# Notes on the Semantics of the Romanian *cruce*: from Lexis to Proverbs

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*L'objectif de notre étude est d'observer et de décrire quelques valeurs sémantiques du mot roumain croix. Plus précisément, les sens lexicaux considérés proéminents et productifs sont mis en relation de correspondance avec les sens que ce mot a dans les proverbes roumains sur la croix. La tentative d'interpréter les convergences et les contrastes que le terme croix développe dans les proverbes ont la capacité d'engager les valeurs sémantiques prototypiques des certains éléments constitutifs dans des oppositions plus complètes que les distinctions supposées par l'analyse sémanthique lexicale.*

*Mots-clés : croix, sémantique lexicale, proverbes roumains*

As object, sign and concept, the cross has a vast array of values and functions within the material and spiritual life of many human communities, especially of those that embraced the Christianity. Within the realm of language, the importance of the cross is witnessed by the rich semantics of words, collocations and phrases used to speak about it.

The semantic richness of lexical items and fixed expressions such as idioms, sayings and proverbs that express something about the cross and cross-like entities and representations reveals the solidarity between language and culture. The linguist keen to observe how the signs of a language mirror concepts and cognitive scenarios would not be in wonder to find out that in spite of many obvious differences that naturally spring out in the history of human communities due to different habits, practices, beliefs and influences, there is still enough ground to assume that nouns like Engl. *cross*, Fr. *croix* or Rom. *cruce* and others display a relatively significant degree of resemblance which goes as far as unveiling at least two types of senses, objective and subjective.

The objective senses feature the semantic primitives /matter/ or /material/. In one way or another, they outline properties of the elements pertaining to the physical world and refer mainly to objects, places and the like. A typical example of this category is the sense 'structură alcătuită din două elemente liniare îmbinate perpendicular' ('structure consisting of two intersecting linear elements at right angles to one another').

The subjective senses feature the semantic primitives /spirit/ or /spiritual/ and account for the domain of spiritual life, here largely understood as the human complex of ideas, beliefs and emotions. In short, they reveal the spiritual values of



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the human subjects. Senses like 'creştinătate' ('Christianity, Christendom') or 'suferinţă' ('distress') fall into this category.

Even if the attempt to distinguish between the objective and the subjective senses of words like the Romanian noun *cruce* may be regarded as of a rather tall order, it is worth noticing that the distinction may prove useful to show that subjective senses are usually rooted in objective senses. In other words, senses give rise to senses so that the ever-changing kaleidoscope of life may be put into words and phrases.

In order to observe how proverbs as facts of language do frame facts of life, a few remarks on the semantics of *cruce* seem in order. It is the necessary step to be taken when examining the continuity between the lexical and translexical semantics[1].

The Romanian noun *cruce* comes from the Latin word *crux* (acc. *crucem*, gen. *crucis*). As such, it inherited the sense 'structure consisting of two intersecting elements' which is probably the oldest sense in the semantic network since it favored the creation of a rich polysemy and the formation of such regional and popular derivatives as *crucelnic*[2] (cruce + suf. -elnic) 'part of the weaving loom', 'reel', *crucelniţă* (cruce + suf.-elniţă) 'part of the cart', *crucioaie* (cruce + suf. -oaie), 'big cross', 'cross of the cart'; *crucişoară* (cruce + suf. –işoară) 'small cross', *cruciţă* (cruce + suf. –iţă) 'small cross', 'cross-shaped part of on object', *cruciuliţă* (cruce + suf. -uliţă) 'cross-shaped ornament' etc. The above mentioned derivatives usually have objective senses.

However, one objective sense of the Latin word *crux*, namely 'any wooden frame on which criminals were exposed to die'[3], is related to the senses that depict emotional states like deep sufferings, great misfortunes and torment and this enrichment is found not only in the semantic structure of the Latin *crux* but also in the polysemantic networks of the direct (Fr. *croix*, Rom. *cruce*) and indirect (Engl. cross) lexical descendants. Subjective senses like 'extreme discomfort, torture' and 'anything which causes grief or annoyance, a plague, torment etc.'[4] suggest that a change of focus took place in the complex civilization and language of the Romans and this turn is undoubtedly due to the rise and growth of Christianity. It is not a just semantic shift from the cross itself to the reactions of the human subjects prone to crucifixion or witnessing it but a major ideological and cultural metamorphosis that converted the ancient means of punishment that made the Romans feared into a revered symbol of human sacrifice and endurance.

From a linguistic perspective, one of the consequences of this extraordinary turn was that in many if not all languages spoken throughout the Christian world the

[1] In the present paper, by translexical semantics I understand the semantics of language units larger than words.

[2] The words *are taken from Mic dicţionar academic* (MDA), Editura Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2010, vol. I, p. 557.

[3] The *OLD*, 1968, p. 463.

[4] The *OLD*, 1968, p. 463.



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words for CROSS also came to mean 'something unavoidable that must be endured'. In Romanian, for example, *cruce* means both 'deep and life-long suffering'[5] and 'soartă' ('fate'), 'destin' ('destiny')[6]. This striking semantic development may count as an argument to support the idea that languages are the great repositories of ideologies.

Returning to the polysemy of the Romanian noun *cruce* and its lexical family, we must also emphasize not only the shift from the matter to the spirit but also the relationship between the profane and the sacred, conceived in terms of either convergence or contrast. Thus, the sense 'obiect sfînt venerat de creştini' ('sacred object revered by the Christians') converges with senses like 1) 'simbol al credinţei creştine' ('symbol of Christianity'), 2) 'crucifix se care se foloseşte preotul în timpul slujbelor religioase' ('crucifix used by the priest during the religious ceremonies') or 3) 'gest făcut cu mîna dreaptă pentru a invoca ajutorul divin' ('gesture performed with the right hand in order to call for God's help'); since all of them feature the semantic primitive /consecrated/. At the same time, the sense under discussion contrasts with senses like a) 'parte a jugului' ('part of the yoke'), b) 'aripi ale unei mori de vînt' ('the wings of the windmill') or c) 'cumpăna fîntînii' ('well sweep') which, in turn, feature the opposite semantic primitive, /secular/.

The tension brought by convergence and contrast relationships suggests that not all senses of a polysemous word are of equal importance. While some senses act as superordinates that determine the instantiation of lesser ones, others conveniently play a minor role in the network, as subordinates. For instance, the sense 'structură alcătuită din două elemente liniare îmbinate perpendicular' ('frame made of two perpendicular linear elements') converges with other senses that outline the identity, the use or the importance of a certain revered or mundane object, may it be a (holly) crucifix, a part of the yoke, the well sweep, a mechanical shaft or the beam structure of a building.

The convergence and the contrast among senses within the semantic network of a polysemous word might indicate a certain sense's prominence and its productivity. The properties could also be weighed by taking into account the senses of the derivatives that form the lexical family. For instance, one of the objective senses of the Romanian noun *cruce*, namely 'structură alcătuită din două elemente liniare îmbinate perpendicular' ('structure made of two intersecting perpendicular linear elements'), can be deemed as prominent and productive since it converges with other senses that display the feature /cross-shaped physical object/ within the polysemantic network of the word and with the senses of derivatives like *crucioaie* 'big cross', *crucişoară* 'small cross', *cruciţă* 'small cross', *cruciuliţă* 'small cross' etc. The convergence of senses within the lexical-semantic inventory represented by the polysemous word and its derivatives points

[5] Cf. MDA, 2010, vol. I, p. 557.

[6] The sense is particularly relevant for sentences like „Asta i-a fost crucea !" ("This was his cross !") .



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to the fact that a prominent and productive sense is in fact a vivid and adaptive core from which many other senses may develop.

The contrast among senses is useful to detect changes in prototipicality, if one assumes that semantic prototypes change over time. While it is true that convergent senses may signal a prototype within the polysemantic network of a word and of its lexical family, it is also true that contrasts among senses may signal changes in prominence and productivity. In the semantic network of the Romanian noun *cruce*, senses like 'chin'-'torment', 'soartă'-'fate' and 'creştinătate'-'Christianity' stand in contrast with the prototypical sense 'structură alcătuită din două elemente perpendiculare intersectate''structure with two intersecting perpendicular linear elements'. As a matter of fact, they indicate the existence of another nuclear conceptualization, that of human endurance and faith against all odds. This is, of course, the linguistic enactment of a powerful and resilient ideology centered on a new understanding of the man's material and spiritual life. The cross upon which Jesus died in order to save and to redeem mankind has become more than a mere instrument of torture used to execute slaves, rebels, despised enemies and criminals. For the Christian mind, it is the epitome of suffering and sacrifice, of faith in God, of redemption and Resurrection. The languages spoken by Christians are bound to assert its symbolism. In contrast with the way of life that made the cross a dreaded means of capital punishment, the Christian ideology has placed the cross at the heart of the greatest sacrifice ever made.

The ideological turn of tide has much relevance for the conceptual output of the scenarios that underlie the semantic networks of nouns like *crux*, *cruce*, *croix*, *cross*. According to the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (OLD, 1968, p 463), the senses of the Latin noun *crux* displays the capital punishment scenario. In its simplest form, this scenario implies four important conceptual elements: the punisher, the means of punishment, the victim and the outcome. Not all conceptual elements of the capital punishment scenario are equally framed in the semantic network of the Latin *crux*. According to the lexical descriptions offered by OLD, the first of the meanings focuses on the means of punishment, on the social status of the victims and on the outcome[7]; the following two concentrate mainly on the outcome and on the nature of the instrument of capital punishment[8] while the third is mainly concentrated on the means used to inflict the harm[9].

The different framing suggests that the semantics of the Latin *crux* featured two prominent aspects of the capital punishment scenario: a) the nature of the instrument of punishment (any wooden frame, sometimes even a spike) and, by extension, the cause of harm (plague, torment etc.) and b) the physical and/or

[7] [Any wooden frame]$^{\text{MEANS OF PUNISHMENT}}$ on which [criminals]$^{\text{VICTIM}}$ [were exposed to die]$^{\text{OUTCOME}}$.

[8] (a) '[Death]$^{\text{OUTCOME}}$ [by the cross]$^{\text{MEANS OF PUNISHMENT}}$ , [crucifixion]$^{\text{MEANS OF PUNISHMENT}}$; (b) '[extreme discomfort]$^{\text{OUTCOME}}$ , [torture]$^{\text{MEANS OF PUNISHMENT}}$ .

[9] [Anything]$^{\text{CAUSE}}$ which causes [grief or annoyance]$^{\text{OUTCOME}}$ , [a plague, torment etc.]$^{\text{CAUSE}}$.



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emotional outcome of the harm done (death, extreme discomfort, grief, annoyance).

In comparison with the semantics of the etymon, the lexical descendants of the Latin *crux* have far more intricate polysemantic networks and lexical families in which each of the two basic aspects of the ancient semantic structure have taken relatively autonomous pathways and developed into prominent and productive sense generators. At the same time, under the growing influence of Christianity, the perception upon the cross as material object, means of physical and emotional harm and religious symbol changed dramatically.

According to the information provided by various etymological and explanatory dictionaries of Latin[10] and treatises on the Ancient practices of crucifixion[11], *crux* generally named not one but several relatively similar instruments of torture. The Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca, quoted by Gallonio (1904, p. 2), described them rather accurately: "I see before me crosses not all alike, but differently made by different peoples: some hang a man head downwards, some force a stick upwards through his groin, some stretch out his arms on a forked gibbet. I see cords, scourges, and instruments of torture for each limb and each joint."[12].

While it is clear that in the times of Seneca and later on, "les poteaux plantés en terre étaient tous inclus par les Anciens sous le nom général de Croix" (Gallonio, 1904, p.2), it is less clear when did the change in the perception on the shape of the cross actually occurred. One can only presume that it was during the Middle Ages that I-, Y- or T - shaped crosses gave way to †- or X-shaped crosses. It was not only the perception on the shape of the cross that was altered but also the meaning of the Latin noun *crux*[13] as the word seems to have weakened its old, prominent and productive meaning ('any wooden frame on which criminals were exposed to die'[14]) so that a rather specialized sense ('instrument and symbol of Christian martyrdom') could emerge and strengthen.

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[10] See, for example, Jacob, M. F., *Lexique étymologique latin-français*, A-L, Paris, Imprimerie et Librairie Classiques, 1883, p. 231: "crux, crucis, f. Croix, instrument de suplice, gibet"; Lewis, Charlton T., *A Latin Dictionary for Schools*, American Book Company, New York, Cincinnati, Chicago, 1916, p. 249: "*crux*, *ucis*, f. **I.** Lit. **A.** In gen., *a gallows*, *frame*, *tree* (on which criminals were impaled or hanged), B. Esp. *a cross* (…) **II.** Meton. torture, trouble, misery, destruction"; Walde, A, Hofmann, J. B., *Lateinisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, Heidelberg, 1938, Erster Band, p. 296: "crux, crucis, f. (…) 'Marterholz', 'Kreuz'".

[11] Gallonio, Antonio, *Traité des Instruments des martyre et des divers Modes de supplice employés par les paiens contre les chrétiens (1591)*, Paris, Charles Carrington Librairie-Éditeur, 1904, p. 2-3.

[12] Seneca, *Of Consolation: To Marcia* (20.3), http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Of_Consolation:_To_Marcia#XX.

[13] Niermeyer's *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, fasciculus I, 1976, p. 284 records the following senses for the Medieval Latin *crux*: "1*signe de la Croix. 2. *torture, martyre. 3. *mortification ascétique. 4. ordalie de la Croix".

[14] OLD, 1968, p 463.



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This plausible semantic change revolving around the epitomic crucifixion of Jesus Christ outlines the interference between two competing cognitive scenarios, the old capital punishment frame and the emergent Christian scenario of sacrifice[15]. Similar to the capital punishment, the sacrifice presupposes the existence of an agent that performs the sacrifice and of a cause that requires the sacrifice, the procedures (the rituals) that must be accomplished by means of various instruments and techniques, an entity to be sacrificed and an outcome. Unlike the capital punishment, the sacrifice is essentially a process of consecration by which an entity, be it object or being, is transferred from the profane to the sacred (Mauss and Hubert, 1997, p. 49-62).

The contrast between the scenarios is far more obvious than the presupposed similarities. Whereas the capital punishment ends with a negative outcome (the death of the victim), the sacrifice turns any potential material loss into a far greater spiritual benefit.

Any attempt to find the links between the depicted scenarios and the senses that illustrate them within the lexical inventory of a word would serve the interest of noticing how prototipicality changes over time.

For once, the semantics of the Classical Latin *crux*, structured, as we argued, around the capital punishment scenario contrasts with the semantics of the Medieval Latin *crux*, structured, as shown in Niermeyer (1976, p. 284), around the Christian sacrifice scenario.

Furthermore, within the polysemantic network of the Romanian *cruce*, the two scenarios have different semantic outputs. For example, a meaning like 'instrument de tortură în Antichitate format din două bucăți inegale de lemn prinse perpendicular una de cealaltă'[16] counts as one of the very rare illustrations of the capital punishment scenario. It is clearly a modern semantic acquisition. What we usually find in the polysemantic network is, at best, the interference of the capital punishment frame with the sacrifice scenario, as proven by the meaning of the idiom *a(-i) pune crucea/crucile* 'a omorî pe cineva, mai ales, în bătaie'[17] . A possible explanation for the lack of semantic efficiency of the capital punishment frame is that, under the growing ideological pressure of Christianity, it did not

[15] The capital punishment scenario and the sacrifice scenario are undoubtedly very old, much older than the practice of crucifixion and the emergence of Christianity. For an anthropological analysis of sacrifice see, for instance, Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert, *Essai sur la nature et la function du sacrifice*, 1899 (in Romanian, *Eseu despre natura şi funcţiile sacrificiului*, translated by Gabriela Gavril and forwarded by Nicu Gavriluță, Editura Polirom, Iaşi, 1997). The Christian scenario of sacrifice corresponds to a version of the structural model. The lexical entry found in Niemeyer, 1978, I, p. 284 it is undoubtedly related to the Christian sacrifice scenario and. Given the time span of the citations mentioned in Niemeyer's dictionary, the capital punishment scenario has probably been superseded by the Christian sacrifice scenario sometimes between 550 and 1150.

[16] The description is an adaptation of the meaning given by the authors of MDA, vol. I, 2010, p. 557. The English translation would be 'Ancient instrument of torture consisting of two unequal wooden pieces perpendicularly attached to one another'.

[17] Literally, to put someone to the cross 'to kill someone, especially by beating him/her to death'.



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seem to complete the transition from Latin to modern Romance languages[18]. Instead, more practical conceptualizations seem to have survived the archaic scenario of crucifixion, namely CROSS-LIKE ENTITY/ ELEMENT[19] and DISTRESS, as illustrated by meaning relationships within the polysemantic network of the Romanian *cruce*. Their prominence and productivity are well documented by a variety of senses and mirror the semantic network of the etymon.

The sacrifice scenario is far more entrenched than the capital punishment scenario. It is not only reflected by convergent senses regarding the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the major symbols of the Christian faith (the sacred object, the representations of the consecrated object, the gestures performed by the members of the Christians communities etc.), various religious ornaments and the like, but it also motivates semantic instantiations of secular realities such as taxation[20] and social relationships[21].

To conclude, the Romanian lexical descendant of the Latin *crux* has a polysemantic network in which the capital punishment scenario lost its importance and gave way for the semantic evolution of its most prominent constituents, CROSS-LIKE ENTITY/ ELEMENT and DISTRESS, whereas the Christian sacrifice scenario gained prominence and made ready the emergence of objective and subjective senses, not only religious but also secular. The occasional blending of various attributes pertaining to the two scenarios was also made possible. The theoretical assumption staged by the examples is that the conceptual schemata called scenarios trigger, in the words of language, interwoven semantic instantiations.

So far, it has been argued that convergence and contrast are systematic sense relationships indicating the prominence and the productivity of a given sense within the polysemantic network of the word *cruce* and of its lexical family.

The rich inventory of words pertaining to the lexical family of the Romanian noun *cruce* stands in contrast with the small number of Romanian proverbs containing the same word.

One possible explanation as to why a lexical item with a potent polysemantic network and a rather large lexical family plays a minor role in the creation of proverbs is that it gives rise to a great numbers of compounds and phrasemes as

[18] Niermeyer's *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, fasciculus I, 1976, p. 284 records the following senses for the Medieval Latin *crux*, clearly related to the Christian sacrifice scenario: "1*signe de la Croix. 2. *torture, martyre. 3. *mortification ascétique. 4. ordalie de la Croix". The lexical entries reveal that the capital punishment scenario has been superseded the Christian sacrifice scenario sometimes between 550 and 1150, according to the time span of the citations included in the already mentioned dictionary.

[19] Many folk phytonyms, zoonyms, toponyms as well as other categories of terms underline the prototypical nature of such conceptualizations.

[20] 'Unitate de doi până la patru soldați, obligați să plătească căpeteniilor o anumită cotă de impozitare'- 'A unit of two to four soldiers bound to pay their captains a certain tax rate', MDA, vol. I, 2010, p. 557.

[21] 'Frate (mai rar soră) de cruce – prieten intim (nedespărțit)' – 'sworn brother (or, more rare, ~ sister) – close friend', MDA, vol. I, 2010, p. 558.



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well as other multiword structures and sentences like blessings, profanities and so on. In other words, the distributional effectiveness of the word seems weaker in proverbs than in idioms and other fixes expressions.

Another possible reason as to why there is but a small number of proverbs containing the word *cruce* is that within the Romanian paremiological thesaurus the dominant moral and spiritual values are enforced by basic and effective conceptual pairings such as ANIMAL - HUMAN, WISDOM-FOOLISHNESS, GOOD -BAD, GOD – DEVIL etc., which stand as central and in relation to which the sporadic representations evidenced by the word *cruce* are peripheral.

In fact, a closer look at the Romanian proverbs containing the noun *cruce* reveals that they display some of the oppositions that are at work within the lexical semantic network of the respective word. Therefore, it does not come as surprise to notice that, sometimes, proverbial semantics reflects the prominent senses of a given word.

Table 1. Prominent and productive senses of the Romanian noun *cruce*

| Word | Semantic features | | Sense | Realia |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *cruce* | /material/ | /secular/ | 'structură alcătuită din două elemente îmbinate cruciș' | cross-like entities, things, shapes, places etc. |
| | | /religious/ | 'crucea pe care a fost răstignit Iisus Hristos' | religious and sacred items: crucifixes, crosses etc. |
| | /spiritual/ | /secular/ | 1.'chin' 2. 'soartă' 'destin' | distress, torment, fate |
| | | /religious/ | 'simbol al creştinismului', 'religia creştină' | abstract symbolism, Christian faith |

In the light of the semantic distinctions sketched in Table 1, there are proverbs in which the noun *cruce* stands for objects and proverbs in which it stands for spiritual values. The first type of proverbial meaning may be labeled as *objective*, since it refers to the cross as something material, either secular or religious. The second type of proverbial meaning may be considered *subjective*, since it refers to various ideas and beliefs embodied in the semantics of the cross.

The two categories of proverbial meaning are fuzzy, with no clear-cut boundaries. Given the 'semantic loop' of proverbs, by virtue of which the literal and the figurative meanings concur, the distinction between the two categories is tentative rather than prescriptive. To put it differently, the reading of the proverb per se outlines that one of the lexical constituents bears an objective or subjective sense, whilst the reading of the proverb in context suggests a different figurative semantic interpretation, yet linked to the literal one. Consequently, the distinction



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between objective and subjective semantic values is useful only to assess the convergence and the contrast among the paremiological lexical constituents. Since most of the proverbs containing the word *cruce* display a blending between the objective and subjective senses of the word, it seems more fruitful to postulate the existence of a semantic continuum between the two semantic poles.

On the one hand, in the proverb "*Dintr-un lemn faci și cruce și lopată*"[22] (Zanne, I, p. 203), *cruce* may be considered to have an objective sense since the syntagmatic convergence among the nominal constituents, namely *lemn*, *cruce* and *lopată*[23], emphasizes the idea that things of the same matter take different identities. The objective sense of *cruce*, namely 'wood made object' is enforced by the vicinity of *lemn*, on the one side, and *lopată*, on the other side. However, the denotative convergence of the nominal constituents does not prevent the proverb from acquiring equally legitimate connotative (figurative) readings in various communicative contexts:

a) If someone used the proverb to evaluate parent-child relationships, the proverb would come to mean 'Parents can have both good and bad children'.

b) If someone resorted to the proverb when speaking about actions and their effects, the paremiological reading in context would probably be 'The same action may cause different effects'.

c) If someone appealed to the proverb when talking about trade-offs in terms of their upsides and downsides, then the meaning would very likely be 'Any trade-off has both benefits and losses'.

The correlations are obviously based on analogy. What the denotative reading issues in terms of MATTER (piece of wood) and ARTIFACTS (*cruce*, *lopată*), the connotative readings issue in terms of ESSENCE and APPEARANCE. At the very heart of the proverb lies the empirical relativism according to which the aspects of reality are deemed to be faceted.

On the other hand, a proverb like "*Una e crucea și alta e neamul*"[24] (Zanne, VI, p. 531) brings forth a subjective sense of the word *cruce*, namely '(Christian) religion'. It undoubtedly pertains to the domain of spiritual life and stands in contrast with the sense of the word *neam*, 'kin'. The semantic tension between the nouns *cruce* and *neam* is semantically supported by the opposition between the indefinite pronominal constituents *una* and *alta*. The basic observation around which the meaning of the proverb revolves is that in times of need strong social ties have a greater impact than the spiritual bonds with (unknown) people of the same faith. In other words, religious beliefs do not equate daily social networking and strong mutual relationships among people since human communities of the same religion may not and usually do not share the same social habits and organization. The teaching behind the proverbial meaning is that in times of hardship one should

[22] The literal translation of the proverbs would be: "From a piece of wood both a cross and a shovel can be made".

[23] Their common semantic feature is /matter/.

[24] Literally: "One is the cross and another is the kin".



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better look after his akin than put his trust into the hands of those with whom he or she probably has nothing more in common than coincidental similarities.

Another possible reading of the proverb is that religion and social interaction fulfil different goals and aspirations and, consequently, they should not be confused in their scopes. More precisely, higher-order concordances should not prevail over down-to-earth relations. According to this line of interpretation, the meaning of the Romanian proverbs resembles those of such English proverbs as "*A near neighbour is better than a far-dwelling kinsman*" or "*Near is my shirt but nearer is my skin*" which express the idea that individual social relationships and self-interest, as practical realities, have a more significant impact in the life of an individual than the highly valued yet extensive biological or ideological affinities.

The main function of proverbs is to evaluate human existence, to ponder its importance in relation to various aspects of reality. By reason of this function, proverbs imply bottom-up and top-down cognitive approaches towards actuality. The bottom-up strategy is used to generalize the value of particular experiences and observations. A certain event turns into a cognitive scenario that subsequently is deemed typical for a great number of real-life situations of the same sort. For instance, a proverb like "*The careless shepherd make many a feast for the wolf*" stresses that the recklessness of the guardian (the shepherd) works for the good of the predator (the wolf). In its virtual[25] meaning, the proverb states that the loss of one becomes the benefit of another.

On the contrary, the top-down strategy enables the creation of a comprehensive proverbial model that applies for particular and seemingly unrelated situations. A proverb such as "*Actions speak louder than words*" underlines the better value of actions than that of mere speaking. It posits the idea that what we do offers better evidence than what we say we do. Due to the general, inclusive nature of its meaning, the proverb may serve as either comment or argument[26] that needs to be supported by particular facts. For example, if a business man promises to donate several computers to a school but fails to do so, the virtual meaning of the proverb, namely 'deeds are better than words', is apt to summarize the facts as it is able to capture the essence of another unrelated event, say, a police raid over the illegal facilities working for the profits of a drug lord.

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[25] Here, "virtual" signals that proverbial meanings are autonomous and latent in the sense that they may or may not be bound to a context. The assumption that it is possible to notice what proverbs mean in the absence of a textual or discursive context provides enough ground to say that in any proverb per se there is an "unsaturated" semantic potential that either demands for contextual fill-in (i.e. the proverbs acts as a template for the context) or finds appropriateness in the context (meaning that the context requires the use of a certain proverb). In other words, the semantic virtuality of proverbs is related to but not identical with what structural linguists such as Bernard Pottier call a "virtuème" ("tout élément qui est latent"). For details on virtuemes, see Pottier, Bernard, 1974, *Linguistique générale*, Klincksieck, Paris.

[26] To have a better understanding of the proverbs' capacity to serve as either evaluative comments or evaluative arguments, see Norrick, Neal, 1985, *How Proverbs Mean. Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*, Mouton Publishers, Berlin, New York, p. 13-18.



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It has already been stated that the proverbial use of the word *cruce* usually involves a blending between the objective and the subjective senses of the term. A typical example is the proverb "*Creştin cu crucea-n sân şi cu dracul de-a spinare*"[27] (Zanne, VI, p. 530) in which the collocation "*cu crucea-n sân*" indicates that *cruce* means 'crucifix', whereas the rest of the proverb, "şi cu dracul de-a spinare", suggests the activation of an equally important meaning of *cruce*, i.e. 'faith'. In more detail, the understanding of the proverb relies on constituents that denotatively or connotatively outline the conceptual opposition[28] between good and evil and constituents that render the opposition in terms of spatial dispositions, the front ("în sân") and the back ("de-a spinare"). Thus, the blending involves not only the contrast between the meanings of the nominal constituents but also the semantic and syntactic difference between the nominal constituents on the one hand, and their adverbial modifiers of space, on the other hand. The semantic contrasts (*cruce – drac*, *în sîn – de-a spinare*) aim at unfolding one the major flaws of human nature: hypocrisy. In order to achieve this evaluative goal, the semantic antinomies among the constituents are exploited to create the simple and memorable image of the two-faced individual. The "bright" face is instantiated by piety[29], the "dark" face, by corruption[30]. The two faces may be interpreted on distinct levels of prominence conveyed by contrastive conceptualization. At the first level, one can find the contrast between virtue and corruption; the hypocrite is pictured as a corrupt individual who wears the mask of virtue. At the second level, the contrast between good and evil creates a more inclusive portrait: the hypocrite is an evil human being who falsely bears the attributes of goodness. At the third and highest level of prominence stands the contrast between GOD and THE DEVIL, as one of the most prominent and productive conceptual pairs[31] around which proverbial semantics revolves. The hypocrite is depicted as an individual who lost his faith in God and got possessed by the Devil.

The double identity of the cross is also present in proverbs like "*Cine umblă cu crucea-n sân, ca crucea uscat rămâne*" (Zanne, VI, p. 530), "*Cine crede în cruce, ca crucea se usucă*" (Zanne, VI, p. 530), and "*Cine înjură de cruce/ Ca ea o să se*

[27] Literally, "Christian with the cross on his breast and the devil on the back". The English proverbial equivalent is quite similar: "The cross on his breast and the devil in his heart".

[28] *Cruce* stands for 'crucifix' / 'faith' and *drac* stands for 'evil supernatural being' / 'devilishness'.

[29] The Romanian idiomatic constructions *a umbla / a fi cu crucea-n sîn* stereotypically describe a gentle, pious or faithful individual.

[30] In many Romanian idioms the devil is conceived as the archetypal agent of corruption. For details, see, for example, the entries in MDA, 2010, vol. I, p. 750-751.

[31] Romanian proverbs like "*Pe dracu la cruce nu-l poţi duce*" (literally, "You can't take the devil to the cross") do not only support the claim that the conceptual pair GOD - THE DEVIL lies at the heart of many paremiological formulas, but also show that the constituent *cruce* stands in metonymical relationship with both *biserică* (church) şi *Dumnezeu* (God). The most plausible reading of the proverbs is that no one can take the devil to the church, in the sense that the essence of evil cannot be turned into the essence of good.



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*usuce*" (Zanne, VI, p. 531)[32]. All of them semantically encode the basic empirical observation that a wooden cross gets dry just like any other wood made object. The empirical observation is then used to create an analogical mapping between the domain of wooden artifacts and the domain of human experiences. By analogy, the wood's property to dry up is projected onto the realm of human behavior and moral values. The conceptual metaphor A SPIRITUAL VALUE IS AN ARTIFACT shows that a concrete source-domain (artifacts) renders an abstract target-domain (spiritual values) more intelligible. The correspondence between the denotation and the connotations of the proverbial constituent *cruce* reflects the conceptual mapping in that the objective sense is linked with the source-domain while the subjective sense stands in connection with the target-domain. However, the interpretation of proverbs involves not only the complex conceptual mappings that lie beyond their meanings but also the awareness that human beings have different reactions and attitudes towards moral values, which are also encoded in the paremiological formulas. As it is the case, the proverb "*Cine umblă cu crucea-n sân, ca crucea uscat rămâne*" hints as the view that the exclusive enactment of a moral value triggers potentially unfavorable effects. This evaluation is not uncommon in proverbs, which often recommend a balanced course of thought and action. The other two proverbs echo contradictory points of view. Whereas the proverb "*Cine crede în cruce, ca crucea se usucă*" infers that someone with ardent religious beliefs does not fit into the world of on-going daily compromise, the proverb "*Cine înjură de cruce/ Ca ea o să se usuce*" warns over the risks of swearing at the cross. One proverb discloses the profane opinion that religious zeal may be a hindrance; the other stigmatizes the act of swearing. What is equally important is that similar syntactic templates carry antagonistic meanings. This puzzling ability to shed new light on the nature of outer and inner realities, to unveil their facets, is what makes proverbs emblematic facts of language and intricate cognitive artifacts.

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[32] "He who carries the cross on his breast dries like the cross", "He who believes in the cross dries like the cross" and "He who swears at the cross may he dry like the cross".



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