

25-november 2025

PAREMIOLOGY AS A MIRROR TO HISTORY

Khusanova S.A.

EFL teacher

English Language Department

University of World Economy and Diplomacy

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Email: sxusanova@uwed.uz

Abstract. This article examines proverbs as historical evidence, demonstrating how paremiology reflects social structures, cultural values, and shifts in worldviews across different periods and civilizations. Through a comparative analysis of Uzbek, Russian, and English proverbs, the study reveals how linguistic heritage and collective memory preserve unwritten histories and cultural experiences.

Keywords: *paremiology; proverbs; historical memory; cultural heritage; linguistic anthropology; Uzbek proverbs; Russian proverbs; English proverbs; social values; comparative analysis.*

Introduction

Paremiology—the study of proverbs—has long been regarded as one of the most reliable indicators of historical, cultural, and social development. Proverbs, as concise verbal expressions, function as “microtexts” that preserve the collective experience and worldview of communities. While official historical sources often document political events or major societal shifts, proverbs offer insight into the everyday life of ordinary people, revealing values, fears, social norms, economic activities, and shared cultural memories. Thus, proverbs become an essential tool for

25-november 2025

understanding not only language but also historical psychology, cultural identity, and the evolution of societies.

Modern paremiological scholarship draws on linguistics, anthropology, folklore studies, and cognitive science. Mieder (2004) emphasizes the pedagogical and cultural role of proverbs, describing them as reservoirs of collective wisdom. Honeck (1997) introduces a cognitive perspective, arguing that proverbs reveal how the human mind structures abstract concepts through metaphor. Permyakov (1979), a foundational theorist in structural paremiology, proposes that proverbs follow universal logical models that reflect worldview patterns. Recent Central Asian studies (Sharipova, 2019) analyze Uzbek proverbs as reflections of social norms, emphasizing hospitality and community values shaped by nomadic traditions. Dundes (1981) highlights the structural and functional aspects of proverbs across cultures, while Norrick (1985) focuses on the semantics of English proverbs, connecting them with historical pragmatics. Additionally, cross-cultural analyses show that many proverbs travel through historical routes such as the Silk Road, colonial expansion, and translation movements. This mobility demonstrates cultural interconnectedness and the adaptive nature of proverbial wisdom. Contemporary research also integrates digital humanities, examining how proverbs evolve in online communication and modern discourse.

The purpose of this article is to examine the role of proverbs as mirrors of historical development and to categorize major thematic groups in Uzbek, Russian, and English paremiological traditions. By analyzing representative examples, the study aims to demonstrate how proverbs encode historical experiences such as social hierarchy, agricultural life, gender roles, hospitality, wisdom through experience, and the resilience of communities facing hardship.

25-november 2025

1. Proverbs as Historical Evidence

Proverbs serve as “time capsules” that conserve the worldview of different eras. Each historical period is marked by dominant social rules, ideological values, and cultural expectations. Unlike written history, proverbs are not filtered by political institutions; they emerge organically within communities and therefore reflect genuine lived experience. For example, the medieval European proverb “The man is the head, the woman is the neck” illustrates socially accepted patriarchal norms of the time, while the Central Asian saying “Mehmon kelsa — risq kelar” (“When a guest arrives, blessings arrive”) reflects the historical centrality of hospitality within nomadic culture.

2. Economic and Social Life Reflected in Proverbs

Proverbs also document economic practices and daily occupations. Agricultural societies produced sayings that equated moral principles with farming labor. The universally known proverb “As you sow, so shall you reap” appears in English, Russian (“Что посеешь, то и пожнёшь”), and Uzbek cultural traditions, indicating the profound historical importance of agriculture as both livelihood and ethical model. In contrast, nomadic societies valued mobility and horsemanship, as conveyed by the Uzbek proverb “Ot — urning qanoti” (“The horse is the wings of a man”).

3. Proverbs as Records of Hardship and Historical Trauma

Many proverbs encapsulate communal responses to wars, oppression, migration, and natural disasters. For example, the saying “When elephants fight, the grass suffers” metaphorically represents the suffering of ordinary people during conflicts among powerful rulers. Migration-related proverbs such as “He who travels

25-november 2025

knows more than he who sits at home” emphasize mobility, trade, and cross-cultural interaction as historical realities shaping collective knowledge.

4. Moral Codes and Social Norms

Proverbs often articulate unwritten social rules that governed communities long before formal codified laws existed. In the Central Asian context, the saying “Kattaga hurmat — kichikka izzat” emphasizes the traditional hierarchy and intergenerational responsibilities within extended families. English proverbs such as “Honesty is the best policy” illustrate moral values that emerged independently of legal systems.

5. Proverbs as Indicators of Cultural Exchange

Proverbs frequently spread beyond their original cultural settings through trade, migration, translation, or conquest. For instance, the well-known philosophical proverb “Knowledge is power,” originally stated by Francis Bacon, has gained international circulation. Similarly, the Chinese saying “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” traveled along major trade routes such as the Silk Road and became globally recognized.

6. Preservation of Linguistic History

From a linguistic perspective, proverbs preserve archaic vocabulary, grammatical structures, and metaphors that may no longer appear in contemporary speech. This feature is particularly valuable for historical linguistics because it allows scholars to reconstruct earlier stages of languages. Many English, Russian, and Uzbek proverbs retain old lexemes or syntactic patterns that have disappeared from everyday conversation.

25-november 2025

7. Comparative Categories of Historical Proverbs

To systematically analyze the relationship between history and paremiology, the following thematic categories can be identified across Uzbek, Russian, and English traditions:

7.1 Family and Social Hierarchy

Uzbek: “Kattaga hurmat — kichikka izzat.” — Emphasizes respect for elders and kindness to the young.

Russian: “Старших нужно уважать.” — Reinforces hierarchical family structures.

English: “Children should be seen and not heard.” — Reflects Victorian-era discipline.

7.2 Agricultural Worldview

Uzbek: “Mehnat qilgan odamning rizqi mo‘l bo‘ladi.” — Hard work ensures abundance.

Russian: “Что посеешь, то и пожнёшь.” — Direct reflection of agrarian life.

English: “As you sow, so shall you reap.” — Medieval rural roots.

7.3 Hospitality and Community Values

Uzbek: “Mehmon kelsa eshikdan — risqi kelar teshikdan.” — Hospitality as sacred duty.

Russian: “Гость в дом — Бог в дом.” — Religious foundations of hospitality.

English: “Make yourself at home.” — Hospitality framed in individualistic terms.

7.4 Gender Roles of the Past

25-november 2025

Uzbek: “Ayol uyning quyoshi.” — Woman as the center of the household.

Russian: “Муж — голова, жена — шея.” — Patriarchal family order.

English: “A woman’s place is in the home.” — Social expectations of the Victorian era.

7.5 Wisdom Through Experience

Uzbek: “Ko‘p yurgan biladi.” — Knowledge gained through travel.

Russian: “Лучше один раз увидеть, чем сто раз услышать.” — Value of direct experience.

English: “Experience is the best teacher.” — Practical learning.

7.6 Hardship, Survival, and Struggle

Uzbek: “Qiyinchilik — sinov.” — Hardship as a test.

Russian: “Терпение и труд всё перетрут.” — Endurance through adversity.

English: “No pain, no gain.” — Individualistic resilience.

Conclusion

Proverbs are indispensable sources for the reconstruction of cultural and historical realities. As verbal artifacts transmitted across generations, they reflect the social norms, economic practices, moral codes, and collective experiences of communities throughout history. Comparative analysis of Uzbek, Russian, and English proverbs demonstrates the universality of certain human concerns—such as family hierarchy, labor, hardship, and hospitality—while also highlighting culturally specific values shaped by geography, religion, and historical experience. Thus, paremiology can be viewed as a mirror to history, preserving the authentic voice of the people and offering insight into how societies understood themselves and the world around them.

25-november 2025

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25-november 2025

