

# NOTAS SOBRE O ESTUDO DE PROVÉRBIOS EM VERNÁCULO USADOS NA COMUNICAÇÃO DO QUOTIDIANO

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## Resumo

Os provérbios pertencem à comunicação do quotidiano. No vernáculo, um provérbio vive enquanto é mencionado. Um provérbio é usado ou referido como um provérbio em si ou o uso de um provérbio confere valor agregado à situação em curso. A situação pode ser entendida como uma circunstância de fala ou um texto vernáculo. A perspectiva é baseada na paremiologia folclórica. Nos estudos do folclore, a perspectiva dos provérbios vem da maneira como as pessoas os compreendem e utilizam. As pessoas comuns, um povo, não seguem (ou não deveriam seguir) o jargão acadêmico. É um desafio folclórico e paremiológico mapear provérbios que as pessoas utilizaram e estão a utilizar nas suas práticas quotidianas. Usuários de provérbios, colecionadores, arquivistas e investigadores fazem parte desse processo. Cada etapa do processo tem a sua influência no material coletado. O desafio de encontrar material de pesquisa relevante é o centro das atenções no estudo dos provérbios vernáculos no contexto. Não sabemos quais os provérbios (e como e porquê) foram usados nos primeiros tempos. Conhecemos apenas os colectados e registados. A crítica da fonte pode ser vista como parte integrante do estabelecimento de uma imagem realista do material que é usado em estudos paremiológicos.

**Palavras-chave:** estudos folclóricos, vida quotidiana, paremiografia, paremiologia, provérbio, vernáculo.

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## Curriculum Vita

Liisa Granbom-Herranen, a minha investigação atual concentra-se na paremiologia folclórica. Obtive o meu segundo doutoramento em estudos de folclore, e o primeiro é um doutoramento em educação. Tenho o título de docente (professor adjunto) na Universidade de Turku, Departamento de Folclore, onde a minha área específica é a paremiologia e o título de docente (professor adjunto) no Departamento de Educação da Universidade de Jyväskylä na Finlândia, área específica em educação não formal. Os meus estudos são multidisciplinares, uma vez que o principal interesse nos estudos folclóricos está relacionado com os provérbios, o conceito de metáfora na filosofia, bem como as questões de poder, autoridade e autonomia na educação. Sou membro da Associação Internacional de Paremiologia (AIP-IAP).

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# NOTES IN THE STUDY OF PROVERBS IN VERNACULAR USED IN EVERYDAY COMMUNICATION

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## Abstract

Proverbs belong to everyday communication. In the vernacular, a proverb lives as long as it is referred to. A proverb is used or referred to as either a proverb itself or the use of a proverb lends added value to the ongoing situation. The situation can be understood as a speech event or vernacular text. The perspective is based on folkloristic paremiology. In folklore studies the perspective to proverbs comes from people's way understanding and use them. Ordinary people, a folk, does not (or should not) follow the academic parlance. It is both a folkloristic and paremiologic challenge to chart proverbs which people have used and are using in their everyday practices. Proverb users, collectors, archivists, and researchers are a part of this process. Each step of the process has its own influence on the collected material. The challenge how to find relevant research material takes centre stage in studying vernacular proverbs in context.

In folklore studies the perspective to proverbs comes from people's way understanding and use them. Ordinary people, a folk, does not (or should not) follow the academic parlance. It is both a folkloristic and paremiologic challenge to chart proverbs which people have used and are using in their everyday practices. Proverb users, collectors, archivists, and researchers are a part of this process. Each step of the process has its own influence on the collected material. The challenge how to find relevant research material takes centre stage in studying vernacular proverbs in context.

We do not know which proverbs (and how and why) have been used in the earlier times. We know only collected and recorded ones. Source criticism can be seen as an integral part of establishing a realistic picture of the material that is used in paremiologic studies.

**Key words:** folklore studies, everyday life, paremiography, paremiology, proverb, vernacular.

## Introduction

At their best and most alive proverbs are part of everyday language and this way they are also closely linked to culture. There are two methodological approaches to proverbs. First there must be the steps of paremiography. This work includes recording proverbs and preparing the collected material for archives. As for the paremiology, it is the study of proverbs and proverbial expressions. The research might focus for instance on the definition, form, structure, style, content, function, meaning, or values given to proverbs. Both paremiography and paremiology are important and needed form parts of the whole. Proverb users, collectors, archivists, and researchers are a part of the process, and all of them have some impact on what will be stored, and this way specify the uses of the existing material in the future.

The challenge how to find relevant research material takes centre stage in studying vernacular proverbs. It is both a folkloristic and paremiologic challenge to chart proverbs which people have used and are using in their everyday practices. Published collections often include selected material from the earlier publications or collections. In most cases, the contexts in printed collections are

unknown, and their actual interpretations are even more of a mystery. Proverbs may be collected in different eras, and various political and social contexts. However, the action of collecting proverbs itself is always influenced by what is happening in the spheres of politics, the economy and society. Small nations, like Finland and as I know also as example in Estonia and Ireland, have asserted their cultural independence through their languages and by collecting proverbs, for example, which were part of the spoken vernacular ones. It is not possible to think that neither paremiology nor paremiography could be free of the values of a society or group inside a society. The question is if the collectors or researchers have been aware of the valuations they have made. Depending on what is valued, people see or do not see certain aspects of the context.

### **Proverbs, proverbs everywhere**

In terms of the proverb genre, we can say that both as the name of a genre and the name of an utterance called *proverb* – can be, has been and still are defined both in emic- and in etic-language. Emic-language is the language of everyday life while etic-language takes place in the academic world.<sup>1</sup> The research ought to obtain both emic and etic knowledge, which in the proverb genre means both emic and etic concepts of the proverb.

One of the most chuckling-worthy descriptions of emic and etic concepts is found in J. R. R. Tolkien's story *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1967: 84–85), when hobbits Pippin and Merry meet a living tree, the Ent:

- 'Please,' he [the hobbit] said, 'who are you? And what are you?'

A queer look came into the old eyes, a kind of wariness; the deep wells were covered over. 'Hrum, now,' answered the voice. 'Well, I am an Ent, or that's what they call me. Yes, Ent is the word. The Ent, I am, you might say, in your manner of speaking. Fangorn is my name according to some, Treebeard others make it. Treebeard will do.'

- 'An Ent?' said Merry. 'What is that? But what do you call yourself? What is your real name?'

- 'Hoo now!' replied Treebeard. 'Hoo! Now that would be telling! Not so hasty. And I am doing the asking. You are in my country. What are you, I wonder? I cannot place you. You do not seem to come in the old lists that learned as I was young. But that was a long, long time ago, and they may have made new lists. Let me see! Let me see! How did it go?'

[...]

- 'It was a long list. But anyway, you do not seem to fit in anywhere!'

- 'We always seem to have got left out of the old lists and the old stories,' said Merry. 'Yet we've been about for quite a long time. We're hobbits.'

- 'Why not make a new line?' said Pippin.

[...]

- 'Put us in amongst the four, next to Man [the Big People] and you have got it.'

- 'Hm! Not bad, not bad,' said Treebeard. 'That would do. So you live in holes, eh? It sounds very right and proper. Who calls you hobbits, though? That does not sound elvish to me. Elves made all the old words: they began it.'

- 'Nobody else calls us hobbits; we call ourselves that,' said Pippin.

As I see, the same kind of situation occurs with proverbs. Whose point of view should be counted as the bedrock for the concepts of the proverb and the proverb genre – the standpoint of everyday life (emic) or of academic research (etic)?

I argue that the basis of the concept is in everyday life. Thus, we should favour emic language, the language, and its concepts that the proverb speakers use (Granbom-Herranen 2011). New proverbs are created by using old proverbs and old proverbs are thus transformed. A question for scholars is whether proverbs are allowed to change or not, in other words, what is the point with proverbs when we are dealing with a new concept and phenomenon. I suppose the answer is clear for the proverb users since the proverbs and their interpretations change whether we want them to or not. The genre system has been grounded in the existing folklore forms and the organization of archival collections and published texts (Bauman 1992). For example, in the Finnish life stories from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (PE-85), over 60 different concepts were given as synonyms for the *proverb* (*sananlasku*).

Sometimes, the concepts of proverb, saying, Bible quotation and so forth are used as synonyms but each tells us something about the proverbial nature of an expression. It is obvious that users of proverbs cannot always identify proverbs or determine a difference between proverbs and other proverbial expressions (see also Čermák 2005; Järv 1999). Another question is whether it matters if we accept the two parallel ways to see proverbs: on the one hand, the emic language that is known within a group and, on the other hand, the researchers' etic language (Headland 1990). I tender to count with the emic definition as I have accepted the view of proverb users. Sometimes the concepts *proverb*, *saying*, *Bible quotation*, etc. are used as synonyms, but all these indicate the proverbiality of a given expression (see Granbom-Herranen 2016a). The method is called the *empathetic reading method* (see Vilkkö 1997). In defining what a proverb is, I have accepted the view of the proverb users; they use the concepts of proverb, saying, Bible quotation and so on synonymously. As Maja Boškovič-Stulli (1980) wrote already in 1980's, regardless of the origin, these expressions have become part of everyday language (Granbom-Herranen 2013, 2018).

In folklore studies the perspective to proverbs comes from people's way of understanding and use them. Ordinary people do not (or should not) follow the academic parlance. In research and interpretations, we are to handle with in two different ways of thinking: the emic-language of the folk and the researchers' etic-language. The researchers are expected to understand both the emic- and etic-concepts and contexts. Should the standpoint be the language of the everyday life (emic)

or that one of the academic types of research (etic), is the question we are to pay attention. I argue, that comes to oral tradition we should come nearer the emic language, the language with its concepts the speakers use. The researchers meet new challenges when trying to adapt to the changes in the boundary between the oral tradition and the written culture (Granbom-Herranen 2011).

### **On the definition of a proverb**

Nowadays, the term most often refers to *proverb and proverbial expression*, both in emic and etic language, as in *American Folklore* (1996). This definition follows the contemporary international position in paremiology. However, we should keep in mind Honko's (1989) claim: "It is not always necessary, or even possible, in the dynamic research tradition to define the key concepts exhaustively, for there must always be room for new connections."

What comes to definitions and interpretations of a proverb I lean on the concepts of emic and etic by Kenneth Pike and Marvin Harris (see Headland 1990). The dichotomy of the emic and etic in language use can be handled in various ways. Briefly, the etic-based definitions are used by the paremiologists and other researchers and the emic-based definitions can be understood more as concepts that are not actually defined (Granbom-Herranen 2010, 2016b). The biggest difference between these concepts becomes evident in Harris and Pike's focus on etic interpretations and their justification. They are very much of the same opinion regarding the emic (Headland 1990). By using a loose definition of the proverb, this article leans primarily on the emic concept, but the etic concept also comes into play because the other kinds of utterances of various short-form genres which might, in the reader's eyes, also represent proverbs (in folkloristics) are not considered here (see Granbom-Herranen 2016b, 2021).

The dichotomy of emic and etic in language can be approached in different ways. In short, etic-based definitions are used by the paremiologists and other researchers, whereas emic-based definitions do not actually exist (Granbom-Herranen 2010, 2016a). The difference between them becomes evident in Harris and Pike's focus on etic interpretations and their justification. They agree with Headland's (1990) views on the emic. By using a broad definition of proverb, this analysis relies primarily on the emic concept. However, the etic concept also comes into play because the other types of utterances that represent different short-form genres <sup>2</sup> which might, in the reader's eyes, also be proverbs (in folkloristics) are not treated here (see Granbom-Herranen 2016b).

## **Proverbs in vernacular**

The basis for the interpretation of a proverb is constructed when a proverb is heard for the first time (often in one's childhood), and this later creates the basic meaning on an individual level (see Granbom-Herranen 2008). In everyday life and vernacular use, the meaning of a proverb is a matter of individual experience. Proverbs and their meanings as well as interpretations rely on the combination of socio-cultural contexts, people, emotions, and information in different situations. To understand the mechanism behind interpretations, we are to realize that proverbs are part of everyday language built on people's individual social realities. Proverbs are a part of the vernacular people are familiar with.

The main challenge in search of vernacular proverbs consists in finding them. The same challenge is to be greeted both in past and presents. Looking for proverbs in speech and texts like speech means to consider the proverbs, the shortened proverbs, or references and allusions to some proverb. Even more difficult is to identify "potentially-to-become-a-proverb" (Grzybek 2011). The paradox is that old proverbs are recognizable, but modern or future ones are not. It is easy to conclude that there are no modern proverbs.

The situation as such might be the key to recognition the proverb. One way is to see the use of a proverb as a violating element which introduces new aspects into a discourse. It makes a pause in it. Proverbs might be signalled with a linking phrase, a marker or introducer of proverbs. As an event or short performance, the proverb is a fixed part of the situation: something is happening, and proverbs might be signalled with a linking phrase or a marker or introducer of proverbs. The successful proverb performance sums up the kernel of the performance (see Granbom-Herranen 2014).

The history of a nation is always somehow present in paremiologic study. For the first three centuries after the birth of literary Finnish in Finland, the collectors of vernacular proverbs were primarily clergymen. Afterwards, even as late as the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both collectors of folklore (and proverbs) were mainly men. Their informants were men. The world view was invariably androcentric. No wonder the Finnish proverbs have been labelled to be patriarchal speech. Hence, as collectors encountered the everyday life of the people, women, and children (more than 50% of folk) were not included. However, this trend was not unique to Finland. From 1916 until the 1970s, women participated in fieldwork in Finland as assistants to men.

## **Conclusion**

Whether the unit of analysis is expressed in emic or etic language is a matter of choosing one's approach, that is, deciding whose concepts are used. The outsiders of the group understand the

language, but the tacit knowledge involved in it may remain unattainable. This applies our own culture on another era. It concerns the foreign culture both in our times and in the past. Anyhow, the identification of proverbs assumes the socio-cultural knowledge. In many cases, it is obvious that the collector's morals and didactic grip are imposed on the text. The influence of earlier publications is also sometimes visible. It is not obvious who collected the proverbs, as well as when, where and for what reason they were collected.

Looking for proverbs in speech and texts like speech, it is to look at proverbs, shortened proverbs, or references and allusions to some proverbs. In the vernacular a proverb lives as long as it is referred to.

#### Endnotes

1. Shortly said, etic-based definitions are researcher-centred definitions and emic-based user-centred definitions.
2. Also called small-scale folklore (Honko 2013, 118).

#### Materials

PE-85 = Perinne elämässäni -kilpajoitus 1985. [Tradition in my life] in The Finnish Literature Society Archives in Helsinki.

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#### Curriculum Vitæ

**Liisa GRANBOM-HERRANEN** is associate professor at the Department of Folkloristics, University of Turku, Finland, as well as at the Department of Education, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She holds a PhD both in folkloristics and education. Her studies are multidisciplinary – while her main interest in folkloristic studies is related to the proverbs, she is also interested in the concept of metaphor in philosophy as well as the questions of power, authority, and autonomy in education. Her main research interests in paremiology (proverb science) have focused on the interpretation of proverbs, considering the environment and purpose of use.

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