

Uses of Proverbs and Sayings in Foreign Language Teaching: A case study of Russian Proverbs

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Abstract

The pedagogical role of proverbs in the study of a foreign language and its importance in the classroom is indisputable. The article focuses on the methods of using proverbs in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Proverbs and sayings specialist Wolfgang Mieder (2004) noted “Proverbs have been and should be used in teaching as didactic tools because they contain educational wisdom. When it comes to learning foreign languages, proverbs play an important role in teaching as a part of cultural and metaphorical learning. Linguists also argue that the use of proverbs in teaching a second or foreign language is important for effective communication.”¹ (Mieder 2004 p. 297-316) Proverbs as a didactic tool will help students communicate effectively. They also help to improve reading and speaking. As we know, proverbs require knowledge of the language structure of the language being taught, i.e. syntax, morphology, vocabulary, phonetics and semantics. Therefore, this research paper suggests analyzing proverbs on the basis of their linguistic structure. The selection of proverbs is based on the elementary level of language proficiency accepted in Russia.

Proverbs: A theoretical perspective

Proverb is a folk saying, which expresses the opinion not of individual people, but the people's assessment, the people's mind. The study of proverbs is called paremiology (from Greek παροιμία -paroimia, "proverb"). According to Kinderstand (1978) and Rousseau (1983) the definition of the proverb caused difficulties for scientists from many disciplines for centuries. Many attempts at definition have been made, starting with Aristotle and philosophical considerations, to express lexicographical definitions. (B. Leader 2004: 1) Mieder (1985:119) defined the proverb as “a short, well-known verdict of the people that contains wisdom, truth, morality, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed, and memorable form that is passed down from generation to generation.”²

According to V.I. Dahl, "the proverb is a short parable; it says that "naked speech is not a proverb". It is a judgment, a verdict, a saying expressed in abundance and put into circulation, under the stamp of the nation. The proverb is an abundant proverb with an appendix to the case, understood and accepted by all" (Dal 1984:13). (Dal 1984:13): "The proverb is understood as a precise figurative saying (usually of an instructive nature), typifying various phenomena of life and taking the form of a complete sentence (simple and

¹ Mieder (Ed.) Wise Words. Essays on the Proverb. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 297-316

² Mieder, Wolfgang. (2004). Proverbs - A Handbook. Westport, CT; Greenwood Press

complex)" (Zhukov 2007:8). N.F. Alefirenko points out that proverbs in their content and functions are close to lyrical poetry. Their purpose is to express the attitude of the people to various life phenomena in short aphoristic formulas (Alefirenko 2000: 22).

TSB defines proverb and proverb as follows: “³The proverb is a short, rhythmically organized, steady in speech, figurative saying of the people. It has the ability to be used in many ways by analogy. The judgment 'Forest is cut down - chips fly' is interesting not by the direct meaning, but by what can be applied to other similar situations. The subject matter of the statement is considered in the light of the generally accepted truth expressed by the proverb. Hence it's ideological and emotional character. The compositional division of the proverb, often supported by rhythm, rhyme, assonance, alliterations, coincides with the syntactic division.”

V.P. Zhukov defines a proverb as a short folk saying that has both a literal and a figurative plan or only a figurative plan and makes up grammatically complete sentences. According to his understanding, proverbs are "brief folk sayings that have only a literal plan and grammatically represent complete sentences" [Zhukov 2000:11].

Proverbs and sayings help to improve language ability. With this ability a person can briefly express his opinion. We use phraseology as a ready-made material in our speech. Phraseology is a language of expression. They are used in speech ready-made, i.e. they need to be known as they are set in the language and with the meaning assigned to them. We see a change in their composition in fiction and journalism, when the authors update its composition.

Proverbs are concise, memorable, and culturally relevant sayings that offer wisdom and insight into the values and beliefs of a society. As such, they can be a valuable resource in foreign language teaching. In this case study, we will explore the use of Russian proverbs in language learning.

Cultural understanding: Proverbs are an excellent way to introduce students to the culture of the target language. By examining the meaning and context of proverbs, students can gain insight into the values, beliefs, and customs of the society in which the language is spoken.

Russian proverbs can provide valuable insight into Russian culture and history. Here are some examples:

1. "Не говори гоп, пока не перепрыгнешь" (Don't say "hop" until you've jumped over): This proverb emphasizes the importance of not making promises or boasting before you can follow through. In Russian culture, it is generally seen as a virtue to be modest and not draw attention to oneself.
2. "Повторение - мать учения" (Repetition is the mother of learning): This proverb highlights the Russian emphasis on education and the value of hard work. It is common for Russian children to attend extra classes or study for hours after school in order to succeed academically.
3. "Век живи - век учись" (Live for a century, learn for a century): This proverb emphasizes the importance of continuous learning throughout one's life. In Russian culture, education is highly valued and is seen as a way to improve oneself and succeed in life.
4. "Семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь" (Measure seven times, cut once): This proverb stresses the importance of careful planning and preparation before taking action. It is common in Russian culture to take a methodical approach to problem-solving and decision-making.
5. "Друг познается в беде" (A friend is known in trouble): This proverb emphasizes the importance of loyalty and support in Russian culture. In times of trouble, it is expected that friends and family will come together to help and support one another.

³ <http://slovar.cc/enc/bse/2031812.html> (Проверено 4 июня 2015 г.)

6. "Горбатого могила исправит" (Górbatavó magíla isprávit) - The grave will even out the hunchback. This proverb reflects the Russian attitude toward hard work and perseverance, and the belief that everyone is equal in death.
7. "Тише едешь, дальше будешь" (Tishé edyesh', dál'she búdeshe') - The quieter you go, the further you'll get. This proverb emphasizes the value of patience and humility in Russian culture.
8. "Делу время, а потехе - час" (Delú vrémya, a potékhé - chas) - Time for work, and an hour for fun. This proverb reflects the Russian belief in the importance of balance and enjoying life.
9. "Своя рубашка ближе к телу" (Svoyá rubáshka blízhe k télu) - One's own shirt is closer to the body. This proverb emphasizes the importance of personal relationships and loyalty in Russian culture.
10. Лучшее один раз увидеть, чем сто раз услышать (Luchshé odín raz uvídét', chem stó raz uslyshát') - It is better to see something once than to hear about it a hundred times.

By studying and understanding Russian proverbs, learners of Russian can gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of Russian culture and values.

Vocabulary building:

Russian proverbs can be a valuable resource for vocabulary practice because they often contain words and expressions that are commonly used in everyday communication. By studying and memorizing these proverbs, learners can improve their vocabulary and develop a better understanding of the nuances of the Russian language.

For example, the proverb "Всяк кулик своё болото хвалит" (Vsýak kulík svoýo bolóto hvalít) contains the word "болото" (boloto) which means "swamp" in Russian. Similarly, the proverb "Что бы то ни было" (Chto by to ni bylo) includes the phrase "было" (bylo) which means "was" or "were" in Russian.

By analyzing and learning Russian proverbs, learners can also improve their knowledge of idiomatic expressions and colloquial language. This can be especially useful for learners who are looking to improve their speaking skills and develop a more natural and fluent communication style in Russian.

Using Russian proverbs is a great way to practice vocabulary and become more comfortable with the language. It can help learners expand their vocabulary, learn new expressions, and become more fluent in their communication skills.

1. Повторение – мать учения (Povtorenie – mat' ucheniya) - Repetition is the mother of learning.
2. Говори медленно, ясно и понятно (Govorí medlénno, yásno i pónyatno) - Speak slowly, clearly, and understandably.
3. Тишина – золото (Tíshina – zolotó) - Silence is golden.
4. Всяк смотрит, что ему угодно (Vsýak smótrit, chto yemu ugodno) - Everyone sees what he wants to see.
5. Слово – не воробей, вылетит – не поймаешь (Slovó – ne vorobéy, vyletít – ne poymáesh) - A word is not a sparrow, once it flies out, you can't catch it.
6. Без труда не выловишь и рыбку из пруда (Bez trudá ne výtashchish' i rýbku iz prudá) - Without effort, you won't even catch a fish in a pond.
7. Не говори гоп, пока не перескочишь (Ne govorí gor, poká ne pereskóchish') - Don't count your chickens before they hatch.
8. Своя рубашка ближе к телу (Svoyá rubáshka blízhe k télu) - One's own shirt is closer to the body (means that one's own interests are the most important).
9. Не всё то золото, что блестит (Ne vsyo to zolotó, chto blyéstít) - All that glitters is not gold.
10. Делу время, потехе – час (Delú vrémya, potékhé – chas) - There is a time for work and a time for play.

11. Молчание – знак согласия (Molchanie – znak soglasia) - Silence means consent.
12. Без труда не выловишь рыбку из пруда (Bez truda ne vylovish' rybku iz pruda) - You can't catch a fish in a pond without making an effort.
13. Не рой яму другому, сам в неё попадёшь (Ne roj yamu drugomu, sam v neyó popadësh') - Don't dig a pit for someone else, you'll fall into it yourself.
14. Век живи, век учишься (Vek zhivi, vek uchis') - Live for a century, learn for a century.
15. Говоришь – язык ломаешь (Govorish' – yazyk lomáesh') - You talk too much (literally: You're breaking your tongue).
16. Знание – сила (Znanie – síla) - Knowledge is power.
17. Лучшее один раз увидеть, чем сто раз услышать (Luchshé odín raz uvídét', chem stó raz uslyshát') - It is better to see something once than to hear about it a hundred times.
18. Семь раз отмерь, один отрежь (Sem' raz otmér', odín otrozh') - Measure seven times, cut once (meaning it's better to be careful and plan ahead than to rush into something).
19. Тихая вода глубока (Tikhaya voda gluboká) - Still waters run deep (meaning someone may be calm on the surface, but there may be a lot going on underneath).
20. Не знаешь, что будет – не гадай (Ne znáesh', chtó búdet – ne gadái) - Don't speculate about what might happen in the future.

Grammar practice: Proverbs can also be used to reinforce grammar concepts. Russian proverbs can be a great tool for grammar practice because they contain a variety of grammatical structures and elements of the Russian language. They can help learners reinforce their understanding of various grammatical concepts such as reflexive verbs, possessive pronouns, comparative adjectives, verbs of motion, imperatives, verbs of perception, comparative constructions, and more.

Here are some examples:

Noun

1. Мой дом – моя крепость. (My house is my castle)
2. Здоровье – первое богатство. (Health is above wealth)

Adjective

3. Глупый болтает – умный думает. (First think and then speak)
4. Лучшая вещь новая, лучший друг старый. (Old is gold)

Numbers

5. Ум хорошо, а два лучше. (Two heads are better than one)
6. У семи нянек дитя без глаза. (Too many cooks spoil the broth)

Pronoun

7. Мой дом – моя крепость (My home is my castle)
8. Сын у меня мой, а ум у него свой. (Man is the master of his own fate)

Adverb

9. Всё хорошо, что хорошо кончается (All well that ends well)
10. Насильно мил не будешь. (Love cannot be compelled)

By studying the grammar patterns and structures used in Russian proverbs, learners can gain a deeper understanding of the language and develop their ability to use it effectively.

Reading and writing practice

Proverbs can be used as a source of reading and writing practice. Students can read and analyze proverbs, write essays or short stories based on proverbs, or create dialogues or skits that incorporate proverbs.

Russian proverbs can be a helpful resource for reading and writing practice because they offer a glimpse into the culture and mentality of the Russian people.

By analyzing these proverbs and understanding their cultural significance, learners can also improve their writing skills by incorporating these expressions and concepts into their own writing. This can help learners develop a more nuanced and sophisticated writing style that is more reflective of the Russian culture and mindset.

Additionally, reading and analyzing proverbs can help learners improve their reading comprehension skills by challenging them to interpret the meaning and context of the proverb. This can be especially useful for learners who are preparing for standardized tests or academic writing assignments that require a high level of reading comprehension and analytical skills.

Russian proverbs can be an effective tool for improving reading and writing skills by providing cultural insights and challenging learners to think critically and analytically.

1. "Кто рано встаёт, тому Бог подаёт" (Kto rano vstáyoť, tomu Bog podáyoť) - He who rises early, God gives. This proverb includes the use of the present tense in the verb "встаёт" (vstáyoť) and the dative case in the noun "тому" (tomu).
2. "Не мой день" (Ne moy den') - Not my day. This proverb includes the use of the genitive case in the noun "день" (den').
3. "Готовь сани летом, а телегу зимой" (Gotov' saní létom, a telégu zimói) - Prepare the sleighs in summer, and the cart in winter. This proverb includes the use of the imperative mood in the verb "готовь" (gotov').
4. "Не все то золото, что блестит" (Ne vsyó to zoloto, chto blestit) - All that glitters is not gold. This proverb includes the use of the accusative case in the noun "золото" (zoloto).
5. "Утро вечера мудренее" (Útro véchera mudrénee) - The morning is wiser than the evening. This proverb includes the use of the comparative degree in the adjective "мудренее" (mudrénee).

Conversation practice: Proverbs can be used as a starting point for discussions in the target language. Students can discuss the meaning and context of proverbs, compare and contrast Russian proverbs can be a great resource for conversation practice because they offer a way to connect with native speakers and communicate more effectively in everyday conversations. By using proverbs in conversation, learners can demonstrate their knowledge of the language and culture, while also engaging in a more authentic and natural communication style.

For example, when discussing a difficult decision, learners can use the proverb.

1. "Своя рубашка ближе к телу" (Svoyá rubáshka blízhe k télu) to emphasize the idea of valuing personal relationships above all else.
2. "Говорить - серебро, молчать - золото" (Govorít' - serébro, móltchat' - zóloto) - Speech is silver, silence is golden. This proverb can be used to discuss the importance of speaking up or staying quiet in different situations, such as in the workplace or in personal relationships.
3. "Не всё то коту мясо, что мышь поймала" (Ne vsyó to kotú myáso, chto mysh' poymála) - Not everything that the cat caught is meat. This proverb can be used to discuss the importance of analyzing a situation before making assumptions or taking action.

4. "Что имеем - не храним, потерявши - плачем" (Chto iméem - ne khraním, poteryávshi - pláchem) - What we have, we don't keep; when we lose it, we cry. This proverb can be used to discuss the value of gratitude and appreciating what we have in our lives.
5. "Семь раз отмерь, один отрежь" (Sem' raz otmér', odín otrozh') - Measure seven times, cut once. This proverb can be used to discuss the importance of careful planning and decision-making in various situations, such as in business or personal life.
6. "Рыбак рыбака видит издалека" (Rýbak rýbaka vidít izdáleka) - A fisherman sees another fisherman from afar. This proverb can be used to discuss the importance of recognizing and respecting others in the same profession or field.
7. "Говорить - серебро, молчать - золото" (Govorít' - serébro, móltchat' - zóloto) - Speech is silver, silence is golden. This proverb can be used to discuss the importance of speaking up or staying quiet in different situations, such as in the workplace or in personal relationships.
8. "Не всё то коту мясо, чтомышь поймала" (Ne vsyó to kotú myáso, chto mysh' poymála) - Not everything that the cat caught is meat. This proverb can be used to discuss the importance of analyzing a situation before making assumptions or taking action.
9. "Что имеем - не храним, потерявши - плачем" (Chto iméem - ne khraním, poteryávshi - pláchem) - What we have, we don't keep; when we lose it, we cry. This proverb can be used to discuss the value of gratitude and appreciating what we have in our lives.
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Proverbs are great conversation starters, learners can practice their speaking and listening skills, expand their vocabulary, and gain a deeper understanding of Russian culture and values. By incorporating these proverbs into their conversations, learners can demonstrate their understanding of the Russian culture and mindset, while also improving their speaking and listening skills. Additionally, using proverbs can help learners to expand their vocabulary, practice grammar structures, and develop a more natural and fluent communication style.

Russian proverbs are a valuable tool for conversation practice, as they allow learners to connect with native speakers and engage in more authentic and natural conversations. By using proverbs in their conversations, learners can demonstrate their knowledge of the language and culture, while also improving their speaking and listening skills. Proverbs from different cultures, or share personal experiences that relate to the proverbs.

The use of proverbs in foreign language teaching can be an effective way to engage students, build vocabulary, reinforce grammar concepts, and promote cultural understanding. In the case of Russian proverbs, they offer a rich source of cultural insights and linguistic challenges that can enhance the language learning experience.