

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### DOCTORAL THESIS ON LITHUANIAN PROVERBS



On June 28, 2012, Dalia Zaikauskienė defended her doctoral thesis *Lietuvių Paremiijos XX–XXI a. Sandūroje: tradicija ir inovacija* (Lithuanian Paremiias at the Turn of the 20th-21st Centuries: Tradition and Innovation) at the Council of Folklore Studies of Vilnius University.

The research was carried out under the supervision of Dr. Lilija Kudirkienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore), and the opponents were professor Gražina Kazlauskienė (Vytautas Magnus University) and docent Bronė Stundžienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore).

Dalia Zaikauskienė has been working in the research group of paremiology at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore since 1997, being one of the compilers and editors of the publication *Lietuvių patarlės ir priežodžiai* (Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases) (I–II, 2000–2008). Her doctoral thesis consists in the systematisation of Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases and the formation of an electronic database.

The following overview is based on the English summary of the doctoral thesis.

Dalia Zaikauskienė is convinced that the proverb or paremia (the term that the author prefers) is a living genre, which is part of contemporary communication just like it was centuries ago. The study embraces both the old layer of paremiias and the new paremiological phenomena, i.e., both old and new texts constitute the objects of research. In terms of temporal limits, the empirical material comes from the 20th and 21st centuries. The author aims at describing the relationship between tradition and innovation not as spontaneous and chaotic but rather as systematic, i.e., liable to classification. The main objectives of the research are as follows:

- 1) Summarise the materials of the modern paremiological research and determine the spheres of usage of Lithuanian paremiias;
- 2) Describe structural, functional and semantic features typical of the contemporary usage of paremiias;
- 3) Compare Lithuanian paremiological phenomena with international data.

The author has repeatedly emphasised that Lithuanian folklorists have only recently started to collect and explore modern culture, focusing on the changes in traditional folklore. Dalia Zaikauskienė maintains that contemporary material should be treated as a continuation of tradition and she also presents her research material as such. To some extent, her research helps to fill in the gap in modern Lithuanian paremiology

caused by disregard of modern culture. The author also hopes that both the accumulated research data and the theoretical insights as well as the peculiarities of modern usage situations and the shifts in the world view should be of interest to sociologists, researchers of culture and psychologists.

Predominantly, the sources of empirical material are periodicals from the past couple of decades as well as other media and also the Internet. To a smaller extent, the research deals with literary texts. The majority of the material has been collected by the author specifically for the purposes of this research. In addition, she has also used voluminous archival material: the card-file catalogue of Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases at the Lithuanian Folklore Archives, the electronic database of Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases ([www.aruodai.lt/patarles/](http://www.aruodai.lt/patarles/)), the electronic data archive of the Department of Ethnology and Folkloristics at Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University (<http://etnologijadb.vdu.lt>), the data collected in 2003–2004 by the students of the Department of Lithuanian Language at Vilnius University, etc. The novel material – anti-paremiās – presented as an appendix to the dissertation is also remarkable. In total, 1500 variants of anti-paremiās (*antiparemijos*) and 670 variants of new paremiās (*naujosios paremijos*) were collected for research purposes.

Dalia Zaikauskienė's dissertation consists of introduction, four chapters, conclusions, bibliography, the list of the author's publications on the dissertation theme and the appendix entitled *Dictionary of Anti-Paremiās*. The dissertation presents as hypotheses the following statements:

- 1) If folklore tradition is considered to be a continuous process, including aspects of change, the usage of paremiās at the turn of the 20th/21st centuries should be regarded as a natural part of this process, which has preserved features characteristic of the old usage as well as acquired new features and new means of expression; the main indication of paremiās as living folklore is the need of modern man to use them also today;
- 2) Anti-paremiās and new paremiās have common features with the traditional ones in form, content and functions;
- 3) The creation of anti-paremiās and the occurrence of new paremiās can be regarded as the development processes of proverbs, rather than spontaneous and accidental phenomena;
- 4) Changes occurring in the corpus of Lithuanian paremiās are determined by both internal (development of paremiās) and external (social, historical, communicational) factors;
- 5) The 'incursion' of new paremic formations is part and parcel of the global process.

In the first chapter the author gives an overview of the most important works by foreign paremiologists, which focus on the contemporary usage of paremiās. Two aspects of folklore tradition are particularly emphasised in this work: traditionality as the most typical, defining feature of paremia, and tradition as a continuous process comprising aspects of both stability and change. The starting point for the author is the complex notion of traditionality, which comprises the most typical and stable indications of form, artistic image and usage. Innovation is understood as the new expressive means of paremiās, new spheres of usage and new features determined by contemporary usage, i.e., new functions and specific modern wording.

The concept of *paremia* is used by Dalia Zaikauskienė not only to denote proverbs and proverbial phrases, but also in a broader meaning: it comprises situational sayings, formulas of etiquette, phraseological units, aphorisms, maxims and literary quotations. In the first chapter the author introduces all the short sayings constituting the category of *paremia*, focussing on the three types of *paremias* within the temporal limits of the 20th and 21st centuries: traditional *paremias*, anti-*paremias* (in international terminology anti-proverbs) and new *paremias*.

As the most popular spheres of functioning, the author mentions common speech and journalism, as well as advertising and various spheres of entertainment. While earlier on, the spread of literary language (textbooks, periodicals) contributed to the dissemination of proverbs, then the contemporary corpus of Lithuanian *paremias* has been most strongly affected by the mass media. The analysis of the classical repertoire of Lithuanian *paremias* has highlighted the following tendencies in their development: 1) narrowing or widening of the semantic field; 2) demetaphorisation of the artistic image; 3) appearance of antithetic versions; 4) increase of comic effect; 5) appearance of the extended versions or shortening of the *paremias*; 6) appearance of contaminations; 7) enhancement of the artistic effect of poetic images by means of phonic organisation of phrases. The author also presents an overview of the functions of Lithuanian traditional *paremiological* units, claiming that proverbs preserve their typical 'inner' functions (pedagogical, didactic, psychotherapeutic) also while performing in individual situations.

In the second chapter the author describes the usage of popular traditional *paremias* in the 20th and 21st centuries, hereby distinguishing between two different ways of usage – canonic and creative – and giving descriptions of both. The anti-*paremias* that are dwelt upon in the third chapter are described by Dalia Zaikauskienė as modifications of traditional proverbs. It is remarkable that until today Lithuanian *paremiology* has not paid any attention to this kind of texts. In her work the author reveals the international character of this phenomenon, emphasising the influence of other, particularly Russian- and English-speaking cultures, on the contemporary (late 20th and early 21st centuries) corpus of Lithuanian *paremias*. Dalia Zaikauskienė differentiates between diverse patterns of creating anti-*paremias*. The author's approach to the different nature of anti-*paremic* texts is also remarkable: the ones preserving the most general meaning of the basic *paremia*, with only a few shifts in form, are regarded as variants of the basic *paremia*, whereas others that are meant to achieve comic effect are called anti-*paremic* texts. The most popular way of creating Lithuanian anti-*paremias* is equal lexical substitution (in the case of two-part proverbs) and extending of the traditional *paremia* by a comment or reference. Today the creativity of the authors of such texts can be encountered mainly on internet websites.

As the third type of *paremias*, in the fourth chapter, Dalia Zaikauskienė describes the so-called new *paremias*. The new *paremia* can be identified by comparison with traditional *paremias*. These are utterances similar to classical *paremias*, which have acquired independence and certain stability of contents and form. Part of the new *paremias* are shorter and simpler by their structure than the traditional ones. Usually they are devoid of artistic image and can rather be understood literally, and have only associative connection with the context in which they are used. Dalia Zaikauskienė determines diverse material as types of new *paremias*: texts deriving from anti-*paremias*, translations, slogans, quotations, phrases of established authorship, and utterances similar to traditional

paremias. The author declares that in everyday speech the usage of new paremias is similar to that of traditional ones, yet their functional peculiarities and spheres of usage are more situational. Similar to anti-*paremias*, this kind of utterances are encountered mainly in the press, internet portals and comments, as well as advertising.

From the final conclusions of Dalia Zaikauskienė's doctoral thesis, the following aspects should be mentioned.

1. Not only classical *paremias* belonging to the old layer should be regarded as *paremias*, but also their diverse modifications and the new *paremia*-like utterances. In modern society oral and written tradition are interrelated, and the spread of *paremias* is greatly affected by modern technologies. The usage of such texts is unrestricted and creative and largely improvisational, as it is not so much the appropriate use of *paremias* that is important, but rather their smart and inventive adaptation to language use. Lithuanian *paremias* of the recent decades are diverse in terms of form, content and origin.
2. Traditional *paremias* are still abundantly used; yet, their former typical syntactic constructions, grammatical and lexical forms are increasingly replaced by simpler syntax and more contemporary grammar, i.e., they are used in somewhat modified forms and rather in the entertainment sphere or for the purpose of drawing attention.
3. The creation of anti-*paremias* is an especially remarkable feature of the contemporary usage. Part of them are closely related to traditional *paremias*, whereas others have acquired a completely independent and different meaning. The majority of Lithuanian anti-*paremias* have been created by means of lexical substitution.
4. New *paremias* of various origins have not been regarded as *paremias* in Lithuanian tradition, nor have they been included in *paremic* indices; yet, the corpus of Lithuanian *paremias* has been significantly enriched by loan translations originating mainly from mass culture.
5. The formation of the corpus of Lithuanian *paremias* has been remarkably influenced by social, economic and cultural changes in society, as well as by linguistic interactions.
6. The innovative transformations in Lithuanian *paremias* are part and parcel of global processes.

As the author has argued, the accumulated data reflects the current usage of *paremias* and opens up new perspectives for further broader interdisciplinary research. The global character of innovative linguistic transformations should encourage debates about general social and cultural tendencies, as well as about linguistic and cultural identity.

Anneli Baran