

“A GOOD WOMAN IS...”: GENDERED EVALUATION AND DISCURSIVE FOSSILISATION IN ROMANIAN AND ENGLISH PROVERBS

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Abstract:

This paper examines gender-related proverbs as culturally sedimented evaluative patterns that encode asymmetrical role expectations for women and men. Drawing on a qualitative contrastive analysis of Romanian and English proverb collections, the study explores how conventional figurative language articulates normative assumptions concerning domesticity, authority, marriage, moral conduct, and social value. Following paremiological approaches that treat proverb collections as repositories of culturally stabilised meanings (Mieder, 2004; Norrick, 2014), the analysis focuses on recognisability and discursive availability rather than frequency.

The study identifies recurrent asymmetries in the evaluative framing of femininity and masculinity across the two languages, with women more frequently subjected to moral judgement, behavioural prescription, and role confinement, and men more often associated with agency and authority. These findings are consistent with previous cross-cultural research on gender ideologies in proverbs (Schipper, 2006; Lomotey & Chachu, 2020), but are interpreted here as features of proverbial meaning rather than as evidence of behavioural effects.

To illustrate the contemporary relevance of such evaluative models, the paper further examines selected examples from Romanian media discourse in which proverb-based gender formulations are activated through metaphor, quotation, or explicit rejection. Drawing on discourse-oriented approaches to evaluation and (im)politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Fairclough, 2003), the analysis shows that proverb-based gender evaluations are interpretable as culturally recognisable formulations that can be invoked, contested, or reformulated in public texts. The paper argues that gendered proverbs remain discursively relevant not because they are frequently cited, but because they continue to provide recognisable evaluative patterns that can be mobilised, contested, or recontextualised in contemporary communication.

Keywords: Gendered proverbs; Discursive fossilisation; Language and gender; Romanian; English.