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MATEJ METERC

THE SLOVENE PAREMIOLOGICAL OPTIMUM:  
NEW EMPIRICAL RESEARCH TOOLS AND THE  
AUGMENTATION OF THE FIELD OF MINIMUM-  
ORIENTED RESEARCH

**Abstract:** The article presents the main results of an online survey and corpus research of Slovene paremiological units and discusses how paremiological units of modern origin are gathered. Some practical examples of the advantages of an optimum are given. An overview of the top 50 units of the Slovene paremiological optimum and their English equivalents touches upon the question of describing shares of units with a common motivation as “high” or “low”, while a comparison of genetically close languages – Slavic languages in this case – points towards a broader context. The article also discusses how the field of minimum-oriented research can be expanded by taking different socio-linguistic criteria into account. Lastly, it argues that the use of spoken corpora could lead to an even more holistic optimum in the future.

**Keywords:** paremiological optimum, paremiological minimum, paremiological unit, online survey, corpus-based research, paremiological lemma, Slovene language, Slavic languages, paremiological equivalents, empirical paremiology.

***1. Minimum- and optimum-oriented paremiological research***

The two research projects presented here – demographical research with an online survey and corpus-based research on the Slovak National Corpus (SNK) and the Corpus of Written Slovene (FidaPLUS) – were conducted in the framework of a doctoral thesis aimed at establishing the Slovene and Slovak paremiological optima in order to effect a comparison from a constructional, semantic and suprasemantic perspective. Erika Kržišnik, one of the most influential Slovene phraseologists, recently stated (2013: 25) that Slovene paremiology has received too little attention. The choice of empirical approaches is therefore well grounded. The minimum-oriented empirical studies introduced by Permyakov (1988) gained popularity in the 1980s

and 1990s and are still current today. Mieder notes that “demographic research will also finally give scholars a much better idea as to which of the thousands of proverbs listed in the older collections are still in actual use today” (2004: 128). The paremiological minimum has been established – or attempts have been made to establish it – for Russian (Permyakov 1988), Hungarian (Tóthné-Litovkina 1992), Czech (Schindler 1993, Čermák 2003), English (Grzybek, Chlosta 1995), Croatian (Baur, Chlosta, Grzybek 1996), German (Baur, Chlosta, Grzybek 1996, Ďurčo 2006, Steyer 2012), Sorbian (Hose 1995), Spanish (Muñoz, Diaz 1997), Slovak (Ďurčo 2002), Polish (Szpila 2002), Ukrainian (Vyshnya 2008) and recently also for Slovene (Meterc 2014a). The revolution in linguistic research that occurred over the last twenty years as a result of language corpora has also led to important changes in phraseology. The concept of the paremiological minimum was enhanced with the notion of the frequency of the paremiological units in the language corpus (Čermák 2003), and a basic theoretical and methodological step forward was taken when phraseologists divided the vague descriptive term “popularity of units” into two different and empirically measurable categories – frequency and familiarity. According to Grzybek and Chlosta (2008: 102), the two notions are mutually interdependent and form a feedback loop. In Ďurčo’s opinion (2006: 17) information about both familiarity and frequency is needed to establish an empirical basis for phraseography and contrastive paremiology. The resulting set, the so-called paremiological optimum, is a larger set of paremiological units arranged as a correlation between the familiarity of the units as ascertained through demographical research and the frequency of the units as ascertained in research on the corpus. To date, the paremiological optimum has been established for Slovak (Ďurčo 2014, Meterc 2014a), German (Ďurčo 2006) and Slovene (Meterc 2014a).

## ***2. Establishing the Slovene paremiological optimum***

According to Ďurčo (2006: 4, 2014) research on the paremiological optimum should consist of five phases: 1. selection of a data set and design of a questionnaire, 2. reduction of the core set of proverbs through work by experts, 3. a survey questionnaire to determine commonly known proverbs, 4. frequency

analysis of the best known proverbs in the corpus and 5. creation of the paremiological optimum. The following article will discuss this process in the context of the Slovene optimum and will also present the use of an online survey to collect new paremiological material.

### *2.1 Demographical research: A list of best known paremiological units in Slovene*

The making of the experimental corpus for the online survey was described in detail elsewhere (Meterc 2015: 196-197). To summarize, it consisted of 918 proverbs, sayings, and (proverbial) winged words and one Wellerism<sup>1</sup>. These units were found by a systematic search of two dictionaries: *Slovar slovenskega knjižnega jezika* (Standard Slovene Dictionary) and *Frazeološki slovar v petih jezikih* (Phraseological Dictionary in Five Languages, Pavlica 1960). An analysis of answers given by informants was conducted at the very end of the survey and revealed that the experimental corpus for Slovene was rather well made<sup>2</sup>. Āurčo's full text presentation questionnaire model makes it possible to observe the important difference between passive and active knowledge of proverbs (Āermák 2003), as it allows respondents to choose from five possible answers for each individual unit: 1. I know it and I use it; 2. I know it but I do not use it; I do not know it, but I do understand it; 4. I do not know it and I do not understand it and 5. The possibility of adding a variant form. The Slovene questionnaire can be found on the webpage <http://vprasalnik.tisina.net><sup>3</sup>. Filters can be used to make different lists according to the demographical data (year of birth, sex, level of education, the regional group of Slovene dialects in which a respondent grew up, and the regional group of Slovene dialects in which he or she is living at the moment) and the completion percentage of the questionnaires. The answers can be arranged using one filter or combinations of several filters. The software thus makes it possible to create a variety of minima.

### *2.2 Main results of the survey*

On October 13, 2012, the data was frozen on a separate page to establish a list of the 300 best known Slovene paremiological units. Up to that point, 316 respondents had marked all of the 918 units presented to them. The oldest respondent was born in 1928, and the youngest in 2000. The familiarity of the best

known paremiological unit was 99.7% and the familiarity of paremiological unit 300, that is, of the unit at the end of the minimum, was 79.7%. Āurčo (2014) suggests that 50% familiarity of a unit could also be used as a cut-off point – 546 out of 918 units in the demographical research met this criterion. Āurčo defines (2014) paremiological performance as “the active and the passive overall knowledge of proverbs by all informants in a paremiological experiment” (2014). Taking into account all paremiological units in the experimental corpus, overall knowledge was 36.8% (168,256 instances of answers 1, 2 and 5 out of 470,167 total answers). On average, a Slovene speaker uses 290 and knows but does not use 250 of the 918 presented units. They understand the motivation of the majority (318) of the units they do not know. There were 224 known and actively used units, and 12 units were known but not used (passive knowledge) by over 50% of the informants. Over 50% of the informants were not familiar with 292 units in the corpus, but the motivation of these units was understood in most cases (286).

Paremiologists underline the need to gather paremiological units of modern origin (Mieder 2004: 128). Slovene folklorist Marija Makarovič even stressed the importance of this task when she presented the results of her field research on the familiarity of Slovene proverbs in the 1970s (1975: 207)<sup>4</sup>. The Slovene online survey fulfilled this function by asking respondents to list any proverb, saying or similar unit that they could think of and could not recall seeing in the questionnaire. A cursory overview of the long list of answers reveals textemes of different types and origins (movie quotations, commercial slogans, song titles and parts of lyrics) among other paremiological units. A detailed analysis of this material (that would probably include corpus-based research and another questionnaire) would be needed to ascertain the degree to which a particular unit is known to Slovene speakers, the frequency with which it is spoken and written in Slovene and whether its heterosituativity can be proven. Attention would also need to be given to the kinds of textemes (and other paremiological genres) accepted and listed by the respondents as proverbs, since the collected material reveals a large number of superstitions, weather proverbs, anti-proverbs, winged words and slogans (international slogans and especially slogans from Socialist Yugoslavia). Also present were some Wellerisms

which are not very common in Slavic languages (Mlacek 1986: 157, Grzybek 1994: 290) and quite rare in Slovene paremiological collections; as noted above, the Standard Slovene Dictionary only lists one Wellerism. Other questions adopted from Āurčo's survey (2002) encourage respondents to write down their favorite proverb or saying as well as any anti-proverbs, jokes and anecdotes associated with proverbs. The five most frequently listed anti-proverbs were already discussed elsewhere (Meterc 2014), and more work will need to be done on the rest of the material in the near future. Two additional questions were added to the final set of questions: respondents were asked to list units from other languages which they quote when they communicate in Slovene and to list their least favorite proverb or saying<sup>5</sup>. It is interesting that by far the proverb the respondents most frequently listed as their least favorite was *Rana ura, zlata ura* (*The early bird catches the worm*, lit. Early hour, gold hour/clock/watch)<sup>6</sup>. Surprisingly (or not), this is the 22nd best known unit. It was familiar to 99% of the respondents (80.7% of them actively use this proverb) and was listed in 77th place in the Slovene paremiological optimum.

### 2.3 Corpus research: A list of the most frequent paremiological units among the 300 best known paremiological units in Slovene

As noted above, the paremiological optimum is a list of the top paremiological units arranged as a correlation between the familiarity of the units and their frequency (Āurčo 2006: 17). Information about the frequency of the 300 best known units in the Slovene experimental corpus was collected from the reference corpus of written Slovene, FidaPLUS. When the corpus research began, FidaPLUS contained around 600 million words; its successor, Gigafida, which contains 1.2 billion words, was only available as a demo at the time.

Two basic tactics were used to search for units in the corpus. The first tactic was to search for units with the help of their lexemes. This was a good way to find out whether any syntactic variants exist. A number of proverb transformations were also found with this tactic. The second tactic was more sophisticated, and involved the use of constructional formulas (for example *Like X, like Y*), as suggested by Āurčo (2006: 9-10). These formulas made it possible not only to find numerous variants and

actualizations, but also additional proverbs (even some that have not been registered in Slovene paremiographical sources). Attempts were made to use both tactics on each single paremiological unit (Meterc 2014a: 80-92). The lexical and also phonetic and orthographic variants found using the second tactic were further checked using the first tactic. On the other hand, if syntactic variants were found while searching for units by their lexemes, the search model based on the constructional formulas was modified to get as close as possible to the so-called paremiological lemma or abstract model of every unit (Đurčo 2014a: 13). Attempts were also made to develop alternative search procedures. These were based on the syntax irregularity of some units and the archaic forms captured in them.

The average frequency of the 300 best known units was 101 occurrences. Only 42 units occurred more than 200 times. Seven units occurred more than 400 times, and the unit with the highest frequency occurred 691 times. At the opposite end, 71 units occurred fewer than 20 times in the corpus. Some reasons for their low frequency will be discussed below. In either case, comparisons of the frequency and familiarity of Slovene paremiological units confirmed the observation that frequent proverbs tend to be familiar, while familiar proverbs do not necessarily occur frequently (Grzybek, Chlosta 2008: 104). Information about the number of all prototypical occurrences of paremiological units in FidaPLUS (30,462) and the number of words in the corpus (600 million) made it possible to estimate that a unit from the minimum (in the classical sense) can be expected roughly for every 20,000 words in the FidaPLUS corpus. By comparison, Čermák (2007: 570) estimated that a unit from Schindler's list of the 99 best known Czech proverbs occurs every 80,000 words. Recent research on the frequency of the 300 most familiar Slovene proverbs and sayings in the GOS reference corpus of spoken Slovene (Meterc 2015: 7) also arrived at an estimate of about 20,000 (22,502) words<sup>7</sup>. The low frequency this corpus revealed for some units is in most cases a result of the difference between the oral and written usage of phraseological units. Đurčo (2006: 15-16) has also presented numerous examples of well-known proverbs with below-average frequency. It should be noted that language corpora mostly include texts from journalism genres, and this certainly has an impact on the distribution and frequency

of the proverbs. These facts by themselves show why it is a good idea to combine data from corpora with data from sociolinguistic research; there are of course other factors, some which will be discussed below.

Following Āurčo's concept, we arrive at the top of the intersection of the familiarity level as indicated by speakers and the frequency of occurrences in the Corpus by correlating the two parameters (familiarity and frequency). The top of the Slovene optimum (50 units) has 30 units in common with the list of the best known paremiological units (the paremiological minimum in Permyakov's classical sense; Āurčo, Meterc 2013). The ten best known units (and 18 out of the top 20 units) are found in the top 50 units of the optimum. Below, examples will be used to present certain advantages that the paremiological optimum has over the paremiological minimum.

Research in the FidaPLUS corpus showed that the frequency of the Latin variant *In vino veritas* (56 occurrences) in written Slovene is almost as high as the frequency of the Slovene variant *V vinu je resnica* (60 occurrences). The relation between the frequency of original Latin quotations (and those taken from other languages) and their variants differs from unit to unit and from language to language. Being aware of the mutual influence present between the familiarity and frequency of the proverbs, it should be kept in mind that active usage of the Latin unit also influences the level of familiarity with the Slovene unit among respondents who prefer to use the Slovene variant. In practice this means that some Slovene units which are as frequent as their foreign-language variants or even less frequent drift towards the lower part of the paremiological optimum in comparison to their place in the paremiological minimum. The mutual influence of the familiarity and frequency of the proverbs should also be taken into consideration in the case of proverb transformations. The Slovene and Slovak corpora show that in some cases proverbs are much less frequent than their transformations. An example would be the Slovene proverb *Vsak naj pometa pred svojim pragom* (19 occurrences, literally *Let each man sweep his own doorstep*) and its Slovak equivalent *Každý nech si pred svojim prahom zametá* (27 occurrences), both with the meaning *People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones*. In the case of this proverb, transformations (the verbalization *to sweep own door-*

*step*) are at least ten times more frequent in FidaPLUS and SNK. Information about proverb frequency can also solve some problems associated with the diachronic aspect of paremiological units. A large number of archaic units can be found not only in proverb collections, but also in some standard language dictionaries<sup>8</sup>. Comparing the demographical and corpus-based research, it was possible to observe that respondents sometimes marked a proverb which they don't use as familiar, even though it might just seem familiar to them because of a unit with a similar motivation but rather different structure and meaning: the proverb *Brez setve ni žetve* (literally *There is no harvest without sowing seeds*) was known to 88.3% of respondents, but no occurrence could be found in FidaPLUS. The unit *Kar kdo seje, to bo tudi žel* (*You reap what you sow*), on the other hand, was known to 93.3% of respondents and had 119 occurrences in the FidaPLUS corpus. All three examples show how data about proverb frequency help obtain a more accurate picture of proverb usage.

One must also be critical of the data presented in language corpora. Čermák (2003: 16) draws attention to the fact that language corpora don't include all information about language because they only reflect written language, which represents a rather small part of daily communication. This is another argument in favor of combining demographical and corpus-based data in the optimum and an important factor of proverb frequency in both written and in oral communication. A significant difference can be noted in the range of situations the different proverbs refer to, and certain situations can be presumed to be less frequent than others in day-to-day communication. Only 21 occurrences (below-average) of the Slovene proverb *Riba mora plavati trikrat – v vodi, v olju in v vinu* (*A fish must swim three times – in water, in oil and in wine*) were found in FidaPLUS, although this proverb was known to 85.1% of the respondents. At the same time 93 occurrences (near average) of the proverb *Riba smrdi pri glavi* (*The fish stinks from the head down*) were found in the corpus, but only 82.6% of respondents knew this proverb.

### ***3. Comparing paremiological equivalents with a common motivation as a share of the best known and most often used units in different languages***

Once English equivalents for the first 50 units in the Slovene paremiological optimum have been found, the share of Slovene-English equivalents with a common motivation can be placed in a broader perspective by comparing Slovene paremiology with those of other Slavic languages.

#### ***3.1 The top 50 units of the Slovene paremiological optimum and their English equivalents***

As Mieder (2004: 128) points out, many proverbs of classical, biblical or medieval origin will be found in the paremiological minima of European languages. English phraseological equivalents with the same motivation were found for 26 (52%) of the top 50 proverbs in the Slovene optimum. The share of synonyms is a bit lower (19, 38%), but further investigation of their usage would be needed in order to state with certainty that they are all typical synonyms or to determine whether some other kind of relation exists between equivalents – for example equipollent synonymy or hypernymy as described in the complex typology of phraseological equivalents (Đurčo 2012)<sup>9</sup>. Comparison with a list of 75 units “which would represent 25% of an Anglo-American paremiological minimum of 300 texts” (Mieder, 1992, 2004: 129-130, Litovkina 1994) gives nine proverbs with the same motivation and five synonyms.

	<b>Paremiological unit, English equivalent or meaning and literal meaning</b>	<b>Familiarity</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
1	<i>Denar je sveta vladar. Money makes the world go round. (lit. Money rules the world.)</i>	99.3	439
2	<i>Jabolko ne pade daleč od drevesa. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.</i>	99.1	313
3	<i>Boljši je vrabec v roki kakor golob na strehi. One in the hand is worth two in the bush.</i>	99	323
4	<i>Po toči zvoniti je prepozno. It's no use crying over spilt milk. (lit. It's too late to ring the bell after the hail.)</i>	99.4	237

5	<i>Vaja dela mojstra. Practice makes perfect.</i> (lit. Practice makes a master.)	98,7	386
6	<i>Počasi se daleč pride. Haste makes waste.</i> (lit. Slowly we come far.)	99,4	217
7	<i>V tretje gre rado. Third time's a charm.</i>	98,4	573
8	<i>Iz te moke ne bo kruha.</i> (lit. There will be no bread out of this flour.)	99	261
9	<i>Pustimo času čas. Rome wasn't built in a day.</i> (lit. Let's give time to time.)	98,4	393
10	<i>Vsi za enega, eden za vse. All for one, one for all.</i>	98,8	243
11	<i>Kdor čaka, dočaka. Good things come to those who wait.</i> (lit. He who waits lives to see it.)	99	207
12	<i>Nobena juha se ne poje tako vroča, kot se skuha. Things aren't as bad as they first seem.</i> (lit. No soup is eaten as hot as it is cooked.)	99,1	196
13	<i>Zarečenega kruha se največ poje. Never say never.</i> (lit. The bread one swore he would not eat is eaten in the largest amounts.)	99,3	185
14	<i>Ni vse zlato, kar se sveti. All that glitters is not gold.</i>	98,7	245
15	<i>Konec dober, vse dobro. All's well that ends well.</i>	98,4	312
16	<i>O tem čivkajo že vrabci na strehah. Everybody knows it.</i> (lit.: Sparrows are tweeting about it from the rooftops.)	98,1	617
17	<i>Ljubo doma, kdor ga ima. Home sweet home.</i> (lit. Lovely is the home to he who has one.)	98,7	240
18	<i>Nesreča nikoli ne počiva.</i> (lit. Bad luck never rests.)	98,4	253
19	<i>Čas celi rane. Time heals all wounds.</i>	99,4	150

20	<i>Dober glas seže v deveto vas. Good news travels fast. (lit. Good news reaches the ninth village.)</i>	98	397
21	<i>Za malo denarja malo muzike. You get what you pay for. (lit. Little money, little music.)</i>	99,1	160
22	<i>Bolje pozno kot nikoli. Better late than never.</i>	98,7	181
23	<i>Dobrota je sirota. Eaten bread is soon forgotten. (lit. Kindness is an orphan.)</i>	98,4	203
24	<i>Oko za oko, zob za zob. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.</i>	97,8	327
25	<i>Več glav več ve. Two heads are better than one. (lit.: More heads know more.)</i>	99,4	138
26	<i>Zdrav duh v zdravem telesu. A sound mind in a sound body.</i>	98,1	255
27	<i>Vsak je svoje sreče kovač. Man is the architect of his own fortune. (lit. Man is the blacksmith of his own fortune.)</i>	98,4	196
28	<i>Obljuba dela dolg. A promise is a promise. (lit. A promise makes a debt.)</i>	98,1	251
29	<i>Zrno do zrna pogača, kamen do kamna palača. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves. (lit. Grain by grain, white bread is made, stone by stone, a palace.)</i>	99,3	138
30	<i>Za dežjem sonce sije. Every cloud has a silver lining. (lit. After the rain comes sunshine.)</i>	98	295
31	<i>Kdor prej pride, prej melje. First come, first served. (lit.: He who arrives first uses the mill first.)</i>	98,4	190
32	<i>To je pa druga pesem. That's something completely different. (lit. That's another song.)</i>	97,7	373
33	<i>Ljubezen gre skozi želodec. The way to a man's heart is through his stomach.</i>	98,1	227

34	<i>Lepa beseda lepo mesto najde. Kindness begets kindness.</i>	99,4	127
35	<i>V slogi je moč. Union is strength.</i>	97,5	316
36	<i>Kuj železo, dokler je vroče. Strike while the iron is hot.</i>	98,5	144
37	<i>Obleka dela človeka. Clothes make the man.</i>	97,5	298
38	<i>Kovačeva kobila je zmeraj bosa. (lit. The blacksmith's horse is always unshod.)</i>	97,8	204
39	<i>Kjer se prepirata dva, tretji dobiček ima. Two dogs fight for a bone, and a third runs away with it. (lit. Where two people argue, a third profits.)</i>	99,4	114
40	<i>Ena lastovka ne naredi pomladi. One swallow doesn't make a summer. (lit. One swallow doesn't make a spring.)</i>	98,2	173
41	<i>Na napakah se učimo. We learn from our mistakes.</i>	98,1	183
42	<i>V tem grmu tiči zajec. There's the rub. (lit. There is a rabbit in this bush.)</i>	96,8	396
43	<i>Podarjenemu konju se ne gleda na zobe. Never look a gift horse in the mouth.</i>	97,8	195
44	<i>Laž ima kratke noge. Lies have short wings. (lit. A lie has short legs.)</i>	98,4	141
45	<i>Rečeno – storjeno. Said and done.</i>	97,1	300
46	<i>Kdor drugim jamo koplje, sam vanjo pade. He who digs a hole for someone will fall into it himself.</i>	99	113
47	<i>Kar se Janezek nauči, to Janez zna. Knowledge in youth is wisdom in age. (lit. What Johnnie learns, John knows.)</i>	99	106
48	<i>Klin se s klinom izbija. Fight fire with fire. (lit. A wedge is used to knock out a wedge.)</i>	99,3	96
49	<i>Kdor išče, najde. Seek and you shall find.</i>	99,7	86
50	<i>Okusi so različni. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder. (lit. Tastes are different.)</i>	96,8	263

Further investigation of the aspects of equivalency should include suprasemantic differences between phraseological units (Đurčo 2012, Đurčo, Meterc 2013). A large number of equivalents with the same motivation (formal variants, lexical-transpositional variants and even idionyms) which are a part of known and actively used paremiology in one language may appear only rarely (and mostly in older collections), or be known to a very small group of people in another language. This suprasemantic feature (diachronic difference) is of course connected to the diafrequent difference. Cases of Slovene-Slovak paremiological equivalents which reveal a link between the diafrequent difference and other suprasemantic differences (for example diastratic, diaevaluative or dianormative differences) were recently presented (Đurčo, Meterc 2013, Meterc 2014a). Diamedial difference is a result of the fact that a certain unit is more frequent in oral communication in one language, while it is usually found in written texts in another language. In order to arrive at a short list of such paremiological pairs, the sociolinguistic results were compared with the corpus data. First a list of the most actively used Slovene units (according to Slovene respondents' intuition; units that received answer 1) with below-average frequency in the corpus was prepared (Meterc 2014a). This list was then compared with a list of the units' Slovak equivalents to try to find equivalents which were quite frequent (average or above average) in the Slovak corpus.

### *3.2 Equivalency in the context of the Slavic languages*

While Czech and Slovak paremiologies could be expected to have a great deal in common with Slovene paremiology, the degree of similarity found between Slovene and English paremiologies comes as somewhat of a surprise, particularly when the considerable distance between the Slovene and Russian paremiologies is taken into account. The phraseology of genetically close languages can be used to design a metric which could describe the share of units with a common motivation as "high" or "low". For the top 50 units in the Slovene optimum, 36 (72%) Slovak equivalents with the same motivation were found, while 35 (70%) Slovene equivalents were found for the 50 top units in the Slovak optimum; 25 of the 36 Slovak equivalents are part of the Slovak optimum and 26 of the Slovene equivalents are part

of the Slovene optimum. This is just a part of a more extensive comparison (Meterc 2014a) in which Slovak equivalents were sought for all 300 units of the Slovene optimum and vice versa. Equivalents were found for roughly half of the units in each of the paremiological optima. About one third of the units in the Slovene and the Slovak optima have equivalents with the same motivation in the other paremiological optimum. Once equivalents from secondary sources (classical and online proverb collections) were added, the overall share of paremiological equivalents was 274 (91.3%) in the case of the Slovene optimum and 261 (87%) in the case of the Slovak optimum, while the share of equivalents with the same motivation in the other language rose to above half of the units in that language's optimum. There were only 16 units in both optima for which a phraseological equivalent could not be found, meaning the degree of idiosyncrasy was low (5.3%). This research made it possible not only to present the distribution of the types of equivalency in a large sample, but also to show how the share of each type of equivalency changes in line with the six intervals (50 units) of the optimum.

It is also interesting to consider the relation between Slovene and Slovak paremiology in the context of other Slavic languages. The first 50 units of the Slovene paremiological minimum (in the classical sense) were compared with the Russian, Czech and Slovak minima (Meterc 2014a). Comparing the situation in the first 50 units in the Slovene optimum (72% Slovak equivalents with the same motivation) with the situation in the first 50 units in a recently presented Slovene minimum (Đurčo, Meterc 2013: 23-25, Meterc 2014a), the number of equivalents is even higher: 39 (78%). Research conducted in the framework of my dissertation (Meterc 2014a: 199) revealed a similar situation when the first 50 units in Čermák's Czech minimum (Čermák 2003) were compared with the Slovene paremiology – 37 equivalents (74%) were found. On the other hand, the number of Slovene equivalents with the same motivation as the top 50 Russian units (Permyakov 1989) is quite low – only 10 proverbs (20%) (Meterc 2014a: 199). A future goal would be to establish a larger and more complex web or map of paremiological relations in the Slavic language group. It would be very interesting to compare such data with similar research conducted on the level of (non-

sentential) phrasemes (Fojtů 2012)<sup>10</sup>. Petra Fojtů has questioned the classical division of Slavic languages (south, west and east) and its usefulness for phraseology, where other patterns, groups and links can be observed. She and other scholars (Földes 2010) have shown how the German language has influenced a large number of Slavic languages. It would be interesting to find out if this also holds true for paremiology. There is still much work to be done in contact phraseology. By comparing all this information, in the future it will perhaps be possible to show that paremiological units migrate faster (or slower) or influence the units in contact languages more (or less) than other parts of phraseology.

#### ***4. Expanding the field of minimum- and optimum-oriented paremiological research***

As the amount of research on paremiological equivalency between languages continues to grow, the informational context for estimating how close or far the paremiologies of different languages are will become more precise. However, comparisons based on the same or at least very similar methodological tools are needed. Phraseologists have already presented a variety of projects which provide valuable information on phraseological relations between different languages (Pirainen 2005, Fojtů 2013), and these often include paremiological relations (Sprichwort-Plattform) and healthy amounts of material. The plane of suprasemantic differences between phraseological units represents a vast and highly dynamic field, since individual types of differences often interact. Sociolinguistic research on proverb familiarity and corpus-based research have already been very informative in this regard, but in our opinion an array of specific research tools will have to be developed for the detailed exploration of every single type and its interaction with other types. To give an example of the possibilities of research on the diamedial difference between equivalents, although the reference corpus of spoken Slovene (GOS) is small (120 hours of recordings), it is significant that some units with below-average frequency in the written corpus were found, while many of the most frequent units were absent (Meterc 2015a: 6-7). Paremiologists will have to wait until the spoken corpora are large enough to achieve a more representative comparison and a more precise list of units

which are used more in oral than in written texts. Research on Slovene paremiology in the spoken corpus (Meterc 2015a: 13) also points towards the idea of a “spoken optimum” and of a “combined spoken/written optimum”. Once the spoken corpora are large enough, it will be possible not only to establish the spoken optimum, but also a more holistic paremiological optimum which would combine information on the frequency of units from both types of corpora. Āurčo (2006: 3) proposes making specific minima out of the paremiological optimum on the basis of various criteria and in line with different purposes. Instead of the classical concept of the paremiological minimum as a set of units which all people (or at least all adults) are supposed to know, he suggests making a number of different paremiological minima out of the paremiological optimum for specific groups of people. The plurality of such minima could be multiplied by the sociolinguistic filters presented above. The use of these tools would make it possible not only to establish different minima out of the already made optimum, but also to establish different optima for different age intervals, education levels and regions. Mokienko (2012: 83) has criticized the concept of the minimum in the classical sense as a rather static top list of units and has proposed a new concept: the paremiological minimum as a zone of known units. The trend of multiplying paremiological minima and optima is in our opinion a combination of Mokienko's critique – that the static list should be replaced with the concept of a dynamic sphere of active paremiology – and a continued awareness of the importance of data produced by empirical research on the familiarity and frequency of phraseological units. Finally, the place of the paremiological optimum and minimum in the broader field of sentential phraseology should also be analyzed more carefully. What would a hypothetical “optimum of sentential phraseological units” look like? What tools would have to be developed? And how would the criteria (for example, the level of frequency) have to differ from the criteria used to establish the paremiological optimum? Paremiology is, after all, an integral part of phraseology as a whole, and the borders between the many types and (sentential and non-sentential) levels of phrasemes are liquid.

*Notes:*

<sup>1</sup> Weather proverbs and superstitions were not included.

<sup>2</sup> Only one proverb added by respondents was listed by more than five respondents (out of the 191 who answered the additional question) and not included in the survey (*Po jutru se dan pozna*, lit. *A man can guess what the day will be like by its morning*).

<sup>3</sup> The survey is still active and the number of completed questionnaires had risen above 420 at the time of writing (February 2015).

<sup>4</sup> A set of 100 proverbs intuitively designed by Makarovič was presented to 64 respondents from different parts of Slovenia. Makarovič also asked respondents to add any units that spontaneously came to mind. Grzybek has noted (2008: 24-25) that this can be considered the first modern empirical work on Slovene paremiology.

<sup>5</sup> The list of answers is quite long and rich. There is a rather large number of English and Latin units. Of particular interest was the usage of Italian, German, Hungarian and Croatian units among Slovenes living near the border with Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia respectively. On the other hand, Croatian, Bosnian and Serbian units represent a rather large share due to the fact that Slovenia was a part of Yugoslavia and the older generation was taught so-called Serbo-Croatian in school; the popular culture of other former Yugoslav republics also had and continues to have an important impact on Slovene phraseology. Of course, units from other languages were also listed by the respondents.

<sup>6</sup> The Slovene expression *ura* is a polyseme that means *clock*, *watch* and *hour*.

<sup>7</sup> Since fifty-five examples were found for 37 different units and the corpus contains 120 hours of recorded speech, it is realistic to expect a unit from the Slovene paremiological minimum to show up once per every hour and a half of recorded speech.

<sup>8</sup> According to the research over one quarter (158 out of 599) of the paremiological units in the Standard Slovene Dictionary (SSKJ) are known to less than 50% of the respondents.

<sup>9</sup> Taking into account the fact that the four basic logic relations (identity, equipollent opposition, privative opposition and disjunction) can occur in both semantic and formal comparisons of phraseological units, Āurčo introduced 16 hypothetical types of equivalence. To date, examples of 14 out of these types have been found in contrastive researches for German, Slovak, Russian (Āurčo 2012: 93-94), Slovene

and Slovak (Đurčo, Meterc 2013, Meterc 2014a). The fact that it is based on structural relations in the language system instead of deduction from examples found makes this typology very different from other typologies of phraseological equivalents used by scholars to date.

<sup>10</sup> A set of 1,000 Russian phrasemes was chosen as a starting point to search for equivalents in Czech, Slovak, Polish, Upper Sorbian, Croatian, Bulgarian, Belorussian and Ukrainian. Fojtů presented a fairly precise typology of phraseological equivalents which is comparable to the typology developed by Đurčo and used in our research on Slovak and Slovene paremiology.

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