NUANCES CONVEYED BY COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN PROVERBIAL SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Anca-Mariana Pegulescu

Assoc. Prof., PhD, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romanian Academy

Abstract: There is no doubt that proverbs still represent an important cultural heritage linking past into present and foreseeing events, connections, situations. Proverbs function in interaction and convey through specific communicative strategies different degrees of ritualisation. Comparing Romanian proverbs to their English versions I have observed and retained profound interrelations between paremic patterns and social structures describing society as a whole. My approach is a descriptive and a contrastive one, having analysed the etnofields ***man, work*** *and* ***social hierarchy.***

Keywords: dichotomy, hearer, hypothesis, interrelation, sender

1. When acquiring language people learn words meant to label the world around them, the concepts and values that make sense of what they see and understand, of the society they live in.

Proverbs belonged more to the oral code than to the written one and were concieved and transmited by adult members of a completely or predominately oral society. The importance of orality has been proved while acknowledging the expanding function of writing. If we admit with Ong[1] that only about 78 of the 3000 languages in existence have a literature, we may ask ourselves about the relevance of the oral techniques used in the space of the written word and narratives recorded after many generations and changed from what was told yesterday and what might be told tomorrow.

It was in action and interaction that the most profund interrelations between language and society were to be found and proverbs should not be overlooked.

It is only within the past five or six centuries that Romanian as a written language was recorded. It went the same for English (perhaps one century earlier) but tales and proverbs appeared much later in collections that have been published in the 19th-20th centuries. What is obviously a common feature for both languages is that proverbs became a reference to literary history and a mirror of social changes.

Speakers are well aware of the fact that successful management of interpersonal relationships is a difficult task. Anticipation of the action of others, calculation of short and long term costs and gains, people's behaviour are illustrated by proverbs. Predictability is very important. Proverbs function on different degrees of ritualisation of the human interaction as "they are signs and models of certain situations or certain relations between objects" according to Permyakov [in Kapchits,G:2020, p.135].

[1] Ong, W, J ,1982, *Orality and Literary. The Technologizing of the World*. London, Methuen

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

That is why I have selected proverbs that can be grouped in three ethnofields: *social hierarchy*, *man* and *work*.

2. Proverbs do not always display *the sender* of the message. From a pragmatic angle, the sender should take into account social factors like:

- the social distance between the speaker and the hearer;
- the relative power of the speaker over the hearer;
- the ranking of imposition in a certain culture.

The paremic units of the corpus I selected, are in their great majority lacking personal pronouns in Romanian. Still, such an example like:

R(omanian): Eu dorm, tu dormi, cine să ducă sacul?
E(nglish): I proud/stout and thou proud/stout who shall bear the
Ashes out?

implies the two poles of the dialogue.

The social hierarchy is differently seen in the two languages. In Romanian it can be seen as a big world wheel (*roata lumii*) while English decides that ”the world is a ladder for some to go up and some down.”

2.1. The dichotomy between *superior* and *inferior* is seen in very many units and there is even a variety of ranks:

R: ...în satul tău fruntaș decât codaș la oraș.
E: ...be first in a village than second at home.
R... fruntea cozii decât coada frunții.
E: ...the head of an ass than the tail of a horse.

The village is seen through ”the peasant”, ”the yeomen” and ”the noblemen,” while the town is targetted less.

For everybody there is a Government because:

R: Schimbarea domnilor, bucuria nebunilor.
E: Only fools exult when Governments change.

2.2. The same dichotomy is also important when discussing how people see themselves in social settings:

R: Mai bine țăran în picioare decât boier în genunchi.
E: Better be the head of the Yeomanry than the tail of gentry.

The strong hierarchical sense of values is felt in the paremic units where *ability* and *cleverness* in everyday situations appear when setting one’s place in society:

R: Răzeș c-un sac de hartie și-un petic de moșie.
E: He that hath lands, hath quarrels.

The ”cool heart” of a person is seen on his face and soul:

R: Din omul bun, bun lucru iese.
E: If better were within, better wools come out.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 “Petru Maior” University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

It seems that the Latin tradition makes *man* an authority figure in his home:

R: Tot omul e împărat în casa lui.
E: A man's house is his castle.

Within the ethnofield *man* there are several subthemes like.

- good face/fair face:

R: Chipul omului e oglinda sufletului.
E: A good face is a letter of recommendation; A fair face cannot have a crabbed heart.

- honesty/ business:

R: De la omul cinstit e destul un cuvânt.
E: An honest man's word is as good as his bond.

- wisdom:

R: Omul cuminte îşi cumpără vara sanie şi iarna car.
E: In fair weather prepare for foul; He is wise that is ware in time.

- fate:

R: Omul cinstit se ţine de cuvânt.
E: An honest man ever keeps his word.

*Man'*s characterisation is nevertheless multi-featured, even if not multi- dimensional. There is, however, a stereotypic valuing role when such a sentence is transmitted:

R: Omu-i om si numai om.
E: Remember thou art but a man.

2.3. The relative power of *the speaker/sender* over *the hearer* can be seen through:

- material control (economic distribution and physical force):

R: Cum vei sămăna, așa vei secera.
E: As they sow, so let them reap.

- meta-physical control:

R: Dă din mâini și Dumnezeu îți va ajuta.
E: God helps those who help themselves.

The absolute ranking of impositions leads to the situation when *the speaker* minimizes cost to certain interlocutors and maximizes benefits to others:

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

R: Ce nu poate face un singur om, fac mai mulți împreună.
E: Many hands make light work.

If the power of the speaker and the hearer are more or less equal like in:

R: Cine nu lucrează să nu mănânce.
E: He that will not work shall not eat.
A horse will not carry a saddle must have no oats.

the imposition is no great.

The independence of the ranking can also be shown if *the speaker*'s power is small and the "deference" (social distance) is great:

R: Când te apuci de vreo treabă n-o lăsa fără ispravă.
E: Better never to begin than never to make an end.
If you buy the cow, take the tail into the bargin.

The speaker always tries to reach his goal and satisfy his needs. Maintaining face, he minimizes the risk of the tactful approvals:

R: Omul cu ruşine piere/ Nimeni nu-i dă pân' nu-i cere.
E: He that cannot ask, cannot live.

The choice of strategy will determine the choice of an adequate linguistic form:

R: Treaptă cu treaptă, te urci pe scară.
E: Step after step, the ladder is ascended.

The correspondence of the terms is almost perfect in the above Romanian and English proverbs versions: noun+noun/verb + noun vs noun + noun/noun + verb. This symetry is not the common rule because the asymetry between *the speaker* and *the hearer* appears in the criticism vs the approbation pattern:

R: In lipsa cârmaciului, corabia se scufundă.
E: Master absent and house dead.
vs
R: In casa lăutarului fiecare joacă.
E: In a fiddler's house everyone sluggards.

3. A possible hypothesis on the *communication strategies* in the proverbs that constituted the corpus I have mentioned, may include:

a. positive politeness:

R: Lucru laudă pe meșter.
E: A carpenter is known by his chips.

b. offers:

R: După lucru e bun repausul
E: All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

c. assumptions:

R: Din bucăţele cojocarul blana mare face.
E: Penny and penny laid up will be many.

d. questionning:

R: Văzut-ai vreun ciubotar cu ciubote bune?
E: None more bare than the shoemaker's wife and the smith's mare.

e. being pessimistic:

R: Cine spune multe face puțin.
E: They bray most that can do least.
Good words without deeds are rushes and reeds.

f. impersonalizing *the speaker* and *the hearer*:

R: Multă lucrare face pe meșter bun.
E: Use maketh mastery.
Use/Practice makes perfect.

g. being ironic (an apperently friendly way of being offensive):

R: Găina care cântă nu ouă.
E: You cackle often, but never lay an egg.
Much bruit, little fruit.

CONCLUSIONS

The corpus of the 115 proverbs contains unequal shares covering the ethnofields I have selected: 9 units targetting *social hierarchy*, *67* units illustrating *work* and *39* units focussing on *man.*

The theoretical interest cannot diminish the other aspects linked to *communicative strategies* and *social structure*. We have observed that:

- many of the politeness strategies have passed into main proverbs microtexts;
- in terms of communication strategies it is possible to understand the existence and functionality of a large number of forms;
- social goals shaped conversational encounters and they constrained the message construction;
- comparing Romanian proverbs to their English versions, there are similarities as well as significant differences between the surface plane and the deep plane. One language may display details while the other one is the concision image:

R: Cel ce învaţă încontinuu este un om deştept, iar cel ce se crede învăţat, nu e înţelept.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

E: Live and learn.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1.Ingarden, R, 1973, *The Cognition of Literary Work of Art*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press

2.Kapchits, G, 2020, 'Somali Paremias and their Russian Equivalents' in Proverbium no 37, 2020, pp. 135-142

3. Ong, W, J 1982 *Orality and Literary. The Technologizing of the World*. London Methuen

4.Pym, A & Schlessinger, M, eds., 2008, *Beyond Descriptive Translation Studies*, Amsterdam: Benjamins

ANNEXES

Ierarhie socială
Social hierarchy

1. Aşa e roata lummii, unii suie, alţii coboară.
The world is a ladder for some to go up and some down.

2. Cine se scoală de dimineaţă acela e mai mare.
He that come first to the hill, maz sit where he will.

3. E loc la soare pentru toţi.
The sun shines upon all alike.

4. Eu dorm, tu dormi, cine să ducă sacul?
I proud/stout and thou proud/stout who shall bear the ashes out?

5. Mai bine în satul tău fruntaş decât codaş la oraş.
Better be first in a village that second at Rome.

6. Mai bine să fii fruntea cozii decât coada frunţii.
Better be the head of an ass than the tail of a horse.

7. Mai bine ţăran în picioare, decât boier în genunchi.
Better be the head of the Yeomanry than the tail of the gentry.

8. Răzeş c-un sac de hârtie şi-un petic de moşie.
He that hath lands, hath quarrels.

9. Schimbarea domnilor, bucuria nebunilor.
Only fools exult when Governments change.

10. Treaptă cu treaptă, te urci pe scară.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

Step after step, the ladder is ascended.

11. Alergi mult, mănânci unt.
No sweet without sweat.

12. Arătura cu sudoare, deşi te doare, dar în urmă veselie are.
Plough deep, while sluggards sleep, and zou shall have corn to sell and to keep.

13. Bate fierul până e cald, că de se va răci, în zadar vei munci.
Make hay while the sun shines.
Strike while the iron is hot.

14. Bun de gură, rău de mână.
They bag most that can do least; great cry and little wool.

15. Carele însuşi face, face cît trei.
you want a thing well done, do it yourself.

16. Cel ce învaţă încontinuu este un om deştept, iar cel ce se crede învăţat, nu e înţelept.
Live and learn.

Muncă
Work

17. Cel ce munceşte învaţă.
In doing we learn.

18. Ce nu poate face un singur om fac mai mulţi împreună.
Many hands make light work.

19. Cine lucrează, acela, se cade să mănânce.
No pains, no gains; A horse that will not carry a saddle must have no oats.

20. Cine nu lucrează să nu manânce.
He that will not work shall not eat; A horse that will not carry a saddle must have no oats.

21. Cine nu munceşte nu mănâncă.
He that will not work shall not eat.

22. Cine spune multe face puţin.
They bray most that can do least; Good words without deeds are rushes and reeds.

23. Cine voieşte să se imbogăţească din plug trebuie să-l poarte de coarne.
The plough goes not well if the ploughman hold it not; Let them that be cold, blow at the coal.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

24. Când te apuci de vreo treabă, n-o lăsa fără ispravă.
Better never to begin than never to make an end; if you buy the cow, take the tail into the bargin; Let him that beginneth the song, make an end.

25. Cu muncă şă îngăduială dinţii şorecuţului taie odgonul de la corabie.
A mouse in time may bite in two a cable.

26. Cum vei sămăna, aşa vei secera.
As they sow, so let them reap.

27. Dă din mâini şi Dumnezeu îţi va ajuta.
God helps those who help themselves.

28. De multe ori unii samănă şi alţii seceră.
One beats the bush and another catches the birds.

29. După lucru e bun repausul.
All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.

30. Fă-ţi datoria, şi nu te teme.
Do your Duty, come what may.

31. Harnic ca o albină, strîngător ca o furnică.
Industry is fortune's right hand, and frugality her left.

32. Lucrează de-ngheţată şi mănîncă de-asudă.
Eat till you sweat and work till you freeze.

33. Lucru face sănătate, trânda tot păcate.
By doing nothing, we learn to do.

34. Lucrul lungeşte viaţa şi lenea o scurtează.
Better to wear aut than to rust out.

35. Multă lucrare face pe meşter bun.
Use maketh mastery; Use/Practice makes perfect.

36. Multe mâini fac sarcina mai uşoară.
Many hands make light work.

37. Munca ne scapă de trei mari rele: de urît, de fapte rele si de neavere.
Be not idle, and you shall not be longing.

38. Munca sfinţeşte locul.
Work consecrates a place.

39. Munceşte azi ca să mănînci mâine.
Toil today and you'll eat tomorrow.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

40. Nimeni nu moare de lucru.
Work never killed anyone.

41. Prin muncă şi prin stăruinţă vei ajunge la dorinţă.
Care and diligence bring luck; industry is fortune's right hand, and frugality her left.

42. Pune mîna şi o să pună şi Dumnezeu milă.
Use the means and God will give the blessing.

43. Puţine cuvinte şi ispravă mai multă.
Few words and many deeds; More matter, less art.

44. A face/a învaţă bărberia pe capul altuia.
A barber learns to shave by shaving fools.

45. Cel mai bun vînător, cel ce vine cu vînat.
He plays best that wins.

46. Cizmarul umblă cu cizmele sparte.
None more bare than the shoemaker's wife and the smith's mare.

47. Cîrmaciul bun scapă din furtună.
A good pilot will ever escape a storm.

48. Crîşmaru cu un gând şi beţivul cu alt gând.
The horse thinks one thing and he that rides him another.

49. Cu două bucătărese iese ciorbă prea sărată sau nesărată.
Too many cooks spoil the broth.

50. Cu învăţul unuia şi cu părul altuia.
A barber learns to shave by shaving fools.

51. Dacă nu ştii să vopseşti Nu te pune să mânjeşti
He may ill run that cannot go.

52. De multe ori ce este scăzut în fire, meşteşugl cum se cade plineşte.
Murture is above nature; Art improves nature.

53. Din bucăţele cojocarul blană mare face.
Penny and penny laid up will be many.
Many a little makes a mickle.

54. Douăsprezece meserii / Treisprezece sărăcii
A man of many trades begs his bread on Sunday.

55. După grădinar şi florile.
The workman is known by his work.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

56. I-a venit doctorul după moarte.
After death the doctor.

57. În casa lăutarului fiecare joacă.
In a fiddler's house everyone sluggards.

58. În lipsa cârmaciului, corabia se cufundă.
Master absent and house dead.

59. Judecătorul e ca osia de cai, cum o ungi nu mai scîrţîie.
A layer's opinion is worth nothing unless paid for.

60. La grădinari castraveţi să nu vinzi.
An old fox needs learn no craft.

61. Lăutarul cîntă mai bine când îşă cîntă lui.
The parson always christens his own child first.

62. Lucru laudă pe meşter.
A carpenter is known by his chips.

63. Meşterul se cunoaşte la lucru.
The workmanis known by his work.

64. Meşterul e totdeauna cu banul în mînă.
He who has an art has everywhere a part;
He that learns a trade hath a purchare made.

65. Meşteşugul e brăţară de aur.
A handful of trade is a handful of gold.

66. Meşteşugul vreme cere, nu se-nvaţă din vedere.
Use maketh; Use/Practice makes mastery.

67. Multe ştie, multe croieşte şi nici una nu isprăveşte.
Jack of all trades, and master of none.

68. Nimeni nu se naşte meşter.
None is born master. No mean is his craft's master the first day.

69. Păstorul cel bun cel ce tunde oaia şi nu o jupoaie.
A good shepard must fleece his sheep, not flay them.

70. Sacul popii îi fără fund.
When heather – bells grow cockle – shells, the miller and the priest will forget themselves.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

71. Şi cel mai bun căruţaş răstoarnă carul pe cel mai bun drum.
The best cart may overthrow.

72. Tot olarul laudă oala sa.
Every pedlar praises his needls.

73. Un meşteşug îi cât o moşie.
He that learns a trade hath a purchase made.
He who has an art has everywhere a part.

74. Văzut-ai vreun ciubotar cu ciubote bune?
None more bare than the shoemaker's wife and the smith's more.

75. Vizitiul prost bate calul bun.
A bad workman quarrles with his tools.

76. Vrednic este muncitorul de plata sa.
The labourer is worthly of his hire.

Om
Man

77. Ce-şi face omul singur nici dracul nu mai poate să-i desfacă.
The evil we bring on ourselves are the hardest to bear.

78. Chipul omului e oglinda sufletului.
A good face is a letter of recommendation; A fair face cannot have a crabbed heart.

79. Cunoaşte întâi omul, apoi tainele îî descopera.
Before you make a friend eat a bushel of salt with him; Sudden friendship, sure repentance.

80. Decât să muşti omul din dos, mai bine muşcă-l din faţă.
He who wants to strike let him strike from the front not from behind.

81. De la omul cinstit e destul un cuvânt.
An honest man's word is as good as his bond.

82. Din acelaşi aluat sunt făcuţi toţi oamenii.
Men are all made of the same paste.

83. Din omul bun, bun lucru iese.
It better were within, better wools come out.

84. După amici se cunoaşte omul.
Like will to like; Tell me with whom thou goes, and I'll tell thee what thou doest.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

85. Fapta bună laudă pe om.
An ill deed cannot bring honour.

86. Găina care cîntă nu ouă.
You cackle often, but never lay an egg.
Much bruit, little fruit.

87. Nu după suman trebuie judecat omul.
It is not the gaz coat that makes the gentelman.

88. Nu e om fără cusur.
Every man has his faults

89. Numai când pui cu omul în plug, îl cunoşti bine.
The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

90. Nu va scăpa omul de ce e ursit să păţească.
There is no flying from fate.

91. Omu-i om şi numai om.
Remember thou art but a man.

92. Omul beţiv, la beţie, scoate din gură ceea ce are la trezie.
Fair chieve good ale, it makes many folks speak as they think.

93. Omul bun după faptă se cunoaşte.
Gentle is that gentle does.

94. Omul ca lumânarea, când luminează atunci se sfârşeşte.
A candle lights other and consumes itself.

95. Omul care este harnic totdeauna are praznic.
He that labours and thrives spins gold.

96. Omul cel nărăvit rău, tot la rău e gândul său.
To the jaundiced eye, all things look yellow.

97. Omul cinsteşte haina, nu haina pe om.
It is not the coat that makes the gentleman.

98. Omul cinstit se ţine de cuvânt.
An honest man ever keeps his word.

99. Omul când e să se înece se agaţă şi de un pas.
A drowning man will catch at a straw.

100. Omul când îmbătrâneşte, copilăreşte.
Old men are twice children.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

101. Omul cât să-mbătrânească tot cere să mai trăiască.
None do old that he hopes not for a year of life.

102. Omul cât trăieşte învaţă şi tot moare neînvăţat.
We are aye to learn as long as we live.

103. Omul cât trăieşte tot află.
The longer we live the more wonders we see.

104. Omul cu meşteşug nu piere.
Who hath a good trade through all waters may wade; He who has an art has everywhere a part; He that learns a trade hath-a purchase made.

105. Omul cuminte îşi cumpără vara sanie şi iarna car.
In fair weather prepare for foul; He is wise that is ware in time.

106. Omul cu răbdarea/ Trece chiar si marea.
Patience overcomes all things.

107. Omul cu ruşine piere/ Nimeni nu-i dă pîn nu-i cere.
He that cannot ask, cannot live.

108. Omul după ce moare atunci darul i se cunoaşte.
In life you loved me not, in death you bewail me.

109. Omul după grai, ca clopotele după sunet îndată se cunoaşte.
The bird is known by his note, the man by his words.

110. Omul e ca iarba, zilele lui ca floarea.
Man is like grass and his days ressemble flowers.

111. Omul e ca un puţ cu apă: cu cât face mai mult bine, cu atât mai mult îi vine.
Never be weary of well doing.

112. Pe om în viaţă păţaniile-l învaţă.
Experience is the mother of wisdom; An ounce of practice is worth a plound of percept.

113. Să fugi de omul însemnat ca dracu.
Beware of him whom God hath marked; Beware of breed.

114. Tot omul e împărat în casa lui.
A man's house is his castle.

115. Un om macină, altul face azimă de faima lui.
The poor man turns his cake and another comes and takes it away;
One beats the bush and another catches the bird.

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)

Lefter, V. 1978 *Dictionar de proverbe român-englez*, Ed. Științifică și enciclopedică, București

BDD-A32412 © 2020 "Petru Maior" University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-17 21:49:26 UTC)