

CHALLENGES IN THE INTERNATIONAL AND OFTEN MULTIDISCIPLINARY PAREMIOLOGIC CO-OPERATION

Introduction

The background of this article is the "Newspaper project". The web page of the project is located at http://www.folklore.ee/rl/fo/koostoo/prov_news.htm, and the article called JA (joint article) is available at <http://isn.zrc-sazu.si/index.php?q=sl/node/467>. The project (actually the process) started at Tavira 2011, "one beautiful night after the day in colloquium". The motivation was to look at contemporary newspapers from a paremiologic point of view. After the pilot study (one week in May 2012, covering three countries and six newspapers) of the first year, the project continued (see Babič 2013, Granbom-Herranen 2013, Lauhakangas 2013, Voolaid 2013). As a Finnish proverb says: "Nälkä kasvaa syödessä" [lit. Hunger becomes bigger when you eat]. The second phase (one month in May 2013, covering three countries and six newspapers) was shortly reported at Tavira 2014 (Granbom-Herranen 2015) and the project was concluded with a joint article in 2015 (Granbom-Herranen, Babič & Voolaid 2015). Although the project has ended, there has been and still will be some more articles and presentations based on this material since, supposedly, each of us has developed ideas connected, for example, to contemporary used proverbs, everyday language and newspaper texts.

As Outi Lauhakangas (2013) wrote after the first pilot study:

The Newspaper project arose from a need to combine points of view of folklorists Saša Babič, Liisa Granbom-Herranen, Piret Voolaid and myself (and originally some other scholars). All of us are interested in everyday aspects concerning proverb research. It was easy to find a common and familiar type of present day texts, namely newspapers. We decided that each of us would follow one or two newspapers of her country during the same week in May 2012, from the 7th to 13th. The only precondition was to go through all the texts in the paper. Everybody had an opportunity to decide herself which kind of paremiologic items she would collect for her data. Each of us would analyze her own findings following the method she had chosen. The starting point of this study was to serve as an experiment to better understand newspaper texts as research materials get ideas and discuss about results with each other.

We were after various perspectives for proverbial utterances in European newspapers and wanted to cover significant expert areas in the group (see the above-mentioned articles).

In any case, this is not the story of this process but it could be the story of what we might have learned thanks to the project that actually was a process. Many of the challenges named in this article could luckily be overcome. As a matter of fact, the process itself was not a unique one. The project is used as an example since the article recounts the main events in paremiologic cooperation that often is either international or multidisciplinary. And, since the community of paremiologists is small, the co-operative process is very often both international and multidisciplinary. Multidisciplinarity is a challenge and a possibility. The challenge is to develop common concepts. The possibility is the prospect of finding some new avenues in theories and methods.

To start a project

Most often, the project group is formed around some phenomenon. The interest in the phenomenon in question is apportioned between the researchers. The researchers might have a different degree of interest, but they share the will and ability to join the process in order to generate new knowledge of the phenomenon in question. All academic research is interaction. It is interaction between the researcher and the object of study as well as interaction between researchers. The aim of research is always to achieve new information. However, it is to be taken into account that scientific knowledge is always more or less connected with the ways of thinking that change from era to era. (Niiniluoto 1994.)

One particular feature in qualitative research is that both the researcher(s) and the object as a phenomenon are situated in the same frame (Varto 1992). This means that, on the one hand, there is considerable tacit knowledge; on the other hand, it establishes specific restraints since language is both the object and the tool in tandem. The phenomenon might have various manifestations in different cultures that use different languages. Thus, participants in a paremiologic process are also, next to being in the role of a researcher, in the role of the expert of a language and culture. And the greatest challenge lies in proverbs and the interpretations they might have in various contexts. Proverbs are often combined with the history of the nation. The connection between language and social capital is the result of historical development. Proverbs come from the past (even if the past is not in ancient times) that is a combination of social, economic, geographical

and other cultural factors. Next to the past, the present is a unique creation of those past tracks. At the same time, the present carries the expectations of the future. The participants, like future readers, have different backgrounds and so, in an international research group, history has a greater role than in a national one. All this means that it might be better to talk about sameness and differences between cultures, instead of making comparisons between some cultures, languages or eras.

It is a challenge to recognize proverbs in any context, and it is even more challenging to interpret them. This cropped up in a conversation during the colloquium in 2015 when Dr. Joanna Szerszunowicz spoke about a proverb that is approximately as follows: "A person might leave the village but the village does not leave a person". We, participants from different parts of Europe, attached various connotations to this proverb. This is why we in the newspaper project decided: "Each author of the article focused on newspapers published in her native language" (JA 2015).

One small and, at the same time, important practical thing is the timetable. The best thing would be a realistic timetable. This is a rather brilliant idea. However, nobody knows how to make one. Moreover, many things might be decided and accepted in theory, BUT how do you put it into practice? One thing is that, at all times, all the information is sent to all the participants. It does not save time, but it helps to understand what is going on. The group (hopefully) decides when to start and how to go on. With the report (article), the final point of the project that the group has control over, is the date when the article is to be ready for peer-review – this is the last datum you can decide. After this, everything is “if the editor-in-chief accepts it – we hope the editor-in-chief accepts it”. The article might (or might not) be published after quite a long time.

Critics are one of the final steps in projects. The reason for critics is evaluation. It is worth giving up some time to looking at the project. Many kinds of evaluation are needed: evaluation of the process inside the research group, evaluation of the methods, reliability and validity, evaluation of ethical questions. Feedback from other colleagues is also welcome. All this is necessary in order to turn a research process into a learning process. We concluded:

The qualitative study is based on sufficient material and extensive analyses, and it is expected to use research methods that make it both repeatable and appreciable. The study will fulfill all of these criteria. Ethical issues as well as good academic practice were considered and the study was conducted based on published material. (JA 2015).

About the research itself

Even if the participants know the aim of the research, research questions have to be formulated and defined so that everyone understands them in the same way. It is not only a matter of understanding, but they also have to be able to explain and justify their involvement in the project to their organizations and colleagues. One question to answer is: What will the results be worth? The "benefit" is not always economic. However, in academic life, non-economic results are most often counted in money.

To start a project means that some practical questions are to be solved. Apart from what was said about the common motivation for the phenomenon, there are questions to be answered. Paremiology as such is actually not an academic discipline. Instead, it is situated in linguistics, philology and folkloristics. In fairly early stages of planning, there will already be questions like: Where to publish the report? Will it be an article, posters or papers in conferences? What is the intended audience of the report? Even more practical questions are those combined with the conditions of the team work. Is it possible to meet during the process? Where and how often? What kind of costs will there be: travel expenses, conference room for meetings and so on? How to get funding to cover the costs?

A project has a beginning and an end. These are two fixed points in the timetable even if they are not enough. All the steps (when something is to be ready) and who takes care of which steps is to be clarified, so that everyone is aware of the timeline.

What are we doing? The aim of the research

The aims of the project are supposed to be informative. For example, when we wrote articles after the first "one-week-project" the aims were expressed as follows:

"The research is focused on the use of proverbs, trying to show when, under what circumstances, in which contexts and themes they are used in a journalistic language." (Babič 2013). "The aim of this part of the newspaper project is to have a glance at the Finnish proverbs as a part of contemporary colloquial written language in everyday use and context." (Granbom-Herranen 2013). "The research question especially for this material will be to find out if familiar proverbs, fragments of proverbs and modifications of proverbs that editors might use in their texts have same or other functions as proverbs have in social interaction." (Lauhakangas 2013). "The main purpose of my paper is to analyze the proportion of paremiologic material, its nature and connotations in the Estonian daily newspaper *Postimees* ('The Courier')." (Voolaid 2013).

In any case, for us, this sounded informative enough.

In the closing report (JA 2015), we described the aim of what we had done:

"The project was to examine proverbs and proverbial expressions in contemporary newspaper contexts and in everyday use in three languages: Estonian, Finnish, and Slovenian" and "The working hypotheses for the qualitative project were: 1) both similarities and special features in use and selection will be found across different languages and newspapers; 2) proverbs are more common in some locations (e.g., titles and endings) because they sum up the content of the newspaper text and are more common in some journalism genres (e.g., comments and columns) because these are a personal response to the world or national events and they contain more metaphorical expressions than reported news; and 3) new proverbial expressions are used in newspaper texts less than established proverbial expressions".

Do we need any theory? The theoretical basis of the phenomenon in question

Some theoretical expectations always exist in the background of a study. When these presuppositions are clear to the project group, the viewpoint, the choice of material, the method as well as the conclusions become easier to fit in an academic frame of reference. The report will also be more intelligible.

Parts of the theoretical starting points were already mentioned in the pilot study. Our joint article says, for example:

In this study, the significance of an utterance has some basic starting points. First, language is not understood only as an instrument of communication but, because it is linked to thought (Vygotski 1967), language use needs some context. Second, in order to be understood, an utterance should follow Grice's (1975) cooperative principle. Third, the theory central to analyzing the proverbs of Estonia, Finland, and Slovenia uses the idea of emic and etic proposed by Kenneth Pike and Marvin Harris (see Headland 1990). (JA 2015.) (See also articles year 2013).

Concepts to be used

The concept *proverb* is defined in different ways depending on the discipline: linguistics, philology and folkloristics. It is possible to find some common way to define concepts to be used as well as to solve methodological questions. The greatest challenge lies in proverbs and their interpretation in certain contexts.

The first challenge in conducting this research was the concept of *proverb*. In defining concepts linked to proverbs, we encountered the problem of emic definitions and the paradox of modern proverbs. In addition, it emerged that the folklore traditions of all three countries differ in how traditional and

modern proverbs are defined. Finding common ground in references to traditional proverbs was easier because, once the basic concept is defined, references to it are quite undemanding to identify. It is possible that we will also find references to modern proverbs in the near future. The question is to what extent a proverb is allowed to change before it ceases being a recognized proverb. (JA 2015.)

We shared some common principles even in cases where we had to apply some country (language) specific solutions. For example, "Providing a definition for what constitutes a traditional proverb and modern proverb was a challenge", because all three countries had their own prerequisites for traditional proverbs. We had no reason to try to invent the wheel:

In the Estonian context, it was interesting to determine how many of the proverbs published during that period are listed in the registered type index in the publication *Eesti vanasõnad* (Estonian proverbs I–IV, 1980–1988; Voolaid 2013). Inclusion in this index was also the criterion for a proverb to be traditional, not modern. Most Finnish proverb types from before the 1950s are included in three published collections: Nirvi & Hakulinen (1948), Kuusi (1953), and Laukkanen & Hakamies (1978). In the Finnish research tradition, the concept of the proverb has been advanced to coincide with the types and structures presented in these publications. For the Slovenian cultural space, proverbs were already defined in the nineteenth century in Wilhelm Urbas's discussion (1869). nevertheless, the criterion for differentiating traditional and modern proverbs is Fran Kocbek and Ivan Šašelj's supplemented edition of the proverb collection from 1934: if a proverb is included in that collection, then it is treated as traditional proverb; if not, it is a modern proverb. (JA 2015.)

Materials. What is to be looked for and how to get the context for it?

Defining the research material sounds like an obvious task. However, this is one of the most important decisions made in a co-operative project. First, there has to be a consensus on the kind of material the group will focus on. Second, the context in which the phenomenon occurs should be identified. The material has to be in a form that will be available to all the participants approximately in the same form and function. The observation period has to be reasonable compared to the time set aside for the project.

We decided to define 'a newspaper' as follows:

By the term newspaper, we mean here specifically what a subscriber would physically receive during that one month. As in the pilot study, we only looked at the printed versions of newspapers. One reason for this is that the Internet version is perpetually changing and is not publicly accessible in its entirety. The paper version includes a greater number of categories and texts within a category. The paper version is written and published for the general public, and in many cases edited (more than the

online articles) for language (and proverb) usage. Moreover, in all three countries the printed version is available in many public places (e.g., libraries) and can be read by anyone at no cost. (JA 2015.)

We also decided what to collect and tried to explain why:

In this study, the focus in collecting units is on contemporary proverbial expressions, including proverbs, references to proverbs, Bible quotations and references to them, slogans, proverbial aphorisms, and citations, as well as references to other folklore genres that reference traditional proverbs or are used as a proverbial expression. We believe that only by including findings of all these proverbial forms can we obtain comprehensive data about the presence and positioning of paremiologic units in journalism texts. (JA 2015.)

Methodological decisions

There are no ready-made methods and the method is valid only if it takes into account the matter it is supposed to help study (Varto 1995). This is especially true with qualitative research. In any case, what has been done and why should be explained.

We put it like this:

This study uses mixed methods, predominantly qualitative ones. The principal research method is content analysis, which is understood as a cluster of methods connected with empirical and theoretical methods. Content analysis is commonly used with existing text material (e.g., text published in newspapers) and it differs from discourse analysis, which concentrates on communication in written form, although the contact between the sender and receiver of a message is important. (JA 2015.)

Of course, this is not enough. As mentioned above, it was to say what we did, why it was done and how it was done; and so it continues: "The study was conducted in four stages (...)"

Summary

The one-week pilot study gave us answers like:

"Finding proverbs in [Slovenian] newspaper also showed that proverbs are not so much fixed forms as it is usually stressed. They are often changed to fit the context grammatically or even lexically, but they are still maintaining the meaning." (Babič 2013). "Traditional proverbs, references to traditional proverbs, modern proverbs and bible quotations are used in modern colloquial written Finnish in newspapers 2012. This is to do with the fact that proverbs in Finnish have firstly been a part of oral language." (Granbom-Herranen 2013). "Against my expectations I didn't find any indications of proverb use in discussions about economy and on the pages of public opinions. Reason for that might be the difference between the style of expressing one's opinions in HS, evening papers and local newspapers." (Lauhakangas 2013). "The novel content and altered function of [Estonian] proverbs

point to traditions and improvisations, creativity and playfulness. The proverbial structure is part of the user's acquired cultural experience, which they fill with new topics." (Voolaid 2013).

This article cannot have any real conclusions but, in order to answer the question presented at the 2015 colloquium, I add some notes about the conclusions of the "Newspaper project":

"Because the study focused on how proverbs live in contemporary use, quantitative comparisons were not central, but were instead used as approximate information."; "Inspection of the material shows some visible cultural similarities in the use of proverbs in newspapers in Estonia, Finland, and Slovenia."; "The project found both similarities and special features regarding proverbs in newspapers in Estonian, Finnish, and Slovenian."; "The Slovenian newspaper included many fewer proverbs than Estonian and Finnish papers." (JA 2015.)

When dealing with proverbs in contemporary everyday language, it might be better to talk about similarities and differences as well as specialties between cultures than to make comparisons between some cultures, languages or eras. We found some **similarities** in Estonian, Finnish and Slovenian newspapers. Even though the number of proverbial expressions varied considerably between countries we could conclude:

"The majority of the proverbs and proverbial expressions were mentioned or referred to only once in the entire month"; "Using proverbs in articles and opinion pieces confirms the active role of proverbs in these three languages. Proverbs are truly alive and in use." and "In all three countries, it seems that, if a text is intended as informative, journalists avoid utterances like proverbs to avoid misunderstandings." (JA 2015.)

There were also some **differences** between these countries.

"In a relative sense, both Estonian and Slovenian newspapers have a higher percentage of modern proverbs, whereas Finnish newspapers' references to traditional proverbs seem to be the most frequent form of proverb usage. The conclusion is that in Finnish traditional proverbs are still in use and quite well known because, in order to refer to proverbs, they have to be known."; "There are also some general differences between the genres and sections of text in Estonian, Finnish, and Slovenian newspapers. In Estonian newspapers, proverbs in in-text citations are common, in Finnish newspapers proverbs are most often to be found in the names of TV programs, and in Slovenia readers encounter proverbs in opinion pieces or readers' letters to the editor." and "In Slovenian and Estonian newspapers, the majority of proverbs appear in articles. However, they differ in the second-most-frequent section, which is opinion pieces in Slovenia's Dn, whereas in Estonia's PM this is news, and in TPM it is citations. In contrast, in Finnish newspapers proverbs are most often found in headlines because they occurred most often as the titles of TV programs." (JA 2015.)

The country-specific features are presented in the article (JA 2105).

By the term **specialities**, we mean those that feature in the use or occurrence of proverbs and proverbial expressions or references to them. In Estonian newspapers, proverbial sayings abound in the horoscope section; in Finnish newspapers, most of the proverbial expressions were in the names of TV programs in *Helsingin Sanomat* (a national newspaper) and *Salon Seudun Sanomat* (a regional newspaper). The Finnish specialty is also the so called *Tekstari-palsta* [column for SMS-messages] in the regional newspaper (SSS) that includes SMS messages as short letters to the editor. In Slovenia, most of the proverbial expressions were in the opinion pieces in *Dnevnik*, a national newspaper. (JA 2015.)

The aim of this article has been to make some observations of what an international (and often multidisciplinary) research project entails. As mentioned in the beginning, it is both a possibility and a challenge. The citations are examples from the "Newspaper project". With them, the abstract project became slightly more concrete.

All of us, Dr. Saša Babič, Dr. Outi Lauhakangas, Dr. Piret Voolaid and myself, the participants of the "Newspaper project" over the years, want to thank all of you for supporting us during the process. Especially, we thank you for the tips, the questions, general interest and encouragement we have received in the colloquiums during all these years.

Epilog

"Minä juon nyt kahvia!"

lgh-article-proposal-ICP2009.jpg

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Picture 1. The morning coffee on Thursdays when all these Finnish newspapers come out, this time there were 108 pages in total. Quite a normal way to start mornings in Salo district, Finland.

The history of Finland has left coffee with a special status in Finnish everyday life. Coffee breaks are mentioned even in the Law for Occupational Safety (law 23.8.2002/738), and in field-specific instructions (*Työturvallisuuslaki* 31§).

Former Finnish prime minister Harri Holkeri's *minä juon nyt kahvia* [lit. I'm drinking coffee] from 1990. Holkeri as prime minister participated in a big meeting where the press wanted to get an interview from him. He felt disturbed and did not want to talk, and to all the questions he answered only: *Minä juon nyt kahvia*.

The response spread immediately via the media and afterwards the utterance came to denote superiority towards whoever dared to disturb someone above them. This is especially associated with relations between politicians and journalists. It was only some years before (1984) when President Mauno Koivisto clashed with the media and called journalists lemmings (*Lemmus Lemmus*) (Kansallisbibliografia, <http://www.kansallisbiografia.fi/kb/artikkeli/633/>). (Granbom-Herranen 2016.)

The video clip where Harri Holkeri is drinking his coffee and gives a birth to a an utterance that might be seen nowadays as a modern proverb is available at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT8HK_GYdFo (14.4.2016)

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Curriculum vitae

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