

## **WOMEN, PROVERBS AND CULTURE DIVERSITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF KOREAN AND ROMANIAN PROVERBS**

**Elena BUJA**

Department of Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, *Transilvania University*, Braşov, Romania

**Abstract:** *The paper aims at examining some traditional values related to the women living in two geographically and culturally distant cultures (Korean and Romanian) the way they emerge from proverbs that reflect the many roles women have had in society (daughters, mothers, wives, mother-in-laws), as well as their positive and negative characteristics. The premise I have started out from is that despite the huge differences between Korea and Romania there are many similarities in the women-related proverbs. My main interest is in unraveling the inequalities between men and women, in finding out men's attitudes towards their female peers, and in identifying whether the Korean women have enjoyed a better treatment than their Romanian sisters. I am convinced that by scrutinizing the lessons of life transmitted through their languages, we can obtain a wealth of data about these cultures and a better understanding of them.*

**Keywords:** *culture diversity; proverbs; female roles; women*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowadays, intercultural encounters seem, more than ever, to be on the crest of the wave and the need to comprehend the values, traditions, and heroes of foreign cultures has become more pressing. By analyzing proverbs, one can get an understanding of the culture that produced them. This understanding is even deeper if proverbs from one foreign culture reflect the same values as those in our own. Proverbs, as folklore statements, may be considered a mirror that reflect elements of life which people belonging to various cultures have in common; at the same time, they also reveal unique cultural features. They are an excellent starting point for a better mutual understanding and form “an excellent way to build bridges between cultures” (Schipper, 2006:14).

Proverbs came into being a long time ago and the reason why nowadays they are still considered an important living genre is that they embody the wisdom of the cultures that have created them. They are well-tested truths of condensed knowledge that can be employed at present, just as they were used hundreds of years ago, to observe and to instruct. Over centuries, they were passed from one generation to the next first orally, by word of mouth and then in a written form. This process occurred initially at a local level, having reached an international spread at present. The premise of this paper is that we can learn

a lot about the Korean and Romanian cultures by scrutinizing the ‘lessons of life’ or ‘words of wisdom’ transmitted through their languages.

### **2. PROVERBS: DEFINITION AND FEATURES**

Pratt and Rutt, define proverbs as

pithy sayings using stock epithets, similes, and metaphors to express commonplace experience or advice. (...) Their wisdom is often trite and is virtually the same in all languages (1999:362).

As most paremiologists (Mieder 2004, Schipper 2006) agree, they are characterized by a number of features, among which we can mention (a) their colourful and vivid language; (b) the short, fixed form; (c) their unknown origins; (d) their status as ‘rules of conduct’; and (e) they express common concerns. All these lead to the conclusion that proverbs can be considered “compact treaties on the values of culture” (Steidensticker, 1987, quoted in Rou, 2016:32).

As the approach I made recourse to is a comparative one, comparable data was required. Thus, for Romanian I employed the 19th century paremiologist Iordache Golescu's collection of proverbs, reprinted in an abbreviated form in 1973, under the title *Proverbe comentate* (Commented Proverbs), Anton Pann's (2007) reprinted version of *Povestea vorbii* (The Story of Words), as well as

Botezatu and Hîncu's (2001) *Dicționar de proverbe și zicători românești* (Dictionary of Romanian Proverbs and Sayings) from which I have extracted all the examples referring to women. The search words were: *femeie*, *muiere* (woman), *mamă* (mother), *soacră* (mother-in-law), *fiică* (daughter), *noră* (daughter-in-law). For the Korean counterparts, I received help from two of my former students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, Lee Kyeong-lim (Clara) and Lee Jeong-Min (Celina)<sup>1</sup>, who searched various Korean sites for proverbs unified by the theme of women. They also provided me with the English translation of these phraseologic units.

Despite the fact that the Korean and Romanian cultures are quite different, I found many similarities in the proverbs related to women. Thus, the questions I sought to answer in this paper are the following: a) What accounts for the similarities between the Korean and the Romanian proverbs, considering that the two countries had different historical backgrounds and were influenced by different religions? b) In what way(s) do women-related Korean proverbs differ from the Romanian ones? c) What cultural features emerge from the proverbs in these two languages?

With these questions in mind, let us proceed with the analysis of the two small corpora of proverbs.

### 3. WOMEN-RELATED KOREAN AND ROMANIAN PROVERBS: THE ANALYSIS

As the focus of the analysis are the proverbs concerning women, I will venture into the world of (mainly village) women, entering their households, and identifying the social roles assigned to them by men for the benefit of men.

#### 3.1. Similarities

**3.1.1. General characteristics of women.** The features attributed to women fall in two categories: *good* and *bad*, but in male-dominated cultures, like the Korean and the Romanian ones, it is the *bag/negative* ones that prevail in proverbs. Thus, both in the Korean and the Romanian folklore statements<sup>2</sup>, women are perceived to be evil, being often **associated with the Devil/Satan**:

<sup>1</sup> I take this opportunity to thank Clara and Celina, my former students from HUFSS, for the help they offered me in carrying out this small-scale research into Romanian and Korean proverbs related to women.

<sup>2</sup> For the Romanian proverbs, the source employed will be rendered by the capital letters of the names of the authors of the collections of proverbs

(1) *Femeia e sora dracului/Femeia'i dracul.* (AP)  
'The woman is the Devil's sister./The woman is the Devil himself.'

(2) *Chiar și cea mai bună femeie are în ea o coastă a Dracului.*  
'Even the best of women still has a Devil's rib in her.'

(3) *yeojaneun saheulboda iljjig taeonassda*<sup>3</sup>.  
'The woman was born three days earlier than the Devil.'

Another negative characteristic attributed by men to women is their **changing their mood**, which is frequently rendered by weather metaphors in both languages:

(4) *yeojawa gyeoul nalssineun mid-eul suga eobsda.*  
'The woman and the winter weather are doubtful.'

(5) *Așa's fetele, când senin, când ploile.* (AP).  
'This is how girls are: one moment like bright blue sky, the next like rain.'

Many of the proverbs stress that women are verbally gifted, to compensate in a way for their weak constitution. Their talkativeness is presented under various forms, such as *cackling*, *twittering* or *nagging*, while their tongues are perceived as some kind of weapons they use to fight against men. Thus, men feel entitled to reduce women to silence, many times using violence (as illustrated in subsection 3.1.3).

(6) *Dacă limba femeii ar fi mai scurtă, zilele bărbatului ar fi mai lungi* (B&H).  
'If the woman's tongue were shorter, man's life would be longer.'

(7) *Femeile, când se adună, parcă's gîscele la pîreu.* (AP).  
'When women come together, they sound like geese on the river.'

(8) *yeojaga jansoliga manh-eumyeon jib-an-i manghanda.*  
'If a woman nags a lot, her family will be in ruin.'

(9) *amtalg-i ulmyeon jib-an-i manghanda.*  
'When the hen cries, the house falls.'

**Wickedness** is another feature attributed by men to women, and it can take various forms: being morally wicked, naughty, or behaving badly. When women are compared to men, this negative characteristic is even more obvious, as reflected by the following Romanian proverb:

<sup>3</sup> In keeping with the Korean writing style, no capital letters will be employed at the beginning of the Korean sentences rendered in Romanized style.

(10) *Doi bărbați la un loc tot pot locui, dar două femei într-o casă nici cum nu pot trăi* (AP).

'Two men can live together, but two women cannot share the same house'.

(11) *yeojaga ses-imyeon namu jeobsiga deulnonda*.

'If three women get together, dishes are broken'.

Example (10) capitalizes on women's wickedness and maybe also on their jealousy, which prevent them from staying united/together, especially if they are mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The Korean proverb, on the other hand, underlines that fact that when more women come together, as a result of the fact that they may not agree on various topics, they would start quarreling so loudly, that the noise produced is able to break the dishes in the kitchen.

From among the positive characteristics, the following emerged from the investigated proverbs: being hard-working (12), having the power to persuade (13), being able to keep all her thoughts to herself (14), outwitting men (15), and being chaste (16) and (17):

(12) *Casa e casă când ai gospodină în casă*. (B&H)

'The house is properly kept when you have a hard-working woman in it'.

(13) *Vrei să intre toți în danș? Pune o muiere să tragă danșul*. (IG)

'Do you want everyone to dance? Then ask a woman to start the dance'.

(14) *cheon gil mul sog-eun al-ado han gil gyejib sog ma-eum-eun moleunda*.

'You can know 1,000 fathoms deep, but you can't know the mind of a woman'.

(15) *Femeia vede unde bărbatul abia zărește*. (AP)

'The woman understands what the man barely sees'.

(16) *Mai bine fată moartă/ Decît necinste să poartă* (IG).

'Better a dead daughter than a deflowered one'.

(17) *gat-eun gabs-imyeon dahongchima [cheonyeo]*.

'If the price is the same, choose the red skirt [virgin]'.

### 3.1.2. Women's roles

**A. Wife/Mother.** In both cultures under investigation, the position of *wife* is the one most approved. Despite the fact that very often women are associated with Satan and are seen as potential troublemakers (as shown above), an obedient, skilled, active and fruitful wife is considered an undisputed prerequisite for men's wellbeing and advancement in the world. Those men who found an industrious woman to oversee their household considered themselves blessed. This is illustrated by the examples below:

(18) *jinjeonghan anaeneun nampyeon-ui ma-eum-ui bomul-ibnida*.

'A true wife is her husband's heart's treasure'.

(19) *Muirea înțeleaptă, coroana bărbatului*. (B&H)

'A wise woman is the man's crown'.

(20) *Femeia înțeleaptă își zidește casa*. (B&H)

'The wise woman builds her home'.

Many of the proverbs in Korean and Romanian stress the fact that women need a husband and men need a wife. In both cultures, the reasons for men to get married are almost the same. First, they needed to have a spouse to look after them, so that they could focus on their manly duties. Second, they needed to have legitimate sons who should perpetuate the family name, "glorify the family through official appointment" (Chul, 2013: 24), inherit the family house, look after the elderly parents, burry them according to tradition and perform the ancestral rites for their departure parents.

The girl's dowry was an essential element in the marriage: the bigger the dowry, the higher chances for young women to get married. In many cases, when the time came to settle down and take a wife, men would choose a less worthy woman as their bride whom they would marry only for the sake of money.

(21) *Bogăția șede-n ladă și toanta șede pe vatră*. (B&H)

'Wealth fills the chest, and the stupid woman lies on the oven'.

(22) *Miile și sutele mărită și slutele*. (AP)

'The thousands and hundreds help the ugly ones get married'.

A counter-example to men's general tendency in the 18th and 19th century Romania to marry for the sake of the dowry is provided below.

(23) *Decât să mănânc mămăligă cu unt și să mă uit în pământ./ Mai bine pâine cu sare și să mă uit la ea ca la soare*. (AP)

'Rather than eating polenta with butter and looking down, it's better to eat bread with salt and look at her [my wife] as if she were the sun'.

What emerges from this phraseological unit is that some men preferred to live in poverty and share their joys and sorrows with a beautiful and kind woman, rather than marrying someone who was so ugly-looking, lazy or stupid that the sight of her made them avert their gaze, while the opinion of the

fellow villagers made these men feel ashamed with their choice.

As for the woman, once she become a wife and then eventually a mother, she was no longer a suspect vehicle of bad luck, curse or perversity, but she became productive in her household, as she had been taught by her mother. "The socially constructed goal of marriage for a woman is not some sort of 'romantic' fulfillment, but rather a context in which her fertility and economic assets are channelled 'honorably'" (Fontaine, 2002: 24). The idea that mothers should be a role model for their daughters is captured by the following Romanian phraseological unit, which capitalizes on the education that daughters receive from their mothers in everything concerning housework, prior to their marriage, in order to become good wives:

(24) *Mama, când m-o dat, tot m-a învățat.* (B&H)  
'When mother gave me in marriage, she had taught me everything'.

The mother figure frequently emerges in both Korean and Romanian proverbs, where she is presented as a model for her daughters:

(25) *Uită-te la mamă-sa și cunoaște pe fie-sa.* (B&H)  
'Look at the mother and you will know the daughter'.

(26) *jasig-eul bogi jeon-e eomeonileul bolaessda.*  
'Before seeing the kids, we have to see the mother'.

**B. Daughter.** Despite the message of the Romanian proverb *Copiii sînt o bogăție la casa omului* 'Many children are the riches of the Romanians', it was only the birth of a son that was a reason for immense joy in the family, while the arrival of a daughter brought sorrow to the parents, because in order to marry her, they needed to gather some wealth, to offer as dowry. More daughters in a family meant poverty. This attitude seems to be shared by the Korean parents, too:

(27) *Cînd se naște băiatul, rîd pereții, cînd se naște fata, plîng pereții.* (B&H)  
'When the boy is born, the walls laugh, when the girl is born, the walls cry'.

(28) *myeong-ui ttal-iiss-eul ttae, dangsin-eun mun-eul yeolgo jam-eul jagedoebnida.*  
'When you have three daughters, you sleep with the door open'.

(29) *Cine are fete multe, însoară mulți măgari.* (AP)  
'The one who has many daughters marries many mules'.

The examples under (28) and (29) show that in desperate situations, families with too many

daughters would give them away in marriage to anyone, be that person a thief or a good-for-nothing, only to get rid of such 'burdens'.

Moreover, in the Korean society, "in extreme cases, girls are ignored to such a degree that a father would leave them out of his calculations when asked about the number of children in the family" (Chul, 2013:24). At the same time, when Korean girls married, they had to submit to all men in their husband's family. But in both cultures, men had the right to divorce their wives and send them back to their families if they were unable to fulfill one of their main duties, namely to conceive (in Romania) or to bear a son (in Korea). In those cases when daughters were born in a family (both in Korea and Romania), mothers tried to console themselves by making their daughters helpful to them and by teaching them everything that was necessary for them as future wives, namely moral conduct, womanly tasks, and proper appearance.

**C. Mother-in-law/daughter-in-law.** The dissensions between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law are well known throughout the world, Romania and Korea making no exception in this respect, as illustrated below:

(30) *Nici nora fată, nici soacra mamă.* (IG)  
'Neither is the daughter-in-law a daughter, nor is the mother-in-law a mother'.

(31) *Cîte pite rele, toate ale nurorii mele.* (IG)  
'All the bad loaves of bread are my daughter-in-law's'.

(32) *myeoneuliga miumyeon baldwichug-i dalgyal gatdago namulanda.*  
'If there is no chest, your daughter-in-law's legs are white'.

(33) *Soacră, soacră/Poamă acră.*  
'Mother-in-law/ Sour fruit'.

The Romanian proverb under (30) shows that no matter how hard they try to keep up the appearance of a friendly relationship, there is mutual hatred between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. This could be attributed to the fact that blood relations take precedence over in-law relations. "As opposed to blood relatives, all in-laws are usually valued negatively" (Schipper, 2006: 141). The other two proverbs highlight the mother-in-law's tendency to find fault with everything a daughter-in-law does, while the last one (33) argues that there cannot be any sweetness in a mother-in-law.

In many cases, the tensions between the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law escalate to the extent that the latter feels like kicking the former, but in

order not to spoil the harmony in the house or to show disrespect, she prefers to let the rage fall on a poor animal:

- (32) *sieomi miwoseo gae yeopguli chanda.*  
'A daughter-in-law kicks a dog because she hates her mother-in-law.'

**3.1.3. Men's attitudes towards women.** In the past, just like in the present (in certain societies), men always ignored and neglected women and demanded obedience from them. Many proverbs, both in Korean and Romanian, reflect this consciousness of women's subjection. The following examples clearly reveal that women were regarded as having a lower social status than men:

- (34) *Femeia nebătuță, e ca moara neferecată.* (IG)  
'A woman who is not beaten is like a mill that is out-of-order'.  
(35) *yeojaneun saheul an ttaelimyeon yeouga doenda.*  
'If you don't beat your woman for three days, she becomes a fox'.  
(36) *jeongbueseo ttae lida. jib-e waseo yeojaleul ttaelyeo.*  
'Get slapped at the government office; come home and hit your woman'.

These proverbs indicate that beating was part of women's lives, but we are not quite sure what the meaning of beating was: to show women that men did not ignore them and that this might be a sign of affection, to teach women a lesson in being faithful to their husbands or to turn them into beings that lacked features such as arrogant, quarrelsome or opinionated, in other words into obedient and dutiful wives, whose voices are entirely muted?

Male chauvinism also emerges from the two examples below, which highlight the fact that men considered women stupid (or that they didn't want women to be clever, so as to be able to 'shine' over them) and that they thought of them as being less reliable than an animal:

- (37) *Femeile au fuste lungi și minte scurtă.* (AP)  
'Women have long skirts and short minds'.  
(38) *so-deoreo han mal-eun an na-do cheo-doreo han mal-eun nanda.*  
'Words spoken to a cow don't spread, but words spoken to a wife do'.

On the other hand, in the new collection of Romanian proverbs (Botezatu and Hînduc, 2001), a change of attitude of the Romanian men towards

women can be noticed. Thus, the following example contradicts the message of the proverb in (34):

- (39) *Femeia cine-și lovește, norocul își oprește.* (B&H)  
'The one who hits his wife will hinder his good luck'.  
(40) *Nevasta nu e o cârpă să o descoși și să o lepezi.* (B&H).  
'The wife is not a piece of cloth to tear apart and dispose of'.

Unfortunately, in the Korean society, where Confucianism reduced women to an inferior status, a great change in attitude and perception is needed until the two genders should come to treat one another ethically. In this country, which has progressed to such an extent that it is one of the most developed in the world, the mentality concerning women is still very 'old-fashioned'. The idea that homemaking is exclusively the responsibility of women is still pervasive throughout the Korean society. Even if women hold university degrees and have a career, once they get married and have children they give up their jobs and turn into housewives. Their status is so belittled that they are not called by their names, but "are addressed by reference to their children's names, even by their close friends" (Yoon, 2016).

**3.2. Differences.** Though there are many similarities between the Korean and the Romanian women, proverbs also reflect a much bolder character of the latter. Despite the general claim that they should be submissive and faithful to their husbands, they are more rebellious than their Korean sisters and do not fully comply with the social demands. Thus, even if they get married, not all of them consider that the social rules need to be strictly obeyed, in that they see themselves entitled to enjoy life just like men do. This is reflected in the following examples:

- (41) *Dacă m-am căsătorit, nu m-am și călugărit.* (AP)  
'If I got married this does not mean that I also became a nun'.  
(42) *Lelea joacă pînă-n noapte, iar bărbatu-i e pe moarte* (B&H).  
'The woman is dancing until late at night, while her husband is on his death bed'.  
(43) *Cîți văd cu nădragi, toți îmi sînt dragi.* (AP).  
'I like all those wearing trousers'.  
(44) *Țara piere de tătari și ea bea cu lăutari.* (AP)  
'The country is conquered by the Tartars, while she is drinking with the fiddlers'.  
(45) *De m-ai bate cît vei vrea, tot nu voi tăcea.*  
'Even if you beat me hard, I will not keep silent'.

The message of the proverb in (41) is that marriage should not deprive women of all human rights: just like men, women feel entitled to enjoy life. The next proverb (42) shows how much a woman loves her husband. She is so fond of enjoying herself that she does not care for the fact that her husband might pass away soon. Though chastity is mentioned as a virtue in many Romanian proverbs, there are also lots of such folklore structures that highlight some women's tendency to perceive themselves as equal to men in terms of sex (43). The proverb under (44) emphasizes the idea that even under dangerous or important circumstances, women would not renounce their little joys (like drinking or tarding up). In the last example (45), the envisaged outcome of beating is questioned, in that instead of the anticipated muted wife, beating produces an outraged wife, unwilling to submit to her husband.

Despite the frequent association of women with the Devil/Satan in both cultures, it seems that the Romanian women, unlike their Korean sisters, are capable of outwitting it, as illustrated by the following examples:

(46) *Femeiei nici dracu' nu'i vine de hac.* (AP)  
'Not even the Devil can defeat the woman'.

(47) *Femeea judecă pe dracu și'l scoate dator.* (AP)  
'The woman judges the Devil and finds him indebted'.

(48) *Femeea a îmbătrînit și pe dracul.* (IG)  
'The woman has made even the Devil age'.

(49) *Femeea hotărâșce și Satana împlinesce.* (AP)  
'The woman decides (on something) and Satan will carry it out'.

These examples hint at women's cunningness and manipulating skills. If a woman sets her mind on doing something, she will invariably find the means to achieve it. As Schipper (2004: 245) puts it, "women's power is presented as so dangerously spectacular that the Devil himself is overruled and has to accept being a woman's subordinate".

Another important difference that emerges is a much stronger emphasis on the personal sacrifice of the Korean women and especially mothers, who perceive self-sacrifice to be part of their lives.

(50) *hyungnyeon-e eomineun gulm-eo juggo aineun baeteojoyeo jugneund.*  
'During the famine, the mother starves to death and the child dies from eating too much'.

(51) *hananimkkeseo yeoleo gos-e hankkeobeon-e gyesil su eobsjie eomeonileul changjohasyeossda.*  
'God created mother because God cannot be in every place at the same time'.

(52) *yeojaneun yaghaedo eomeonineun ganghada.*  
'Mother is strong even if the woman is weak'.

The proverb under (50) points out that in times of "great economic hardships due to climatic conditions, the scarcity of natural resources, and the lack of productive capacity" (Lee, 2006: 77), Korean mothers would save every grain of rice for their children, to help them survive, even if this meant leaving their children orphans. The second example (51) very nicely captures the idea that mothers watch permanently and everywhere over their children, being a substitute of God, while the proverb under (52) shows that even if a woman's body is weak, she has a very strong power to raise a child, being able of any sacrifice required.

Though the Romanian proverbs are written from the perspective of men, and consequently one expects to come across only male names in them, I have also encountered examples of words of wisdom containing female names, which is not the case in the Korean proverbs. This might represent additional evidence for the Romanian women enjoying a more favourable position in society than their Korean sisters:

(53) *Tir mi-e baba Rada, tir mi-e Rada baba.* (IG)  
'Whether it's Rada, the old woman or the old woman Rada, it's of no importance'.

(54) *Aceași Mărie cu altă pălărie.*  
'The same Mary with a different hat'.

Another difference I noticed in comparing the Korean to the Romanian women-related proverbs was the fact that in the latter the mentions of women's professional skills are far more numerous. Thus, Romanian women were cooks, midwives, tailors, wool-spinners, and weavers, while the Korean women made good doctors, especially for their own children:

(55) *Cu două bucătăreșe iese ciorba prea sărată/nesărată.* (B&H)  
'When there are two female cooks, the soup is too salty/not salty at all'.

(56) *Copilul cu două moașe rămîne cu buricul netăiat.* (B&H)  
'The child delivered by two midwives remains with the navel uncut'.

(57) *Cămașă bărbatului, cîstea femeii./ Cămașă copilului arată ce mamă are.* (B&H)  
'The man's shirt, the woman's credit./ The child's shirt shows what kind of mother he has'.

(58) *Femeia harnică ține casa cu fusul.*  
'The industrious woman keeps house with the spindle'.

(59) *eolin ai byeong-en eomimanhan uisaga eobsda.*  
 'There is no credible doctor but mom, when the kid is sick'.

The message of the proverbs in (55) and (56) is that if a woman is trying to do her job, no interference on behalf of another equally qualified person is needed, as this may result in failure. But while the quality of the soup is not so very relevant, the safe delivery of a baby, especially of a male one was of crucial importance. Proverb (58) shows that women were also very skilled in producing both the fabric for the clothes, as well as the clothes themselves. Moreover, in many cases clothes were nicely embroidered with patterns specific of the geographical areas of the country. This example also presents spinning as the gendered task from the very beginning of the world.

While in exceptional situations Romanian men would take (and even appreciate) women's advice, for the Koreans this would have meant a loss of face:

(60) *Bine e să ascuți și de sfatul femeilor.* (B&H)  
 'It's good to follow women's advice, too'.

(61) *yeoja mal-eul jal deul-eodo paegahago an deul-eodo mangsin-ida.*  
 'If you listen to woman's advice, the house comes to ruin; if you don't listen, the house comes to shame'.

One last difference between the Korean and Romanian proverbs related to women concerns the use of vulgar terms. Both languages employ exactly the same dirty lexical item, namely *fart/farting*, but even if at first sight one may be tempted to say that it depicts the naivety of girls (virgins), Golescu's explanation of the Romanian proverb sheds light on its meaning, showing that there is no similarity between the Korean and the Romanian examples below:

(62) *cheonyeodeul-eun mal bang-gwiman kkwieodo usneunda.*  
 'The virgin laughs even when the horse farts'.

(63) *Fata mare/beșe tare.* (IG)  
 'The big girl/virgin farts loudly'.

Example (60) shows the inexperienced young women'/girls' tendency to laugh at everything that is new or unexpected. The use of the term 'fart' should not come as a surprise for someone who is familiar with the Korean customs of spitting, burping and farting openly. Its emergence in a Romanian proverb was quite surprising to me. The Romanian example is ambiguous in that *fată mare* could be interpreted either as a 'virgin' or as a 'corpulent'/'big' girl. The proverb makes reference to the latter meaning of the

syntagm, its message being that the higher your social status, the bigger mistakes you can make, and the louder these will be heard from afar.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis of the Korean and Romanian proverbs has brought to light many similarities, but also some differences, the latter being determined to a large extent by the strong impact of Confucianism on the Korean society, on the roles assigned by this doctrine/philosophy to girls and married women. In both cultures, from an early age, girls were raised to be good women, with the ultimate goal of being married and becoming good wives. This reinforced the idea that women were entirely dependent on men in society. They were taught (sometimes by violent means) to sacrifice their personalities, feelings, emotions, and achievements for men.

Both in Korea and in Romania, a certain kind of behaviour was expected on behalf of women: they needed to be hard-working and skilled in many activities, but had to be quiet, faithful to their husbands, and disciplined; they were not expected to express any personal opinion, but to completely obey their male family members' orders; next, women were not expected to be beautiful, but well-groomed, and if they happened to be blessed with beauty, this was perceived to endanger the domestic peace and happiness, as a beautiful woman would be desired by all men in the community. Finally, it was expected of women to properly perform womanly tasks such as cooking, weaving and looking after the children. Additionally, it was demanded of the Korean women to be also self-sacrificing daughters-in-law. If women did not comply with these norms imposed by male-centered societies, they were shamed and punished, sometimes even beaten. An expected outcome of this attitude towards women was their complete submissiveness to men.

But while the Korean women stoically accepted their fate, among their Romanian sisters a more rebellious attitude could be noticed. Thus, they had the courage to confront their husbands, to retort when they were beaten, to reconsider the norms related to chastity, at the same time expecting some sort of gender equality, by getting involved in activities like drinking and dancing, which were prerequisites of men. Moreover, the determination of Romanian women was so strong, that very often they were portrayed as outwitting or overpowering Satan himself. So, the notion of personal sacrifice was not as deeply rooted in the conscience of the

Romanian women as it was in the case of the Koreans, who

believed that they were committing self-sacrifice for their families. (...) Korean women were driven by fear and anxiety stemming from this. This was the direct result of the patriarchal Korean society (Chul, 2013: 28).

As far as the cultural issues are concerned, I expected to discover more lexical items denominating tools employed by women in their everyday activities or names of specific Romanian or Korean dishes. The only one I came across was the term *fus* (spindle), employed by Romanian women to spin wool. But this dearth of information was compensated by the discovery of some aspects that made me empathize with the Korean women and feel fortunate that I was born in a culture where women had the right of being addressed by their own names. In the Korean society, even nowadays, people prefer to address one another not by their names, but rather by using titles, which they consider a sign of politeness. When somebody has to address a woman they don't know, they would use titles based on the appearance of her age. Thus, a middle-aged woman who may be married would be called *ajumma* (a term carrying negative connotations) or *samonim* (teacher's wife), if she looked like a wealthy married woman. These two terms highlight the Korean women's dependence on their husbands. But even if they are educated and have a career, they would not be called by their names accompanied by their titles (like doctor X or professor Y); they will still be addressed on the basis of their sex and relative age: *eonni* (older sister), *ajumma* (aunt). In such a situation, one may wonder why Korean mothers try to give their daughters such beautiful names as *da-won* (more than beautiful woman) or *ga-yeong* (beautiful flower).

#### 4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

No matter how impartial and objective I have tried to be in carrying out the comparison between the Korean and the Romanian women-related proverbs, I have the feeling that in some cases I was biased in my evaluation of the cultural aspects and that I sided with my compatriot ancestors, which I hope will be pardoned by the possible Korean readers of the paper. At the same time, I am well aware of the fact that my lack of knowledge of Korean prevented me from grasping the real, deep meaning of the proverbs, which gets lost or altered

in the process of translation into English. Proofreading by a Korean-English bilingual would have been necessary.

Finally, I would have liked to have access to a much larger database of Korean proverbs, which would have given me a better perspective on the topic and would have prevented me from making just guesses. Despite these shortcomings, I am hopeful that the image of women as revealed by the Korean and Romanian proverbs comes close to reality.

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