordination, achieved by the use of an explicit conjunction like in the following examples: *Dedina horí a cigáni vyhrávajú.* RO: *Satul arde și baba se piaptănă.; Dôveruj, ale preveruj.* RO: *Încrede-te, dar vezi în cine; Host' a ryba na tretí deň smrdí.* RO: *Omul vine, dar mai și pleacă.*

Yet, sometimes we may witness asyndetic coordination, characterized by the lack of an explicit conjunction introducing the parallel construction, for instance: *Človek mieni, Pán Boh mení.* RO: *Socoteala de acasă nu se potrivește cu cea din târg.; Aj najmilší host', tri dni dosť.* RO: *Omul vine, dar mai și pleacă.; Kamaráti budme, dlhy si platme.* RO: *Frate, frate, dar brânza-i pe bani. / Socoteala curată, prietenie lungă.* In case of asyndetic coordination, the condensed message is conveyed in a more dramatic way. The syntactic parallelism orchestrating the two clauses is doubled by rhyming, alliteration, and other poetic features, not to speak about the use of metaphysical generic entities being accompanied by a determiner meant to bring them closer to people, to humanize it (*Pán Boh*).

David Crystal points out the difference between asyndetic coordination and juxtaposition as a type of parataxis (Crystal 2008, 233). They are both structural

devices omitting the use of coordinating conjunctions. However, parataxis primarily involves the juxtaposition of two or more elements rather than the mere omission of a conjunction. Hence, the cumulative effect of parataxis.

According to Mac Coinnigh, there are three types of asyndetic coordination in proverbs (Coinnigh 2014, 128-129). The first type is the comparison of two equivalent elements, for example: *Iný kraj, iný mrav*. RO: *Câte bordeie, atâtea obiceie*. The point is that there is no contrast between the first and second clause as they are equal. The second type is the cause-and-effect type, where two elements are juxtaposed so as to establish a cause-and-effect relationship, for example: *Koniec dobrý, všetko dobré*. RO: *Totul e bine când se termină cu bine*. The third type involves contrast and antonymy, for example: *Hovoríť striebro, mlčať je zlato*. RO: *Vorba e de argint și tăcerea, de aur*. Indeed, the relationship between the two clauses, although not anticipated by any conjunction at all, is however predicted by the very semantics of the proverb.

However, parallelism between two clauses may be reached even when it comes to a complex sentence, where the independent clause is paired with another clause by a subordinate correlative conjunction, for example: *Kam nechodí slnko, tam chodí lekár*. RO: *Unde nu intră soarele pe geam, intră doctorul pe ușă*. Beyond the parallelism between the affirmative and the negative form of one and the same verb *chodiť* in the Present Tense, there is a much more subtle parallelism between the sun as the embodiment of light, the main condition of life, and the doctor as the symbol of the symbol of the alchemist who brings people back to life.

Hypotaxis is most frequently used in the Slovak proverbs, for example: *Ani čert nie je taký čierny, ako ho malujú*. RO: *Nu-i dracu' așa de negru pe cât pare.*; *Čo je vzácne, nie je lacné*. RO: *Cât dai, atâta face.*; *Čo môžeš urobiť dnes, neodkladaj na zajtra*. RO: *Nu lăsa pe mâine ce poți face azi! Čo nechceš sebe samému, nerob druhému*. RO: *Ce ție nu-ți place, altuia nu-i face! Čo ťa nepáli, nehas!* RO: *Nu îți băga nasul unde nu-ți fierbe oala! Čo sa babe zachcelo, to sa babe prisnilo*. RO: *Vrabia mălai visează.*; *Čo sa v mladosti naučíš, v starobe ako by si našiel*. RO: *Ce înveți la tinerețe, aia știi la bătrânețe.*; *Čoho sa kto bojí, o tom sa mu najskôr sníva*. RO: *De ce ți-e frică, de aia nu scapi.*; *Čo si kto navaril, nech si aj zje*. RO: *Cum îți așterni, așa dormi.*; *Aj pes vie, kto mu dáva jesť*. RO: *Să nu muști mâna care-ți dă de mâncare! Dobre myšiam, keď mačky doma nieto*. RO: *Când pisica nu-i acasă, joacă șoarecii pe masă.*; *Dokiaľ je človek šťastný, má vždy dost priateľov*. RO: *Bogatului multe rude i se arată.*; *Jedna ruka nevie, čo robí druhá*. RO: *Nu știe stânga ce face dreapta.*; *Každý dobre vie, kde ho topánka omíňa*. RO: *Fiecare știe unde îl strânge opinca.*; *Kde nič nie je, ani smrť neberie*. RO: *De unde nu e, nici Dumnezeu nu cere.*; *Komu sa nelení, tomu sa zelení*. RO: *Munca îl înobilează pe om*.

A great part of the Slovak proverbs which hypotactic structure involves the existence of a correlative conjunction give place to interpretation when it comes to the syntactic analysis of the complex sentence. For example, in the sentence *Kde obe strany nie sú v zhode, tam je tretí ku ich škode*. RO: *Când doi se bat, al treilea câștigă.*, we face two distinct interpretations. In the first interpretation, the pronoun *tam* as an autosemantic and autosyntagmatic part of speech has the syntactic function of circumstantial complement. In this context, the subordinate clause *Kde obe strany nie sú v zhode* determines the pronoun *tam* in the main clause, which means that the subordinate clause is attributive. In the second interpretation that actually corresponds to the Slovak linguistic tradition, the pronoun *tam* is but an element of the correlative phrase *tam..., kde...*, which turns it into a mere conjunction in syntactic terms, and into a synsemantic and synsyntagmatic part of speech in morphological terms. In this second scenario, the subordinate clause *Kde obe strany nie sú v zhode* determining the pronoun *tam* is not an attributive clause, but a circumstantial clause. Thus, *tam* ceases to play the role of a syntactic connector and turns into a mere syntactic “ornament”, whose sole function to syntactically anticipate the type of subordinate sentence.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on this analysis, we may conclude that the Slovak proverbs share a binary structure, reinforced by the syntactic relationship between the two elements. The first type of syntactic relationship I identified is parataxis, materialized in the use of a *coordinating conjunctions* (syndetic coordination). Sometimes, syndetic coordination is achieved by means of the adversative coordinating conjunction (*Neodplácaj zlým za zle, ale dobrým za dobré*. RO: *Este mai ușor să faci rău decât să faci bine.*), but most often it is achieved by means of the copulative coordinating conjunction (*Človek varuj sa a Boh ti pomôže*. RO: *Dumnezeu îți dă, dar nu-ți bagă și-n traistă.*). The second type of syntactic relationship is the asyndetic coordination. This term overlaps with the juxtaposition and consists in the elimination of the conjunction. There are three subtypes of asyndetic coordination. The first subtype involves the comparison between two equivalent elements (*Vtáka poznáš po peri, človeka po reči*. RO: *Cunoști pasărea după cânt și omul după cuvânt./ Pomul se cunoaște după roade și omul, după fapte.*), the second subtype focuses on the cause-and-effect relationship between the two elements of the proverb (*Krátke reči, dlhé klobásky*. RO: *Vorba lungă, sărăcia omului.*) and the third subtype points out the contrast and antonymy within the binary structure of the proverb (*Klamstvo len do času, spravodlivosť naveky*. RO: *Minciuna are picioare scurte.*) Last but not least,

the most frequent syntactic relationship in the Slovak proverbs is hypotaxis, achieved by means of subordinating conjunctions (*Po akej ceste ideš, tam prídeš.* RO: *Norocul și-l face omul cu mâna lui.*)

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