

# Combinatorial Mechanisms of New Paroimias

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**Abstract**—The article considers structural and semantic modifications of the traditional paroimias (sayings, proverbs, aphorisms, etc.) in combinatorial paremiology. In the theory such modifications are called combinatorial mechanisms of new paroimias formation. As a result of the analysis made, it is revealed that traditional paroimias convert into new paroimias (anti-proverbs or perverses). The causes of paroimias modifications are changes in the life and livelihood of the certain ethnic group. The focus of our research is to analyse mechanisms of new paroimias formation including structural, semantic and functional transformations of English paroimias.

**Keywords**—new paroimias, transformations of traditional paroimias, combinatorial mechanisms, combinatorial paremiology, anti-proverbs

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research of semantic changes in different lexical units is prospective for modern linguistics as a whole. Such changes are fixed in language units under influence of extra-linguistic factors. The consequences of semantic changes that have been revealed in our investigation are different modifications of paremiological units, i.e. proverbs, sayings, aphorisms, etc. The **relevance of the theme** is conditioned by the need to study the problems of semantic evolution and combinatorial transformation of language units as well as necessity to analyze paremiological units in English language. We conduct our research within the framework of combinatorial linguistics dealing with syntagmatic relations of language units and their combinatorial potential [1–5].

As known, paremiological units are studied by paremiology which has a purpose to define patterns of the paroimias formation, their objective characteristics and features of the syntactic structure, functional properties and peculiarities of their appearance in languages and speech [6, pp. 6–10]. However, the analysis of the paremiological fund shows that the group of these language units includes not only paroimias (traditional paroimias, e.g. sayings, proverbs, etc.) but also new paroimias (secondary language units which are formed in a consequence of the paroimias transformation or modification [7–9]. Here are some brief examples which illustrate transformations from paroimias to the new paroimias: *As a man sows, so shall he reap* => *As it shows, so shall you sweep* [10]; *A stitch in time saves nine* => *A stitch in time saves a lot of things* [8], etc.

According to these examples, a new paroimia is defined as a language unit created by means of the structural-semantic modification or newly formed by traditional paroimias models. A transformed paroimia generates other means of expressing the specific content than in norms and usage or objectifies the new content [11, p. 143]. Here is one more example. In English the paroimia *Doing is better than talking* [10] is transformed into the new paroimia *Doing is better than long talking* [8] by adding the component **long**. This component does not change the meaning of the original paroimia but details and emphasizes its content “benefits of actions in comparison with a long discussion”. Consequently, to differentiate new paroimias from proverbs, sayings, etc., to single out peculiarities of transformed paroimias and structural-semantic changes, we need to identify combinatorial mechanisms of new paroimias formation.

We carry out our work in the field of combinatorial paremiology, i.e. a branch of combinatorial linguistics dealing with the ways of paroimias transformation, differentiating the “paroimia” and “new paroimia” concepts in their structural and semantic statics and dynamics as well as revealing formation mechanisms of new paroimias and determining extra-linguistic causes for their appearance, etc. The main method of investigating paroimias, their transforms (new paroimias) and determining their evolutionary semantics is the dynamic analysis.

The objective of this article is to determine combinatorial mechanisms of new paroimias formation. The novelty of our research consists in singling out the combinatorial mechanisms of new paroimias formation and identifying the ways of paroimias transformation, considering the terms “paroimia” and “new paroimia” in their structural-semantic opposition and dynamics.

## II. NEW PAROIMIAS AND THEIR CLASSIFICATION

Paremiological units have certain structures, functions and include different language elements. In our research, we pay attention to the newly formed paroimias (new paroimias, anti-proverbs, folk aphorisms, quasi-aphorisms or quasi-proverbs, neoproverbs, etc.).

Newly formed paroimias nearly correlate with anti-proverbs. Nowadays, the term “anti-proverb” is not clearly defined. However, anti-proverbs are opposed to traditional paroimias and created under influence of extra-linguistic factors in people’s life. They “adapt” to living conditions of the certain ethnic group. People evaluate a new life situation and compare

it with social standards represented in traditional paroimias. As a result, they rethink and reform these paremiological units to express new realities and fix in their language.

The term “anti-proverb” was firstly used by the German paremiologist W. Mieder in his articles and dictionary “Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs”. The anti-proverb is a word-coinage inspired by the model of the German word “Antispruchwort”. It means a parodied, twisted or fractured proverb that reveals humorous or satirical speech play with traditional proverbial wisdom [8, p. 3-4].

The authors of the dictionary “Anti-proverbs in Russian language” emphasize that anti-proverbs are semantic antipodes or opposites of traditional paroimias [12, pp. 8-16]. Anti-proverbs are considered as modified paroimias with changes at different language levels [13, pp. 18]. These paremiological units can be interpreted without a certain context and operate as aphorisms [14, pp. 5-7]. Anti-proverbs are new paremiological units created by the model of traditional proverbs and sayings.

In English, anti-proverbs are indicated as *perverbs* most of all. The word perverb is formed by combining words *perverse*

and *proverb*. It means “twisted proverbs”, i.e. proverbs humorously modified by changing the final component in order to surprise or to mislead the listener. The term “perverb” is introduced by Maxine Groffsky as a synonymous to the “anti-proverb”.

Anti-proverbs are considered as:

- semantic antipodes or opposites of traditional paroimias [12, pp. 8-16];
- new paremiological units which are created by proverbs and sayings models [15, pp. 89];
- humorous alteration of the proverb, its peculiar semantic antipode used as a means of the language game [16, pp. 10-11];
- modified paroimias which have changes at the lexical, morphological and syntactic levels [13, pp. 18], etc.

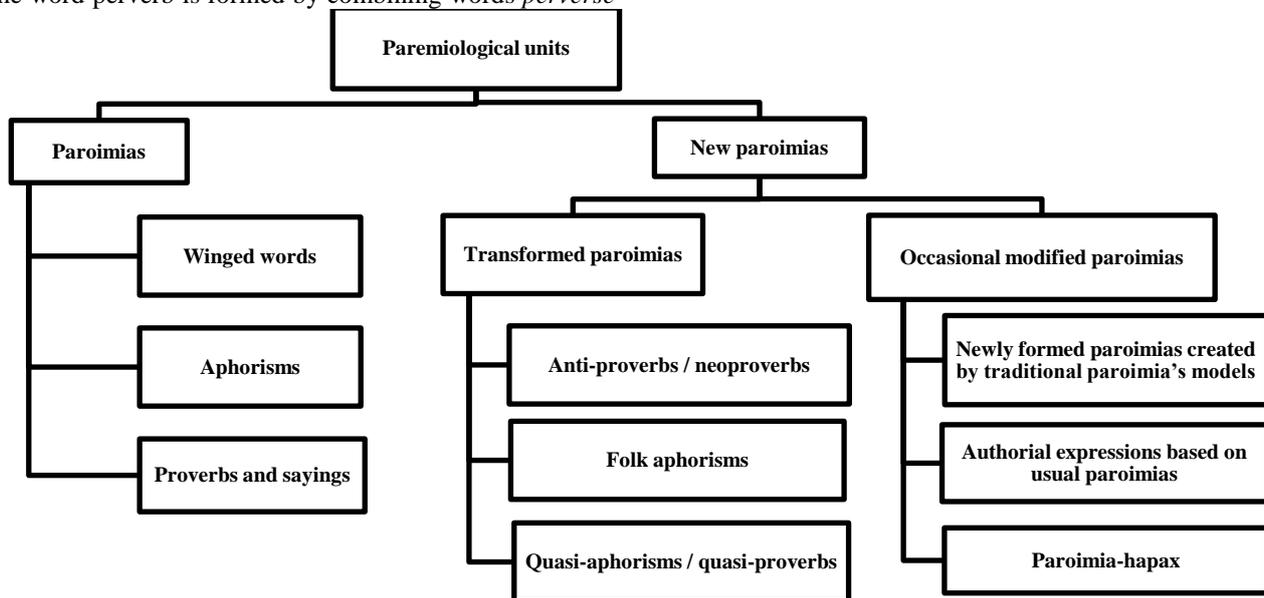


Fig.1. Classification of paremiological units

The term “anti-proverb” is closely related to the notion “new paroimia” [11, p. 143]. All mentioned definitions tend to reflect new paroimias as language units created by traditional paroimias transformation.

Besides that, the second type of new paroimias formation is **occasional modification** [15]: paroimia-hapax, authorial expressions based on usual paroimias, new paroimias created by traditional paroimias models. There are different kinds of paremiological units in Russian, English, German dictionaries of new paroimias [7–9] such as: 1) transformed proverbs, sayings, winged words, etc.; 2) occasionally modified paroimias and newly formed paremiological units; 3) structural and semantic models of transformed paroimias; 4) derivational sets of the transformed paroimia-intertext; 5) units with obscene

vocabulary, etc. The correlation between these paremiological units is described in Fig. 1.

Let us consider new paroimias in detail. The first category of the new paroimia is a **transformed paroimia**:

- 1) **anti-proverb** [7, 8] or **neoproverb** [17] is formed by the proverb or saying transformation into the new paroimia [15, p. 89], e.g. *Crime doesn't pay => Crime pays – be a lawyer; Here today, gone tomorrow => Hair today, gone tomorrow*, etc. [18, p. 333];
- 2) **quasi-aphorism** or **quasi-proverb** [19], i.e. a new aphorism which includes proverbs or sayings: *Haste makes waste => Haste makes waste, but not for all: the speed-accuracy trade-off does not apply to neurotics* written by Jams J. Bell [20];

- 3) **folk aphorism** – an aphorism or winged word transform [21], e.g. *We can't expect favors from nature* (the translation from Russian *Мы не можем ждать милостей от природы* written by I. V. Michurin) => *Nature has been already tired of giving us favors, so now it only requires an advance payment* (the translation from Russian *Природе уже надоело давать нам милостыню, поэтому теперь она требует только предоплату*).

Paremiological units of this category are understandable without context and known to people.

The second category of the new paroimia is an **occasional modified paroimia** which is divided into the following types [15]:

- 1) **paroimia-hapax** is a modified paroimia which can be correctly interpreted only in a certain context, i.e. *If you want to make God laugh tell him about you plans* => *I sit and talk to God and he just laughs at my plans*. The new paroimia is fixed in the song "Feel" written by R. William and reflects a conversation with God about the singer's love. This sense differs from the paroimia meaning "people's plans are changeable and imperfect";
- 2) **authorial expressions based on usual paroimias**, i.e. modified traditional paroimias which are understandable in a certain context and emphasize authorial thoughts, ideas, life experience or attitude to the objects of the surrounding reality, e.g. the paroimia *Every cloud has a silver lining* is used by R.M. Gates who quotes the journalist: "I had quite a reputation as a pessimist when I was in the intelligence business. A journalist once described me as the Eeyore of national security – **able to find the darkest cloud in any silver lining**. I used to joke that when an intelligence officer smelled the flowers, he'd look around for the coffin. Today, as one looks around the world – wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an ambitious and fanatical theocracy in Iran, a nuclear North Korea, terrorism, and more – there would seem to be ample grounds to be gloomy" [15]. The paroimia components "the darkest cloud" and "silver lining" are fixed in the new paroimia "**able to find the darkest cloud in any silver lining**". This paroimia is occasionally modified with the help of the structural-semantic change;
- 3) **newly formed paroimias created by traditional paroimias models**, i.e. new paroimias which are not often used by the ethnic group and created by paroimias structural-semantic models: *Every dog has his day* => *Every song has its place; If the cap fit, wear it* => *Hand fits giving, so do it*, etc.

Thus, new paroimias are formed by combination of paroimias components to reflect changes in the society, people's attitude to the surrounding reality or authors' opinion.

### III. NEW PAROIMIAS AND THEIR COMBINATORIAL MECHANISMS

The transformation process from traditional paroimias to new ones can be analyzed in the combinatorial-syntagmatic aspect in accordance with the rules of combinatorial linguistics.

As we know, syntagmatics is defined as relations of language units in one position. We consider them as positionally ordered language units. Combinatorics implies formation and substitution of language signs together creating a higher-level language unit.

Based on the M.M. Makovsky theory, "combinatorics is a principle of all linguistic units organization, a form of their existence, evolution and interactions. It appears and exists at all language levels" [22, pp. 5–7]. Combinatorics as a property of language units contributes to the solution of different problems caused by extra-linguistic factors and given by the certain content. Syntagmatics and combinatorics intersect and exist in the equipollent opposition. The role of *syntagmatics* is to construct language units of one level in a linear order; *combinatorics* is a semantic limiter in the case of transformation from paroimias to the new paroimias.

Transformation from traditional paroimias to new paroimias is realized in accordance with the following stages:

- 1) by solving communicative problems – by reflecting appeared characteristics of objects and phenomenon in newly formed and modified paremiological units;
- 2) by conditions to accomplish the given objectives – by application of basic rules to combine components for formation of new paroimias in order to represent newly emerged extra-linguistic features;
- 3) by the choice of specific language units to reflect the new meaning.

Based on the study of language materials and combinatorial rules, it is possible to distinguish the following combinatorial mechanisms of new paroimias:

- 1) **a structural transformation** includes implication, explication, changes of paroimias components, contamination, a combined type of the new paroimias formation, e.g. *No cross, no crown* => *No cross, no light; No song, no supper* => *No song, no nest*, etc.;
- 2) **a semantic transformation** involves partial and full lateralization of paroimias. All components of paroimias are used in the direct meaning in case of full lateralization. All components of paroimias are understandable in the direct meaning in case of partial lateralization, e.g. the paroimia *A stitch in time saves nine* is used in the title "A stitch in time saves nine: the crafty story of embroidery in medieval manuscripts" by Veronica Parkes in her article about restoring pages with the help of darning [23]. The paroimia is transformed to the new one by using the component *stitch* in the direct meaning;
- 3) **a functional transformation** is a change of the communicative purpose in paroimias, i.e. modifications of the communicative approach being a semantic-functional category of the language. The change of the paroimias communicative purpose can

be accompanied by partial or full lateralization [24, p. 30], e.g. the paroimia *Actions speak louder than words* is transformed to the interrogative sentence which demands an answer “Yes” or “No” at the forum Debate.org [25];

- 4) **a structural-semantic transformation** includes a set of combinatorial mechanisms which imply a semantic modification of the traditional paroimias, e.g. the paroimia *Better late than never* [10] is transformed to the new paroimia *Better never than late* [8] in a consequence of changing the meaning “it is necessary to complete a deal” to “doing something in time” and the modification of the paroimia structure using components substitutions.

Let us start by considering a few examples with the realization of combinatorial mechanisms.

The first mechanism is **the change of paroimias components**, e.g. the paroimia *Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today* [10] points to the need for completeness of work in time. Over time, semantics of this language unit has changed and entailed a structural modification of the paroimia, namely, the change of the component **you** to the component **your secretary**. The result of this modification is the formation of the new paroimia *Never put off until tomorrow what your secretary can do today* [8] reflecting people’s attitude to work, i.e. the activity which can be done by another person instead of them.

The second mechanism is **explication**, i.e. addition of the components. As an example, the paroimia *Many hands make light work* [10] emphasizes advantages of the teamwork (collective work): the more people do one thing, the faster it can be completed. However, social values change over time. The salary scale has become one of the main values. The new paroimia *Many hands make light work and a heavy payroll* [8] is modified in accordance with the extra-linguistic feature, i.e. dissatisfaction of American people with the low salaries or wages for the completed teamwork.

The third mechanism is **implication** – omission of one or more components in the traditional paroimia, e.g. the paroimia *All’s well that ends well* [10] reflects a good quality of the product. Over time, this paroimia has acquired a new semantics emphasizing the significance of the work completion. The paroimia is transformed to the new paroimia *All’s well that ends* [8] by the omission of the component **well**.

The fourth mechanism of the new paroimias formation is **contamination**, i.e. mixing of two or more paroimias components. The traditional paroimia *Let sleeping dogs lie* means that it is important to avoid troubles, unpleasantness or to ignore a problem because trying to deal with it could cause an even more difficult situation. However, this proverb is transformed to the new paroimia using contamination, i.e. the first paroimia *Let sleeping dogs lie* + the second paroimia *A barking dog never bites* => the new paroimia *A sleeping dog never bites* [18]. Thus, the new paroimia *A sleeping dog never bites* acquires the meaning “idleness”.

The fifth mechanism is **a combined type of the new paroimias formation**, e.g. the paroimia *Early to bed and early*

*to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise* [10] which emphasizes the necessity to maintain the daily routine to be healthy. Over time, this paroimia is being transformed into the new paroimia *Early to rise and early to bed makes a man socially dead* [8] as a result of implication and substitution. This new paroimia reflects the sense of uselessness to have a strict daily routine.

Thus, these examples show that traditional paroimias can be transformed to the new paroimias in accordance with the main rules of combinatorics of paroimias elements in different languages; new paroimias are created using the appropriate combinatorial mechanisms; the transformation from traditional paroimias to new ones reflects dynamic semantic changes of paremiological units formed under the influence of extra-linguistic factors.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The investigation of structural-semantic and functional transformation is relevant in modern linguistics. The semantics study of paroimias as well as their structural-semantic and functional modifications lets us identify their semantic dynamics. Newly formed paroimias reflect changes of the people’s attitude to certain objects or phenomena in the ambient reality. Paroimias are transformed to the new paroimias due to extra-linguistic causes. New paroimias are formed according to the combinatorics rules of:

- a) a structural transformation of paroimias (implication, explication, change of the paroimias components, contamination, etc.),
- b) a semantic transformation (partial or full lateralization),
- c) a functional transformation.

The analysis shows that our description of the traditional paroimias transformation to the new ones, their structural-semantic classification, identified combinatorial mechanisms of the new paroimias formation and extra-linguistic factors allows us to define a new branch of combinatorial linguistics (combinatorial paremiology) and to study these paremiological units during the classes of foreign languages correctly.

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