



Criteria For Distinguishing Folklore And Paremiological Units

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Abstract. This article systematically examines the theoretical nature, classificatory boundaries, linguistic features, and folkloristic characteristics of folklore and paremiological units. Epic, fairy tale, myth, legend, traditional narrative, folk song, lullaby, humorous anecdote, tall tale, askiya, riddle, tongue-twister, blessing, prayer, curse, proverb, and proverbial saying are compared in terms of their genre status, textual structure, and semantic and pragmatic properties. Paremiological units are identified as a distinctive microsystem within the folklore macrosystem, characterized by brevity, stability, generalization, and repeated communicative use. The article proposes length, narrative structure, predicativity, gnomicity, communicative independence, mode of performance, variation, traditionality, and pragmatic function as criteria for distinguishing folklore and paremiological units.

Keywords: folklore, linguofolkloristic unit, paremiology, proverb, proverbial saying, epic, fairy tale, traditional narrative, riddle, folklore formula, variant, invariant, pragmatics.

Introduction

Folklore is a complex cultural and semiotic system that transmits a people's historical memory, social experience, aesthetic views, moral norms, and linguistic resources from generation to generation. It comprises units that differ considerably in length, structure, mode of performance, and communicative function. An epic consisting of several hundred or thousand lines and a proverb expressed in a single sentence are both associated with folk tradition. Nevertheless, their textual status, linguistic structure, communicative independence, and pragmatic function are not identical. Treating folklore units



and paremiological units as phenomena at the same level therefore creates theoretical confusion.

Modern interpretations of folklore attach importance not only to the “ancient oral text” but also to its creation, performance, transmission, re-creation, and social function. A. Dundes associates folklore with the traditional knowledge and forms of expression of groups that share common characteristics. R. Bauman views folklore as a performance event and shows that a text's meaning also emerges within its communicative situation. D. Hymes interprets folklore discourse as an ethnopoetic and communicative structure.

Paremiology studies concise and usually generalizing units that have become established within a community and are repeatedly used. The proverb is its central object, but related units such as proverbial sayings, proverbial expressions, maxims, wellerisms, and anti-proverbs also fall within the scope of paremiological research. W. Mieder describes the proverb as a traditional, concise expression of wisdom recognized within a community. Community recognition is essential because an elegant or wise individual statement does not automatically become a proverb. This article aims to define the theoretical nature of folklore and paremiological units separately, describe the principal folklore genres individually, and demonstrate their differences from paremiological units through an approach based on multiple criteria. Genre, text, formula, proposition, imagery, performance, context, and pragmatic function serve as the central analytical criteria.

A folklore unit is a verbal structure that develops within folk tradition, is preserved in collective memory, becomes established through repeated performance or use, and possesses particular generic, poetic, and communicative properties. This term is not synonymous with folklore genre. Epic, fairy tale, song, and riddle are genres, whereas the traditional openings, endings, epic formulas, recurring syntactic constructions, or motifs within them may function as linguofolkloristic units. Milman Parry and Albert Lord's oral-formulaic theory demonstrated how epic texts are composed using established linguistic patterns. An oral performer does not create every line in an entirely new form. Instead, during an actual performance, the performer combines formulas, images, motifs, and syntactic patterns already available in the tradition. Folklore formulas are



therefore characterized by stability. Yet this stability does not make them proverbs. A folklore formula usually functions within a larger genre-specific text, whereas a proverb can be used separately as an independent communicative proposition. The main properties of a folklore unit are its collective character, traditionality, variation, recurrence, contextual functionality, and, in many cases, its connection with performance. Collective character does not mean that a work was created simultaneously by an entire community. A particular variant may be produced by an individual performer, but it exists within folk tradition and changes in subsequent performances. Variants are not “incorrect copies” of folklore; variation is its mode of existence.

The epic is a major narrative genre of epic folklore, characterized by a developed plot, a system of characters, epic space and time, heroic or romantic conflict, and formulaic language. An epic such as *Alpomish* cannot be equated with a proverb. The semantic core of an epic consists of events and the actions of its heroes. The semantic core of a proverb, by contrast, is a generalized proposition. Recurring formulas within an epic, such as “set out on the road,” “mounted a horse,” and “one day,” serve to construct the text but do not, by themselves, express a generalization about life. Thus, an epic is a narrative macrotext with a plot, whereas a proverb is a concise gnomic microtext.

Fairy tale. The fairy tale is a narrative genre based on fantastic, magical, everyday-life, or animal plots. V. Propp showed that a wonder tale can be analyzed through the sequence of functions performed by its characters rather than through the characters' names. A fairy tale narrates events, while a proverb more closely resembles a general conclusion drawn from those events. An entire tale describing the success of a hardworking hero may be condensed into a gnomic proposition such as “*Mehnatning tagi rohat*” (“Hard work brings comfort in the end”). Thus, the fairy tale encodes experience through a plot, while the proverb encodes it through semantic generalization.

Myth, legend, and traditional narrative. Myth is an ancient narrative system that explains the origins of the world, nature, humanity, divine forces, and other beings. Legend develops through the interweaving of real and supernatural elements. A traditional narrative, or *rivoyat*, is often more closely associated with a historical person, place, or event. Narrative structure predominates in all three.



A proverb answers not “What happened?” but “What general conclusion can be drawn from this kind of situation?”

Folk song and lullaby. The folk song is an important genre of lyrical folklore in which rhythm, melody, rhyme, parallelism, and emotional experience play leading roles. The lullaby is associated with a specific communicative situation between mother and child and is strongly characterized by melody and expressions of good wishes. Paremiological units may also contain rhythm and rhyme, but these are not necessary conditions for the genre. Constructions such as “Yaxshi bilan yursang yetarsan murodga, yomon bilan yursang qolarsan uyatga” (“Keep company with good people and you will achieve your aim; keep company with bad people and you will be left in disgrace”) have rhythm, but the defining feature of the proverb is its generalized proposition rather than its rhythm.

Humorous anecdote, tall tale, and askiya. The humorous anecdote, or latifa, is a short comic narrative based on a situation, a character, and an unexpected ending. Exaggeration is the defining device of the tall tale, or lof. Askiya is a dialogic, improvisational, and competitive form of verbal wit. These three genres differ from paremiological units because their central elements are events, verbal confrontation, or improvisation in performance. A proverb is introduced into discourse as an established expression. In askiya, the ability to produce a new response suited to the immediate situation is especially important.

Riddle. Because of its brevity and imagery, the riddle may appear superficially similar to a proverb. Its purpose, however, is to identify a concealed referent. The listener must discover the answer using metaphorical clues. A proverb requires no solution. It applies an established generalized conclusion to a situation. Thus, communicative purpose, rather than length or imagery, is the decisive criterion for distinguishing a riddle from a proverb.

Tongue-twister. The tongue-twister is based on phonetic complexity and a test of articulation. Similar sounds, alliteration, and sequences that are difficult to pronounce quickly occupy a central place. Meaning may be secondary in a tongue-twister, whereas semantic generalization is primary in a proverb. Although both types may exhibit concise formulaic structure and repetition, the tongue-twister centers on sound, and the proverb on a proposition.

Blessing, prayer, and curse. Blessings and prayers are performative units directed toward wishing the recipient well, whereas curses express wishes for adverse consequences. In “Yo‘lingiz ochiq bo‘lsin” (“May your path be open”), the speaker directly performs an act of wishing. The proverb “Yaxshi niyat yarim davlat” (“Good intentions are half of good fortune”), however, expresses a generalized evaluation. In prayers and curses, the illocutionary purpose is directed immediately at the recipient. In proverbs, influence on the recipient is often exerted indirectly through a general proposition about life.

Paremiology is the field that studies stable, traditional, and repeatedly used expressions of wisdom. Although its central object is the proverb, the paremiological stock has broader boundaries. Proverbial sayings, proverbial expressions, maxims, wellerisms, certain fixed comparisons, and anti-proverbs may also become objects of paremiological analysis. What unites these units is their availability in a community's communicative memory in established or partially established forms and their transfer to particular discourse situations. A paremiological unit cannot be equated with a phraseological unit. A phraseological expression such as “Og‘ziga talqon solmoq” (literally, “to put roasted grain flour in one's mouth,” meaning to remain silent) functions as a nominative or expressive component within a sentence. “Yetti o‘lchab, bir kes” (“Measure seven times, cut once”), however, is a distinct communicative proposition that independently serves as advice, warning, or conclusion. Communicative completeness is therefore an important criterion alongside structural stability. Nevertheless, not all units in the paremiological system are predicative to the same degree. Some proverbial sayings and proverbial expressions, in particular, function more prominently as parts of sentences. Understanding paremiology merely as a “collection of complete sentences” is therefore also inadequate. Its boundaries are determined through a combination of structural, semantic, and pragmatic criteria.

A proverb is a paremiological unit that expresses a community's accumulated social experience in the form of a concise, stable, and often figurative proposition. One of its principal features is gnomicity. Gnostic meaning concerns a general regularity applicable to many situations rather than a particular person or a single event. “Yetti o‘lchab, bir kes” (“Measure seven times, cut once”) is not an

instruction addressed to a particular tailor; it conveys the need to think carefully before undertaking any important task.

The English proverb “Look before you leap” serves a similar pragmatic purpose. The imagery in the two languages, however, is different. The English expression uses the image of leaping, whereas the Uzbek expression uses measuring and cutting. In the pair “No smoke without fire” and “Shamol bo‘lmasa, daraxtning uchi qimirlamaydi” (“If there is no wind, the treetop does not move”), the general meaning concerning cause and effect is preserved, but the culturally specific images differ. This demonstrates that paremiological equivalence cannot be restricted to word-for-word similarity.

The proverbial saying, or matal, is one of the units closest to the proverb. It often provides a figurative description, an ironic evaluation, or an allusion to a situation, but does not always express a complete gnomic conclusion. A proverb's meaning is often understandable even when it is used independently. A proverbial saying may depend more heavily on context. The main criteria for distinguishing the proverb from the proverbial saying are therefore not length, but the degree of generalization, predicative completeness, didactic force, and contextual dependence.

Table 1. Principal differences between the proverb and the proverbial saying

Criterion	Proverb	Proverbial saying
Semantic structure	Generalized proposition	Figurative allusion or evaluation
Predicativity	Usually strong	Relatively limited
Didactic force	Often present	Not obligatory
Independent use	High	Often requires context
Gnomicity	Defining feature	Relatively weak
Function in discourse	Conclusion, advice, evidence	Description, irony, expressive evaluation

A folklore formula is a linguistic pattern that recurs regularly within the text of a particular genre, enabling the performer to compose the text and the listener to recognize the genre. Examples include fairy-tale openings, epic addresses, formulas for setting out on a journey, and traditional endings. Their function is to



organize the text. A proverb, however, evaluates an actual discourse situation as an established communicative proposition. Although stability is a feature of both units, their functions differ.

Distinguishing folklore and paremiological units by a single feature is scientifically insufficient. Riddles are also concise. Prayers and tongue-twisters also exhibit stability. Imagery occurs in fairy tales, riddles, proverbs, and proverbial sayings. Collective character is typical of almost all folklore genres. Classification must therefore rely on the combined operation of several features. The first criterion is semantic generalization. A paremiological unit, especially a proverb, tends to convey meaning that extends beyond a particular situation. The second criterion is communicative completeness. A proverb can independently offer advice, a conclusion, or an evaluation as a separate sentence. The third criterion is traditional recognition. An individual sentence used only once is not yet a paremiological unit. The fourth criterion is reproducibility: the unit is retrieved from memory in an established or partially modified form rather than created from scratch in discourse.

One important property of paremiological units is their persuasive force in discourse. A proverb not only preserves experience but also serves to evaluate a particular situation, advise or warn an interlocutor, support an argument, criticize, or conclude a line of thought. When a speaker says “Yeti o’lchab, bir kes” (“Measure seven times, cut once”), the communicative effect is stronger than that of a simple instruction such as “Do not rush,” because the statement appears to speak on behalf of collective experience.

This property distinguishes a paremiological unit from an individual judgment. When an author expresses an opinion using “in my view,” responsibility remains individual. When using a proverb, the speaker supports their position through traditional experience. A proverb can therefore be interpreted as a “voice of the people,” a “formula of experience,” or a “means of invoking collective authority.” This does not mean that its content constitutes an absolute truth. Different proverbs may even offer contradictory advice. This reflects the diversity of real-life situations represented in the paremiological stock.

Folklore and paremiological units are closely interconnected, but they are not identical concepts. Folklore is a broad macrosystem embodying a community's



collective aesthetic, historical, and communicative experience. Epic, fairy tale, myth, legend, traditional narrative, folk song, lullaby, humorous anecdote, tall tale, askiya, riddle, tongue-twister, prayer, blessing, curse, proverb, and proverbial saying occupy different functional and generic positions within this system.

The paremiological layer is a distinctive microsystem within this macrosystem, marked by brevity, recurrence, traditionality, semantic generalization, and transferability across communicative situations. Its central unit is the proverb. A proverb's defining feature is not merely brevity or imagery, but gnomicity, a relatively complete predicative structure, and the capacity to evaluate an actual discourse situation.

Conclusion

The epic differs from the proverb through its narrative and plot-based nature rather than simply its length. The fairy tale expresses experience through events, whereas the proverb does so through a generalized proposition. The riddle requires the identification of a concealed referent, whereas the proverb provides an established conclusion. The tongue-twister rests on a phonetic challenge, prayer and curse on a performative act, the humorous anecdote on a comic narrative, and askiya on improvised dialogue. Consequently, not all short folklore units can be called paremiological units.

The boundary between the proverb and the proverbial saying likewise cannot be determined solely by outward form. Gnomicity and a generalized conclusion are prominent in the proverb, while figurative description and contextual dependence tend to predominate in the proverbial saying. A phraseological expression differs from a paremiological unit through its nominative and expressive function, a folklore formula through its role in text construction, and an aphorism through its association with individual authorship. The study concludes that a multi-criteria approach is appropriate for distinguishing folklore and paremiological units. Such an approach considers semantic generalization, predicativity, communicative independence, narrative structure, mode of performance, traditionality, variation, gnomicity, pragmatic function, and transferability across discourses together. This model also provides an effective methodological basis for comparing English and Uzbek units.



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