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THE MAIN ISSUES OF GEOLINGUISTICS OF ITALIAN PAREMIOLOGY

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Abstract

This article deals with the problem of paremiology in Italian Geoparemiological School, which is the result of a great scientific research entitled Italian Paremiological Atlante (IPA) and which has been going on for more than a quarter of a century. According the author, this atlas makes an original project, which applies the criteria of Geolinguistics to Paremiology and helps in teaching and learning foreign languages.

Keywords: geographical linguistics, paremiological value, phraseology, phonetic transcription, proverb, communicative competence, pragmatic character.

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INTRODUCTION

The *Géographie linguistique* was born a hundred years ago in France, when Jules Gilliéron realized (with the help of Edmond Edmont) the first linguistic atlases: the *Atlas Linguistique de la France*. Naturally these atlases are composed by linguistic maps, which under the geographical aspect they represent — in a highly simplified way - always the same territory. In it they highlight progressive numbers indicating the localities that were the site of a linguistic search, carried out each time "according to the same questionnaire; so that each map becomes a synoptic documentation of the local versions (transcribed next to said numbers) of the word or expression that appears as a title.

As far as Italy is concerned, the Swiss professors Karl Jaberg and Jakob Jud made among the two wars (with the help of three scouts) the *Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz* (AIS), published between 1928 and 194-0. On the other hand, only for a few months has he was able to start the printing of a parallel, but broader atlas: the *Italian Linguistic Atlantean* (ILA), created in the twenties by Matteo Bartoli and carried out forty years later by several collaborators, under the direction of Benvenuto Terracini.

The research work completed in 1968, the importance of the new method of study to know the reality-of the community life of the *paremia* or proverb, whose varying, formal and textual, from one place to another (consistent with its quality of social fact) showed the applicability to this field of the methods of geographical Linguistics (including the "spatial norms" prepared by Matteo Bartoli). Other theses followed (developed in different provinces, on all of the Adriatic slope), whose *paremiological* maps (by provinces) always seemed to rich in scientific interest. Thus, the API project was taking shape.

The little more than six hundred sayings that resulted from the first investigation served as questionnaire for the second, and so on. It must be considered that the quotation of a saying often makes the interlocutor think of another saying; so that, when, after fifteen of labor, the first official API questionnaire was completed, the number of voices it had (in Italian version) it amounted to eight thousand already. The material collected is grouped into 12 large semantic fields, which constitute as many chapters of the *Questionnaire dell'API* (of which a first edition was made in 1985). These are: the physical man; the man who moves, speaks and acts; the moral man; love and the family; house, food, clothing; human society; possessions, businesses, trades; agriculture and plants; the animal world; the calendar; nature; the supernatural. The distributive criterion of the said it is always based on the literal meaning of the text, without considering its translational meaning at all, because it is often too difficult to identify it (or choose it among divergent interpretations, valid in different areas). Therefore, in some case the same concept may be found indicated more times, by means of different figures placed in different semantic areas. The criterion more widespread, the alphabetical, has not even been taken into consideration, and truly in a geographical area as rich of variants as the Italian area is, it would not make sense.

Collecting *paremiological* materials in situ is neither short nor simple. He needs the same care of phonetic transcription of the dialect forms that in normal linguistic research; but a greater refinement must be acquired in the art of proposing the voice of the questionnaire, and also in requesting at least one example of application of the formula given by the source.

This is an element of great importance, of which not all of our operators acquire just conscience. In truth,

the proverb is often misleading. More than once it is discovered that a saying, which seems to be of obvious interpretation, has instead, at least locally, a well-different. Especially in the-south of Italy cryptic formulas are frequently found, the text of which it seems to present nothing in common with the meaning attributed to it by the users; so,-in the absence from an explanation, its emisological pair value (PV) remains incomprehensible.

This is the term we use to indicate the broad semantic spectrum subtenive to the sense apparent of the "true" proverb or, as we usually say, the proverbial saying (PS); spectrum of the that the user unconsciously evidences each time the particular value tuned to the situation to which it is applied. The proverb is in fact characterized by a polysemy (ambiguity), which it is usually proportional to its degree of indeterminacy. And, as is often the case in the field of human, however wide the limits recognized to the PS by the learned, the reality of the application by the speaker - of the fantastic-logical connections made by man—he often overcomes them.

Experience forces us to recognize that the proverb belongs to a particular code, than to call us emisological pair code, and of which one must have knowledge in order to interpret correctly the pronounced saying —moreover, in order to understand in advance that such a sequence is not a formulation

For example, the Italian *riso* "laughter" (from the Latin *risus*) in most part of Italy is replaced with *risata*; so a saying such as *il risofa buon sangue* [laughter makes good blood], i.e. "laughing puts in a good mood, therefore it procures good health", "joy makes digest better", in many regions it is well understood only by people of a certain cultural level. Being instead known by all Italians *riso* in the sense of "rice", there is a risk that the formula is interpreted as "rice is healthier than pasta, because it

lightens the blood", which is precisely the current interpretation in Piedmont, today the elective homeland of that cereal. If the researcher ignores this, in the absence of a systematic investigation, he will fatally tend to attribute to the saying the paremiological value that is familiar to him.

A couple of cases still, taken from the Florentine area, among the many that abound in an investigation carried out for the API by Haría Cángioli. *Son passate le capre, i cacherelli fumano* [the goats have passed, the shits are smoking] is an ironic local saying that can be applied, for example, to those insignificant people who give themselves importance because of the merits of others (such as the "fans" who are making a fuss around the city after the victory of their team, or the "balls" of an important political man). For Florence, a couple of citizen publications of the last century indicate a restricted application of the saying to the boy who signs; for the peasant area of her province, on the other hand, the Cangioli documents a VP not different from that of *quando i bambini parlano - i grandi han già paríalo* [when children speak - the elders have already spoken]. And so the well-known *la lingua batte dove U dente duole* [there goes the tongue to do hurts the tooth] "We always return to the topic that matters most to us," for four of the informants of the camp, on the other hand, "Misfortunes always happen to those who already have many".

These examples testify to a remarkable alteration of the paremiological culture; even noting that these evolutions have always taken place (and not only because of the decline of tradition, but also as an expression of innovative poetic freedom), as shown by the multiplying and to lose of the variants, formal and semantic, across the nation. So, for example, , *a lavóla non s'invecchia* [at the table you don't get old] was born with a value opposite to the value it has today, and already more than thirty years ago, in

various regions of southern Italy is heard it repeated that *chi é gentile nato - beve il vino sull'insalata* [the well-born drinks wine with the salad], without ever finding anyone that he knew how to clearly indicate to me a precise application of the saying. Other times, however, he alters the figure, as in the piedmontese saying already quoted *maunetfa graset* [dirt makes fat], that such once is repeated in Turin like *maumet fa graset*, with an incongruous introduction of Mohammed. If each word (e.g. *lezna*, *o azada*) has its own story, all the more reason this applies to the saying, where the plurality of the words and the possibility of altering the text while respecting the paremiological value (and vice versa) favor the preponderance of centrifugal motion over centripetal. Given that the political history of Italy has delayed the cultural and linguistic unification of our nation by five centuries with respect to states such as France and Spain, it is obvious that cultural fragmentation stands out particularly in the traditional saying, and in general in the entire area of idiomatic expressions (idiotisms).

The paremiological field presents a singularly pragmatic character. No one can foresee theoretically, a set of such words can only be taken historically as an act of their formation. A poet can write beautiful phrases, or similarities; but only when they are accepted in a tradition collective cultural, we will be able to consider them idiomatic expressions. And anyone can compose a phrase by way of saying; but we can only affirm that it is a saying when there is entered a community circuit, where it will remain for generations. All the definitions in fact, demanded to be traditional, succinct and meaningful formula. The nickname happily expressed by whoever it is, can be said passed into proverb only after its inclusion, through a repetitive social process, in the paremiological code of a community, be it large or small.

And what determines the success of a proverbial saying? The same items that are necessary for all innovations, or fashions, and particularly for linguistic ones. First of all, the social prestige of the person repeating the formula (whoever the inventor may be), then its structural and formal qualities, which must be appropriate to that particular society, and, naturally, a paremiological value corresponding to a widespread opinion — *communis opinio*, commonplace—of that society, because no generation transmits to successive ones the expression of an opinion he does not share. If the priest teaches from the pulpit the evangelical precept he loves your neighbor as yourself, people may assent, but without true conviction; instead, he will easily accept in his paremiological code *chi la fa-l'aspetti* [he who does it-waits for it] ("where they are given - they are taken"), or *U diavolo fa le pentole - ma non i coperchi* ([the devil does the casseroles - but not cover-ups] "it is easier to do evil than to cover it up"). Sometimes the common places of any society are opposed, because it is easy to change the way of reason when the perspective is changed, and this is reflected punctually in the proverbs, which they can express (democratically) contrastive points of view.

The most frequent motivation for the interest in these formulas is actually of a psychological order: the study, superficial or in-depth, of popular philosophy (even comparing between different cultural traditions, to establish parallels and divergences). This interest is often tinged with affective elements, due to the participation that is proved by sayings that remind us of the person we've heard them say, or also because of considerations induced by the personal experiences, of the type: "*But, how much wisdom in those old sayings!*", or also: "*If I had only known it before!*". . And also because of the frequent participation of an aesthetic order: be for the conciseness, often admirable, either for the right figure and for other

rhetorical aspects of the construction, such as the repetition of a word (or the opposition of opposites), the altered order of words and other morphosyntactic particularities, or by certain characters with functional mnemonics that we usually consider peculiar to poetry, such as eurythmy, assonance, rhyme, alliteration.

We offer here some examples of these rhetorical and formal elements: the Latin *intelligenti pauca* "the intelligent person needs little to understand", the Tuscan *chi non ha - non e* [he who does not have, is not] "who does not possess wealth, socially nothing counts, he does not exist", the southern Italian *mondo é stato, mondo é, mondo sará* "*nihil sub solé novi*"; the Veneto *baso no fa buso* "*bacio non fa buco*", or — in Italian version — *miglior becco che becca - che becco che tribola* [kiss does not make a hole, better beak (= bastard) that itches (= eats) - that bastard that suffers], founded on the ambiguity between *becco* "bird beak", and *becco* "goat" and, hence, "*bastard*", and so *porco pulito non fu mai grasso* [clean pig was never fat], *piú if he lives - e piú s' impara* [the more one lives - the more one learns], *chi di lamaferisce - di lamaperisce* "he who kills with iron - with iron he dies", *chi poco pepe ha - poco pepe pesta* [who has little pepper - little pepper pashes], // *buon manto - fa la moglie buona* [the good husband - makes the woman good], *la donna fa la casa - e anche la disfá* [the woman builds the family - and destroys it too], *brutta infascia - bella in piazza* [ugly girl in diapers - beautiful in the square], *un bello ha cento difetti - un brutto/ un solo* [a handsome one has a hundred defects - an ugly/one only], *chi ruba a mamma e babbo - non é peccato* [who steals from mother and father - it is not a sin], *lafiglia muta - la mamma la intende* [the mute daughter - the mother understands her].

In recent decades, to the interest in the psychosocial and "miniliterary" aspects of our formulas a linguistic-logical one has

been added, very well received by several Italian researchers. But, although the saying has been treated in the most different ways, no one had stopped to consider how it works, how and why it is quoted and transmitted in the oral tradition. By incredible that it seems, in the thousands of years in which the proverb has been talked about, no one, at it seems, we had thought to examine its true function, that is, the only factor that can justify to remain for centuries as such a conspicuous treasure. We have done it, coming to conclusions that we consider of no little importance.

By the way, the saying is born as a minimum literary composition: a sententious phrase, figuratively well constructed and formally well expressed (often eh aspect of verse, or distich), which lends itself well to being remembered, and quoted. But in order to be entitled to the title of proverb, it is not enough to have been born well: it is necessary to make a career. The formula has to like so much to the community that the latter, by dint of repeating it, ends up making the children learn as complex element of speaking, as has happened with so many idioms of which everything abounds historical language, and which we continually use without realizing and without looking for them. Only then it may be said that the formula aspiring to proverb has become such, that the saying of Mengano or Perengano, or the philosopher's sentence, or the poet's verse, has become a proverb. This expression means, always and only: "it has been assumed in the community linguistic memory, and placed among the conventional (and often cryptic) expressions that make up a complex instrument linguistically." The instrument itself, which we call the paremiological code; a term that is not would justify, if the proverbial sayings were simply a repertoire of innumerable minimal poetic compositions, a reflection of the society that has adopted and uses it, and not a communication subsystem (with an

appreciable degree of autonomy) included in a system, or linguistic code.

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