

## EVERYDAY PRACTICES AND FOLK BELIEFS OF THE ANCIENT SLAVS IN RUSSIAN PHRASEOLOGY

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### ABSTRACT

A linguocultural micro corpus of 25 Russian phraseological units is assembled and annotated to model how images of daily routine and vernacular belief encode aspects of East Slavic ethnoculture. Lexicographic interpretation is triangulated with corpus based contextual checking, yielding a compact taxonomy of cultural codes and a future oriented framework for scalable analysis.

**Keywords:** Russian phraseology, linguoculturology, Slavic ethnoculture, folk belief, domestic space, cultural codes, ritual speech, taboo, corpus linguistics.

### INTRODUCTION

Across Russian phraseology, the cultural memory of archaic life persists not as a museum relic, but as an operational resource for evaluation, warning, and social regulation. Short formulas travel well. Their inner form, the motivating image that links lexical material to figurative meaning, may preserve traces of earlier belief even when speakers interpret the unit in purely social or psychological terms. [2]

In the linguocultural tradition associated with cultural codes, phraseology is treated as a site where conventional images become interpretable against shared cultural knowledge. A methodological complication remains. «As far as we know, a complete list of codes does not yet exist either in ethnology or in linguacultural studies». [5]. This observation is especially relevant for Slavic material, because the boundary between pre Christian myth and later folk Christianity is porous, and the same idiom may index both layers depending on genre, register, and pragmatic situation. Here the term cultural code is used in the established sense of a relatively stable cluster of culturally salient images that organizes interpretation, such as domestic architecture, demonology, mythic geography, or calendric ritual. The goal is

empirical. It is to demonstrate, on a controlled sample, which cultural codes recur and what kinds of social meanings they support.

A corpus perspective becomes essential once the analyst stops treating a dictionary entry as a final authority and starts tracking pragmatic distribution in context. The Russian National Corpus presents itself as a resource built for this triangulation. The Russian National Corpus is a representative collection of texts in Russian [6].

Chronological depth is equally relevant, because many phraseological images have long histories and shift in polarity. The same platform explicitly frames its coverage as spanning from early East Slavic manuscript culture to modern usage. The Russian National Corpus covers the period from the first East Slavic manuscripts of the 11th century to the first decades of the 21st century. A structural feature of the resource also supports a future program of layered analysis, since different subcorpora can be recruited for genre sensitive comparisons. The Russian National Corpus is a collection of individual corpora, each of which is assembled to tackle different linguistic tasks.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

The dataset contains 25 phraseological units and proverb like formulas selected for two conditions. Their lexical imagery must plausibly index everyday practices or vernacular belief, and their conventional meaning must be attested in contemporary reference lexicography with usage notes. Selection was guided primarily by phraseological dictionary entries and culturally oriented explanations, then cross checked against corpus use through the Russian National Corpus interface and its tools for distribution across years and text properties.

Each unit was annotated with a primary cultural code and, when relevant, a secondary one. For operational clarity, six codes were used. Demonological and spirit imagery, domestic space and household taboo, travel and threshold ritual, calendar and festival time, mythic geography, and agrarian ritual. The coding scheme is descriptive rather than exhaustive, and it is designed to be extendable, so that future annotation guidelines can be written for larger samples without changing the conceptual backbone.

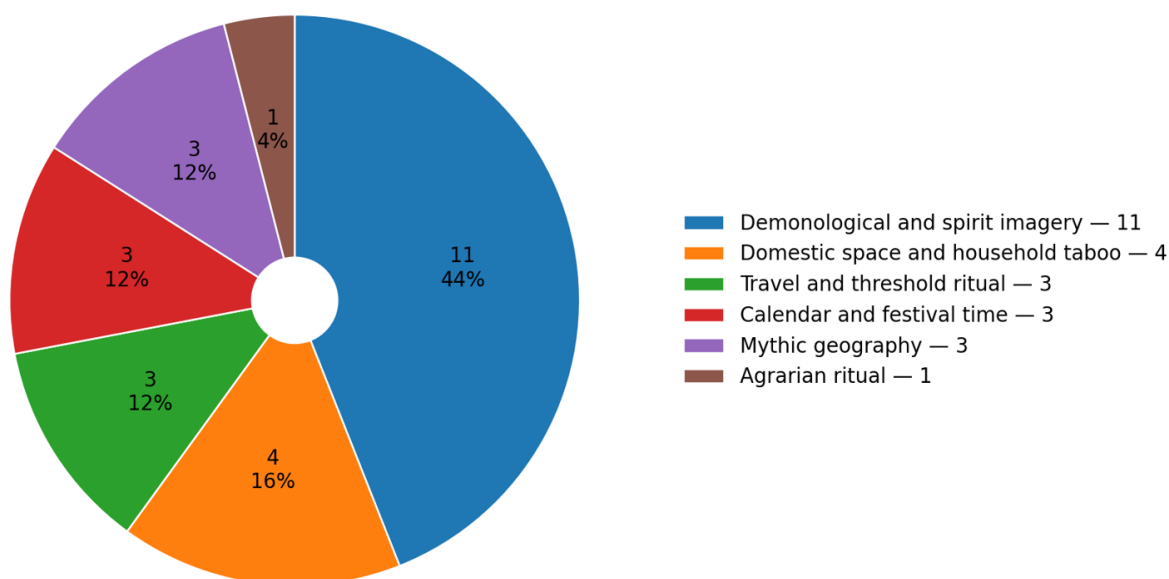
For ethnocultural grounding, phraseology is treated as an indirect index of practice. The analysis avoids retroprojection, meaning it does not treat every metaphorical component as a direct record of a specific ancient rite. Instead, it asks whether a given image aligns with independently documented motifs in Slavic folklore and ethnography, for example apotropaic speech, household boundary taboos, and the personification of forest space as an agent.

Quantitative claims in the Results section are restricted to the micro corpus itself. Counts therefore describe the distribution within the 25 unit sample, not Russian phraseology as a whole, and they are reported to keep the analysis replicable. This constraint is methodological. It also prepares a clear path for future scaling through corpus guided extraction of candidate units and semi automatic coding supported by corpus tools that already provide year wise and genre distributions.

## RESULTS

The classification reveals a clear dominance of demonological and spirit imagery, followed by domestic taboo and travel rites, while agrarian ritual appears as a thin but distinctive stratum. The pattern suggests that belief related metaphors function as a high salience explanatory layer in everyday evaluation, especially as accounts of error, danger, distance, and social risk.

Unit in Russian	Closest English gloss	Primary cultural code	Ethnocultural referent
чур меня	protective spell, keep away	demonological and spirit	apotropaic formula, boundary protection
ни пуха ни пера	good luck via verbal inversion	demonological and spirit	hunting charm and anti jinx practice
к черту	go away, reject	demonological and spirit	sending to the otherworld adversary
бес дёрнул за язык	forced to say it	demonological and spirit	externalization of speech fault
бес попутал	misled by a spirit	demonological and spirit	spirit as agent of wrong action
леший попутал	lost one's way	demonological and spirit	forest spirit as disorienting power
леший его знает	who knows	demonological and spirit	forest spirit as epistemic placeholder
черт ногу сломит	impossibly confusing	demonological and spirit	demon as measure of chaos
боится как черт ладана	fears intensely	demonological and spirit	incense as protective substance
дышать на ладан	be near death	demonological and spirit	ritual incense and mortality
у черта на куличках	in the middle of nowhere	demonological and spirit	remote space marked as otherworldly
после дождичка в четверг	never, unlikely	calendar and festival time	calendar anchoring of improbability
не все коту масленица	good times do not last	calendar and festival time	ritual feast as temporal benchmark
первый блин комом	first try fails	calendar and festival time	ritual food and household practice
скатертью дорога	good riddance, or safe journey	travel and threshold ritual	symbolic smoothing of the road
присесть на дорожку	sit briefly before travel	travel and threshold ritual	liminal pause, departure rite
выпить на посошок	final drink before leaving	travel and threshold ritual	departure rite tied to the walking staff
не выносить сор из избы	keep conflicts inside	domestic space and taboo	taboo on removing traces from the home
танцевать от печки	start from the beginning	domestic space and taboo	stove as organizing center of the house
хлеб да соль	greeting at a meal	domestic space and taboo	hospitality formula and protective speech
плюнуть через левое плечо	spit to ward off harm	domestic space and taboo	apotropaic gesture against evil eye
медвежий угол	remote place	mythic geography	forest periphery and wildness
за тридевять земель	very far away	mythic geography	fairy tale distance model
тридевятое царство	far off kingdom	mythic geography	folk cosmology of the beyond
хлебную бороду завить	finish the harvest	agrarian ritual	ritual tuft of grain, harvest closure



## DISCUSSION

The demonological cluster is not simply a fossil record of paganism. It is a functional semiotic layer that allocates responsibility and shapes emotion, often by outsourcing agency to spirits or the devil. This is visible in formulas of misaction such as *бес попутал* and *леший попутал*, and in epistemic placeholders like *леший его знает*, where a forest agent functions as an explanation for ignorance. First, the spirits invoked by these units differ by cultural topology. The *лесной дух* belongs to forest space and acts as a trickster, and this is stable enough to be stated in an encyclopaedic summary.

The *leshy* is a sportive spirit who enjoys playing tricks on people, though when angered he can be treacherous. Second, domestic space has its own agent. Here, a household guardian is linked to prosperity, which makes ritualized speech and taboo practices pragmatically coherent in a peasant worldview.

The *domovoy* is the guardian of the family and its wealth. Apotropaic formulas exemplify how belief becomes interactional technology. The hunting wish *ни пуха ни пера* is lexicographically defined as a wish for success, yet it is structurally negative and often triggers a conventional reply, which adds a second protective layer [3]. *Пусть всё будет удачно*. When such formulas cooccur with gestures, for example spitting over the *левое плечо*, the phraseological unit becomes part of a multimodal micro rite. Here a computationally promising prospect emerges. Future corpus studies can measure when the verbal formula appears alone, when it is paired with the reply, and when it is embedded in metalinguistic commentary about superstition, tracking these patterns across decades using corpus tools that provide distribution by years and text properties.

Household taboo materially anchors the cultural semantics. The proverb *не выносить сор из избы* is semantically social, yet its motivating scenario treats domestic residue as dangerous when it exits the protected interior. One culture directed explanation links the phrase to peasant belief in the possibility of harmful magic directed through objects taken out of the house, and to a practical strategy of burning waste. Travel and threshold formulas preserve another recurrent motif [4]. Liminality is encoded as a sequence of small actions, pause,

farewell, and boundary crossing, which are easily conventionalized as speech and remembered as etiquette. The phraseological unit *скатертью дорога* is especially informative because a public explanation explicitly links the tablecloth to symbolic order, and also documents later semantic drift into irony.

Calendar anchoring illustrates how ritual time becomes a measuring instrument for expectation. The proverb *не все коту масленица* compresses a festive calendar into a moral lesson about scarcity, and first blin failure is tied by popular explanation to both kitchen practice and ritualized use of pancakes in commemorative contexts. Notably, the same explanatory text also models a critical stance toward origin myths, separating comparatively supported motivations from later speculative narratives, and this makes interpretation empirically disciplined. One unit in the dataset is particularly useful for connecting phraseology to older incantatory practice because it comes from a documented charm formula preserved in a classic folkloristic work. In the recorded text, the closing segment uses the particle *chur* as a performative boundary marker. *Чур слову конец, моему делу венец!* This line does not prove a deity. It proves a speech technology. It also motivates a future oriented bridge between corpus linguistics and ethnolinguistics, where formulaic segments are tracked across genres, from charms to proverbs to conversational interjections, and then interpreted against archival accounts. The encyclopaedia summary of *chur* frames modern usage as a spell like exclusion and records scholarly disagreement about mythological reconstruction, which can guide cautious interpretation in future work.

Finally, the agrarian residue in the micro corpus matters even when it is rare. Afanasyev documents a harvest rite of leaving and treating a tuft of grain as a beard, and he also notes that later Christian naming can replace older divine reference while preserving ritual structure. The derived expression *хлебную бороду завить* aligns with this pattern, because the phrase maps a physical act of harvest completion onto a compressed formula for closing a work cycle. Such units are promising targets for future research because they can connect phraseology, ethnography, and diachronic corpus evidence within a single explanatory chain [1].

## CONCLUSION

The annotated set of 25 Russian phraseological units demonstrates that everyday practices and vernacular beliefs remain visible in the imagery of contemporary Russian fixed expressions, even when speakers do not recognize the older cultural motivation. Demonological and spirit coded images dominate the sample, while domestic taboo and threshold ritual form a stable supporting layer, and agrarian ritual survives as a marked but interpretable residue.

Future work can extend the method in three directions. First, enlarge the dataset via corpus guided candidate extraction and automatic patterning of formulaic expressions, then validate candidates by manual linguistic analysis. Second, operationalize cultural code annotation with interannotator agreement so that results become comparable across projects and languages. Third, model semantic change by mapping contexts of use against genre and time within the Russian National Corpus and its subcorpora, using corpus metadata and built in distributional summaries to connect shifts in polarity with historical and genre contexts.

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