

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROVERBS, APHORISMS AND OTHER
PAREMIOLOGICAL UNITS

Rahimova Shahzoda

Termez University of Economics and Service

Abstract. This paper examines the relationship between proverbs, aphorisms, maxims, sayings and weather lore. These short expressions often share a memorable form and a generalizing function, which makes their classification difficult. Using descriptive and comparative analysis, the paper argues that authorship, communal circulation, communicative purpose and scope of application offer more useful distinctions than length or metaphor alone. It also considers how an authored statement may acquire proverbial status through repeated use.

Keywords: proverb, aphorism, parasitology, maxim, saying, authorship, tradition.

Paremiology studies proverbs and related forms of concise expression. Defining the boundaries of the proverb, however, remains a scholarly problem. A short statement may look like a proverb without being widely known, while an expression with a traceable author may eventually circulate as part of a community's shared speech. Villers (2024) therefore cautions against relying on a single feature to identify a proverb. This paper considers the relationship among these forms through four criteria: origin, circulation, meaning and use.

A proverb is generally a relatively stable expression that conveys a judgment or practical insight applicable to recurring situations. A stitch in time saves nine, for example, can be used whenever an early intervention may prevent a larger problem. Its force in conversation comes partly from its recognizability: the speaker presents the advice as established knowledge rather than a personal observation. As Mieder (2007) explains in his discussion of proverb research, structure alone cannot establish whether an expression is traditional; evidence of its circulation also matters. An aphorism likewise expresses a compact and often generalizable thought, but its association with an individual thinker or writer is typically more prominent. Its wording may draw attention to a distinctive interpretation of experience. Ivanov (2020) identifies generalized meaning and the ability to stand independently in discourse among the central properties of aphorisms. These properties overlap with those of proverbs. Authorship is thus a useful indicator, but it is not an absolute boundary: repeated quotation can cause an aphorism to lose its immediate association with its author and function proverbially.

A maxim differs chiefly in emphasis. It usually states a principle for conduct or decision-making, often in a direct and prescriptive form. Proverbs can also advise, but they may do so indirectly through a concrete image or a comparison. The Uzbek proverb Yetti o'Ichab, bir kes ("Measure seven times, cut once") illustrates this point: an image from practical work conveys advice about careful decisions. By comparison, a maxim such as Consider the consequences before acting states the principle directly. These examples express a similar idea, yet their rhetorical methods differ. The term saying is broader and less precise. It may refer to a familiar expression without specifying whether that expression offers general wisdom. Weather sayings form another related group. They typically connect an observed sign with an expected condition. Some can also be used figuratively, which complicates classification. The purpose and context of an expression must therefore be considered alongside its wording. The relationship among these units is best understood as a set of overlapping features rather than a rigid hierarchy. A researcher can ask whether an expression has an identifiable author, whether it is independently attested in common use, whether it states a general principle, and what a speaker accomplishes by using it in context. This approach is especially useful in comparative research: an English aphorism and an Uzbek proverb may convey similar meanings while carrying different associations of authorship and collective authority.

Conclusion

Proverbs, aphorisms, maxims and related sayings share brevity and the capacity to express general meaning. Their distinctions emerge most clearly from the interaction of origin, circulation and communicative function. Recognizing these differences supports more accurate classification and helps explain why short expressions can change status as they move between written works and everyday speech.

References

1. Ivanov, E. E. (2020). Aphorism as an object of linguistics: The main properties. RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics, 11(4), 659–706. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-2299-2020-11-4-659-706>
2. Mieder, W. (2007). “The proof of the proverb is in the probing”: Alan Dundes as pioneering paremiologist. Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore, 35. <https://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol35/mieder.pdf>
3. Villers, D. (2024). Definition matters: The pitfalls of proverb studies. Proverbium, 41(1), 154–173. <https://doi.org/10.29162/pv.41.1.556>

