

Speak of the Wolf and You See His Tail : Lithuanian Situational Sayings

Summary

The publication contains situational sayings attributed to spoken folklore. These sayings are close to proverbs and especially to proverbial phrases, yet, unlike both of these, they do not express an idea or a generalisation. They emerged as a reaction to a situation that was somewhat exceptional or did not comply with the established norms of life. The nature of the situation, the occasion or the reason to use a saying is one of the key criteria of the definition and classification of situational sayings.

Some sayings are provoked by **non-verbal situations**: somebody does a shoddy work or is lazy, or behaves or looks inappropriately: bangs doors, obstructs the light, puts a hat on a table, is wearing dirty or untidy clothes; somebody has not been rewarded for work done; somebody sleeps too long, does not return home until very late, or has unexpectedly fallen over, tripped or hurt themselves; or gave a sigh, sneezed, laughed, or is crying, and the like. Some of these situational sayings have a well-defined purpose and fulfil a certain function: for instance, they are used when wishing luck to a working person, or guests are encouraged to take their seats at the table and enjoy their food, and so on. These are the sayings that have originated and are used in the situations resulting from traditional etiquette. A fairly small part of sayings used in non-verbal situations is made up of vivid descriptions of various natural phenomena and the weather.

The sayings arising from situations of **verbal communication** are different. These are retorts to a request, an order, or an accusation, responses to inappropriate forms of address, humorous replies to thanks, greetings or farewells, retorts to someone who has not caught what was said or is asking something, and making

mockery of braggarts and liars, squealers or cowards, and so on. Still different are the sayings which are used as a response to the text just heard and not to a situation: these are responses to a word or a short phrase taken from the context and usually having very little to do with it. Sometimes they even distort the meaning of the particular word and form a pun (...*rodos, kad...*(... it **appears** that...) – *Rodos, bet neišlenda* (It **appears** but doesn't pop out); ... *kas bus, jei...*(... **what** will happen if.... – *Kas bus, tą krikštysim* (**What** comes will be baptised). Motivation for the overwhelming majority of situational sayings should be sought in the structure of people's life. Many of them are inseparable from the attitudes of traditional etiquette, and sometimes they are connected to a particular person or event. Lithuanian situational sayings can be traced back to rituals and no longer existing customs. They are especially numerous in traditional phrases accompanying the seating of a guest at the table. The group of sayings which are based on past beliefs that found their way into the sphere of traditional etiquette and are used to encourage the success of the work done is not numerous and does not expand any more: *Atvažiuoja su moliu!* (literally, '[They are] coming with clay!'), they say to a butter churner; a washerwoman is encouraged with the saying *Mačiau gulbes skraidant* (I saw swans flying), while *Kiškis striūnas taiso* (A hare is fixing strings) is addressed to a weaver. A lot of traditional prohibiting sayings used in the case of inappropriate behaviour are based on old beliefs. At present the aspect of popular ethics is also prominent: these remarks are used when somebody spits in water or fire, treats bread disrespectfully, or whistles in a room. The usage of these sayings increasingly lacks the value aspect of belief, ethics, or etiquette; in other words, a text that has detached itself from its primary sphere of origin and purpose becomes a means of daily communication and moves to the sphere of banter and vivid wit. In general, the human's eternal desire to wisecrack and play, to surprise the other with one's wit, to say things suggestively and make an impression is an important stimulus for the birth and existence of situational sayings.

The same situational sayings are not necessarily used across the whole Lithuanian-speaking area: sometimes they are known only in one particular area that can be quite small. Just like proverbs and proverbial phrases (which are the reflection of common, if sometimes contradictory, experiences and attitudes), some of which are used

almost universally while others are not widely known, so situational sayings and various other sayings are often used in a narrower areas thus demonstrating individual human creativity.

Similar sayings also exist in the daily culture of other nations. The situations which trigger a response or provoke a certain riposte, which is usually a more or less traditional phrase, are in the majority of cases very similar or even identical, except that each nation frequently responds differently to identical situations. To some extent this is dictated by different customs and lifestyle, but also by different possibilities provided by each language. On the other hand, there are situations that elicit verbal responses that are either based on a similar idea or are simply identical. For example, the whole of Europe knows and still uses the saying *Speak of the wolf and see his tail*, the Lithuanian variant of which is *Vilką minim, vilkas čia* (Latvian *Te vilku piemin, te vilks klāt*, German *Wann man den Wolf nennt, so kommt er gerennt*, Polish *O wilku mowa, a wilk tu*, Russian *Pomianuli volka, a on i tut*). This saying is used by other Slavic nations, by the Italians and Greeks, the Scandinavian and other nations; it is recorded in Latin, while in French it has been used since the fifteenth century. Everybody says the same when a person mentioned suddenly makes an appearance. The existence of similar traditional sayings in different nations was prompted by the semblance of their magical beliefs, similar value orientation, and at times similar conditions and realities of everyday life.

Mostly it is the circumstances of usage and the function that determine whether a phrase belongs to the category of situational sayings. Their syntactical form is too diverse to be treated as a distinguishing feature. As a rule, a situational saying is a sentence-long statement, yet quite often these sayings are fragmentary and resemble a part of some longer text. Conversely, some of them do not look like a saying because they exceed a sentence in their length, and sometimes exist only in the form of a dialogue (a real or an ostensible dialogue, when the same person asks a question and answers it). Quite often, a remark used in certain situations does not have a text of an established form, and only the statement itself or a conclusion is said: with a sentence of a free form one points out that somebody has not yet paid a dressmaker if they see a tack that has not been pulled out, or that somebody still owes a shoemaker if new shoes squeak.

Many qualities – brevity, assertive nature, expression – make situational sayings close to proverbial phrases. When the sphere of usage of a proverbial phrase narrows down, that is, when such a phrase is associated with certain situations and is used only when such a situation occurs, it becomes a situational saying. Many a situational saying may resemble a proverb in such formal characteristics as the structure and the nature of the text. They would differ only in usage circumstances, the broadness / narrowness of interpretation, and sometimes motivation (its presence or absence). Incidentally, the content and information provided by a situational saying in the form of a proverb is often doubtful or strange. For example, when somebody – usually a child – asks a question and one is unwilling to answer it, one says *Daug žinosi – greit pasensi* (If you know much, you will grow old fast). However, a classic proverb can at times play the role of a situational saying. Just like a situational saying can be used as a proverb. *Pagyry puodas netaukuotas* (meaning ‘nothing to boast about’) is addressed to a braggart, but as this saying is motivated, it is widely used as a proverb and has different variants. *Dėl vyžočių nėra slūgočių* (There is no servant for a poor man) would be a proverb if it were used as a statement on, or a generalization of a life reality. However, the tradition of its usage keeps it within the framework of a situational saying: these words are used to refuse a request or an order to do, to fetch, or to take something, in other words, to do somebody a service.

Paremiologists approach these sayings in different ways. The current trend is to treat them as a separate sub-class of proverbial phrases, although with considerable reservations: this sub-class would not include texts that exceed the length of a phrase, but they are numerous. In Volume 5 of the collection of *Lietuvių tautosaka* (Lithuanian Folklore), which was prepared by Kazys Grigas and published in the 1960s, such sayings make up a separate section of ‘Banter’ (juokavimai), in which they are classified by the sphere of usage: [vairios situacijos (Different situations, LTt V, 834–841), as well as Klausimai, prašymai, pastebėjimai (Questions, requests, observations, 841–856), Linkėjimai, dėkojimai, sveikinimai (Wishes, thanks, congratulations, 857–865), Atsidūsėjimai (Sighs, 866). In addition to proverbs, proverbial phrases, riddles, and ‘popular maxims’, the Russian scholar Grigorii Permiakov mentions ‘excuses’ (Rus., *otgovorki*), ‘joking responses’,

'idle talk', and short dialogues in which the interlocutor is cheated, the latter being metaphorically called 'purchase' (Perm., 89).

Sayings of this type constantly find their way to numerous collections of proverbs and proverbial phrases. Since they are different and to some extent lack independence (as a rule, the text does not reveal the meaning of the saying), they are usually supplied with explanations of when or why they are used. In the collections of Latvian proverbs and proverbial phrases (*Latviešu sakāmvārdi un parunas* by Pēteris Birkerts and Mērija Birkerte (Birk) and Elza Kokare's capital work of the same title (Kok)) they are given separate sections, but some appear in corresponding thematic sections. In the best-known collections of Russian proverbs and proverbial phrases by Vladimir Dal (Dal), Vlas Zhukov (Žuk), Aleksandr Molotkov (Mol), Vladimir Anikin (An) and others these sayings appear alongside the 'classic' proverbs and proverbial phrases, but many of them are accompanied by a commentary. Neither Polish nor German multi-volume collections (three volumes edited by Julian Krzyżanowski (KrzMG); Oskar Kolberg's collection in the publication *Litwa* (KL); Lutz Röhrich's collection of proverbial phrases (Röhr), Karl Wander's five volumes of proverbs (Wand), and two volumes by Ida and Otto Düringsfeld (Dür)) concentrate these sayings in separate sections. Röhrich maintains that his multi-volume collection of proverbial phrases *Lexikon der sprichwörtlichen Redensarten* includes 'other sayings' – statements and exclamations which are meaningless and incomprehensible without context, such as *Das geht auf keine Kuhhaut!*; *Es ist höchste Eisenbahn!*; *Alles für die Katz!* and others (Röhr I 14), which literally translate as 'it doesn't fit into a cow's hide', 'This is the very (= the most suitable) railway', 'Everything for the cat!'). He also mentions that in the process of the collection of material for the atlas of German ethnology (*Atlas der deutschen Volkskunde*) in the 1920s, questions were specifically asked about sayings commonly used to encourage a guest to eat, or what used to be said when a piece of cutlery fell on the floor. The answers to the first question (Röhr I 45) – *Eßt und trinkt, der Topf steht draußen* (Eat and drink, the pot is outside), *Tut wie zu Hause, denn dort muß man sparen* (Do as you do at home – you must save there) – show that banter and 'contrary' encouragement were expected. It is this type of sayings that are the object of this publication.

In this book the numerous and structurally diverse pieces of spoken folklore are divided into sections by the sphere of their usage and their themes: Buitis ir etiketas (Daily routines and etiquette); Vertinimai. Nuostatos (Judgements. Attitudes); Veiksmi. Poelgiai. Fizinės būsenos (Actions. Acts. Physical states); Santykiai. Psichinės ir emocinės būsenos (Relationships. Psychic and emotional states); Sutapimai; Įvairios situacijos (Coincidences; Various situations); Posakiai, palydintys veiksma (Sayings accompanying an action); Replikos į žodį (Responses to a word); Išprovokuotas dialogas (A provoked dialogue); Orai, gamtos reiškiniai (Weather, natural phenomena). Since the structure of the publication is oriented towards the thematic aspect, sayings that are used both in non-verbal situations and in the circumstances of verbal communication appear in all sections but in varying proportions. The sayings which react to a text or a word are mainly concentrated in two separate sections ('Responses to a word' and 'A provoked dialogue'). Attributing these sayings that are triggered by another text or word, or form, to any of the thematic groups would not be natural.

Taking the practice of usage into account, the proverbs and proverbial sayings that fulfil the function of situational sayings in spoken language are given alongside. This publication does not aim at covering the entirety and diversity of Lithuanian situational sayings and at indicating all common occasions of their use. It is the first attempt to draw attention to the layer of traditional sayings, which has so far been in the margins of paremiology, and to demonstrate it in a separate book.

Material for the book was collected from the card index of Lithuanian proverbs and proverbial phrases and supplemented with the data from the Department of Manuscripts of Lithuanian folklore that is not represented in the card index. Texts from published sources – collections of short forms of folklore published in different years, Volume 5 of *Lietuvos tautosaka*, the multi-volume *Lietuvių kalbos žodynas* (Dictionary of the Lithuanian language), contemporary periodicals, literary fiction, local monographs, publications in regional studies, and other similar sources have also been included.

In the case of close variants (some of which are quite numerous), only the place and the year of the record are indicated

(if it is recorded in a collection; only one variant is given from one location); if the place and the year are not recorded, then the number of the collection of the Department of Manuscripts of Lithuanian Folklore (LTR) or the fund (I, II, or III) of the Lithuanian Scientific Society (*Lietuvių mokslo draugija*, LMD) are given. In order not to expand, other data (informant, recorder, the fact of publication) are not given. The published source is indicated when a manuscript collection did not exist or it was unavailable. A reprint of a saying in other publications is not indicated. The sayings are given in the forms of standard language; dialectal genders are retained where they are important for rhymes and rhythm. In this book, italic type is used for proverbs and proverbial phrases cited in the original text, for the explanations placed after situational sayings, and for the dialectal genders of situational sayings.

This book is intended both for paremiologists, folklorists, and scholars in the history of Lithuanian culture, and for the general public. The publishers welcome the readers' contribution: if an interested reader who does not find situational sayings used in his or her area in this book would send this saying to the Department of Verbal Folklore at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore (*Antakalnio 6, Vilnius*, or *daliaz@liti.lt*), the book would fulfil yet another of its aims.