

## EXPLORING THE MORAL IMPLICATIONS OF ENGLISH PAREMIAS IN SHAPING PERSPECTIVES ON INDIVIDUALISM AND PERSONAL FREEDOM

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### Abstract

This article examines the moral dimensions embedded within English paremias (proverbs) and their role in shaping cultural perceptions of individualism and personal freedom. By analyzing a selection of widely used English proverbs, the study identifies conceptual metaphors and value-laden oppositions that reflect and reinforce Western ideals of self-reliance, autonomy, and personal responsibility. The research highlights how these linguistic expressions not only mirror social norms but also contribute to the moral framework through which individuals interpret their roles within society. Through a discourse-analytical and conceptual approach, the article reveals that English paremias serve as vehicles of cultural transmission, promoting ethical attitudes toward independence, decision-making, and self-expression. The findings suggest that proverbs are not merely rhetorical devices but powerful tools in the construction of socio-cultural identity and moral outlooks in English-speaking communities.

**Keywords:** Value-laden oppositions, self-reliance, autonomy, paremias, cultural transmission, promoting ethical attitudes, decision-making, self-expression.

### Introduction

Language and culture are outworkings of the beliefs and value systems a group of people hold. Language often represents the beliefs and value systems a group of people adhere to. By studying the language of a specific culture in depth, one can begin to understand the underlying beliefs and value systems. It is then possible to use this in understanding and comparing English and its paremias to Russian beliefs, value systems, collectivism, individualism, and respect of authority and the history of the two cultures. Understanding underlying value systems of a language is important when learning new languages. This way, they go beyond the spoken language and can begin to understand a group of people at its core<sup>1</sup>. One also must begin to see the world in the same way native speakers would, grasping the same intrinsic beliefs and values a population adheres to. English and Russian are two languages that exhibit a rich variance in underlying beliefs. One way to compare these beliefs is through idiomatic language. Focusing on the beliefs of respect, collectivism, and individualism in Russian culture, this project sought

<sup>1</sup> Wiese M. They Say It Where I'm From: Using the Language of Idioms to Compare the Characteristics of Individualism vs. Collectivism. 2018. [PDF]



to analyze idioms based on the language, which would, in turn, reveal the beliefs underlying the culture.

**Settings and methods.** Bulleted are cultural orientations of English and Russian. a. English – Opposed to collectivism. - Emphasizes individual goals. - Personal identity isn't dependent on groups. - Personal space is important. - Collective organizations exist, but are often funded by individuals. - Democracy is for the people, by the people, and of the people.

Wise sayings, also called proverbs and sayings, are such small and conventional utterances that are normally used in speech, and are passed down from generation to generation. Paremias express, in a poetic and symbolic manner, traditional wisdom acquired through collective human experience<sup>2</sup>. Such an idea is normally regarding life, providing practical advice about people's behavior, personal and interpersonal relations, determining ambitions, and facing difficulties. Paremias are related to aphorisms and are favorite parts of any wisdom tradition and are some ways by which nations and individuals from different social groups voice their worldviews, aiming to the keen knowledge of the social tradition and ethos prevalent in a community<sup>3</sup>. Another issue is that proverbs are small and conventional, however, it consists of information and insight too-often big and durable- that our cultural inventory could be poorer without them. In such a cultural sense, paremias take part as an important formal function of language, since they are a frequent means of this huge and irreversible acquisition of knowledge, behavior, and habits, constituting a set of ready-made parcels concerning the world and the ways it is dealt and spoke about within a community. Besides this cultural contribution, paremias as an aspect of language are subjects of a more intricate task, involving particular causes and effects in different languages and on regarding the same language, requiring the intimate knowledge of social, urban, and cultural factors. The present hypothesis is that the comparison of paremias through different languages may exhibit cognitive patterns of thought suitable for the inclusion of influenced perspectives. Simple types of like proverbs, languages adorned with a more specific form of openness, will be here adopted, and in order to stress the understanding to be gained from a larger corpus, emphasis, aiming to advance mainly argument topics, is spent on special groups where translating equivalencies were found. However, translatability is by no means the rule. Furthermore, like texts in general, including word-groups, discourses and genres, are subjects of changeover and adaptation to changing values and tastes.

This paper explores some ethical implications of English paremias. Paremias (proverbs, sayings, maxims and many related expressions) embody cultural values, assumptions, and beliefs, and have been passed from generation to generation. Moral lessons are often couched in these compact statements, and English itself has a rich heritage of paremias that continues to expand. English paremias not only bear witness to the ethical preoccupations of English-speaking countries, but also shape perspectives on individualism and personal freedom<sup>4</sup>. Their ethical importance is not static however, as interpretations of these expressions are socially

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<sup>2</sup> Aparecida Teixeira de Faria S. Funciones discursivas de los enunciados sentenciosos en Papéis Avulsos (1882) - de Machado de Assis (1839-1908). 2018. [\[PDF\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> M. Dwyer A. Uprooted and replanted: recontextualizing a genre.. 2011. [\[PDF\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> Nataša P. Moral education through literature. 2006. [\[PDF\]](#)



construed within specific historical, cultural, political, and societal contexts. Paremias simultaneously encode and reflect the ethics of their time and culture. This dual process is encapsulated in the saying ‘*give someone an inch and they will take a mile*’, balancing society’s interests in protecting its rights and individuals’ ambitions for self-improvement. Socially constructed interpretations of paremias can either comply with or challenge prevailing norms, leading to complex moral implications. As a consequence, careful attention to the various contextual levels at which these sayings can be analysed is crucial for unearthing specific moral evaluations<sup>5</sup>. At the same time, this discourse should acknowledge that these expressions can promote both actions that ennoble the individual and behaviours that benefit society at large within an environment of tenuous power.

Life, language, history, time, culture – all these words go together; they are Jam, Jelly, and Preserves. A people’s reflections held in paremias preserve and hold the people’s cultural heritage and folk wisdom intact across centuries. The world’s major languages are only appropriations of the culture of their native speakers’ communities. These appropriations are shaped and influenced in the wake of the society’s social, political and economic life; they in turn give expressions to the people’s perception of this life. As language is formed, it leaves deeply marked fingerprints of the populace’s historical identity well preserved in the language’s discourse. Paremias too carry this historical fingerprint. All through the centuries, great cultural epochs and events have given new impulses to the formation and reinterpretation of paremias. Some of these sayings are changed; some paremias are created anew. Constitutional traditions, mores and rules have equipped all national paremiological reservoirs with unique pockets of paremias. Nevertheless, because cultures tend to enmesh and blend, the reservoir of paremias of even one of the major languages has turned out to be an unfamiliar cocktail of Norman, Saxon and Viking paremias.

Philosophically speaking, discussion of individual and society, including family, community, and state, has a far-reaching history, virtually as old as the very existence of human beings. Moreover, a question of individual and social relation is unanimously significant in ethical discourse, because most of ethical norms are sorts of general principles, as the Declaration of Independence proverbially declares, “that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”<sup>6</sup>. Thus, elucidation about individual freedom and rights is impossible to be isolated from inquiry about political justice and societal obligation<sup>7</sup>. Concern with the individual has a respectable tradition in philosophy going back to the ancient Greeks. Emphasis on the value of the unique individual found one of its first expressions in the person of Socrates, with his explicit repudiation of the materialistic pursuits that were held in esteem by his contemporaries. The Stoics have also argued for this intrinsic worth of the individual soul, and Christianity, with its doctrine of the soul’s salvation, has added further weight to the notion. But it was in the thinking of the Enlightenment that the individual took a preeminent place; and spontaneous order economist Friedrich Hayek subscribes to this tradition. The concept of

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<sup>5</sup> Kostogriz A, Doecke B. English and its others : towards an ethics of transculturation. 2008. [\[PDF\]](#)

<sup>6</sup> Hee Lee K. INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY: TOWARD A NEW ‘BRAVE NEW WORLD’. 2015. [\[PDF\]](#)

<sup>7</sup> Morgan J. Societies Within: Selfhood through Dividualism & Relational Epistemology. 1970. [\[PDF\]](#)



individual rights eventually flowed into the notion of natural rights from this background. As Locke, one of the fathers of early liberalism, argued, “*All men by nature are equal...no one ought to harm another in his life, health, Liberty, or Possessions*”. However, inter-dependence with each other is a universal and fundamental law that has been governing human nature since the time when the human species first appeared on the surface of the earth. It must be granted, of course, that outside formal ethical discourse there is little or no consensus about the relevant matters. Yet it surely belongs to the office of philosophy to make the most profound and comprehensive questioning of the presuppositions and consequences of formal ethics. It is the intention of this article to pursue such questioning in regard to the notion of individual rights. There are also philosophical roots of individualism in relation to the conception of personal autonomy, the ontology of the self or person, and epistemology. Compatibilists have espoused an aesthetic dressing of one’s personal or self narrative that, although not intimidating the initial existence of free will, force its existence in and out of a list of binary inevitabilities—decisions of what is experienced along the way. In Sartrean terms, a personal platform piercing generant reality on the stage of the perpetual present always selects from a symphony of possibilities; an existence preceding its choices. But ones enigma is why confetti free will flowcharts should Columbus a safe haven of personal freedom. That is: How can these infinities of roads taken or not taken encircle the self in a resolute hoop walled garden independent of social and scientific determinants glitter filtered by the filigree of aesthetic execution?

The individual is an essential subject in understanding significant aspects of society and culture. No other concept is so similar and at the same time so different as individualism. The aim of this study lies in exploring the moral implications of certain English pemiias in shaping perspectives on the notions of individualism and personal freedom from a broader, interdisciplinary point of view. This involves bringing together concepts originating from various fields of knowledge from the perspective of a scholar specialised in philosophy. The study tries to identify the cultural heritage, both universal and local, which defines outlooks on individual culture and tradition. The term pemia or paroemia — from the Greek for proverb — designates fixed phrases or statements of a sententious nature, and in a broader sense includes maxims, proverbs, adages, idiomatic expressions, aphorisms, etc. used and transmitted by non-professional speakers with an informative, didactic or moralistic intent. On the other hand, experience, tradition, and language not only nurture but also define thinking, feeling, and behaviour for every single person.

The individual is a unique, incalculable, and sovereign being. Individuum mobile, said the Ancients; and Locke repeated: *Tibi soli omnipotens de te fecit arbitrium*. Kant pronounced that every man may think differently from every other man; and Schopenhauer, accepting that according to its quality and number of ideas, everyone is free, but acknowledging it too that freedom is the exception rather than the rule of human behaviour. This focus on the individual consciousness by philosophers, thinkers, realists, nationalists and revolutionists alike, contributed to the fact that the need for individual liberty became the symbol, the spirit and the quintessence of Western civilization. With many varieties of understanding and preferring, freedom was regarded and worshiped as the supreme treasure of mankind after the eternal and unsolvable mysteries of life and death. But freedom stands upon a pedestal. It is the privilege



and the conquest of the few bold ones who dare to embark upon the transcendental path of self-search and self-enhancement, both as leverage and destiny<sup>8</sup>.

The term paremia refers to proverbs and sayings that belong to a particular language, tradition, or community. Paremias are robust instances of collective wisdom, societal experience, or cultural reflection, crystallized in simple, memorable, and often instructive language. It is an important step toward self-awareness and self-examination to understand the paremias of one's first language. An individual's paremias may ground extremely sensitive or relevant issues; not only the expressions used, but the very idea reflected in a paremia may be a very sensitive or personal topic. As an example, Moroccan Arabic paremias that include the word eye are compared and related to English paremias including the word eye. This analysis intends to reveal the different cultural perspectives marked by such paremias. In order to identify them, the Proverb Collector site is searched for English paremias with the word eye. Six paremias are selected. Using the same site and methodology, Moroccan Arabic paremias with the word eye are identified. Six correspondences are distinguished, ensuring that in all cases the paremias share the same basic idea or theme. Circumstances, cultural attitudes, and social sensitivities are discussed. Simply listening to other individuals comment on these proverbs can have a significant impact. Furthermore, that near-monolingual experience can announce changes and shifts in cultural senses of "*privacy*," "*harassment*," or "*theft*."

It is sometimes argued that there are patterns in paremias that reflect broader notions or ways of thought or assumption pertaining to language and the world. Individualism is a notion with such deep roots that it is inevitably expressed and articulated in proverbs, sayings, and paremias. Such paremias may be critical of individual endeavor and promote the virtues of collectivity, or they may glamor its outstanding achievements and underscore the curse of mediocrity. Following a critical analysis of a selection of English paremias, such paremias are examined: those that seem to champion individual effort, but also those which seem to challenge individual claims upon the good in life. All of them, it is submitted, come self-evidently loaded with an understanding of the world and of things that are worthy of human pursuit<sup>9</sup>.

This critical examination focuses on select English paremias—words to the wise—widely recognized and familiar at least in the United States. As expressions on morals, ethics, advice, and judgment, they are pervasive among many cultural traditions including Western, Asian, Occidental, Oriental, ancient, and contemporary. Widely repeated and recited, paremias raise subjects of general interest reflecting commonly held wisdom or value. English paremias of interest invite critical moral reflection on individual freedoms, rights, privacy, and personal lifestyle. As words to the wise shared in this society, how are these paremias read? Given translations often reflect the culture and context of a language, would paremias—proverbs, maxims, verbal expression of common thought, or parables—be different if this examination proceeded in another common language? Do these paremias become transformed or take on different meaning when read within a different or foreign cultural context? As a craft of

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<sup>8</sup> Gorun A. The idea of freedom and the premises of liberalism in Greek thought. 2010. [PDF]

<sup>9</sup> Wiese M. They Say It Where I'm From: Using the Language of Idioms to Compare the Characteristics of Individualism vs. Collectivism. 2018. [PDF]



interpretation, the meaning of paremias often escapes easy definition or explanation without deep reflection.

This examination interprets or reads English paremias on individualism from an Oriental perspective—primarily Chinese and Japanese—as more than an academic exercise or playful diversion, attempting a serious moral consideration. As moral judgment or ethical reasoning is grounded in social norms or cultural-specific values, moral reflection on paremias beyond or outside these norms becomes difficult. Further, as English paremias of interest are closely linked to the United States culture and history, their readings or interpretations elsewhere may require some explanatory context. Given the general availability and accessibility of wisdom literature on morals in English, caution is given regarding hasty or precipitous interpretations; the interpretation of paremias may be as fluid, adaptable, versatile, and enigmatic as language and cultures themselves<sup>10</sup>.

There is wisdom in the old sayings of the world. From the Russian spoken proverbs such as “*Nine cuts—out of tenth blood,*” to the English written proverbs such as “*Hasty climbers have sudden falls,*” paremias—phrases used universally for the transmission of wisdom and morals—have been indispensable tools of morality for the entire span of human history. This essay was written in hopes to pave the foundations for a possible deeper understanding of how English paremias effect the viewing of morals with the dawn of the bargain. This is really a question of ethics concerning the kind of society this system of morals arises or reflects, and what kind of society this system of morals encourages. Particularly, well thought out English paremias tends to contain (and therefore tend to propagate) systems of morality emphasizing the importance, value and right of individual initiative and survival, as well as its expression in the forms most similar to the beliefs in personal freedom and what it entails in this day and age, The land of the free—the United States where free market is regarded as the most moral and productive kind of market, free speech is legally protected and regarded with respect, the first amendment secures the right to petition the government—does not petition other governing bodies to extinguish those in the right to free speech, the right to bear arms is kept to secure freedoms etc. on the basis that it encourages growth and growth is moral, yet is moral in this specific way due to the ethical system of morals disseminated by its paremias stating such moral growth is always positive, such is comprehensive of the matter at hand.

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