

# Explication of the National Value Parameter in Paremiological Units



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**Abstract:** *The article is devoted to studying the national value parameter in paremiological units with the key lexemes “die Witwe” and “вдова” (“a widow”) in the concept of the comparative ethnolinguistic analysis. In the work, the comparative ethnolinguistic description of paremias is based on the authors’ method of cultural contrast that allows determining the ethnocultural identity based on identifying general and specific possibilities of expressing national cultures in the phraseological picture of the world through the material of the German and Russian languages.*

**Keywords:** *ethnolinguistics, comparative study, German and Russian languages, paremiological units, lexemes “die Witwe” and “вдова”, cultural contrast, national value characteristics.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

At the present stage of the linguistic thought development, vocabulary and phraseology acquire new study frontiers, starting from the significant knowledge accumulated by their structural and grammatical study and today’s clear transition to the ethnolinguistic paradigm that includes the study of the linguistic picture of the world. Today it is necessary to consider the foundations of various processes involved in the formation and perception of phraseological units. Along with this, within this approach, more and more attention is also paid to the correlation of lexical and phraseological units with the categories of culture and mentality that are characteristic of speakers of various languages [1]-[3].

## II. METHODS

### A. General description

This article is a comparative ethnolinguistic description of German and Russian paremias with the key lexemes “die Witwe” and “вдова” (“widow”) based on the authors’ cultural contrast method. The cultural contrast method is based on the description of basic lexemes and component words expressing the image of a widow with their semantics and having a linguistic expression as part of paremias that are

indicators of the linguistic picture of the world; the determination of the ethnocultural identity of the language communities under comparison when making the ethnolinguistic commentary.

Let us compare the paremias “*Einer jungen Witwe weiß jeder einen Klecks anzuhängen*” and “*Шей, вдова, широки рукава, было бы куда класть небывлые слова*” (“*Stitch, widow, wide sleeves to put yarns about you into*”) in the languages under consideration. The keywords and phrases that emphasize the image of the widow are identified: in German – “*der Klecks*”, in Russian – “*широки рукава*” (“*wide sleeves*”), “*небывлые слова*” (“*yarns*”). Let us make the semantic analysis of these lexical units. The etymology of the lexeme “*der Klecks*” will be determined. The noun “*der Klecks*” has been used in German since the 18th century instead of the ancient word “*Kleck*” in the meaning of “*a spot, a heap*” that derived from the verb “*klecken*” [4, p. 411]. The modern semantics of the lexeme “*der Klecks*” shows the meanings: “*a colored spot, ink spot*”, “*colloquial: a small amount of liquid required in the mass of something*” [5, p. 999].

Consequently, the lexeme “*der Klecks*” correlates with the temporal and spatial codes of culture and is symbolically interpreted as a means of discrediting, moral blackening. The proverb is based on the situation that simlizes the person’s assessment according to a pattern set by the society. This contradicts the affirmation of the culture that each person is a personality, and facts and events have the properties that are characteristic only of them and it is impossible to measure everyone according to the pattern, all the more a negative one.

The paremia “*Einer jungen Witwe weiß jeder einen Klecks anzuhängen*” acts as a stereotype of a deliberate and crude slander of a widow.

### B. Algorithm

The etymological analysis of the phrases “*широки рукава*” and “*небывлые слова*” will be carried out.

The adjective “*широки*” from “*широкий*” goes back to the Old Slavonic word “*ШИРОКЪ*”, associated with the Ukrainian word “*широкий*”, Belarusian – “*шырокі*”, Bulgarian – “*широк*”, Serbo-Croatian – “*широки*”, Slovenian – “*širòk*”, Czech, Slovak – “*široký*”, Polish – “*szeroki*”, Upper Sorbian – “*šěroki*”, Low-Sorbian – “*šyroki*”, and Polabian – “*sårũke*” [6, p. 442]. In the modern Russian language, the lexeme “*широкий*” explicates the following semes: “*having a long length across*”, “*spacious, not tight, not pressing*”, “*having a long length, spacious*”, “*figurative: covering a lot, vast, large, without restrictions*”,

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unconfined”, “figurative: covering all, many, mass”, “about a vowel: pronounced with the mouth open wide” [7, p. 1345].

In the Russian mentality, the word “широкий” objectifies the idea of freedom, unlimited by force, and implies internal looseness, emancipation, which fully manifests the personality’s natural qualities.

This determines the fundamental aspect of the Russian nature [8, p. 504].

The “рукава” lexeme is common in Ukrainian, “рукав” in Belorussian “ръкав” in Bulgarian, “рукава” in Serbo-Croatian, “rokaw” in Slovenian, “rukáv” in Czech, Slovak, “rękaw” in Polish, “rukaw” in Upper Sorbian and Low-Sorbian, and in the modern Russian language means “the part of the clothes covering an arm (of different lengths: from the shoulder to the wrist or shorter)”, “the water inlet separated from the main channel”, “technical: a pipe or a hosen for draining liquids, gases or granular materials” [9, p. 515], [7, p. 1401].

The phrase “широки рукава” contains a spatial metaphor based on the awareness of the breadth of external space, which goes back to archetypal forms, as an internal space, for a person as a personal one. The component “рукава” says about the widow’s complete readiness to carry out any difficult task and is associated with the ability to master the surrounding world. The phrase “широки рукава” expresses “the widow’s readiness for any action from outside”.

The etymology of the word “небылые” is correlated with the elements “не” (“not”) and “быть” (“be”). The etymological description of the prefix “not” was given above. The word “to be” was used in Ukrainian – “бути”, Old Slavonic – “БЫТИ”, Serbo-Croatian – “бити”, Slovenian – “bíti”, Czech – “býti”, Polish – “być”, Upper Sorbian – “być”, and Low-Sorbian – “byś”. It is conjugate to the Lithuanian “būti” – “to be”, the ancient Indian “bhūtis” – “being, good state, prosperity”, the Irish “buith” – “being”, the ancient Indian “bhávati” – “(it) is, is available, is happening”, the Greek “φύομαι” – “I am becoming”, Latin “fui” – “I was”, “feitūrus” – “future”, Gothic “bauan” – “live”, and Old High German – “beman” [10, p. 260]. In the modern Russian language, the word “небылые” is a dialectic word and is used in the meaning of “something that did not and does not happen” [7, p. 480].

The lexeme “слова” from the old Slavonic “SLOVO” (“word”) goes back to the pro-Slavic basis “\*slovo” and is akin to the Latvian word “slava”, “slave” – “rumor, reputation, praise, glory”, East Lithuanian “šlāvė” – “honor, esteem, glory”, “šlāvinti” – “to praise, to honor”, the ancient Indian “çrávas” – “glory, praise, respect, call”, the Avestan “sra vah” – “word, doctrine, saying”, Greek “χλέος” – “glory”, Old Irish “clú” – “glory” [9, p. 673]. In the modern Russian language, the lexical unit “word” has the following meanings: “a unit of speech that serves to express a separate concept”, “ability to speak”, “conversation, discourse, something that has been said”, “oral public speaking, speech at a meeting”, “speech on a theme, narrative, story”, “right, permission to speak publicly”, “opinion, conclusion: achievement in any field”, “promise”, “text for a piece of music” [11, p. 717].

The phrase “небылые слова” is correlated with the anthropic code of the culture. Using the component “слова”,

it is metonymically identified by adjacency with the speech act and at the same time with the word “producer” – the person. The phrase “небылые слова” means “falseness, deception”.

The paremia “Шей, вдова, широки рукава, было бы куда класть небылые слова” takes on the role of a stereotype – an unjust slander causing moral damage.

Consequently, despite the diverse structural organization, the proverbs “Einer jungen Witwe weiß jeder einen Klecks anzuhängen” and “Шей, вдова, широки рукава, было бы куда класть небылые слова” are interpreted in the same way in both languages, namely: the slander defaming a widow. This fact will be commented from the standpoint of ethnolinguistics.

### III. RESULTS

In the German and Russian society, the loss of a husband changed the social, economic and psychological situation of a woman. When married, she was perceived as an attachment to a man, but when she became a widow, she was considered a full unit.

According to social laws, an unmarried widow was obliged to maintain innocence; otherwise she was treated as a dissolute woman because the lack of sensual life was perceived as an approach to holiness.

In general, a widow became a useless burden for her relatives and the society. The attitude to her was moderately negative [12].

The image of a widow in the German and Russian consciousness is associated with poverty: “Wer die Witwe freit, freit auch die Schulden” and “На вдовый двор хоть щепку брось” (“Throw at least a sliver into the widow’s yard”). Let us consider the paremiological units in the concept of the ethnolinguistic analysis. The key lexemes “die Schulden” in German and “двор” (“yard”), “щепка” (“sliver”) in Russian are singled out.

The Old German noun “die Schulden” was found in Middle High German – “schulde”, “schult”, Old High German – “sculd[a]”, Dutch – “schuld”, Old English – “sujld”, Swedish – “skuld” and meant “legal payment obligation”. The same meaning is akin to words in the Baltic languages, e.g., Lithuanian “skolà” – “monetary debt”, “skùlti” – “to be in debt”. In Old High German the meaning “a fine obligation” developed into the meaning “crime, evil deed, sin” that in the legal and religious fields showed the concept of “cause, reason (for trouble or harm)” [4, p. 741]. In the modern German language, the word “die Schulden” means “a cause for trouble, evil or misfortune”, “to be responsible for something”, “certain behavior, acts that violate the rules”, “to be wrong, break the rules”, “monetary amount someone owes”, “to owe” [5, p. 999].

It is interesting to note that in the German society the position of a woman left without a husband with teenage children was satisfactory. The society demanded that the widow bury her husband in an appropriate manner and with honors, which caused high expenses. That is why after the funeral she had unpaid debts. The widow who had to work with her children was placed to the lowest level in the European economic hierarchy.

She was added to lists of poor people and records of charity events. In case of charity, a widow was the most obvious candidate whose needs were recognized by all people [13].

Based on the above, it is possible to conclude that the proverb “Wer die Witwe freit, freit auch die Schulden” explicates the idea of the widow’s extreme financial difficulties.

The lexeme “двор” (“yard”) is typical for Ukrainian – “двір”, Belarusian – “dvor”, Old Slavonic – “ДВОРЪ”, Serbo-Croatian – “двор”, Slovenian – “dvòr”, Czech – “dvůr”, Polish – “dwór”, Upper Sorbian and Low-Sorbian – “dwór” and akin to Latvian – “dvars”, Old Indian “dvāram” – “gate”, ancient Persian “duvarayā-maiy” – “at my gate”, Latin “forum” – “front yard, (market) square”, “forus” – “board”, Old High German “bara” – “barrier, block”, New High German “Barre” – “timber, blank” [10]. In the modern Russian language, the word “yard” means “an internal plot of land located between houses of the same property”, “a peasant house with all household constructions and services”, “in monarchical countries – the staff of persons who make up the institution serving the monarch and his family” [7].

In the Slavic culture, the yard is interpreted as part of a residential mastered space and, at the same time, adjoining the alien, outside world, it can be dangerous for family members, especially at certain times of the day and on some calendar holidays.

A fence or at least a conditional border makes the yard a place that protects the living space from harmful external forces, as well as an object of various protective rituals.

A number of beliefs and magical actions are associated with the idea that all objects that are found in the yard or accidentally put there belong to the “house”, “household”. That is why taking them out of the yard causes damage to the well-being of the house and the whole household.

In the yard many rituals that contribute to the prosperity of the house and household: caroling, harvest festivals – are carried out. For example, in Pomerania (Poland) during the harvest festival the last mowed sheaf was brought to the landowner’s house and carried nine times around the yard.

In a number of rituals and customs, the yard acts as a mediator, as a “middle” space where the barrier between the “own” and the “alien” world is erased. This perception is reflected in the rituals of inviting wild animals, mythical creatures and personified phenomena (Frost, Wind) for a Christmas dinner in the yard; in organizing such ritual meetings with ancestors, when huge bonfires are burned in the yard (“warm the dead”), dead mermaid children for whom clothes were hung in the yard during the Trinity [14, pp. 117–152].

The word “щепка” (“sliver”) in the meaning “to graft” was found in similar lexemes of Slavic languages and due to the pro-Slavic stem “\*šcep-” is akin to Lithuanian “skêpsnė” – “piece, flap”, “skêpeta”, “skêpetas” – “rag, scarf”, Latvian “šķēpele” – “splinter”, “šķēps” – “spear”, Greek “σχήπαρος” – “ax”, Old High German “skaft” – “pole, spear” [6, p. 502]. In the modern Russian language, the lexeme “щепка” is interpreted as “a thin plate chipped over a layer of wood [7, p. 1386] and is a symbol of vanity [8, p. 510].

Consequently, the Russian proverb, “На вдовий двор хоть

щепку брось” expresses the meaning of “to shallow support to a widow who has a miserable life”. This fact will be commented on from an ethnocultural point of view. The position of widows in the Russian society was determined by the social role of women. Before her marriage, a girl was taken care of by her father. After that the latter transferred the rights to her husband. The woman was not financially protected. She had no property and income. In a Russian family, sons always inherited everything. In the ancient times the issue on maintaining widows was regulated by a “noble” custom to burn wives of a deceased husband. Little by little in Russia, this custom was excluded and could remain as a kind of eccentric expression of grief and longing for the dead man. According to medieval traditions, the deceased man’s brother took care of the widow. A widowed woman virtually became an “extra mouth” in his large family.

Widows were positioned as socially disadvantaged members of the society. This was especially aggravated if a woman had no children. A childless widow was considered inferior. If she had children, she could marry again. However, the church allowed only two marriages. The third was considered illegal. That is why when her second spouse died, she was doomed to loneliness.

In later periods, many widows went to the monastery and served God [15].

Hence, in the proverbs under comparison: “Wer die Witwe freit, freit auch die Schulden” and “На вдовий двор хоть щепку брось” under a different aspectual organization, there is a common attribute – “poverty”. However, in the Russian language, using the component “щепка”, the image of a widow is associated with the concept of “minor assistance”.

In the Russian phrasicon it is multifaceted: “У вдовушки обычай не девичий” (“A widow’s custom is not like a girl’s”), “Вдовицу бог бережет, а люди не берегут” (“A widow is protected by Lord rather than by people”). The proverb “У вдовушки обычай не девичий” will be analyzed. The key words are “обычай” (“custom”) and “не девичий” (“not like a girl’s”).

The lexeme “обычай” goes back to the pro-Slavic stem “\*ob-vyčaj” and is akin to Ukrainian “обичай”, Old Russian, Old Slavonic – “ОБЫЧАИ”, Bulgarian – “обичай”, Serbo-Croatian – “обичај”, Slovenian – “običaj”, Czech – “obvyčej”, Slovak - “obvyčaj”, and Polish – “obyczaj” [9, p. 112]. In the modern Russian language, the word “обычай” is used to denote a “generally accepted, established, traditional order, rooted in the everyday life of a particular class for a long time” [7, p. 740].

In the Russian mentality, the person’s customs are manifested externally in habits corresponding to his/her mental disposition, and are always individual. As a way and a style of life of a society, a custom is a set of rules, the order that is usual for each member of the society, how it has developed from ancient times and is transferred from generation to generation. It is established by time, rather than by law, and is manifested in the material structure of the society, in external rites and ethical attitudes. The antiquity of customs predetermines their important role in the life and consciousness of the society, hardness and vitality, bringing them closer to the foundations – the foundation the life is based on [8, p. 550].

The adjective “девичий” (“girl’s”) derives from the noun “дева” in Ukrainian – “дівка”, Belarusian – “дзева”, Old Slavonic – “ДѢВА”, Bulgarian – “дева”, Serbo-Croatian – “дјѐва”, Slovenian – “dèva”, Czech – “dèvice”, Polish – “dziewa”, Upper Sorbian – “džowka” – “daughter”, Low-Sorbian “žowka” – “daughter”, [10, p. 491].

In the modern Russian language, the lexeme “девичий” indicates “a young woman who can nurse a child, but is still a virgin” [8, p. 193].

Consequently, taking into account the negative particle “not”, the lexical unit “не девичий” expresses the meaning “a woman who has reached the adulthood and has got the experience of a family life”.

It is necessary to note that in Russia the attitude towards remarriage was negative. According to the Ryazan Kormchaya Kniga, 1284, it was a great sin to force a widow to marry again. In the spiritual verse about widows, Jesus Christ foretells them eternal torment for getting married again.

According to the Macedonian concept, after their death the children born in the second or third marriage will belong to “the first spouses”. Bulgarians living in the Samokov district bury one of the spouses in wedding clothes so that the other could find him in the afterlife. Besides, those men who married widows realized the danger from the late spouse from the first marriage.

In case of widowhood the wedding ceremony was called a cuckoo’s wedding and was reduced to a minimum. Matchmaking a widow was kept in a secret. The Russians did not have a bride show for a widow, there was no hen’s night, and no corbeille was required. In the Vologda province two candles were not lit in front of the icons. In Ukraine and in Belarusian Polesye no round loaf was baked. The Slovaks celebrated the widow’s wedding quietly, without any music. The Thracian Bulgarians married a widow, or a widower, at home, rather than in the church, and on Monday or Wednesday, rather than on Sunday.

Such marriages were negatively assessed, on the one hand, in the form of depredations young people arranged at widow weddings: “cat’s concerts”, and, on the other hand, in the form of prohibitions for young people to attend such a wedding feast [16, p. 43–47].

The proverb “У вдовушки обычай не девичий” expresses the idea of a woman who has some experience in family life that happened to be unsuccessful.

Particular attention in the Russian linguistic culture is paid to the proverbs that form the image of a widow who is under the auspices of God: “Вдовицу бог бережет, а люди не берегут”. The keywords “бог” (“Lord”) and “бережет” (“protect”) are defined, and their ethnolinguistic characteristics will be determined. Let us turn to the etymological insight of the lexeme “бог”.

The Russian word “бог” is similar to the following words in the Slavic languages: Ukrainian – “бог”, Old Slavic – “БОГЪ”, Bulgarian – “бор”, Serbo-Croatian – “bôr”, Slovenian – “bôg”, Czech – “bůh”, Polish – “bóg”, Upper Sorbian – “bóh”, and Low-Sorbian – “bog”. It is akin to the ancient Indian “bhágas” – “gifter, lord”, the ancient Persian – “baga”, the Austrian “baya” – “lord”, “god”, the Greek “φαγεῖν” – “to eat, to gobble”, the Indian “bhágas” – “possession, happiness”, Avestan “baga-” – “share,

participation” [10, p. 181–182]. The modern meaning of the lexeme “бог” is “religious: the supreme being that is supposed to stand above the world or control it” [7, p. 159].

Let us comment on the lexical unit “бог” (“Lord” from the point of view of ethnolinguistics.

In the Russian culture Lord is the supreme being that possesses the highest intelligence, absolute perfection and omnipotence, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Master of the Universe, the origin of the beginning, eternal, spiritual and ethereal. The word “бог” known to all Slavs was originally associated with ideas about good, wealth, and about a creature who endows good and wealth. In the folk tradition, Lord usually appears in flesh – as an old man with a beard, living in the heavens, but often as a wanderer walking on the earth alone, a beggar or accompanied by saints. At the same time, Lord can reincarnate or disappear, like any other supernatural power, including the Evil one. Lord, the ruler of angels, together with the saints confronts the satanic family, primarily demons, devils and all evil spirits. Lord competes with them in temporal and human matters and fights in various ways.

In Slavic folk songs and legends, there are many themes and plots where Lord protects people from trouble, prevents a sin (an incest), heals the sick, crippled, dumb, saves the drowned, martyrs, protects from fire, performs miracles, distributes roles among saints, gives people wealth (gold and silver), marries off the Sun, lets the Moon “change”, and the Sun shine, takes the form of an old man, shepherd, golden tree. These motifs are especially characteristic of southern Slavs. In the same zone, especially in Bulgaria, carols often have themes about the young Lord’s birth.

In South Slavic folklore texts, Lord often walks on the Earth and performs miraculous deeds with St. John or St. Peter, as well as with St. Nicholas and St. Peter for Eastern Slavs. Eastern Slavs considered St. Nicholas to be the Lord’s “deputy”.

The Lord’s name was often used in oaths and curses (at swears) [17, p. 55].

The lexeme “бережет” (“protects”) from “беречь” (“protect”) has similarities with words in such Slavic languages as: Ukrainian – “березь”, “береги”, Old Slavonic “БРЪТЖ”, “БРЪШТИ” – “to take care”, the ancient Serbian “бржем”, “бријећи” – ‘to guard’. Due to other stages of alternation, it is related to the Czech “brh” – “hay stack, cave, hut”, Ukrainian “обопир” – “roof on four pillars for hay”, Czech “brah” – “hay stack”, Polish “bróg” – “hayrick, hay barn, Gothic “baírgan” – “to hide”, Old High German – “bergan” [10, p. 153]. In the modern Russian language, it means “not to let someone expend something, to prevent losses, loss of someone or something, to store”, “to get rid of something unpleasant, difficult, to spare, to feel sorry”, “not to make public, not to disclose” [7, p. 125].

Consequently, the proverb “Вдовицу бог бережет, а люди не берегут” goes back to the opposition “high – low”. Through the component “Lord” the proverb aligns with the religious code of the culture that symbolizes the infinite power, perfect mind, unlimited love for a fellowman, faith, hope, protection, which cannot resemble ordinary people.

As a whole, the proverb shows the stereotypical idea of the boundless, unselfish love of Lord for the weak and unprotected, as well as humiliated people. Thus, having studied the proverbs with the key lexemes “die Witwe” and “вдова” from the standpoint of comparative ethnolinguistic analysis, general and specific features in German and Russian will be noted. The conclusions will be made in the form diagrams.

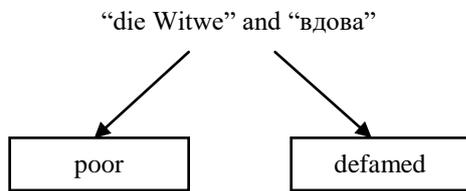


Fig. 1: Common meanings of the German and Russian proverbs with key lexemes “die Witwe” and “вдова”

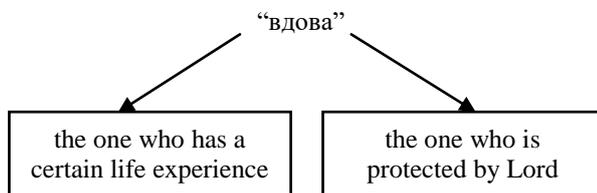


Fig. 2: Specific meanings of the Russian proverbs with the key lexeme “ вдова”

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Thus, the use of ethnolinguistic elements in the comparative analysis of the national-value opportunities of the proverbs that show the image of a widow in the German and Russian phraseological pictures of the world makes it possible: 1) to understand the features of paremiological units as linguistic signs, 2) to describe the cultural function of interpreting paremias, and 3) to study the cultural and linguistic specifics of paremiological units.

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