LONG HAIR AND SHORT WIT— ENGLISH-SERBIAN PARALLELS IN PROVERBS DESCRIBING WOMEN

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Abstract. Proverbs as a genre of folklore contain traditional values of a given culture and views upheld by its members. They form a repository for linguistic analysis, the foundation of which is the relationship between language, culture and society. The analysis of proverbs can be used as a way to deconstruct traditional views. This research paper attempts to explore inter-cultural and contrastive paremiology by contrasting proverbs from two different cultures, and by identifying and analysing common cultural models within proverbs in different languages. By contrasting proverbs in English and Serbian, the aim is to examine how women are described in proverbs and what proverbs reveal about the two different cultures, their cultural models and how they relate to the female gender. The corpus consists of English and Serbian proverbs containing the words describing women, namely *woman*, *women*, *wife* or *wives* in English (Hazlitt, 2007), and *žena* and all its inflectional forms in Serbian (Марковић, 2005). By studying these proverbs, we are able to observe traditional ways of societal expectations of women, how they were seen and evaluated, praised and valued. Also, the research may act as a means of charting and rectifying men's views of women and their place in society.

England's the paradise of women.

Introduction

If we view language speakers as bearers of various cultures, we can also deduce that their understanding of the world and culture differs in various languages and societies. This concept was originally proposed by Humboldt addressing the variability of languages being conditioned by cultural models of social communities that use different languages (Filipović, 2009, according to Бабић Антић, 2022, p. 24). Cultural models constitute culture. Friedrich (2006, p. 220) defines culture as values and ideas about them, shared, transmitted in history, and created or recreated by the members of a given society. Language is an important component of culture and so are all forms of literary expression, including folklore and folklore genres.

Proverbs as a genre of folklore are recognised for their simplicity of form and pregnancy of meaning. They are didactic in nature. As Mieder (1977, according to Grzybek, 1987, p. 47) puts it, proverbs may function as a "warning, persuasion, admonition, reprimand, statement, characterisation, explanation, description, justification, summarisation"[4], and are typically regarded as society's traditional wisdom. Traditional values of a given culture and views upheld (this can be susceptible to change) by its members can form a repository for linguistic analysis, the foundation of which is the relationship between language, culture and society.

The said relationship and the questions raised about the interaction between the three fields occupy a significant role in various disciplines, gender studies and paremiology being some of them. In gender studies, gender is described as a social construct.[5] Gordić Petković (2011, according to Бабић Антић, 2022, p. 29) defines it as "the addition of social components to biological differences,

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[4] This becomes a matter of *polyfunctionality*, and alongside *heterosituativity* and *polysemanticity*, forms a triad of categories for the description of proverbs in the field of semiotics (O Park & Milică, 2016, p. 10).

[5] Contrary to how gender is perceived in gender studies, some authors of late have reopened a discussion that is not new to science. They argue that gender is indeed biological

including differences in the education of men and women, differences in economic status, in the social opportunities offered to them to acquire education, power or status, as well as differences in expectations, criteria and requirements by society, tradition and culture which have been placed before men and women". The original proponent of the social construction of gender was Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) in which she proposes the idea that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". In 1973, Robin Lakoff published an essay *Language and Woman's Place*, which influenced all subsequent research on language and gender, and became a salient part of the discussions on gender inequality. Lakoff had the intention of publishing this study to defend women and offer a better insight into the characteristics of their linguistic patterns. She explains that women are experiencing linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language and in the way general language use treated them. Both downgraded women to a submissive position in society, that of sex object or servant. She argues that language itself is a "tool of oppression and that it is learned as a part of learning to be a woman, imposed on women by societal norms and in turn, it should serve the purpose to keep them in their place" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 1). In 1990, Judith Butler published *Gender Trouble*, describing gender as a repetitive social performance. She asserts that the distinction between sex and gender supports the argument that while sex appears to be biologically intractable, gender is culturally constructed: "Gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler, 1990, p. 10).

Annette Kolodny's essay *Dancing through the Minefield* (1983) gives ideas for future feminist research, including utilising the past in order to better understand the present. This view is congruent with ideas introduced in paremiology, a research area studying proverbs. Fiedler (2014, p. 413) rightfully argues that proverbs contain stereotypes and their analysis can be used as a way to disseminate traditional views. Some of those views are regarded as antiquated by today's societal norms (for instance, violence against women is considered to be unacceptable, even though it is still practiced and defended in some cultures). In a similar vein, Jordan and De Caro (1986, p. 512) argue that "folklore may even serve as a corrective to overtly expressed male opinions about women and their place and outlook." Through proverbs we are able to observe former ways of societal expectations of women, how they were seen and evaluated, praised and valued.

In Serbian linguistics, analyses on proverbs describing women are aimed at studies of solely Serbian folklore, such as Šaulić (1971) and Trebješanin (1985, Требјешанин, 2002, 2011), or at a contrastive analysis of Serbian and other European languages such as Spanish (Georgijev, 2020) or Greek (Kostić & Baćić

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rather than societal, and that sex differences in the brain are responsible for the differences in the interest and behaviour of men and women (see Soh, 2020, p. 32).

Ćosić, 2023). In research into the proverbs in English and Serbian by Jevrić and Radosavljević (2013), proverbs were contrasted in order to determine the relationship between language, culture and society, and more specifically, to ascertain the differences between the two genders in relation to the language used in proverbs and the messages the proverbs convey. Jevrić (Јеврић, 2022) also studied proverbs containing lexemes *God* and *devil* and their semantic and lexical equivalents in Serbian. This research has a thematic section about proverbs which associate women and the devil, whose bond is seen by society as natural and primordial.

Methodology and the Corpus

Similarly as in Jevrić (Јеврић, 2022), this research paper attempts to explore intercultural and contrastive paremiology by contrasting proverbs from two different cultures, only this time by identifying and analysing common cultural models within proverbs in different languages. By contrasting proverbs in English and Serbian, the aim is to examine how women are described in proverbs and what proverbs reveal about the two different cultures, their cultural models and how they relate to the female gender. Thus, this study falls under the categories of gender studies and paremiology.

The corpus consists of English and Serbian proverbs containing the words describing women, namely *woman*, *women*, *wife* or *wives* in English, and *žena* and all its inflectional forms in Serbian. The word *žena* is synonymously used to mean *wife*, so it used as an equivalent for the English noun, while *supruga*[6], another word in Serbian with the meaning *wife*, was not detected in the corpus retrieval. The proverbs were extracted from two books of proverbs. The first one is the collection of *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* compiled by William C. Hazlitt (2007), the second is the collection of Serbian proverbs *Srpske narodne poslovice i izreke* compiled by Radul Marković (Марковић, 2005), with Vuk S. Karadžić's proverbs taking up a large section of the book.[7]

Previous research into proverbs in English and Serbian by Jevrić and Radosavljević (2013) focused on a selected number of proverbs portraying men and women. Images of men and women in English and Serbian proverbs were contrasted in order to identify the similarities and differences between the two languages. The research demonstrated that languages can be used as a means of promoting acceptable behaviour and that their use perpetuates stereotypes about women in society. Specific cultural models were isolated for each

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[6] About the etymology of the words *suprug* or *supruga*, see Todić Stanković (Тодић Станковић, 2019).

[7] A thorough description of the history of collecting proverbs in English and Serbian has already been published (see Јеврић, 2022, pp. 568–569), so it will not be repeated in this paper.

language. Images of women were divided into categories of women and how they are characterised pertaining to: *language*, *animals*, *wisdom and shrewdness*, *the household*, *the devil*, and *a necessary evil*. Men were divided into: *men and marriage*, *men as fathers*, *men as husbands*, and *men and dominance*. In Jevrić (Јеврић, 2022), the focus of the study were proverbs which English and Serbian share containing the entries *God* and *Bog*, *devil* and *djavo* or *vrag*[8]. The results of the analysis exposed common values of the two cultures, stereotypes, warnings and lessons. The following categories of proverbs were isolated: *the devil and women*, *devil's work*, *mentioning the devil*, *the devil and vigilance*, *the devil and colour black*, *other*, *God and initiative*, *God and people*, *God and cleanliness*, and *God and justice*. The section relevant for our research is the first one—*the devil and women*. Not all proverbs containing the lexeme *devil* when describing women and their equivalents in Serbian found in the books of proverbs were included in the study, and other lexemes describing women were subject of the analysis, including *baba* (grandmother or old woman) and *devojčica* (girl). The proverbs already covered in these two studies will not be included in our analysis. They will, however, be referenced if the results of the analysis necessitate their comparison.

The thematic classification of proverbs in our research is based on the classification already systematised in these two studies in which the proverbs were arranged into groups according to the characteristics attributed to women. It does not follow a set order of appearance and it left room for the identification of new categories not found in the two studies. It also relies on the arrangement of proverbs into 17 categories by Kerschen (1998): *wives and marriage*, *a woman's nature*, *a woman's looks*, *mothers and daughters*, *courtship*, *women as property*, *bad women versus virtuous women*, *a woman's place*, *talkativeness*, *whores and old maids*, *flightiness*, *sex*, *widows*, *old women and grandmothers*, *the law under women*, *a woman and her house*, and *miscellaneous*. The modified classification of proverbs comprising 11 categories goes as follows: *women are fickle*, *women and intelligence*, *women and language*, *women and animals*, *women and beauty*, *women and age*, *value of women*, *women and the household*, *women are a necessary evil*, *women and violence*, and *women and ships*.

Analysis and Discussion

Women Are Fickle

Proverbs in English and Serbian describe women's nature as fickle and ever-changing. The weather is found to be the degree of comparison: E1) *Women, wind, and fortune, are ever-changing*, E2) *A woman's mind and winter wind*

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[8] *Vrag* is a euphemistic synonym for the devil (Šafer, 2017, p. 158).

change oft, E3) *Winter weather and women's thoughts often change*, S1) *Žena, vatra, more—ne zna se koje je gore* (Women, fire, sea—each are worse than the other), S2) *Žena, vetar i sreća menjaju se brzo* (Women, wind and fortune are quick to change) or S3) *Žena, sreća i vetar menjaju se brzo* (Women, fortune and wind are quick to change). These may not only suggest the unpredictability of a woman's character, but possibly deceptiveness. Women are fickle and they cannot be trusted. The etymology of the word *fickle* reveals that the Old English meaning of *fickle* "deceitful, cunning, tricky" changed around the year 1300 to mean "changeable, inconstant, unstable", particularly "of fortune and women"[9]. Conversely, women's fickleness may point to their elusiveness, playfulness, charm, and even acts of seduction.

A comparison of women to animals found in E4) *An eel's held by the tail surer than a woman* indicates that the boundary between the stability and instability of a woman's character is quite delicate. This is also apparent in the following proverb: E5) *There's but an hour in a day between a good housewife*[10] *and a bad*. That a woman may abruptly change her mind is depicted in the proverb: E6) *Take your wife's first advice, not her second*. A similar assertion is implied by comparing women to inanimate objects: E7) *Mills and wives ever want*. Trust in women is particularly impeded if women couple it with tears: E8) *Women laugh when they can, and weep when they will* and E9) *Deceit, weeping, spinning, God hath give to women kindly, while they may live*.

Similar imagery regarding woman's unstable nature appears in: S4) *Izmedju ženinog da i ne, ne može se umetnuti ni vrh od igle* (Between a woman's yes and no, not even the tip of a needle can pass through). In Serbian, proverbs associating women with tears are numerous:

S5) *Žena uvek ima kesu suza uza se* (A woman always has a bag of tears at the ready),

S6) *Žena se uzda u plač, a lupež u laž* (Women rely on crying, thieves on lying),

S7) *Žene trguju ljude sa svojim suzama* (Women use their tears as leverage with people),

S8) *Ženskom plakanju, pasjem ramanju i čivutskom zaklinjanju nije verovati* (A woman's tears, a dog's limp and a miser's word are not to be believed),

S9) *Gospodskom obećanju, čivutskom zaklinjanju, pasjem ramanju i ženskom plakanju nije verovati* (A gentleman's promise, a miser's word, a dog's limp and a woman's tears are not to be believed),

S10) *Mačka se brani maukom, a žena plačem* (Cats defend themselves by meowing, women by crying).

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[9] Retrieved June 1, 2023 from: https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=fickle

[10] Although compounds with the noun element *wife* were not part of the research, this proverb was included because of the similarity of the image it portrays. Cf. the proverb with *maiden* discussed below.

Women seem to be capable of utilising tears at will, thus presenting an image of women as calculating, manipulative and downright insincere. To women crying comes naturally.

The disparity between the number of the proverbs in English and Serbian associating women with deceit and crying may not be cultural, but simply that some cultures are richer in proverbs than others (Јеврић, 2022, p. 569). Consequently, six proverbs in Serbian describe trust in women to be inconceivable. Women are equated with inanimate objects and domesticated animals, and are always suspected of insincerity and potential mischief:

 S11) *Ne vjeruj ljetini dok je ne metneš u ambar, ni ženi dok je ne metneš u grob* (Do not trust the harvest 'till it's in the barn, nor a woman 'till she's in the grave),

S12) *Ne veruj ženi ni kad se Bogu moli* (Trust not a woman, even when she is praying to God),

S13) *Od jarca se čuvaj spreda, od konja pozadi, a o žene sa svake strane* (Beware a goat from the front, a horse from the rear, and a woman from all sides),

S14) *Psu i ženi, ne veruj nikad* (Dogs and women are never to be trusted),

S15) *Od sto jednu reč možeš ženi da poveruješ* (Out of a hundred, only one word coming from a woman can be believed),

S16) *Nemaj vere u ženu, žena je žena* (Never trust a woman, a woman is a woman).

Women and Intelligence

Intelligence as a broader term can be broken down into three specific categories describing women: intelligence, shrewdness and wisdom. An identical proverb describing women's intelligence was found in both languages: E10) *Long hair and short wit* in English and three variations of the same proverb in Serbian: S17) and S18) *Duga/Dugačka kosa—kratka pamet* (Long hair—short wit) and S19) *U žene je duga kosa, a kratka pamet* (A woman has long hair, but short wit). A fourth variation describing women with short hair humorously demonstrates that women can never match a man's intelligence, even if they match his haircut: S20) *U žene kratka kosa, kratka pamet* (A woman has short hair and short wit). An occasional exception, however, is sometimes awarded and women do get some acknowledgment for their intelligence: E11) *A woman's counsel is sometimes good* and S21) *Dobro je (kašto) i pametnu ženu poslušati* (A wise woman's word (sometimes) ought to be heeded).

In Serbian, woman's shrewdness and cunning are expressed in male-female relationships where women use their wits to command their husbands: S22) *Čovek je glava, a žena vrat: samo se glava okreće kako je vrat usmeri* (Man is the head, woman is the neck: only the head turns as the neck moves it), S23) *Muž*

je u kući glava, a žena šija, ali šija glavu navija (The husband is the head of the house, the wife is the neck, but the neck moves the head) and S24) *Pametna žena slušanjem zapoveda* (A wise woman commands by listening). In English, an identical proverb was not found in the corpus, but in Litovkina (2019, p. 12): E12) *The husband is the head of the house, but the wife is the neck—and the neck moves the head.* These proverbs are almost identical in form and this linguistic phenomenon suggests that not only do the same cultural models existed in English and Serbian societies, but that they share the same origin. Namely, European proverbs date from Latin and Greek antiquity, with the Bible as one of the four sources of proverbs (Јеврић, 2022, pp. 568–569).[11] Wisdom in women is an unattainable and impossible feat: E13) *When an ass climbs a ladder, we may find wisdom in women.*

Women and Language

Typically, women are associated with language and loquaciousness, and this is mirrored in the proverbs in both languages. Women seem to hold particular strength in their tongue: E14) *A woman's strength is in her tongue*, E15) *A woman's tongue wags like a lamb's tail*, E16) *One tongue is enough for a woman*, and E17) *One tongue is enough for two women*. They are also incapable of adopting a dignified silence. Three English proverbs bear testament to this sentiment: E18) *Discreet women have neither eyes nor ears*, E19) *Silence is a fine jewel for a woman, but it's little worn* and E20) *Silence is the best ornament of a woman*.

Identical proverbs in both languages depict women lacking self-control: E21) *A woman conceals what she knows not*, E22) *Women conceal all that they know not* and S25) *Žena će samo onu tajnu sačuvati koju ne zna* (A woman will only keep the secret which she knows not). Again, it is the common origin of proverbs behind the common cultural models which shape the moral of the proverbs. Occasionally, the lack of self-control seemingly justifies violence: S26) *Lajava žena više puta bijena* (A mouthy woman is oft beaten). Women are grouped together and therefore identified with domestic animals, because of their propensity to talk: S27) *Tri žene i jedna guska čine vašar* (Three women and one goose make for a fair).

In Serbian, the strength of a woman's tongue comes in a form of multiple tongues: S28) *U žene jedna glava, a hiljadu jezika* (A woman has one head, but a thousand tongues). Such is the power of a woman's tongue that its ferocity exceeds the sharpness of a Turkish blade: S29) *Gori je ženski jezik no turska sablja* (A woman's tongue is worse than a Turkish sabre) and S30) *Gora je rana od jezika, neg' li od mača* (A wound [inflicted] by the tongue is worse than that of the sword). The usage of *turska sablja* exemplifies that proverbs often contain idiosyncratic phraseology rooted in a particular culture. Due to its history, references to the

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[11] For a more in-depth analysis of proverb sources, see Mieder, 2004, pp. 10–13.

Ottoman rule are commonly found in Serbian, but not in English. Because a woman's tongue is mightier than the sword, woman's ability to remain silent and exercise self-control is vastly appreciated in society: S31) *Ni jedna žena od stvaranja sveta do danas nije se obrukala ćutanjem* (No woman since the dawn of time until today has brought shame upon herself by being silent).

Women and Animals

A reoccurring theme throughout the analysis is the comparison of women to domesticated animals. In his research on metaphors, Kövecses (2010, pp. 19, 153) describes human behaviour frequently being understood in terms of (assumed) properties of animals. He classifies this concept into several conceptual metaphors, some of them being: *human is animal, objectionable human behaviour is animal behaviour* and *objectionable people are animals*. Women are thus linked to hens: E23) *A whistling wife, and a crowing hen, will call the old gentleman out of his den.*[12] Since it is men who whistle, while cocks crow, the whistling wife and the crowing hen are considered to be doing something unnatural, and therefore ominous. It is no surprise that such activities would even awaken the old gentleman, i.e., the devil himself. Two more proverbs metaphorically link women to hens: E24) *It is no good hen that cackles in your house and lays in another's* and E25) *Women and hens, through too much gadding, are lost*. Serbian proverbs about women and hens were selected and examined by Jevrić and Radosavljević (2013, p. 470). Women are linked to: geese (E26) *Geese with geese, and women with women*) and horses (E27) *A groaning horse and a groaning wife fail their master* and E28) *He that lets his horse drink at every lake, and his wife go to every wake, shall never be without a whore and a jade*). The *ground* for comparison, a term traditionally used in semantics to define metaphors, or the perceived similarity between the comparing imagery, focuses on language propensity of women and discipline exercised by men over women.

Women are also linked to sheep: E29) *It is better to marry a shrew than a sheep*. A sheep is a woman viewed as characterless, passive and unintelligent. Hence a desirable wife. Shrews are argumentative, irritable and mean-spirited. The unlikely choice of a shrew over an obedient wife is explained by Brown (2003, pp. 1–2) who, by exploring the jesting literature in early modern England, discovered that this proverb was used in ballads by female characters "to criticize wives who let their husbands go whoring" and in plays "to scoff at the idea of becoming doormats". As with pigs and bees, women cannot change their character—E30) *Swine, women, and bees cannot be* turned. When a man's perception

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[12] This proverb would normally be categorised under *the devil and women*, as in Jevrić (Јеврић, 2022, p. 572), but since it is the only proverb referencing the devil, it cannot form its own category.

is obstructed, domesticated animals can be mistaken for women—E31) *Handle nothing by candlelight, for by a candle a goat is like a gentlewoman*. This is not to disparage women, but to show that appearances can be deceptive.

In Serbian, women are also compared to horses, as in S32) *Konja i ženu valja držati za ular* (A horse and a woman should be held by the harness), twice in the section *Value of Women* and once in *Women and Violence*, to geese in *Women and Language* and *Women and Age* and to sheep in the section *Women and the Household*. In terms of consistency of character, they are compared to goats in Jevrić and Radosavljević (2013, p. 470).

Women and Beauty

One of the most admired features woman can possess is beauty. Beautiful women, however, can be a burden for their husbands, which demands their utmost vigilance:

E32) *A fair wife and a frontier castle breed quarrels*,
E33) *He that hath a white horse and a fair wife never wants trouble*,
E34) *The smaller the peas, the more to the pot; the fairer the women, the more giglot*,[13]
E35) *Beware of the forepart of a woman, the hind part of a mule, and all sides of a priest*,
E36) *Who hath a fair wife needs more than two eyes*.

While beautiful women are conceivably troublesome, indecent and disloyal, ugly women are worthy of disdain and derision: E37) *An ugly woman is a disease of the stomach, a handsome woman a disease of the head*. Women who are born less fortunate in the realm of physical attraction have less fortune in finding agreeable husbands: E38) *A poor beauty finds more lovers than husbands*. The opposite is also true—E39) *She who is born handsome is born married*.

Because of their beauty, women's faithfulness and morality are questioned: S33) *Ako ti je žena vrlo lepa, ne puštaj je samu na svadbu* (If you have a beautiful wife, do not let her go to a wedding alone), S34) *Lijepu ženu od ljudi i med od mušica teško je sačuvati* (It is hard to keep men away from a beautiful woman and flies away from honey), S35) *Lepa je žena retko poštena* (A beautiful woman is seldom honest). Consequently, a preference for blindness in women over their beauty is found: S36) and S37) *Bolje je da je slijepa, no što je/nego lijepa* (It is better for a woman to be blind than to be/than beautiful). Proverbs are evidently not always examples of pithy wisdom, but are constructed to provide satire, irony and humour as well (Mieder, 1993, according to Mandziuk, 2016, p. 27). Here, rhyme emerges as a common literary device characterising proverbs.

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[13] Meaning *slut*.

Servility appears to be the only choice left for the less fortunate women and the only quality they can offer to men: S38) *Ružna žena—valjana sluga* (Ugly woman—proper servant). Their misfortune is heightened and etched on their countenance because they endure bad men and bad marriages: S39) *U zločesta muža, ružna žena* (Evil husband, ugly wife). Humour continues to emerge in the proverb in which beauty and intelligence are mutually exclusive, as ordained by God: S40) *Dobro bi bilo imati ženu lepu i pametnu, ali gospod nikad dva dobra zajedno ne da* (It would be good to have a wife both beautiful and bright, but the Lord never bestows two gifts at once).

Women and Age

Youth may be another admirable feature in women, yet the dichotomy of young and old presented in proverbs describing women largely does not capture this position. Youth and old age both hide valid arguments for caution. Old women in English are portrayed as desirable when accompanied with wealth—E40) *Old women's gold is not ugly*. Apart from that, old age in women is undesirable, viewed as a destructive agent to a man's sexual desires, which is why old wives are linked to the process of making gunpowder: E41) *What should be done with an old wife, but make gunpowder of her?* Schipper (2010, p. 158) explains that a particular component of gunpowder called *saltpeter* was "used to reduce man's libido and given as a sedative to men in prison." If, indeed, men do marry old women, a practical word of advice is awarded, presumably to counteract halitosis—E42) *He that would an old wife wed, must eat an apple before he goes to bed*. Contrary to that, young women provoke anger in men, alongside geese: E43) *A young wife and a harvest goose, muck cackle will both: a man that hath them in his clos (possession) he shall rest wroth*.[14] One proverbs utilises the noun *maiden* and calls old men cuckolds if they do marry young women: E44) *An old man who weds a buxom young maiden, bids fair to become a freeman of Buckingham*. A freeman refers to a man in "a particular city [who] has been given a special honour by that city, known as the freedom of the city"[15]. Thus, the proverb employs sarcasm and ironic imagery to communicate the message about cuckoldry.

Serbian proverbs mention young women as either a source of mistrust and arising alertness—E45) *Ako ti je žena mlada, ne ostaj dugo u tuđini* (If you wife is young, never be away for long), or they caution society about old age in men not being consonant with young age in women—S41) *U starca mlada žena bijeda gotova* (For an old man, a young wife is misery). One proverb discloses

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[14] Meaning *angry*.

[15] Retrieved June 2, 2023 from: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/freeman

that the relationship between an older man and a younger woman is a more natural one, rather than the reverse: S42) *Staru čoeku mlada žena godimenat, a mladu čoeku stara žena pogibija* (To an old man a young wife is a gift, to a young man an old wife is a curse).

Value of Women

Both languages have proverbs in which women are compared to material items, accentuating the preference of men for good women over varied items of property. In English, one proverb metaphorically references *dowry*—E46) *Better a portion in a wife, than with a wife*. Two proverbs reference the crown—E47) *A good woman is worth (if she were sold) the fairest crown that's made of pure gold* and E48) *A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband*. One references wealth in general—E49) *A good wife and health are a man's best wealth*. The metaphorical usage of the verb *lend* is applicable to women: E50) *The wife may be showed, but not lent*. Only one proverb retrieved advises men not to get involved with women: E51) *Dally*[16] *not with money or women*.

In Serbian, one proverb metaphorically references *dowry*: S43) *Bolji je miraz koji dobiješ u ženi nego sa ženom* (Better a dowry in a wife, than with a wife), while another is a Serbian equivalent to the English proverb referencing the crown: S44) *Dobra je žena svome mužu kao kruna na glavi* (A good woman is like a crown to her husband). The items also referenced are *land*: S45) *Dobra žena je bolja od najveće njive* (A good wife is better than the biggest field), S46) *Više vredi žena nego imanje* (A woman is worth more than a demesne[17]), and *gold* or *money* made of gold or some other precious material:

S47) *Dobra žena je od zlata skuplja* (A good woman is more valuable than gold),

S48) *Zla žena vredi sto groša, a dobra se žena ne može platiti* (A bad woman is worth a hundred groats[18], a good one cannot be bought),

S49) *Pušku, ženu i konja može čoek pokazati, ali u naruč ne davati* (Your gun, wife and horse you may show, but never give away),

S40) *Rđava žena valja sto dukata, a rđava kobila sto pedeset* (A bad woman is worth a hundred ducats[19], a bad mare a hundred and fifty),

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[16] Old-fashioned word meaning to have a romantic, but not serious relationship with someone. Retrieved June 2, 2023 from: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/dally

[17] Old-fashioned word meaning land, especially surrounding a house or manor, retained by the owner for his or her own use. Retrieved August 7, 2023 from: https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/demesne

[18] A type of silver coin.

[19] A type of gold coin.

S51) *Rđava žena valja sto groša, a dobra se ne može platiti* (A bad woman is worth a hundred groats, but a good one cannot be bought),

S52) *Najgora žena valja pedeset groša, a dobra se nikakvim asprama platiti ne može* (The worst woman is worth fifty groats, a good one no coins can buy).

The comparison of women to material items is a reflection of customs of times forgotten today, when it was culturally acceptable to purchase brides, as noted by Šaulić (1971, p. 681).

Some proverbs are a reflection of society valuing women's good character, not necessarily underlining what that constitutes: S53) *Dobra žena, sreća u nedrima* (Good woman, happiness in the bosom) and S54) *Dobra žena—dobra sreća; loša žena—loša sreća* (Good woman—good fortune; bad woman—bad fortune). One proverb values woman's loyalty: S55) *Dobra žena muža ne ostavlja* (A good wife does not leave her husband). The opposite is also true:

S56) *Zla obuća pečavina, zlo vrijeme lapavica, zao gost poturica, zla je žena gora od sve troje* (Bad footwear—worn shoes, bad weather—rainfall, bad guest—Turk-convert, a bad wife is worse than all three),

S57) *Ne treba čoeku više zlojutro od zle žene* (No morning is worse for a man than one with a bad wife),

S58) *Od zle žene bradu u šake* (A bad woman will make you grab your beard),[20]

S59) *Od zle žene i rđava druga ukloni se, da te ne obruka* (Stay away from a bad woman and a bad friend, lest they bring shame upon you).

This juxtaposition between good and bad women continues into the topic of lending money: S60) *Zla žena zajma ne vrati* (A bad woman does not repay her debts) and S61) *Zla žena zajma ne vraća (a dobra i dva vrati)* (A bad woman does not repay her debts (but a good one repays twice over)). Bad or evil women are compared to bitches, snakes or jackdaws: S62) *Zla kao kuja* (*Evil like a bitch*),[21] S63) *Čuvaj se od zlobne žene kaj od otrovne zmije* (Beware of an evil woman like you would a poisonous snake) and S64) *Čavka i zla žena što se (gođ) više pere, to je crnja* (A bad woman is like a jackdaw—the more she cleans herself, the blacker she gets).[22] If women are not compared to domesticated animals, then it is wild animals commonly considered ominous and threatening. As Vujković and Vuković-Stamatović (2021, p. 19) clarify: "Man is more inclined to attribute negative traits to animals that he has tamed and subjugated than to

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[20] Men are advised to run in order for evil women not to grab them by the beard.

[21] This proverb is classified under the category of *proverbial comparisons* (see Kerschen, 1998, p. 3).

[22] See Jevrić (Јеврић, 2022, p. 574) about the relation between the colour black and the devil.

wild animals over which he has no control, which pose a threat to him, which he fears and also admires."

Popin (Попин, 2017, pp. 94, 99) argues that the concept of evil women typifying Serbian oral literature is erroneous, because it also exists in literatures of other nations and cultures. She calls for a need for an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the images of women in oral literature, instead of one-sided approaches. One such approach would be Trebješanin's examination of women in Serbian proverbs (1985, Требјешанин, 2002, 2011), which mostly excludes examples of proverbs which offer a positive portrayal of women. Vlajinac's collection *Žena u narodnim poslovicama* (1975) is segmented into roles of women through different stages of life with both positive and negative characteristics, which should not be disregarded (Попин, 2017, pp. 94–95).

Women and the Household

A number of proverbs describing women position her as an essential building block of the household: E52) *The wife is the key of the house*, S65) *Đe nije žene onđe nije ni kuće* (Where there is no wife, there is no house), S66) *Kuća ne leži na zemlji nego na ženi* (A house rests not upon the ground, but upon the wife).[23] In Serbian, the wife is responsible for the majority of the household tasks, hence she looks after 'three corners of the house', and the husband only one: S69) *Tri kuta kućevna drži žena, a jedan čovek* (The wife looks after three corners of the house, and the husband only one) and S70) *Ženu uvek u kući tri budžaka zovu* (To a wife, three corners of the house are always in need of tending). Poetic imagery is employed in Serbian in order to depict a household with no wife in it: S71) and S72) *Kuća bez žene dan je bez svetlosti, noć bez zvezda, proleće bez ruža/ i leto bez ladovine* (A house without a wife is a day without light, a night without stars, spring without roses/ and summer without shade) and S73) *Kuća bez žene—proleće bez cvijeća* (A house without a wife—spring without flowers).

Two English proverbs and one Serbian proverb focus on the idleness of women, too busy to look after the house, but with plenty of time to look into the mirror or at bare walls: E53) *The more women look in their glass the less they look to their house*, E54) *Bare walls make giddy[24] housewives* and S74) *Da je tkati kao zjati, sve bi žene tkalje bile* (If weaving was as [easy as] staring, all women would be weavers). One English proverb criticises women for putting no food on the table: E55) *As busy as a good wife at an oven, and neither meal nor dough*.

Serbian proverbs largely express appreciation and veneration for women's hard work, which is predominantly associated with house chores:

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[23] Two more variants of this proverb include: S67) *Na zemlji i na ženi kuća stoji* (The house rests upon the ground and the wife) and S68) *Ne stoji kuća na zemlji nego na ženi* (The house rests not upon the ground, but the wife).

[24] Meaning *idle*.

S75) *Valjana žena nije nikad besposlena* (A proper wife is never idle),

S76) *Vredna žena je najveće blago* (A hardworking wife is the greatest treasure),

S77) *Vredna žena napuni kuću do krova* (A hardworking wife fills the house to the roof),

S78) *Dobra žena praznu kuću čini da je puna* (A good wife makes an empty house seem full),

S79) *Ako ti je žena verna i vredna, biće ti puna kuća* (If your wife is loyal and hardworking, your house will be full),

S80) *Ženske ruke zlata vrede* (A woman's hands are worth their weight in gold),

S81) *Ta će im žena vrednica napraviti dosta kućica* (A hardworking little wife will build many little houses).

One English proverb laments over women's unending housework: E56) *A woman's work and washing of dishes is never at an end.*

Proverbs in Serbian also express appreciation of frugality, another characteristic associated with women and the household. Traditional roles dictate that men are the ones who work outside the home, whereas women are at home being diligent and economical. Their contributions to household finances were thus paltry, reaffirming the need for saving (Šaulić, 1971, p. 683):

S82) *Više vredi što žena zaštedi nego što muž zaradi* (What the wife saves is worth more than what the husband earns),

S83) *Da muž vilama u kuču unosi, a žena da vrhom igle iznosi, tu nema kuće* (Were the husband to fill [the house] with a pitchfork, and the wife empty it with the tip of a needle, there would be no house),

S84) *Žena mužu malo vrijedi, ako ne štedi* (A wife is worth little to a husband if she does not save),

S85) and S86) *Žena je kuća i rakuća/raspikuća* (A woman is as good at building a house as she is at wrecking it),

S87) *Muž da unosi kolima, a žena da iznosi iglom, pa će nestati* (Were the husband to fill [the house] with a cart, and the wife empty it with a needle, there would be no house),

S88) *Radnja je za čoeka, a štednja za ženu* (Work is for a man, frugality for a woman),

S89) *Muž je da stiče, a žena da čuva* (The husband is to acquire, the wife to look after [the household]).[25]

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[25] A variation of this proverb S90) *Muž je da svetli, a žena da čuva* (The husband is to shine light [onto the household], the wife is to look after it) explains that the social roles of husband and wife were reserved for the public and private domain, respectively, which Georgijev also observed (2020, p. 89).

Two proverbs in English depict the same sentiment: E57) *A fair wife, a wide house, and a back door, will quickly make a rich man poor* and E58) *Women and wine, game and deceit, make the wealth small and the wants great.*

The relationship between the husband and wife is one of a provider and carer, allowing the husband to take a more laid-back role in the household: E59) *When the good man is from home, the good wife's table is soon spread* and E60) *He sleeps as dogs do when wives sift meals.* Women or wives are hard-working, loving and caring. Another is the relationship of protection between the protector and the protected, as in S91) *Žena bez muža, to je kuća bez krova* (A woman without husband is like a house without a roof).[26]

If a man is domineered by his wife, he is said E62) *To be held by the apron-strings*, while E63) *She wears the breeches.* Similar imagery is deployed in Serbian: S92) *Zavuka' se ženi pod suknju* (He's hiding under his wife's skirt) and S93) *Ne vidi se ispod ženine suknje* (You cannot see him under his wife's skirt). The male-female power dynamics in the household portrays unacceptable conditions if women are the ones holding the reins: E64) *It is a sad house when the hen crows louder that the cock.*[27] The following proverbs in Serbian are found to be replicating the same concept:

S94) *Teško stadu koje ovca vodi, teško kući kojoj žena sudi* (Woe to the flock that a sheep leads, woe to the house that a woman presides),

S95) *Kad je žena starešina, čovek je go k'o mješina* (When a woman is in charge, a man is as naked as a lambskin sack),

S96) *Ko ženu sluša, gori je od žene* (One who listens to a woman is worse than she is),

S97) *Ko za ženu nije, toga žena bije* (Who's ill-fitting for a wife, is beaten by the wife),

S98) *Ko se žene boji, nek đecu doji* (A man afraid of his wife ought to breastfeed his children).[28]

Such conditions make men emasculated and unappreciated in society. It is particularly of note that they are also unappreciated by women: E65) *The calmest husbands make the stormiest wives* and E66) *Women commend a modest man, but like him not.* However, men are advised that in order to have control over women, it is necessary to choose those lower in status or with more flaws than

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[26] A version of the proverb contains a slight modification to offer protection of men to their children, as noted by Grzybek (1987, p. 62) in: E61) *A child without father is like a house without a roof.*

[27] In this example words searched for the purpose of the analysis are not mentioned, but the reference is unambiguous.

[28] The last two proverbs illustrate again that one of the most common literary or phonological devices used in proverbs is rhyme.

generally acceptable: E67) *Go down the ladder when thou marriest a wife, go up when thou choosest a friend*, E68) *Refuse a wife with one fault and take one with two* and S99) *Imaj ženu manju od sebe, ako hoćeš biti gospodarom od sebe* (Find a wife lesser than yourself if you want to be the master).

Women Are a Necessary Evil

Proverb as folk wisdom teach us that women are a necessary evil: E69) *Next to no wife, a good wife is best*, E70) *Wives must be had, be they good or bad* and E71) *Women, money, and wine, have their good and their pine*. This tug of dependency seems to explain the archetypical bond between men and women, gravitating towards one another, despite their differences. In this context, some proverbs may not only contain imaginative imagery, but humour as well: E72) *All women are good: good for something, or good for nothing*. This proverb is found to be containing a paradox, a conceptual device described by Mandziuk (2016, p. 25) to be mocking traditional folk wisdom because it contains two opposing ideas: "The paradox makes use of juxtaposition, and hence throws into doubts seemingly undeniable truths and morals conveyed in proverbs."

Despite being a necessary evil, the ultimate wisdom bestowed upon men is not to marry women at all: E73) *Honest men marry soon, wise men not at all* and E74) *He who marrieth does well, but he who marrieth not, better*. Such an extreme position is supported by E75) *Weal and women cannot pan, but woe and women can*.[29]

In Serbian, the same tug between the sexes is recognised: S100) *Bez žene nema sreće ni nesreće* (Without a wife there is no fortune or misfortune) and S101) *I zla (je) žena dobra žena* (Even a bad wife is a good wife). Humorous symbolism in the context of women being a necessary evil is also recognised by introducing the idea of entering into marriage, only for the marriage to joyously end with the death of a wife: S102) *Dva puta je čoek u svome vijeku veseo: prvom kad se oženi, a drugom kad ženu ukopa* (A man is happy twice in his life: the first when he marries, the second when he buries his wife). The greatest compliment to women is the recognition that male happiness is dependent upon them entering marriage is found in the proverb S103) *Gde nije žene, onda nije ni sreće* (Where there is no wife, there is no happiness), confirming the existence of the male-female interdependence.

Women and Violence

Teachings proscribed by proverbs provide clear insight into a cultural model which proposes and exonerates violence towards women. In the Serbian proverbs women are repeatedly equated with inanimate objects and domesticated animals:

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[29] Meaning that happiness and women cannot go together, but sadness and women can.

S104) *Ništa lakše nego crepulju razbiti i ženu udariti* (Striking one's wife is as easy as breaking a bowl),

S105) *Vodenica neklepana, i žena netepana, ne biva ništa* (A watermill that does not run and a wife that is not beaten are good for nothing),

S106) *Volim da mi vo rikne, a žena jekne* (I love it when my ox bellows and my wife shrieks),

S107) *Brata i vola miti, ženu i konja udri* (A brother and an ox are to be cared for, a wife and a horse are to be struck),

S108) *Konja od kolana i ženu od batina ne treba čuvati* (Spare not the strap neither for your horse nor for your wife).

Women appear not to be possessing feelings, thoughts or gumption. In defence of women, only one proverb is detected: S109) *Ako ženu tučeš, svoju sreću tučeš* (If you strike your wife, you strike your own happiness).

Striking a woman is not only considered a duty, but an enjoyable activity for a man: E76) *For my own pleasure, as the man said when he struck his wife*. This proverb falls under the category of proverb subgenres called *wellerisms*. Wellerisms consist of three segments, a proverb, the identity of the speaker uttering the proverb, and a phrase placing the statement in an unexpected, often humorous situation (Mieder, 2004, p. 15).[30]

Women and Ships

Due to the occurrence of personification in English, pronouns denoting the female gender are often applied to inanimate objects, such as different means of transport. Ship is one of them. Hence, three proverbs in English compare women to ships, through which lack of firmness and stability are attributed to women: E77) *A ship and a woman are ever repairing*, E78) *A ship and a woman want always trimming* and E79) *Women are ships and must be manned*. Women need guidance, control and direction by men. A dominant and firm male hand leads women and ships forward. The ship reference is a cultural component not found in Serbian. The origin of these proverbs dates back to the Roman playwright Plautus and his play *Poenulus*. Acquiring a ship and a woman means asking for trouble, because "neither of them is ever sufficiently equipped, and there is never enough means of equipping them" (Speake, 2008, p. 345).

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[30] They are named after the character of Sam Weller, from Charles Dickens' novel *The Pickwick Papers*, who frequently uses them.

Conclusion

Proverbs as a genre of folklore are one of the oldest forms of literature. They accumulate the wisdom of a nation, presenting it in a pithy and succinct form. They reflect traditional values of the given times. Behind them lie cultural models, whose meaning and significance can be identified and examined. In this research we analysed proverbs describing women in English and Serbian, based on corpus retrieval consisting of proverbs containing the words *woman*, *women*, *wife* or *wives* in English, and *žena* and all its inflectional forms in Serbian. The corpus was collected using two books of proverbs compiled by William C. Hazlitt (2007) and Radul Marković (Марковић, 2005) respectively. Vuk S. Karadžić's collection of proverbs is incorporated in the second collection. By contrasting proverbs in English and Serbian, the cultural models were identified and classified under the following categories: *women are fickle*, *women and intelligence*, *women and language*, *women and animals*, *women and beauty*, *women and age*, *value of women*, *women and the household*, *women are a necessary evil*, *women and violence*, and *women and ships*.

In both languages women are portrayed as fickle and unstable. They are not to be trusted, especially since women can weaponize tears for their seemingly duplicitous goals. Because of this strategy, in both cultures women are given recognition for their shrewdness. Another common cultural model informs us about women's fondness for talking, which in turn makes women incapable of self-control or keeping a secret. Beauty and age are valued in both cultures. Women who possess beauty secure marriages. But beauty can also be another reason for untrustworthiness in women. Proverbs referencing age teach us that a smaller age difference between spouses is a condition for a harmonious marriage (Šaulić, 1971, p. 682). When describing the value of women, in both languages women are compared to material goods, but more so in Serbian. In the same language they are praised and valued for having good character features and admonished for having bad ones. In both cultures good character traits are predominantly associated with the household, women are expected to be hard-working and frugal in the home. In matters of household duties, similar cultural models were observed. Society expects men to be in charge, but women also want men to be in charge. To men, women are simultaneously indispensable and unnecessary. Proverbs condoning violence towards women are found in both languages, but more so in Serbian.

What the analysis of the proverbs revealed about the two different cultures is that they share more similarities than differences. The only differentiating field is comparison between women and ships. Language particularities were observed regarding identical categories being described using nation-specific language, such as *turska sablja*. The number of proverbs in Serbian exceeds the number of proverbs in English, similarly as in Jevrić (Јеврић, 2022). English

proverbs collected for the purpose of this research are 79, while Serbian proverbs reached the figure of 109. This can be misconstrued to interpret that Serbian culture portrays the female gender in a more unfavourable light and that because of culture-specific societal norms, women are held to much more rigorous standards (e.g. women as material goods, violence towards woman). Serbian culture would falsely appear more misogynistic. We can conclude that the two cultures compared in this research have shared cultural models arising from shared perceptions about women and their place in society. Also, the shared origin of proverbs lies behind the appearance of identical or nearly identical proverbs. The manner in which women are perceived by society and by men in literary forms professing wisdom and truth lays bare women's position in society, as well as the values of the times in which the proverbs originated. Gender biased cultural models stereotypically labelled women, which was reflected in the language and therefore in the proverbs about women.

Further research can focus on comparing traditional proverbs describing women in English and Serbian with their contemporary counterparts known as *anti-*, *quas-* or *twisted* proverbs. Mandziuk (2016) places them under the umbrella term *perverbs* (a blend of *perverted* and *proverb*) or *modified proverbs*. One such perverb would be *The only golden thing that some women dislike is silence* (Litovkina, 2019, p. 35), which is a modern variation of the proverb *Silence is golden*, but it also alludes to women's proclivity towards talking and their fondness for expensive, shiny objects. Such research would explain whether women's position in society has changed over time, bearing in mind that some of the proverbs are today anachronistic. They originated in the times with different societal norms, while with new times come new norms and new living conditions for women (Šaulić, 1971, p. 690). Another perspective that could be considered is the dichotomy of good and evil in the proverbs describing women as the most important duality in paremilogy (Grzybek, 1987, according to Јеврић, 2022, p. 572). Therefore, it is not surprising that Šaulić (1971, p. 690) deduced that both good and bad character attributes are universal to humans, including men. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach to proverbs describing women suggested by Popin (Попин, 2017) could engage fields such as biology, psychology and anthropology, in order to explain why men place emphasis on women's beauty, age or woman's indispensable role in the home.

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Дуга коса – кратка памет — Енглеско-српске паралеле
у пословицама којима се описују жене

Резиме

Полазећи из перспективе родних студија и паремиологије, овај рад покушава да истражи интеркултуралну и контрастивну паремиологију контрастирањем пословица из две различите културе, односно идентификацијом и анализом заједничких културних модела у пословицама на енглеском и српском језику. Контрастирањем пословица у енглеском и српском језику, циљ нам је да испитамо како су жене описане у пословицама и шта пословице откривају о две различите културе, њиховим културним моделима и њиховом односу према женском роду. Проучавањем пословица можемо сагледати шта је друштво некада очекивало од жена и како су жене некада биле сагледаване. Пословице су, као жанр фолклора, познате по својој језгровитости и дидактичкој природи. Сматрају се традиционалном мудрошћу друштва. У тој мудрости могу се препознати стереотипи, те се анализа пословица може користити као начин за разоткривање традиционалних погледа у друштву. Корпус је састављен од пословица прикупљених из збирке

енглеских пословица *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, кoju je саставио Хазлит (2007), и збирке српских пословица *Српске народне йословице и изреке*, коју је саставио Марковић (2005), а која садржи и пословице Вука Стефановића Караџића. Корпус чине енглеске и српске пословице које садрже речи које описују жене, а то су *woman*, *women*, *wife* or *wives* енглеском, и *жена* и све њене флективне облике у српском. Анализа пословица показала је да енглеска и српска култура имају више сличности него разлика. Једино разликовно поље јесте поређење између жена и бродова. Такође, уочене су језичке особености у погледу идентичних категорија које се описују језиком специфичним за народ, као што је израз *шурска сабља*. Број пословица у српском језику премашује број пословица у енглеском језику, чиме се може погрешно протумачити да српска култура женски род приказује у неповољнијем светлу и да због друштвених норми специфичних за ту културу жене морају да се придржавају знатно ригорознијих правила и принципа. Српска култура би тиме деловала као мизогинија у односу на енглеску културу. Можемо закључити да две културе које смо поредили у овом истраживању имају заједничке културне моделе који произилазе из заједничких перцепција о женама и њиховом месту у друштву. Начин на који друштво и мушкарци перципирају жене видљиво је у пословицама које садрже народну мудрост, откривају положај жене у друштву, као и вредности времена у којима су те пословице настале. Родно пристрасни културни модели стереотипно су означавали жене, што се одразило и на језик, а самим тим и на пословице о женама. Овим истраживањем покушали смо да укажемо на положај жене у друштвима која су наизглед различита, културама са не тако пуно контаката, али и на потребу за интердисциплинарним приступом анализи пословица о женама која би требало да узме у обзир и неке друге научне области, као што су биологија, психологија или антропологија.

Кључне речи: енглеске и српске пословице; род; жене; језик; култура; друштво.