

G. L. KABJITS/G. L. KAPCHITS: *Maah-maahyada Soomaalida ee ku qoran afka Soomaaliga iyo afka Ruushka oo ay weheliyaan maahmaahyada Ruushka ee ay isu dhigmaan/Somaliiskie poslovitsy i pogovorki na somaliiskom i russkom yazykakh s russkimi sootvetstviyami.* (Poslovitsyi i Pogovorki Narodov Vastoka, Glavnaya Redaktsiya Vostochnoi Literaturyi). 283 pp. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Nauka, 1983. 1.10 roubles.

The book under review has two title pages. The first is in Somali and adapts the name of the author to Somali phonology and orthography in accordance with the current practice in Somalia, and the second is in Russian. The titles of the book correspond closely and inform its readers that it contains 'Somali proverbs and sayings written in Somali and Russian and accompanied by their Russian equivalents'. The two title pages also describe the role of Kapchits in writing the book as one who compiled the proverbs and sayings, translated and annotated them and wrote the introduction. This, however, does not fully reflect the credit due to him since a large part of the book (pp. 177-236) provides a semantic-classificatory analysis of the materials presented, of which Kapchits is the author. The use of two languages on the title pages might suggest that we are presented with a bilingual edition of the work. This, however, is not the case since it is written in Russian and only the original text of proverbs and sayings are in Somali. Although the Somali title page may be merely a laudable gesture of courtesy to the Somali people it performs another useful function. It attracts Somali readers who, even if they do not know Russian can find in the book a large number of their own proverbs and sayings which they can read with interest and pleasure. Kapchits's collection, which contains over a thousand items, is the largest ever published.

This is a thoroughly scholarly work in its critical approach to the existing documentation and its judgement and discernment in the use of oral sources, from which most of the texts were collected. It is to the credit of the author that he has secured the cooperation of many Somalis, including some who were obviously connoisseurs of their national folklore and helped him with difficult points of interpretation and notes on its cultural background. He fully acknowledges their contribution and also gives an account of materials published so far, including those by Somali researchers. The only significant omission, which was unavoidable, is *Maahmaahaa saddexshub: Carabi, Ingiriisi, Soomali* ('Proverbs passed along a chain of three water-drawers: Arabic, English and Somali' i.e. proverbs in these three languages which correspond in meaning) by Maxamed Shire Maxamed, the date of publication of which is given as 1974 but which, as far as I have been able to ascertain, appeared in Somali bookshops only in 1983.

Each item in Kapchits's collection is accompanied by a Russian translation in which meticulous care is taken to preserve the imagery and allusions of the original text. To achieve this kind of fidelity Kapchits makes frequent use of annotations and references to a glossary of Somali terms and proper names

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provided in the appendices since, as he explains in the introduction, the Somali art of paroemia is closely linked to the traditional way of life and the natural environment of Somalia which would be unfamiliar to outsiders. The translations are clear and accurate, with very few exceptions in which some revision could be recommended for the second edition of the book. In explaining the text *Wixii tegey Khadarna ma haleelo* 'Even Khadar cannot bring back what is past and gone' (page 165) the translator refers his readers to the glossary for information about Khadar which, however, is too short to be illuminating. It would have been useful to explain that according to popular beliefs Khadar (Khidr) was given miraculous powers and comes to people's rescue even in otherwise hopeless situations. Another case where some emendation is needed is the note on the text *Caqli gaalo iyo indho quraanyo midna lama arko* 'One cannot see the eyes of ants nor what is in the mind of infidels' (p. 86). The note states that the usual sense of this proverb is that one cannot understand what is in the mind of another person. Normally, however, this proverb is applied to non-Muslims only and is not used in a general sense. In yet another note, which refers to Item 785 on page 140, some change is also required. In it the Somali words *xalaal* 'what is permitted' and *xaaraan* 'what is prohibited [in Islam]' are equated with the Russian *postnoe* 'permitted to be eaten during Lent' and *skoromnoe* 'prohibited to be eaten during Lent' respectively. The note causes a semantic short circuit which results from the differences between the rules of conduct among Muslims and among Christians.

The Russian translations are followed in the majority of items in the collection by Russian proverbs and sayings with similar meanings and this comparative side of the book is based on an impressive amount of research into the Russian sources. Although the corresponding items in the two languages frequently differ in their images and allusions it is astonishing how close the anonymous makers of proverbs and sayings in Somalia and Russia are in their perception of reality and life experience. It seems most unlikely that the correspondences discovered by Kapchits could be due to diffusion or influence or are merely accidental. The inevitable conclusion is that the quest for paroemiological universals has a sound scientific base comparable to similar pursuits in linguistic theory.

In the part of the book which provides a semantic-classificatory analysis of the data, Kapchits applies the structuralist paroemiological theories developed by G. L. Permyakov which have won wide recognition among scholars. The measure of that recognition can be gauged by the accounts of Permyakov's life and works given by Peter Grzybek, Wolfgang Mieder, Dmitru Stanciu and Vilmos Voigt in the 1:1984 issue of *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*. It would be beyond the scope of the present review to discuss Permyakov's theories and their application by Kapchits to his materials; such a task would be much better performed by some

theoretician of paroemiology. From the point of view of Somali studies the theoretical framework which Kapchits sets up for his Somali materials has the great advantage of introducing an element of order into what would otherwise be an amorphous congeries of isolated items. His framework could also be profitably applied as a heuristic device in any search for further materials from oral sources.

Kapchits's book is a substantial contribution to our knowledge of Somali culture. It is of particular value to literary studies since many of the items in his collection are of considerable aesthetic appeal and, what is even more important, play a significant role in the major genres of Somali literature, written and oral, such as classical and modern poetry, oral narratives, short stories, novels and plays. Proverbs and sayings are used very frequently in these genres to give weight to description and authorial comment and to enliven dialogue. They are also often chosen as titles of literary works which anyone acquainted with Somali literature can verify by consulting Kapchits's collection.

The book is also very useful for linguists working on Somali since it attests archaic grammatical forms which, paradoxically enough, form part of everyday language and are commonly used in conversations and in the mass media. A good example of this are those verbal and verbo-adjectival forms which exclude the occurrence of focus indicators (*baa*, *ayaa*, *waxa* and *waa*) in declarative sentences such as for example *Ayax teg eelna reeb* 'Locusts go away but leave damage behind' (p. 20) and *Tuug wax ka tuhun badan* 'A thief is more suspicious than anyone else' (p. 155). In Kapchits's collection 7 per cent of all the items contain such grammatical forms, while normally focus indicators are obligatory in all declarative sentences.

Anyone engaged in the study of Somali society will equally find Kapchits's work to be of interest. Unlike in industrialized countries, in Somalia proverbs and sayings enjoy great prestige and popularity. They are used with all seriousness in public oratory either verbatim or as a source of imagery and allusion. As they embody the traditional patterns of thought which affect private and public opinion even on current issues they have to be taken into account in any sociological inquiry which aims at depth and empathy.

It is unfortunate that most scholars who work in the field of Somali studies do not know Russian and thus cannot make full use of this valuable work. The best remedy for this would be to publish an English translation, which would certainly attract a wide circle of readers.

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