

OS PROVÉRBIOS NA FAMÍLIA – TRÊS GERAÇÕES OLHANDO OS PROVÉRBIOS

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Resumo

O que pode ser encontrado quando se observam os provérbios utilizados ocasionalmente no interior de uma família? Os provérbios dos avós são os mesmos que os pais utilizam? O que pensa a terceira geração, a mais jovem, sobre os provérbios? Este artigo irá destacar o que se encontra quando nos focamos no uso de enunciados proverbiais nas famílias da Finlândia. Como fonte narrativa recorre-se ao material recolhido em entrevistas a famílias com três gerações. As entrevistas foram realizadas durante os anos de 1994 a 1997 e a coleção é composta por duas partes: a primeira abrangendo os anos de 1994-1995 (129 famílias) e a segunda os anos de 1996-1997 (255 famílias).

Palavras-chave: família, provérbios, gerações



FAMILY PROVERBS – THREE GENERATIONS LOOKING AT PROVERBS

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Abstract

The article participates in the discourse of using already existing materials for some new purpose. The example is a study focusing on family use of proverbial utterances. As a narrative source I draw on the material collected with interviews of families with three generation. The interviews have been conducted during the years 1994 to 1997 in Finland. The collection consists of two parts; the first covering the years 1994–1995 and the second the years 1996–1997. The focus is in the first one, 1994–1995. I reflect the findings to the narrative material used in my previous study about proverbs from childhood. The main focus is on the source criticism: do we get what we order?

Key-words: family, proverb, proverbial utterance, upbringing

Introduction

My intention was to use two big collections as parallel materials for further studies. In my previous research I have used two collections from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Finland (Helsinki); the collections *Perinne elämässäni* [Tradition in my

life] and *Karjalaiset elämäkerrat* [Karelian biographies]. For my ongoing project I became acquainted with *Kolmen sukupolven aineisto* [Material of three generations] from the University Museum at University of Jyväskylä.

***Perinne elämässäni* [Tradition in my life] and *Karjalaiset elämäkerrat* [Karelian biographies]**

In the study with the title *Sananlaskut kasvatuspuheessa – perinnettä, kasvatusta, indoktrinaatiota?* [Proverbs in pedagogical discourse – tradition, upbringing, indoctrination?] (Granbom-Herranen 2008) the focus was on the use of proverbial utterances combined with educational power, authority and autonomy in the upbringing of children in the home. As research material I used two collections from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society. The narrative materials were the collections *Perinne elämässäni* [Tradition in my life], from the year 1985, and *Karjalaiset elämäkerrat* [Karelian biographies], from the years 1983–1984. The proverbs were a part of a listener's narration.

The focus was on the narrators born 1898-1929. The age range of the narrators was from 55 to 85 years. Using these collections, I familiarised myself with the life-stories of over one thousand people. The narrative research material consists of 141 narrators' life-stories including all the episodes containing pedagogical speech with proverbs. There were altogether some 300 episodes and 508 proverbs (409 different ones). Narratives were collected during the years 1983–1985 and the age range of the narrators was from 55 to 85 years. The memories of childhood include episodes which tell about the proverbs in pedagogical speech heard in childhood and recalled in adulthood. (Granbom-Herranen 2008; 2009.)

***Kolmen sukupolven aineisto* [Material of three generations]**

The data are included in the data of the project "Tradition and change in parenting and parental beliefs - an intergenerational and cross-cultural study". The project was carried through at the University of Jyväskylä and it was funded by the Finnish Academy of Sciences at the end of 20th century. As the result of the project were publications: three Doctoral theses at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland (Katvala's 2001; Kempainen 2001; Perälä-Littunen 2004), some academic articles and one book to the public (Hirsjärvi & Laurinen 2004). The focus of these studies has been on the practices employed in bringing up children in the home. The aim of Satu Katvala's study (material from years 1994–1995) was "to explore Finnish motherhood and the beliefs related with it across three generations" (Katvala 2001, 3). In her

doctoral thesis Jaana Kemppainen (material from years 1996–1997) wanted to “describe and compare the memories and childrearing beliefs of informants spanning three consecutive generations. In addition, attention was paid to how continuity and change are manifested in these cross-generational memories and child-rearing beliefs” (Kemppainen 2001, 3). The study of Satu Perälä-Littunen (material from years 1994–1995) focused on “the images of a good mother and a good father produced by individuals of both genders and across three generations” (Perälä-Littunen 2004, 3). Among key-words all mentioned “beliefs” but not proverb. In the forewords of *Lempeästi mutta lujasti* (material from years 1994–1997) the authors say: “In this book we have collected reflections, sayings and beliefs in relation to good educator or pedagogue as well as to care and education” (Hirsjärvi & Laurinen 2004, 5; transl. L G-H).

The researchers of the project “Tradition and change in parenting and parental beliefs - an intergenerational and cross-cultural study” aimed to collect creos dealing with child-rearing. The authors see beliefs as constructions of reality. The importance of them is to be based on the expectations that beliefs only concern matters important to people. When discussing about “knowledge” and “belief” the studies lean on Antonio R. Damasio’s (2000, 326) interpretation that “belief refers to the truth value of a thought content” (Perälä-Littunen 2004, 14). They also count with Irwing E. Siegel’s idea that beliefs are a form of knowledge and they can be nonconscious. (Katvala 2001, 27–29; Kemppainen 2001, 29–30; Hirsjärvi & Laurinen 2004, 32–35; Perälä-Littunen 2004, 14–15.) Among these creos (or beliefs) were a lot of proverbs.

The material was collected during the academic years 1994–1995 and 1996–1997. Interviews were made by students of education in the Open University of Jyväskylä and they were conducted by the Department of Education at the University of Jyväskylä. In the introduction to the interview task the students were told that the interview would focus on beliefs and proverbs and their transmission from one generation to another. The students chose the families (three members of the same family each from a different generation) and persons they wanted to interview and it was permissible for them to choose their own family and express first their own opinion in writing (about half of the interviewees were also informants). The whole collection consists of two parts; the first covering the years 1994–1995 (accepted 129 families) and the second the years 1996–1997 (accepted 255 families). I concentrate on the first part of the interviews, made in 1994–1995. In the material 1994–1995 I used, the number of families was 153 (instead of 129) and the number of informants 459 (instead of 387 persons). The difference between total numbers of families and persons is the

result of the fact that the sum of the families is actually more than the project accepted. In the project some families were dismissed because of the age or the definition of family.

The informants' chronological age was 12-89 years. The oldest generation was born 1906-1938, the middle-aged generation was born 1931-1959 and the youngest generation in 1960-1982. So during the interviews the oldest generation was 57-89 years of age, the middle-aged generation was 36-64 and the youngest generation 12-35 years of age. I included also younger than 18 years old persons firstly because if a 17 years old student is old enough to make interviews, he or she is old enough to be included in the material. Secondly, the children are the ones nearest to the situations where proverbs have been used as a part of pedagogical speech.

As Perälä-Littunen (2004, 75) describes: "It was possible for the students to take a distance education course culminating in doing the interview. The students chose the families and persons they wanted to interview and it was permissible for them to choose their own family and express first their own opinion in writing (about half of the interviewees were also informants). In the introduction to the interview task the students were told that the interview would focus on beliefs and proverbs and their transmission from one generation to another. The students were provided with detailed instructions of how to proceed, for example, they were asked to transcribe the interviews word-by-word preserving the dialect used." The length of the transcribed interviews varied from about four to fifteen pages due to the various ways the students handwritten down their transcripts (Perälä-Littunen 2004, 77).

Proverbs

I was after the proverb tradition in three generations. In the data from years 1994–1995 the material included 1328 proverbs (398 differing ones). The proverbs came from the oldest generation 447 proverbs (203 differing ones); the middle-aged generation 490 (150 differing ones) and the youngest generation 391 (209 differing ones). Some of the proverbs were with context but not many.

As it might have been supposed, it was possible to find some proverbs known and remembered in a family in all the generations. There were for example *Rehellisyys maan perii* [Honesty inherits the world] (families 94; 140) and *Ensi työ ja sitten huvi* [Work is the first, afterwards pleasure] (family 68). However, these kinds of chains of a proverb existed less than I expected.

I was interested in the distribution of proverbs. It was a surprise to see that about one of the five (18 %) proverbs was referring to “He who keeps back his rod is unkind to his son: the loving father gives punishment with care.” (Proverbs 13:24). This proverb from Bible was included also the data for the previous research but it was mentioned only a few times (3 %). Actually it was here my interest was woken. The difference was significant.

The twig and discipline –proverb originates from Bible: “He who keeps back his rod is unkind to his son: the loving father gives punishment with care.” (Proverbs 13:24). In the 16th century, the Swedish King Gustav Vasa established the Lutheran Church as the national church of all the Sweden. In Finnish area the language used in sermons was Finnish and all the quotations and proverbs from Bible were to be heard in Finnish. The first Finnish Bible was published in 1642 (*Biblia, Se on Coco Pyhä Raamattu Suomexi*). It was in use about 300 years. The next translation was published in 1933/1938. The last one is from 1992. Although the Bible existed in the written form they were read for the people in the church, during the church service. Proverbs and Bible quotations were used to make the sermon clear and easy to remember. (Granbom-Herranen 2008, 34, 41; Stark 2005, 96.) This means that proverbs from Bible have been a part of very stable oral traditions.

The proverb exist in Bible in form: ”*Joka viitsaa säästää, se vihaa lastaan; mutta joka häntä rakastaa, se häntä ajoissa kurittaa.*” (Sananlaskut 13:24) [Lit. He/she who spares the twig, hates his/her child; but the one who loves the child, he/she disciplines the child in time]. However, the bible quotation has composed two proverbs: *Joka viitsaa säästää se lastaan vihaa* [He/she who spares the twig, hates his/her child] and *Joka kuritta kasvaa se kunniaita kuolee* [The one [the child] who grows up without discipline, will die without any honour].

The narrators in the previous material (used in 2008) can be seen to be near enough the oldest generation in 1994–1995. As the oldest generation in 1994–1995 material was born about same years as in 1983–1985 materials and as the number of proverbs was about the same in 1994–1995 material as it was in proverbs with context (2008) I focused on the oldest generation. The “twig and discipline – proverbs” composed 20 per cent of the proverbs from the oldest generation.

The Appendix 1 presents the Top ten –lists of the generations. In the lists the “twig and discipline –proverbs” are the two first ones. It was surprising to see that most of the proverbs in TopTen-lists of the three generation data 1994-1995 were to be seen in all the generations. Only in the data from the youngest generation the proverb “Ei omena kauas puusta putoa” [The apple does not fall far from the tree] had the highest frequency. The explanation existed: the extra reading material given to students included a book about everyday creos (Virtanen

1994). In the very beginning of the book this proverb was mentioned as an example of creos. Near to half of the youngest generation were students and so interviewing themselves with the knowledge the interviewer had: they had read and used the book.

Conclusions

To collect material by interview is not an easy task. It is also a challenge to use materials that other people have collected for some special purpose. It is also a challenge to look at the data and the conclusions made in previous studies as we can most often count with the relevance of the study and the validity of material and methods. However, this means the reliability and validity only for that study.

Especially with existing material we have to raise questions: Why and for which purpose the data is collected? Who has collected? How? When? Where? What comes to pick up proverbs in the already existing material, it is dubious. Without context information it is impossible to actually get to know about the use of proverb, the interpretation of proverb, the function of proverb. This time the interviewers have been students of education in the very beginning of their studies. The data of the study consist of interviews across three generations from the same family. The task of the students was to interview three members of the same family, each member representing a different generation. It was permissible for the students to interview their own relatives or they could choose persons not related to them. The questionnaire that was used is to be found in archive. It includes examples of creos and proverbs. However, the guidance to use it is not available. The students were doing both near and distant learning. It could be counted more than 10 institutes to carry out the studies and students in them collected the material, the institutes were situated all over the middle and western Finland. Some of the institutes were denominational Christian institutes that also might affect both the interviewers' and the respondents' way to stand with the situation as the interviewer has often been the students themselves. This means also the family they have chosen has been their own family. Some of the students were very young (underage, in Finland, the age of majority is 18): they were seen old enough to make interviews but too young to be interviewed. Their answers were not with the research material but in this proverb material they are. Quite often the questionnaire and its questions are to be read in the answers. Also in the answers are the proverbs that have been included in books given for extra reading. It seems that proverbs used as examples are just what have been got as answers.

In this case the proverbs with the highest frequency were also the proverbs in background materials. Perhaps the interview situation is not the best possibility to collect proverbs; proverbs are not to be remembered when asked. Actually they are much more like slips of tongue in everyday use. The associations with words are often nonconscious which might be one explanation for the frequency of “twig and discipline –proverbs” in material. When talking about care and education people tend to turn to the only proverbs that include these words. In every case, the data contained more than 2000 proverbs even if the task was not to collect proverbs. With the material we can come to the conclusion that these proverbs were known 1994–1995 and they were used in 20th century Finland. What comes to interpretation and the meaning of the proverbs, we do not know so much as these proverbs were rarely connected with a context. Actually this was not even the purpose of the original study. It was just a hypothesis made to an existing material. It was worth of trying, although I did not get the insight to the proverb tradition in three generations.

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Curriculum Vitæ

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