

## THE CONCEPT OF LABOR IN RUSSIAN PROVERBS

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**Abstract.** The article examines the concept of labor as one of the significant fragments of the Russian linguistic worldview represented in the proverbial fund. Based on Russian proverbs, the main semantic zones of the concept are analyzed: labor as a moral value, labor as a condition for prosperity and life success, skill and experience, the collective organization of work, and the opposition between labor and laziness. Special attention is paid to the fact that the Russian proverb not only records the practical experience of the people but also transmits an evaluative model of behavior in which a person's attitude toward labor becomes an indicator of their moral character. As a result of the study, it is revealed that the concept of labor in Russian proverbs has a complex semantic structure and combines economic, ethical, social, and educational components.

**Keywords:** concept, labor, Russian proverbs, paremiology, linguistic worldview, linguoculturology, value semantics, diligence, laziness.

### Introduction

Russian proverbs represent one of the most stable layers of national culture. They preserve people's ideas about the world, the individual, family, society, morality, labor, and life experience. A proverb is characterized by brevity, imagery, and a high degree of generalization; therefore, it is capable of conveying in a concise form not only a practical observation but also an entire system of values.

One of the central notions of the Russian proverbial worldview is labor. In traditional culture, labor is perceived not only as a means of material provision but also as a person's moral duty, a means of character education, and an indicator of responsibility, patience, honesty, and social worth. In proverbs, labor is often opposed to laziness, idleness, empty talk, and fruitless expectation.

The relevance of the study is determined by the fact that addressing the concept of labor in Russian proverbs makes it possible to understand more deeply the value foundations of Russian culture and the peculiarities of the linguistic representation of socially significant concepts. In modern conditions, when attitudes toward labor are changing under the influence of digitalization, migration processes, new forms of employment, and educational practices, the analysis of the traditional paremiological model of labor acquires particular scientific and methodological significance.

The purpose of the article is to identify the main forms of representation of the concept of labor in Russian proverbs and to determine its semantic and axiological structure. To achieve this purpose, the following tasks are set: to consider theoretical approaches to the study of the concept and the proverb; to determine thematic groups of proverbs connected with labor; to identify the key oppositions forming the content of the concept; and to analyze the evaluative and educational functions of Russian proverbs about labor.

### Theoretical Foundations of the Study

In modern linguoculturology, the concept is regarded as a multilayered mental-linguistic unit combining notional, figurative, and value components. Through concepts, the language records the ideas most significant for a culture. The concept of labor belongs to the basic concepts, since it is connected with a person's everyday life, the social structure of society, and the system of moral norms.



A proverb is a special unit of language and culture. On the one hand, it has a stable linguistic form; on the other hand, it functions as a ready-made judgment applicable to various communicative situations. In proverbs, not only factual information is important, but also evaluation: they approve of diligence, patience, skill, practicality and condemn laziness, carelessness, and empty promises. Therefore, proverbial material makes it possible to study not individual words but an entire system of folk ideas.

Labor in Russian paremiology appears not as a neutral action but as a value-marked activity. It is associated with bread, prosperity, skill, honor, patience, time, result, and benefit. At the same time, proverbs show that labor requires effort, discipline, skill, and constancy.

### **Materials and Methods**

The research material consists of Russian proverbs and sayings that represent ideas about labor, diligence, skill, the result of activity, laziness, and idleness. Paremiological dictionaries and collections were used as sources, including classical collections of Russian proverbs, as well as modern lexicographic publications on Russian paremiology.

In the process of analysis, proverbs were selected in which the lexemes *labor*, *work*, *deed*, *master*, *bread*, *laziness*, *patience*, and *skill* are directly or indirectly represented, as well as stable semantic connections expressing a person's attitude toward activity. The study was carried out using the descriptive method, component analysis, semantic grouping, and elements of linguoculturological interpretation. Such an approach makes it possible to consider the proverb not only as a linguistic unit but also as a carrier of cultural evaluation.

### **Research Results**

The analysis of the material showed that the concept of labor in Russian proverbs has a ramified semantic structure. The most stable thematic-semantic zones are the following: 1) labor as a source of well-being; 2) labor as a moral duty; 3) labor and skill; 4) labor and time; 5) labor and collectivity; 6) the opposition between labor and laziness.

The first group of proverbs presents labor as a necessary condition for material prosperity. This group includes such paremias as: "You cannot pull even a little fish out of the pond without effort," "Labor feeds, while laziness spoils," "He who does not work shall not eat," "If you want to eat kalachi, do not sit on the stove." In these proverbs, labor is understood as the direct cause of the result. Food, bread, kalachi, and fish act as images of life provision, while human action is associated with receiving a deserved benefit.

An important feature of this group is its cause-and-effect logic. Proverbs show that the result does not appear by itself; it requires effort. Folk wisdom thereby forms a practical orientation toward activity. A person must act rather than wait for accidental luck. The image of the "stove" in the proverb "If you want to eat kalachi, do not sit on the stove" symbolizes passivity and everyday immobility, whereas "kalachi" denote the desired well-being. The contrast between desire and inaction creates an expressive educational effect.

The second semantic zone is connected with the ethical evaluation of labor. The proverbs "The work fears the master," "There is a time for work and an hour for fun," and "A small deed is better than great idleness" show that labor is perceived as a norm of proper behavior. The lexeme *deed* is especially significant. In Russian proverbs, it denotes not simply work but useful, meaningful, and socially justified activity. The presence of a deed characterizes a person positively, whereas the absence of a deed is associated with idleness and moral emptiness.

The third group of proverbs reveals the connection between labor, mastery, experience, and professional skill. Paremias such as "The work fears the master," "Not the one who is handsome in face is good, but the one who is fit for work," and "As is the master, so is the work" emphasize that a person's value is determined not by external features but by the ability to perform work well. Here



labor receives a personalized expression: the result depends on the person themselves, their skill, responsibility, and attitude toward the task.

A special place is occupied by proverbs in which labor is associated with patience and gradualness: “Patience and labor will overcome everything,” “Measure seven times, cut once,” and “A tale is quickly told, but a deed is not quickly done.” They reflect the idea of labor as a process requiring endurance, precision, and consistency. In this group, not only the final result is important but also the way in which it is achieved. Haste, carelessness, and superficiality are evaluated negatively because they violate the proper organization of activity.

The fourth semantic zone is connected with time. The proverb “There is a time for work and an hour for fun” forms a model of the rational distribution of life activities. Labor here does not exclude rest; however, it establishes a hierarchy: first work, then entertainment. This formula reflects the traditional idea of discipline, order, and responsibility. In Russian paremiological consciousness, labor is connected with the ability to manage time, not to postpone what is necessary, and not to replace activity with empty amusement.

The fifth group of proverbs shows the collective aspect of labor. For example: “With an artel, it is good even to fight an enemy,” “One man in the field is not a warrior,” “Take hold together, and it will not be heavy.” Although not all of these proverbs directly name labor, they express an important attitude: joint action eases difficulty and increases the effectiveness of work. Collectivity in the Russian tradition is perceived as a condition of survival, mutual assistance, and moral support.

The concept of labor is most expressively revealed through the opposition labor — laziness. The proverbs “Laziness was born before us,” “For the lazy one, every day is a holiday,” “You cannot obtain bread while lying down,” and “A lazy spinner does not even have a shirt for herself” present laziness as an anti-value. It is associated with poverty, uselessness, disorder, and social inadequacy. Unlike labor, which feeds and educates, laziness destroys the order of life and deprives a person of respect.

Thus, the results of the analysis show that Russian proverbs are not limited to a simple assertion of the necessity of labor. They form a holistic value model in which labor appears as the basis of prosperity, moral dignity, professional mastery, life discipline, and social responsibility.

### **Discussion of Results**

The results obtained make it possible to state that the concept of labor in Russian proverbs has a pronounced axiological orientation. Proverbs do not merely describe labor as an activity; they evaluate a person’s attitude toward work. This is why paremias often contain oppositions: labor — laziness, deed — idleness, skill — inability, patience — haste, result — empty desire. These oppositions help structure the folk understanding of proper and improper behavior.

The imagery of proverbs plays a special role. A little fish, a pond, a stove, kalachi, bread, a shirt, a deed, a master — all these elements belong to everyday life, and therefore they make moral thought concrete and easy to remember. The abstract idea of diligence is expressed through everyday images understandable to different generations of native speakers. Thanks to this, proverbs preserve their educational power and can be used in educational practice, especially in teaching Russian as a non-native language.

In Russian proverbs, labor is closely connected with the concept of bread. In traditional culture, bread is a symbol of life, prosperity, and an honestly earned result. Therefore, proverbs about labor often have both economic and moral meaning. A person works not only for material provision but also to preserve their dignity. This dual character makes the concept of labor one of the key elements of the Russian value-based worldview.

The pragmatic function of proverbs about labor should also be noted. They are used as a means of instruction, argumentation, evaluation of behavior, and speech influence. In a communicative



situation, a proverb can replace a long explanation: the phrase “You cannot pull even a little fish out of the pond without effort” immediately establishes a norm of behavior and points to the need for effort. Thus, paremias perform not only nominative and informative but also regulatory functions.

The comparison of different thematic groups shows that labor in Russian paremiology is understood as a process requiring internal organization. It is important not merely to work but to work skillfully, on time, patiently, conscientiously, and usefully. Therefore, the concept of labor includes not only physical action but also such qualities as responsibility, reasonableness, endurance, collectivity, and professionalism.

### Conclusion

The concept of labor in Russian proverbs is a complex linguocultural formation in which practical experience, moral evaluation, and social norm are combined. Labor is understood as a source of bread, prosperity, respect, mastery, and personal dignity. Through proverbs, the idea is fixed that a person’s well-being depends on their efforts, patience, and ability to bring a task to completion.

The main forms of expression of the concept of labor are proverbs containing the lexemes *labor*, *deed*, *work*, *master*, *bread*, and *laziness*, as well as figurative constructions based on the opposition between action and inaction. The most significant semantic components are diligence, effectiveness, mastery, patience, collectivity, and the negative evaluation of laziness. These components form a stable axiological model characteristic of the Russian linguistic worldview.

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