Individual essay contest

Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World. Time for Equal Opportunities

Research work (essay)

«Russian and British folk culture images and traditions in proverbs and sayings»

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Introduction

Proverbs and sayings are the reflection of a society's beliefs, values, and cultural heritage. Behind them there is the centuries-old wisdom of peoples, the experience of entire generations. They preserve knowledge about the world and about a person in this world, the "autobiography of the people", the "mirror of culture."

In my essay I will try to delve into the rich folk cultures of Russia and Britain by examining the images and traditions represented in their proverbs and sayings.

At first sight these cultures can seem very different as the countries are located about 5000 kilometres away from each other. Nevertheless, Russia and Britain have a lot in common, especially in their folklore. By exploring the linguistic gems like proverbs and sayings, I hope to understand the unique cultural landscapes of these two nations.

The relevance of this essay is high as lots of people are involved into the process of globalisation today. As a result, there has been a steady decrease of culture value. More and more teenagers are losing their national identity. Studying folklore in terms of a proverbial picture of the world, we can restore a separate fragment hat shows the beauty and harmony of a language and culture.

Russian proverbs

"Beyond the fullness of thoughts, already in the very image of expression, many of our folk properties were reflected in them; they have everything: mockery, mockery, reproach — in a word, everything that stirs and bullies for the living... All great people, from Pushkin to Suvorov and Peter, were in awe of our proverbs."

N. V. Gogol

Russian proverbs and sayings have a long-standing tradition deeply rooted in the country's history and folklore. They often have inspiration from nature, religion and everyday life. One of the prominent themes is the resilience and endurance of the Russians. For example, the proverb "Patience and hard work will grind everything" highlights the values of perseverance and hard work in the face of adversity. "Work feeds, and laziness spoils", "Business - time, fun - hour", "The sun paints the earth, and labour paints man." In Russian culture most proverbs about labour and diligence came from life. Historically 90% of Russian people were involved in the agro sphere.

"Make hay while the sun shines". This English proverb also originates from the practice of farming but only in the field abroad. Any farmer feels the rightness of this thought, but after many hundreds of people expressed this thought in many ways, after many trials and errors, this thought finally acquired its memorable form and began its life as a proverb. "Done the job, walk boldly" This proverb lived even among our ancestors, who noticed that if you don’t do the job on time, you will fail. If you do not insulate the house, you will freeze in winter, if you do not harvest, it will disappear and hunger will begin.

Another recurring motif in Russian proverbs is the importance of community and solidarity. "It is good to be a guest, but it is better to be at home" or "Even a hut feels like paradise when you’re with your loved one" or "Where you were born is where you are most handy" are the sayings that emphasise the significance of home and family. They reflect the strong emphasis placed on family bonds and the comfort found within the domestic sphere in Russian culture. Home and house are very important to the Russians. There is even a widespread positive opinion about loyalty and hospitality as the national feature of Russian people. It is connected with the tradition when all members of the family live in one house sharing household chores. The Russians have the whole system of family hierarchy.

British Proverbs and Sayings

British proverbs and sayings reflect the rich and diverse tapestry of British folk culture. The British Isles have a long history of folklore and legends, which are often reflected in their proverbs.

One of the common topics found in British sayings is the unpredictable weather conditions. The saying "April showers bring May flowers" captures the temperamental nature of British weather and the optimism associated with the changing seasons. As it is known, the territory of Britain is famous for its changeable weather so British people should find the way how to forecast it. There are plenty of proverbs about nature signs that the British take into account. For example, "Red sky at night, sailors delight' "Red sky in morning, sailors take warning" or “Clear Moon, frost soon”. These sayings show how much weather affects the British and how much their lifestyle depends on the weather.

Manners and politeness are another frequently used issues for culture . The proverb "Manners make the man" reflects the cultural value of good etiquette and respectful behaviour. It emphasises the importance of social decorum that is deeply ingrained in British society. It is often marked one's character and upbringing. “Different times different manners” is about national features and traditions. In England it is very important to show your manners and respect in appropriate way. You should follow strict rules based on hierarchy, status and many other features.

One more feature in British culture is Geographical names. Great Britain is a huge country with a great conquestment history, so geography is very close to them. There are some sayings such as “Africa always brings something new”, “Across The Poland”. Nowadays they are used in everyday life without strict connections with those countries. They are just “national” memory indicating, for example, the superiority of Britain and England over all other countries the other days.

"All countries stand in need of Britain, and Britain of none"

"With all the world have war, but with England do not jar"

"There are more good victuals in England, that in seven other kingdoms"

In these proverbs, the most impressive features of foreign countries that attracted the attention of an Englishman are noted.

In the Russian language, geographical proverbs represent the closest neighbours of Russia, which became part of the Russian Empire in the XVIII century, for instance, Poland and Lithuania.

"What's next in Poland, I'll rob more."

"Those who have not been to Vilna have not seen miracles."

About Russia, about the Russian land there are some proverbs such as "in Russia the people are God-fearing", "in Russia the people are inclined to drink" and "in Russia there is no truth".

"The Russian land is all under God"

"The great Holy Russian land, and there is no place for the truth anywhere"

"There is no union between Russia and the summer"

Thus, we see that proverbs and sayings are widely spread in English and Russian languages, and also found out what is common between such folk art of both countries. While Russian and British proverbs and sayings have a striking similarity, they reveal distinct cultural differences. In terms of values, Russian proverbs emphasise resilience, hard work, and the importance of community ties, reflecting the country's history of surviving challenging circumstances. In contrast, British proverbs focus on manners, politeness and the appreciation of nature's beauty and changings, reflecting the values like social etiquette and the history of the land.

Conclusion

Proverbs and sayings provide a unique insight into the folk cultures of different nations. Through the examination of Russian and British folklore, we have witnessed the images and traditions deeply ingrained in the societies. The proverbs and sayings of both cultures serve as a testament to their rich histories, values and ways of life. By exploring these linguistic treasures, we gain a deeper appreciation for the diverse beauty of human culture and the uniqueness of the language heritage.

"Folklore is the perfect second skin. From under its hide, we can see all the shimmering, shadowy uncertainties of the world."

Jane Yolen

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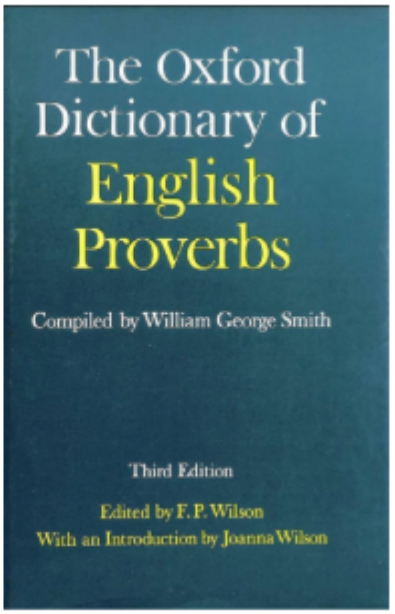
Annex

Book of Russian proverbs



Book of English Proverb

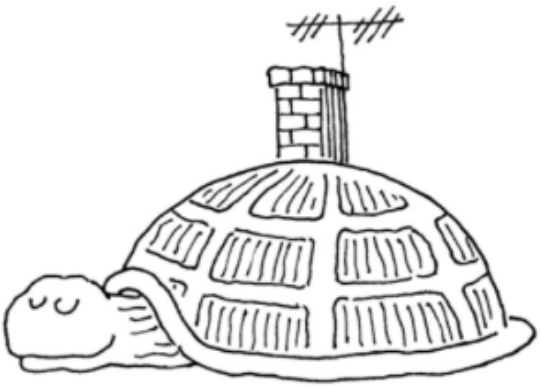
“ Make hay while the sun shines” russian proverb

“Manners make the man”

"It is good to be a guest,but
it is better to be at home"

Proverbs, which are similar both in Russian and English:

There's No Place like Home



(a person is happiest with his or her family and friends)

Two Heads Are Better Than One

(two people working together can solve a problem quicker and better than a person working alone)