

“GRANDMOTHER GAVE US THE GUIDELINES OF LIFE” – PROVERBS FROM CHILDHOOD

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Abstract

Proverbs are an important part of raising, teaching and learning. They occur also as parts of pedagogical speech in everyday life. The proverbs used by parents and grandparents are special even in one's adulthood. Passing from one generation to another, proverbs have been the speech of the family and the neighbourhood.

The main objective in my research has been to find out whether pedagogical discourse using proverbs is more like indoctrination, or a matter of genuine upbringing or whether it is merely a question of transmitting tradition without any hidden purpose. To find out proverbs in contexts they have been used, I have looked at memories of childhood. Trying to get in touch with ordinary people's everyday life and its routines I have used the folkloristic material from the Folklore Archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki. In the life-stories I found the listeners interpretation of the proverb used in his/her childhood. Besides the narratives, I have looked at the statutes concerning parenthood and especially children's lives and living standards. The narrative material and the statutes together make it possible to consider the educational aspects of everyday life.

The slowness of the changes both in society and everyday life strengthen the effect of the proverbs used in raising children. In the material used in this research, the proverbs in pedagogical speech go back to the 19th century in Finland, when Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of Russia.

Key-words: childhood, pedagogical discourse, proverb, upbringing at home.

1. Introduction

My grandmother (born 1872), brought us up and gave us the guidelines of life. The most important was the fear of God: "He sees everything. Not a single hair falls out unbeknown to Him. There was no lack of the Bible quotations. Anyhow, it made the life safe, when you always had a word for every situation. We had much less knowledge and information than children nowadays do have. It was easy to believe all that was said. We were told: "Everybody, who spares the rod, hates his child and that one who lives without any discipline, will die without any honor". Those rods and shakings of the hairs were not nice to get, but already as a little child I learned that it was for my best; even if I didn't understand anything about "the dying without honor".

Woman, born 1919

Origin in the Bible, Proverbs 13:24: "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."

The aim of my research *Sananlaskut kasvatuspuheessa – perinnettä, kasvatusta, indoktrinaatiota?* [Proverbs in pedagogical discourse – tradition, upbringing, indoctrination?] (Granbom-Herranen 2008) has been to increase knowledge of the relationship between proverbs and pedagogical occasions in bringing up children. The main objective was to find out whether pedagogical speech using proverbs is more like indoctrination (propagandist manipulation), or a matter of genuine upbringing (an acceptable target), or whether it is merely a question of transmitting tradition without any hidden purpose (nice and harmless). The research was divided into three parts: In the first part, I consider the basic premises of the research and the framing of questions. In the second part I look at how children were brought up at the beginning of the 20th century concentrating on life-stories and laws, rules and regulations. In the third part, I make use of the functional similarities of metaphors and proverbs to create a model, which I then use to see whether proverbs in pedagogical speech are used for transmitting tradition, or whether they represent genuine upbringing or fulfil the conditions of indoctrination. In this article I focus on the second part especially from the proverbial point of view.

2. Finland and Finnish language

After being a part of the kingdom of Sweden for many centuries, Finland was an autonomous grand duchy of Russia from 1809 to 1917 (some parts even before), when Finland gained independence. As an autonomous grand duchy, Finland had a special position as to the rules and regulations of state, the Lutheran church, popular education, and the question of language. The proverbs used by ordinary people were in Finnish whereas the languages of the power elite were Swedish and Russian (also German, and French). Finnish was the language of the underprivileged majority and the farmers.

The narrators' childhoods date back to pre-Second World War Finland, and the proverbs recounted in the life stories date from the 19th century, time when class distinctions placed strict limits on everyday life of ordinary Finns. Passing from one generation to another, proverbs have been the language of the family and its locality. The Finnish language is connected with social capital because of its history. In the use of proverbs, social background has been more important than the individual one. If for example the grandparents had got familiar with proverbs in their own childhood and heard them from their own parents or grandparents, it means that the proverbs they used originally came from a much earlier time in spite of the fact that the actual narrators were children in the early 20th century. Passing from

one generation to another, proverbs have been the speech of the family and the neighbourhood. In the material to be used in this research, the proverbs in pedagogical speech go back to the 19th century and the time the social classes set limits to everyday life in Finland. In my study I have focused on the underprivileged majority of Finnish speaking people brought up in homes and households during this historical period.

3. Language and life

Language is a tool of cultural expression, which also controls life through its concepts (Devitt & Sterelny 1987). The power of pedagogical speech becomes more obvious in societies which are not based on written knowledge. The ability to read and thereby the possibility to select information are not self-evident for people living in a society with unwritten memory. (Siikala 1984.) Because of this, the exercise of power is also based on oral norms and standards, which are transmitted through upbringing from one generation to another. In the agrarian context, oral tradition has been (and still is) more important than written knowledge. In oral tradition, the instructions must be clear and easy to remember.

The slowness of the changes both in society and everyday life strengthen the effect of upbringing and the proverbs used in it. In the material used in this research, the proverbs in pedagogical speech go back to the 19th century Finland and the time the social classes set limits to everyday life and the time before compulsory public education. Proverbs were regarded as a powerful method of bringing up and teaching children, especially when the information was based on unwritten memory. In the 19th century the majority of Finns (workers and peasants who did not own their land in the countryside and labourers in towns) lived in a world of unwritten memory and were educated at home until compulsory public education covered the majority of population. Speaking and setting an example were the most important methods of bringing up children. As late as in the beginning of the 20th century, illiteracy was common in Finland. The Compulsory Education Act was introduced in 1921, not until Finland became independent in 1917 and in the beginning it did not concern the whole population. Pedagogical speech has played – and still plays – a central role in bringing up the children and proverbs are a part of it.

4. Introduction to the main concepts

Possibilities to define the proverb seem endless. In my text, I speak about the proverbs meaning “proverb and proverbial expressions”. This is justified by the fact that the narrators

use the concepts “proverb”, “saying”, “Bible quotations” etc. as synonyms. In defining what a proverb is, I have accepted the view of the narrators. (f.ex. Seitel 1994, Taylor 1994.)

Another important concept is “pedagogical speech”, which is based on the term “pedagogical discourse” by the folklorist Charles Briggs (1985, 1988). Pedagogical speech has to do with authority; it differs from the speech between peers also in the use of proverbs. The pedagogical speech is speech between unequal people and the listener is the one with lower status. When thinking about speech and proverbs in one's childhood, it is mostly a situation where an adult spoke to a child. In the life-stories used in my research it was quite easy to make a distinction between the use of proverbs in pedagogical speech and their use in metaspeech, i.e. the rhetorical use of proverbs.

Life-story and narration are the concepts when talking about the narrative biographies and autobiographies I used. A life-story is a story without an end and you can tell it at any point of your life. It is not a narration of a complete life and it is not the whole story. A narration can be written or oral: it tells your story to somebody, a real or an imaginary listener. Narrating your life-story is to share memories with somebody; it allows the listener to participate in one's memories. (Dolby 1996, Ukkonen 2000.) This research deals with written memories, storytelling in written form.

Narration gives an opportunity to recall your own past and to evaluate your own life. Even though the narrator recollects his/her childhood, he/she does not re-live it or re-construct the past. Narration is more like a visit to one's memory in order to bring up some episodes from it. The narrators do not tell the truth about the past, but neither do they lie, because they tell about the past as they remember it and as they think it was. This and many other factors like nostalgia, the motives of the collectors of folkloristic material, the system of archives etc. all have an impact on collected and used folkloristic and biographical material. Also, public discourse affects personal narratives, both at the time of the original experience and at the time you remember and recount it.

From the point of view of narration, I consider the age of the narrator more important than his/her narrator generation, which has been emphasized in previous researches. The length of one's life experience is a more important factor in life-stories than the year of the narrator's birth. When telling your life-story, the important thing is what stage you are at when looking at your life. It makes a difference whether you are looking at it from the perspective of your supposed mid-life or looking back from the supposed end of your lifetime. Naturally, the socio-economic history of society is important and the researcher can find out about it by

looking at the narrator's date of birth, but the age of the narrator has more impact on his/her memories and on the way of looking at bygone days.

5. Narrative materials and methods

The basic material consists of written everyday language of ordinary people. The starting point of this research has been the world the person lives in and the way he/she experiences it. The narrators' own experiences and their interpretations of proverbs play a central role.

Table 1: Summary of the narrative material

collection:	PE85	KE84	total
bindings	64	108	172
sides	19 300	22 784	42 084
fotos	759	611	1 370
recordings	16 hours	325 hours	341 hours
persons	487 deliverers	793 writers	1 226 persons

Two collections from the Folklore Archives of Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki are used as research material. The narrative materials are the collections "Perinne elämässäni" (Tradition in my life), from year 1985 and "Karjalaiset elämäkerrat" (Karelian biographies), from years 1983-1984. I have scanned through all the materials in these two collections and picked the life-stories containing proverbs, and from these life-stories I then picked the ones in which proverbs were a part of childhood memories. These proverbs form a part of a listener's narration. The proverbs outside pedagogical speech are mostly used rhetorically as metaspeech to support the story as a true story. The proverbs in metaspeech were not of interest from the point of this research. In life-stories, the proverbs were rather a part of the story than something the narrator concentrated on. The proverbs were a part of both written memories and oral tradition. 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 over 500 proverbs. 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.

The research focused on the narrators born before the year 1930 because they lived their childhood in Finland before the introduction of compulsory public education in 1921 and

before the Second World War, which can be seen as a turning point in many ways: people from Eastern Finland (Karelia) were evacuated and the whole Finnish society had to be reorganised; economic life and the trades were changing; urbanisation continued to change the surroundings, and compulsory public education with organised schools begun more and more to be a part of everyday life for all children. The children were connected to the social system more tightly than before and oral tradition was not as meaningful and powerful anymore as it had been in more stable times.

Beside the narratives, I have looked at the statutes concerning children and their upbringing during the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. In the statutes, we can find rules and regulations meant to supervise the life of families and enforced by both secular and religious authorities (the state and the church). What is written in the statutes does not tell what actually happened in society, but we can interpret them as expectations and targets expressed and set by politically and economically powerful groups in society.

Out of these two realities – the private and the public – emerges a picture of the relationship between the interpretation of proverbs in pedagogical speech and the public expectations. What is the position of proverbs in the field of non-institutionalised education: are proverbs a part of tradition, upbringing or indoctrination?

6. Understood meanings of proverb from childhood

The life-stories are memories of childhood and the listener gives his/her own view of the context and the interpretation of the proverbs. When looking at the proverbs in the context, they turn out to be speech used when advising and counselling someone. They are connected with the training and the upbringing of children at home. Even though the contents of proverbs are seen to be quite the same as the contents of the pedagogical goals of the statutes, the interpretations of contents by the narrators included both the connection to the manners of the narrator's social class and the acceptance of responsibility for one's own life. Neither of these is included in the public pedagogical goals expressed in rules and regulations. If the connection between the public pedagogical goals and the interpreted content of the proverbs is seen as the most important starting point for looking at proverbial speech, we could say that the contents of the proverbs in pedagogical speech did repeat the contents of public speech.

Because proverbs are incontestable speech, they also include beliefs transmitted in this way to children. In addition to that, they are partly unverified beliefs based on the upbringing and

training the speaker received in his/her childhood. For the child as a listener the contents of the proverbs are first of all connected with the matter and the person at hand.

Table 2: Distribution of the themes

all the proverbs from childhood (508)		the proverbs with context (414)	
control of one's own life	28 %		35 %
work	23 %		29 %
livelihood	19 %		23 %
Christian life	11 %		14 %
no contexts	19 %		--

6.1 Control of one's own life and living with others

This theme includes proverbs used with the responsibility for one's own life, living with others, and wealth and property. To own something gave the position in the society. Poorness was seen as one's own fault.

“Ei toinen toisen lusikkaan puhalla.”

My parents pointed out that a man / a woman has to create his/her own life and future by himself/herself. My father restated it with a proverb: – No one is blowing to the spoon of someone else. Man, born 1914

”Tuumoo kahesti, ennen kun tuomihet”

”Huonokii mehtä vastaa niin ku ite huuvat”

When talking about the neighbours my parents pointed out that all people, both richer than we and more needy than we, duller by nature or more communicative, all they were in some way good people. They wanted to find out something valuable of the blameworthy person. Just as a throwaway remark and by using some proper proverb they often ended with the saying:

– *Think twice before you judge, or*

– *Even the bad forest answers to you the same way you yourself are shouting. Man, born 1914*

”Kaikkia siton kun on köyhiäkin”

”Milläs täi rykii kun ei oo rintoja”

She [mother] knew for example an endless amount of proverbs and sayings. For every occasion she had many proverbs. [--] When the money was not stretching to living, mother complained:

“There is everything, even the poor ones” or “With what shall the louse clear it's throat when it doesn't have any chest”.

Woman, born 1923

6.2 Work

This theme there are proverbs used with the work and to work, the quality of work, the worker and training for work, and the instructions how to work.

”Mikä se kiire tänään, vaan ei huomenna”

Grandmother repeated proverbs, sayings and bible quotations. For example, what is the hurry today that vanishes when a new day comes was a perfect one when she wanted to point out that we should work every day instead of every now and then hustle about. Woman, born 1924

”Aamun virkku, illan torkku se tapa talon säilyttää”

I would have loved to sleep long in mornings, until the noon. Anyhow, it was latest at eight a clock when mother called from the kitchen: “Boys, come down, it is eight a clock. Lively in the morning, sleepy in the evening, it makes the house to last.”
Mother repeated often that saying. I still unconsciously think about it. It is difficult to stay in bed without feeling guilty about that. I have in my mind some kind of fear that the saying was not some kind of superstition and there might be some idea included. I smile often at that feeling but I cannot help: the feeling is inside me. Man, born 1926

”Vie mennessäs tuo tullessas”

My mother taught always that “when you go, you take with you and when you come, you bring with you” and every time we went out she advised to do something. Mother delivered daily newspaper Helsingin Sanomat. I and my sister were often on early mornings to help her, even we were not more than 7–8 years old. Woman, born 1924

6.3 Livelihood, support and care, home and upbringing

This theme includes proverbs used with food, clothes, and upbringing that could be considered as the grounds of support and care.

”Hupa huttu, viepä velli, rieska kaikista katalin.”

My grandmother had an opinion about that how much flour or meal was needed to make food: - porridge takes a lot, something takes the gruel, but the bread is the most difficult to know.

Man, born 1914

”Kel ei oo riie rimpsutinta, sil ei oo kirko kimpsutinta.”

My grandmother, born in 1863, brought us up and educated us with proverbs and comparisons. I do not know where she had learnt all these. Anyhow, not from her own mother, who died when grandmother was three years old. She might have learned them from her father or stepmother.

About the clothes to be used when working:

- *“The one who doesn't have something to put on for the drying barn, doesn't have anything to put on for the church”*

Woman, born 1926

”Parempi on kourallinen kuumaa kuin helmallinen häpeää.”

Nowadays it is allowed to do also thing that earlier have been counted to be sin. My grandmother used to say: “it is better to have a hand full something hot than a skirt hem full of shame”. With these words she fed us so we should be could citizens. She succeeded in that.

Woman, born 1929

6.4 Christian way of living and ability to read

The most important parts were the Christian way of living, marriage, and education and the ability to read.

”Ensin pittää olla parsi, sitten vasta lehmä.”

My father had Christian way of thinking about the marriage. He wished best for his children and thought also about the economic side of the life. He advised that for a start it is to be considered dwelling where you can bring your wife. He used the proverb: “At first you have to have a cow shed, then a cow.” My brothers asked father for the promise when they wanted to take a wife. They got the promise, when they could support their families.

Woman, born 1917

7. Proverbs and statutes

In narratives we can read how a child understood what he/she heard in the way that may differ (and mostly differs) from the speaker's assumed intention.

Table 3: The themes of the proverbs and. the themes of the statutes

in proverbs

CONTROL OF ONE'S OWN LIFE AND LIVING WITH OTHERS: the responsibility for one's own life; living with others; wealth and property
WORK, TO WORK, WORKER: the work and to work; the quality of work; the worker and training for work; the instructions how to work
LIVELIHOOD, SUPPORT AND CARE, HOME AND UPBRINGING: food; clothes; upbringing
CHRISTIAN WAY OF LIVING AND ABILITY TO READ: the Christian way of living; marriage; education and the ability to read

in statutes

CITIZEN: bringing up a child to be a good Christian and a useful and honest citizen who has obligations to his/her parents, grandparents and masters
WORK: training to work so that everybody can support themselves
SUPPORT: livelihood; clothes; care and upbringing
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE: membership of the congregation, Christian way of living; reading the Bible

Even if the interpreted contents of the proverbs are quite similar to the pedagogical goals in the rules and regulations, interpretations encourage thinking for oneself and to use one's own brain to understand what has been taught – so the proverbs do not indoctrinate the listeners; on the contrary they guide them towards independent thinking.

Table 4: The comparison of the themes of the proverbs and. the themes of the statutes

Proverb in pedagogical speech	Statute
work; training for work; the instructions how to work	= work
food; clothes; upbringing	= support
the Christian way of living; marriage; the ability to read	= Christian doctrine
BUT:	
the responsibility for one's own life	≠ citizen
living with others	≠ citizen
wealth and property	≠ citizen

8. Conclusions

According to the material, the meanings of the proverbs in pedagogical speech are quite individual experiences for the child. From the social point of view even the use of Finnish language formed a separating barrier between ordinary people and the upper social classes. Passing from one generation to another, proverbs were the speech of the family and the neighbourhood. The context becomes more important in the interpretation of proverbs in pedagogical speech. Because of the similarity of the proverbs and the metaphors the model of possible world semantics clarifies and demonstrates the way meaning and interpretation is given to what is heard. The model shows the influence of the society and the child's life experience when studying the pedagogical meanings of the proverbs. (Granbom-Herranen 2008, 2009.) The indoctrinatory quality of the proverbs in pedagogical speech was the working hypothesis. I have examined possible indoctrination by juxtaposing the rules and regulations expressed in public pedagogical goals with the meanings given by the narrators in their life-stories to the proverbs in pedagogical speech.

The life-stories show that proverbs used by parents and grandparents are seen to be special even in one's adulthood. What makes proverbs in pedagogical speech so meaningful is the fact that they are the language of authority – the very first authority in children's lives – using the indisputable proverbs as a rhetorical method. The language of proverbs is the language of the agrarian culture where even the content of the words may be unknown to the listener. Proverbs from childhood are combinations of socio-cultural items, people, emotions and information in different situations. Even in the adulthood, these feelings are connected with

the proverbs heard as a child. Although the proverbs are connected with the memories of a person is important, the connection with the action that was going on when the proverb was heard is more important.

I assume that the use of proverbs in everyday activities and in pedagogical speech has been - and still is - more like a slip of tongue than wisdom transmitted consciously. This is also the way a child understands them. The child as a listener does not look for the message or the metaphor based on the assumed standard meaning. The interpretation the child makes differs from the standard proverbial interpretation (SPI, more about SPI in Norrick 1985). For the child, the proverb is primarily a piece of advice, not a metaphor. When the child is the listener, the listener's interpretation of the message of a proverb departs from the SPI. The child understands it in a different way from the adult: the child concentrates on the ongoing activities, events and phenomena.

The connection between indoctrination and upbringing cannot be based on the proverbs, in spite of the fact that the content of proverbs, their use as a method and their role as both caretaker's intention and a way of using power seem to be indoctrination at its purest. The way children interpret what they have heard has given the possibility to question the wisdom of proverbs and later in life the liberty to use them in the meanings they have created themselves.

From the pedagogical point of view, it is important that the proverbs follow people all through their lives. In the used narrative material, everybody who mentioned that they use proverbs in their own speech had also heard someone use them in their childhood. Every user of proverbs had earlier been a listener, but not vice versa: not everybody who had heard proverbs mentioned using them. It does not become clear on what grounds the use of proverbs is transmitted to the next generations (children or grandchildren). In the use of proverbs, it is not only the words that matter but also the feelings and emotions read into proverbs in each situation. The material of the life-stories in this research indicates that, for a child, a proverb is first and foremost concrete advice. The time for thinking over the proverb as well as looking for and finding symbolism in it does not come until adulthood.

Epilogy: What did the grandchild learn?

The narrator (woman, born 1919) had been told to take care of clothes. They were expensive and difficult to get. She said that she had used this kind of proverbs when talking to her own

children and grandchildren. Her 15-year-old grandchild came to her wearing torn and worn-out jeans. The grandmother was terrified, but the grandchild said:

“Grandmother, you have taught us yourself that ‘*the one who does not have something to put on for the drying barn ...*’ and ‘*in rags there is property*’ and ‘*one who has a patch over a patch has a coin over a coin*.’” - And grandmother could nothing but laugh.

Proverbs: “Kel ei o riike rimpstutinta, sil ei uo kirko kimpstutinta.” (The one who doesn’t have something to put on for the drying barn, doesn’t have anything to put on for the church.)

“Ryysyissä se raha lepää.” (In the rags there is the property)

”Kel o paikka paika pääll, sil o markka marka pääll.” (The one who has a patch over a patch has a coin over a coin.)

The proverb gets entirely different meaning when the grandchild uses it in 1980’s than when grandmother interpreted it in her childhood in 1920’s. The worlds of the grandmother and the granddaughter differ from each other. The living conditions have changed in fifty years, but the proverb is still the same. Actually the grandmother is a listener in two different worlds. I suppose she has noted the differences between these two worlds because the situation went off with laugh.

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Curriculum vitae

Liisa Granbom-Herranen has got her PhD (education) at University of Jyväskylä in Finland. Her first MA (education) is at University of Helsinki and she her second MA (folklore) from the same university. She is also Kindergarten Teacher (BA's degree) from the College of Kindergarten Teachers in Helsinki. Moreover she has done the advanced special studies in theoretical philosophy at University of Helsinki specializing in problems of the metaphor and the proverb. The advanced degrees consist of various subjects, the studies have been multidisciplinary. Both the doctoral thesis in education and MA thesis in folkloristic focused on the proverbs in context. The particular expertise lays on the combination of educational and folkloristic research combined even with the philosophy of language. Her academic career is about the research both at University of Jyväskylä and at University of Helsinki. The main interest has been related to the questions of power, authority, and autonomy in pedagogy, the proverbs and the given meanings in folklore, as well as the concept of metaphor in philosophy. The ongoing folkloristic research focuses on the proverbs in SMS-messages.

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