

LEXICAL AND COGNITIVE FEATURES OF HAPPINESS IN RUSSIAN PAREMIOLOGICAL SOURCES

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ABSTRACT

The article examines lexical and cognitive features of the concept happiness reflected in Russian paremiological sources. Material from V.I.Dahl's collection and contemporary lexicographic publications reveals systemic asymmetry between positive readings and cautionary, fatalistic interpretations. Frame analysis of 312 units identifies seven semantic groups with quantitative dominance of preordination, brevity and zero-sum distribution. Findings inform linguocultural description of axiological concepts in Russian.

Keywords: Concept, happiness, paremiology, Russian proverb, cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology, lexical semantics, frame analysis, folk wisdom, cultural code, axiological category.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of happiness occupies a central position in axiological systems of natural languages. Across cultures its lexical and cognitive structure varies considerably and Russian preserves a particularly rich repository of proverbs that encode folk understanding of счастье. Increasingly, scholarship has recognized that linguocultural concepts cannot be reduced to dictionary glosses alone. Preserving archaic semantic layers, folk paroemias often diverge from contemporary explanatory entries. Among emotional concepts in Russian, happiness shows perhaps the widest gap between codified positive definitions and cautionary readings dominant in popular wisdom. To address this gap, the present article examines lexical and cognitive features of happiness encoded in Russian proverbs collected by V.I.Dahl, V.P.Zhukov and other lexicographers.

Two questions guide the inquiry. The first concerns which conceptual components dominate paremiological representations of happiness and how they correlate quantitatively. Asked second, to what extent does folk wisdom contradict the optimistic readings of modern explanatory dictionaries. Material includes 312 paremiological units extracted from V.I.Dahl's «Proverbs of the Russian People» and V.P.Zhukov's «Dictionary of Russian Proverbs and Sayings». Comparative reference is made to data from the National Corpus of the Russian Language. Beyond descriptive interest, results contribute to linguocultural lexicography by clarifying which semantic features must be reflected in thesaurus entries dedicated to abstract emotional concepts.

METHODS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Several procedures were combined. Conceptual analysis following the framework of Y.S.Stepanov served to identify the inner form and historical layers of счастье. Componential decomposition isolated semantic features within paremiological units. Frame analysis adapted

from Z.D.Popova and I.A.Sternin allowed reconstruction of typical scenarios where happiness appears as participant, condition or outcome. Frequency processing was applied to compare distribution across thematic groups. Contrastive procedures clarified divergence between dictionary and paremiological readings. Linguocultural commentary followed principles articulated by V.A.Maslova and V.N.Telia. Where appropriate, etymological evidence cited by Y.S.Stepanov was consulted to verify historical layers.

The conceptual content of happiness in Russian has attracted sustained scholarly attention. A.Wierzbicka demonstrated in her cross-cultural studies that English happy and Russian счастливый are not semantic equivalents, since счастье carries connotations of rare and fated good fortune. S.G.Vorkachev devoted a monograph to happiness as a linguocultural concept, mapping its lexical fields and uses across speech genres. Y.S.Stepanov included счастье among the constants of Russian culture, tracing its etymology to съѣсть meaning «good share, good part». V.I.Karasik developed a typology of cultural concepts that informs subsequent classifications of axiological notions. Edited volumes by N.D.Arutyunova on the language of ethical and emotional concepts supplied terminological foundations. V.V.Kolesov examined Russian mentality through key lexical units. A.D.Shmelev contributed materials on the Russian linguistic worldview. The empirical foundation of the present study draws on V.I.Dahl's paremiological collection and V.P.Zhukov's dictionary. Phraseological aspects rely on V.N.Telia's linguocultural approach. General principles of linguoculturology are taken from V.A.Maslova and integral lexicography from Y.D.Apresyan.

RESULTS

Quantitative description of the corpus reveals striking asymmetry. Of 312 paremiological units examined, only 41% express positive evaluation of happiness, while 59% contain cautionary, ironic or fatalistic readings. Particularly numerous are sayings warning against trust in happy circumstances or presenting happiness as transient. A representative example reads «Не родись красивым, а родись счастливым». The proverb subordinates external attractiveness to fated happiness and treats the latter as more valuable precisely because it lies beyond personal control.

Table 1. Distribution of paremiological units by semantic group

Semantic group	N	%
Fatalistic preordination	87	27.9
Transience and brevity	64	20.5
Positive evaluation	51	16.3
Zero-sum distribution	41	13.1
Epistemic distrust and secrecy	38	12.2
Conditional dependence	22	7.1
Mixed and other	9	2.9
Total	312	100.0

Strong is the fatalistic component. Russian proverbs construct happiness as something allotted from above and beyond human agency. The paroemia «Счастливый в огне не сгорит и в воде не утонет» illustrates protective fatalism. The happy person, on this folk reading,

possesses an externally granted immunity rather than acquired skill or moral merit. The cognitive feature preordination appears in 87 of 312 units, the highest single-feature frequency in the data. S.G.Vorkachev observes that Russian счастье retains an etymological link with sharing and allocation that English happy lacks.

Transience is the second dominant feature. Sayings present happiness as a guest who comes briefly and departs. Consider «Счастье вешнее ведро», where happiness is equated with fair spring weather, valued precisely because short. The frame component short duration registers in 64 units, less than preordination but ahead of all other features. A.Wierzbicka noted aspectual differences between Russian happiness predicates and their English counterparts. Such grammatical evidence converges with paremiological data to support a model of счастье as event-like rather than state-like in folk semantics. Continuous-state readings are statistically rare in the corpus.

Recurrent is the zero-sum logic. Folk wisdom treats happiness as a finite resource so that one person's gain entails another's loss. The proverb «Где радость, тут и горе, где горе, там и радость» inscribes joy and sorrow as inseparable opposites within a single distributive economy. Equally telling is «Счастье на коне, безсчастье под конём», which projects vertical asymmetry onto fortunes that exchange positions. A.D.Shmelev described the closed-resource model underlying many Russian axiological notions.

Table 2. Frequency of cognitive features in the corpus

Cognitive feature	Frequency	% of corpus
Preordination	87	27.9
Short duration	64	20.5
Zero-sum distribution	41	13.1
External fortune	31	9.9
Secrecy and concealment	23	7.4
Conditional dependence	22	7.1
Internal emotional state	18	5.8
Mixed and other	26	8.3

Distrust toward visible happiness forms a separate group. Sayings recommend silence about good fortune and warn against premature celebration. «Не хвались, идучи на рать, а хвались, идучи с рати» extends from military self-praise to fortune in general. The frame slot secrecy co-occurs with preordination in 23 units of the corpus. V.I.Karasik connects this pattern with the wider orientation of Russian linguoculture toward humility before fate. Comparable distrust appears far less frequently in West European paroemia, supporting the case for cultural specificity. Z.D.Popova and I.A.Sternin treat such patterns as evidence of nation-specific cognitive models.

Comparison of paremiological data with explanatory dictionary entries shows systematic divergence. Modern dictionaries, including the Ozhegov-Shvedova lexicon, define счастье through positive components such as «состояние полного удовлетворения, высшая радость, чувство глубокого довольства», whereas folk material foregrounds risk, brevity and ambivalence. The proverb «На счастье надейся, а сам не плошай» recommends pragmatic

action over passive trust. Y.D.Apresyan argued that integral lexicography must reflect such cultural connotations even when they fall outside narrow definitional cores.

Table 3. Comparison of dictionary and paremiological readings of счастье

Semantic feature	Dictionary entry (Ozhegov, Shvedova)	Paremiological data
Positive emotional state	present, core component	present, 16.3%
Brevity and transience	not marked	present, 20.5%
External determination	partial, secondary	present, 27.9%
Risk and ambivalence	absent	present, 12.2%
Distributive scarcity	absent	present, 13.1%
Conditional dependence	not marked	present, 7.1%

DISCUSSION

Quantitative imbalance between positive and cautionary paroemia warrants comment. The 59% share of cautionary readings is consistent with V.V.Kolesov's broader claim that Russian mentality codes axiological concepts through pairs of oppositions rather than through singular positive states. Yet the imbalance is not merely cultural decoration. It carries practical consequences for lexicographic representation, since dictionary users encountering only the positive definitional core receive a partial picture of how the concept actually functions in folk usage. A.Wierzbicka's earlier observation that happy in English and счастливый in Russian belong to different semantic networks finds renewed support in the present data. N.D.Arutyunova's work on emotional and ethical vocabulary similarly emphasized the importance of cultural background for proper interpretation.

Several theoretical implications follow. Frame analysis of axiological concepts must include negative or restrictive slots even where these appear marginal in standard definitions, since paremiological evidence shows them quantitatively dominant in folk usage. V.A.Maslova's argument that linguoculturology should treat proverbs as primary data rather than illustrative material receives confirmation here. Divergence between dictionary and paremiological readings raises a methodological question about which source should anchor a thesaurus of an emotional concept, a question that becomes acute when the thesaurus aims at non-native users. V.N.Telia's view that phraseological units carry cultural memory inaccessible to free combinations supports the inclusion of paroemia in such resources. Practical lexicographic decisions must therefore weight both data sources rather than privileging the codified entry.

CONCLUSION

Russian paremiological material encodes a model of happiness diverging in measurable ways from the model presented in modern explanatory dictionaries. Cautionary, fatalistic and transient readings dominate quantitatively, comprising 59% of the 312-unit corpus, while positive evaluative readings amount to 41%. Frame analysis identifies seven recurrent semantic groups, with preordination, short duration and zero-sum distribution as the highest-frequency cognitive features. These findings support the inclusion of paremiological data as primary input in lexicographic descriptions of axiological concepts, particularly in resources

oriented toward foreign users of Russian. Subsequent research should test whether comparable patterns hold across other emotional concepts and whether contemporary speakers retain the cautionary reading reflected in classical paroemia.

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