

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2021.25.1.35>**СИНТАКТИЧЕСКАЯ СЕМАНТИКА РУССКОЙ АФОРИСТИКИ**

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

В статье рассматривается один из аспектов синтаксической природы русских афоризмов. Для полного анализа афоризма как лингвистической единицы необходимо анализировать его синтаксическую структуру, связанную с семантическим наполнением изречения.

Цель – выявить связь синтаксической структуры афоризма и его семантического наполнения. В качестве основного метода исследования используется семантико-синтаксический. Основой анализа стал корпус афоризмов, зафиксированный в «Словаре афоризмов русских писателей».

Афористика русских (русскоязычных) писателей характеризуется стремлением к краткости, однако изречений, синтаксически выраженных простым осложненным/неосложненным предложением около 11% от общего числа афористических единиц словаря. Это объясняется сложностью и неоднозначностью семантического наполнения афоризмов, требующих сложных синтаксических конструкций.

**Ключевые слова:** афоризм, афористическое высказывание, синтаксическая семантика русской афористики.

**SYNTACTIC SEMANTICS OF RUSSIAN APHORISTICS**

Research article

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**Abstract**

The article deals with one of the aspects of the syntactic nature of Russian aphorisms. For a complete analysis of an aphorism as a separate linguistic unit, it is necessary to analyze its syntactic structure related to the semantic content of the utterance.

The main aim of the research is to identify the relationship between the syntactic structure of an aphorism and its semantic content. The semantic-syntactic method is used as the main research method. The analysis is based on the corpus of aphorisms recorded in the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers.

The aphoristics of Russian (Russian-speaking) writers is characterized by the tendency for brevity, however, the utterances syntactically expressed in a simple complicated/uncomplicated sentence are about 11% of the total number of aphoristic units of the dictionary. This fact can be explained by the complexity and ambiguity of the semantic content of aphorisms that require complex syntactic constructions.

**Keywords:** aphorism, aphoristic utterance, syntactic semantics of Russian aphorism.

**Introduction**

The history of Russian aphoristics can be traced back to the pre-literate culture of the Slavic peoples, nevertheless aphorisms began to be recorded with the advent of writing. It should be noted that in the monuments of folklore, you can also find wise sayings.

Despite the fact that aphorisms have been known to mankind since ancient times, still there are disputes about the nature of aphorism, its form, structure, volume, the existence of logical patterns in it, and the predominant theme of utterances.

We believe that it is necessary to consider the aphorism (saying) as a phenomenon of language and speech in its relation to the phrasal-semantic system of language in a broad sense, including paroemiology.

Let us clarify the concept of aphorism that we have adopted, which is translated in numerous works: "in the most general sense, it is advisable to call an aphorism a short phrase of the phraseological type, which has such features as the presence of concept words in the structure; passportization, reproducibility. An aphorism can have such optional characteristics as subjectivity, originality, paradoxicity, unexpected wording, the presence of a figurative meaning, the ability to express universal truths, etc." [7, P. 37]. At present, there is also a problem of systematization of aphoristic units. This issue is mentioned in numerous works on aphoristics by: E.E. Ivanov [4], N.T. Fedorenko, L.I. Sokolskaya [16], K.M. Tangir, V.M. Grebennikova [15], A.V. Korolkova [7], Yu.E. Prokhorov [10], [11], E.M. Vereshchagin, V.G. Kostomarov [3], N.A. Karlik [6], A.A. Pokotilov [9], I.V. Ruzhitsky [13], Yu.S. Ivanova [5], M.Yu. Borisova [1] et al.

When analyzing the essence of an aphorism, the question of its scope inevitably arises. Traditionally, it is believed that the aphorism tends to brevity. However, the question of the length of aphorisms remains open, since, for example, both famous phrase of Kozma Prutkov: "Бди! Козыряй! Если хочешь быть счастливым, будь им!" ("Be on guard! Trump it! If you want to be happy, be happy!") and the sayings of Leo Tolstoy, which syntactically are existed as complex syntactic indivisible units consisting of several sentences, are considered aphorisms.

In the monograph of Fedorenko and Sokolskaya *Aphoristics* [16], it is proposed to separate an aphorism and an aphoristic utterance, which differ only in length. When compiling *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers*, the question of the length of the aphorism was relevant, the group of the authors (A.V. Korolkova, A.G. Lomov, A.N. Tikhonov), relying on a large volume of practical material, came to the conclusion that an aphorism can have up to three sentences of different syntactic structure. The dictionary also presents "aphoristic statements" (the term was introduced by Fedorenko, Sokolskaya) [16], which include up to five sentences of different types.

The material for the analysis was found in *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers* [8] and "folk aphorisms", carefully collected by the newspaper *Argumenty I Fakty*. Units from *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers* are (in the terminology of Fedorenko and Sokolskaya) introductory, i.e. the compilers of the dictionary extracted them from stylistically and functionally diverse author's texts, relying on the presence of key words that are the semantic and stylistic core of the aphorisms and include them in the circle of concepts of Russian spiritual culture. Within the framework of one aphorism, there can be no more than three of them. In the given examples of aphorisms, the key words are highlighted.

### Methods and principles of research

Semantic and syntactic analysis of the corpus of aphoristics recorded in *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers* [8]. When extracting aphorisms from the contexts of journalistic or literary texts, the method of identifying key words-concepts in the utterance was used to record them in the dictionary.

### Text of article

According to our observations, the length of an aphorism (aphoristic utterance) depends on the individual style, on the author's intention, sometimes on belonging to a certain literary movement or a philological school. Thus, syntactically complex sayings are found mainly in the works of L.N. Tolstoy, among the prose aphorisms of A.A. Blok, M. Voloshin, Viach. Ivanov, I.A. Bunin. For the most part, the poetic and prose sayings of A. Akhmatova, I. Brodsky, E. Yevtushenko, A. I. Kuprin, etc. are also brief.

The study of the syntactic nature of an aphorism raises the natural question of whether the subject of an aphorism depends on its length, as well as what syntactic constructions are most frequent in Russian aphoristics and how they are related to the semantic content of the utterance.

Semantic syntax (syntactic semantics) is actively studied at the present time. "The functioning of the semantic segment in the structural field of syntax is one of the most complex and controversial issues of Russian linguistics" [2, P. 151].

Within the framework of research on semantic syntax (syntactic semantics), there is a convergence of the positions of lexical semantics and semantic syntax, and the study of sentences is not limited only to the formal statement of their structure. Syntactic structures are considered in a complex way, and the lexical semantics of each member is taken into account when studying the meaning. Semantic organization is studied in great detail by syntax, and it is even pointed out that "in one of its aspects, a sentence, like a word, is a nominative unit" [2, P. 765]. That is why the study of the structure of the aphorism, its syntactic nature becomes relevant.

### Discussion

Let us examine the structural composition of aphorisms and aphoristic utterances from the point of view of syntactic semantics.

Most of the sayings in the corpus of *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers* consist of one or three sentences of different types.

This study examines aphorisms that consist of a single sentence, since this is a classic example of a short utterance. Brevity is considered a functional feature of an aphorism; this point of view is predominant and is represented in most dictionary definitions. The classic version of an aphorism is considered to be its syntactic expression with a single simple sentence. However, it turned out that such sayings are few.

Our dictionary presents the aphorisms of Russian writers of the XVIII-XX centuries and contains more than seven thousand units. Some of the sayings are simple uncomplicated sentences.

For example: **Никому не проходит безнаказанно бегство из Отечества.** (No one can escape from **the Fatherland** with impunity.) (S.T. Aksakov) [8].

An aphorism cannot be syntactically smaller than a simple sentence. V.P. Beloshapkova suggests examining a simple sentence as an utterance from the point of view of actual division (thematic-rhematic articulation): "The actual division of a sentence corresponds to a communicative task: it organizes the sentence to convey relevant information, that is, the aspect of material information (related to the lexical content and formal organization of the sentence), which is the essence of this communication and for the sake of which this communication should take place" [14, P. 796].

The actual division of the sentence-aphorism is carried out using the word order and intonation.

In the aphorisms recorded in the dictionary, the intonation is only assumed, but the fixed word order in the utterance is indicative. In Russian aphorisms, expressed in a simple uncomplicated sentence, the word order is free, but not random, and depends on the meaning of the utterance, on its stylistic characteristics, and on the author's communicative goal. In most aphorisms of the type under consideration, the word order is stylistically neutral, with a consistent transition from the theme to the rheme.

Quantitatively, *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers* is dominated by sayings with a direct stylistically neutral word order, in which the theme precedes the rheme. Naturally, the topic is a word (less often a phrase), which is the key.

For example: **Пылкий ум** не терпит плена. (**An ardent mind** does not tolerate captivity.) (E.A. Baratynsky) [8].

In Russian poetic aphorisms, expressed in the form of a simple uncomplicated sentence, the inverted word order is often used.

For example: Такой горечью полыни пропитана **русская жизнь**... (Such bitterness of wormwood is **the Russian life** imbued with...) (A.A. Blok) [8].

It can be stated that in Russian aphorisms, the inverted word order is used to give special expression and emotionality, this is particularly typical of poetic aphorisms.

The corpus of aphorisms of Russian writers analyzed by us presents sayings expressed in a simple uncomplicated sentence, reproducing the syntactic structure of proverbs. Traditionally, it is believed that paroemias express the folk language picture of the world. By choosing this form of expression, the authors unconsciously demonstrated their commitment to national and cultural values. It should be noted that most of the aphorisms of Russian writers reflect, although in their own original form, specific features of the national picture of the world of a certain historical period.

In aphorisms of this syntactic structure, there are cases of changing the place of phrasal stress, which helps to shift semantic accents and draw readers' attention to the theme of the utterance. Such aphorisms are emotional and expressed in exclamation sentences.

For example: **Счастье** – в предчувствии счастья! (**Happiness** exists in its anticipation!) (A.V. Vampilov) [8].

Sayings syntactically expressed by various types of simple uncomplicated sentences are not very significant in quantity; this is about 10% of the total number of units from *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers*.

In aphorisms of this type, there is (in the terminology of V.A. Beloshapkova) "a linear-dynamic structure, in which a segmental design is implemented, and the sentence becomes an utterance" [14]. Thus, it can be stated that simple sentences are a syntactic expression of an utterance without any support of a broad context.

Simple uncomplicated sentences can form aphorisms syntactically. At the same time, the semantic content of the utterance does not suffer, but it makes readers think about its ambiguous and original meaning.

For example: Все положительные творческие силы человека – в **любви**. (All the positive creative forces of a person are **in love**.) (M.A. Voloshin) [8].

Traditionally, the theory of world and Russian aphoristics emphasizes the value of the brevity of sayings, although, for example, most of the aphorisms are complex syntactic constructions.

In *the Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers*, the aphorisms expressed syntactically in a simple complicated sentence (semi-composite sentence) are quantitatively more significant. As in the system of modern Russian, the complicating components are "homogeneous parts of the sentence, detached parts of the sentence, various types of introductory and insert constructions. We should especially note that such a complicating element as direct address is in demand, first of all, in poetic introductory aphorisms" [7].

In aphorisms expressed by a simple complicated (semi-composite) sentence, the most common complicating syntactic element (as in the syntax of modern Russian in general) is various homogeneous parts of the sentence.

For example: **Стих** создают – безысходность, необходимость, сжатость, сосредоточенность... (**The verse** is created with the help of – hopelessness, necessity, conciseness, concentration...) (M.A. Voloshin) [8].

The most important function of homogeneous parts of the sentence in aphorisms is to create a special type of expression, to express the emotional assessment of the author of the utterance. Aphorisms created by famous writers, poets, scientists always affect readers, make them think about certain problems, determine their own attitude to them. The emotional side of the utterance affects the reader no less than the semantic content. In this respect, the homogeneous parts of the sentence syntactically construct, for example, a gradation. The gradation in the utterance increases the emotional impact.

For example: **Жизнь человечества** – творчество, стремление к победе над сопротивлением мертвой материи, желание овладеть всеми ее тайнами и заставить силы ее служить воле людей для счастья их. (**The life of humanity** is creativity, the desire to overcome the resistance of dead matter, the desire to master all its secrets and make its forces serve the will of people for their happiness.) (M. Gorky) [8].

Homogeneous parts of the sentence in aphorisms structure, arrange the utterance, build it logically.

When describing the stylistic role of homogeneous parts of the sentence in aphorisms, their importance in creating images and dynamics of action should be particularly noted. They can form the whole series of epithets, "having great expressiveness and picturesqueness, allowing you to create the whole range of colors, sounds, and smells" [12, P. 321].

It should be said that homogeneous parts in aphoristic utterances can also be used to create certain figures of speech, such as anaphora, epiphora, etc.

When examining the homogeneous parts of the sentence in the composition of aphorisms, we must note the fact that the ways of their syntactic connection, in particular, the use of conjunctions, or conjunctionless connection play a special role.

In aphorisms expressed by a simple complicated (semi-composite) sentence, the following pattern is observed: homogeneous parts of the sentence are often associated with a generalizing word, which is the key to this utterance.

For example: **Бездуховность** – это равнодушие, лень мысли, презрение к интеллекту, к глубокому чувству... (**Lack of spirituality** is indifference, laziness of thought, contempt for the intellect, for deep feeling...) (Yu.V. Bondarev) [8].

*The Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers* records sayings that are syntactically expressed in a simple complicated sentence, the homogeneous parts of which are connected without conjunctions. If there are no conjunctions and prepositions with homogeneous parts of the sentence, then in the aphorism there is an incompleteness of thought, a call to dialogue, sometimes to a dispute with the author.

For example: В России **революция** – пыл, ор, ярь, половодье, урывистая вода... (In Russia, **the revolution** is fervour, yell, fury, flood, rapid water...) (A. Vesely) [8].

Most of the aphorisms presented in our dictionary are extracted by structural and semantic analysis from various texts of fiction and journalism, i.e. from texts of the book style. From the point of view of syntax, book styles are characterized by a large number of detached parts of the sentence as complicating elements.

Separations in aphorisms contribute to the creation of an additional semantic center of the utterance, since they traditionally contain an element of an additional message.

In aphorisms, there are any kinds of detachment that add additional meaning to the utterance, clarify, explain, expand the concept (keyword), which is the semantic core.

For example: **Любят** все, не замечая небывалости чувства. (Everyone **loves**, without noticing the unprecedent of the feeling.) (B.L. Pasternak) [8].

Speaking about the use of detached parts of the sentence in aphorisms, it should be noted that they "help to convey the idea concretely, convexly, with details of the situation, time, etc. clarifying the meaning" [2, P. 248].

Utterances that are syntactically expressed in a simple complicated (semi-composite) sentence contain a large number of direct addresses. Addresses are more actively used in colloquial speech than in book speech. Aphorisms, as it has already been noted, are mainly part of book styles. However, the apparent contradiction is quite understandable. Direct addresses are usually used in poetic aphorisms that imitate the structure of a Russian folk song.

Such direct addresses are actively used in the aphorisms of "peasant poets": N.A. Klyuev, A.V. Koltsov, S.A. Yesenin, P.V. Oreshin.

For example: Ах, зачем ты, **жизнь** несносная,  
К нам как мачеха ласкаешься!  
(Oh, why do you, **life** unbearable,  
Treat us like a stepmother!) (P.V. Oreshin) [8].

Direct address in aphoristics performs a variety of functions. The most important function of address is naming the addressee of speech. It is this function that is in demand in poetic aphorisms.

In prose aphorisms that are syntactically expressed in simple complicated (semi-composite) sentences, introductory and insert constructions can be used as complicating elements.

For example: К сожалению, **смелость** слишком часто бывает следствием чувства обесцененной жизни... (Unfortunately, **courage** is too often the result of a sense of devalued life...) (F. Iskander) [8].

Introductory words and combinations of words in aphorisms express a real modality, which is all the more important, since aphorisms are short and become independent of a broad context that could clarify the author's attitude to the meaning of what was said (more often – an emotional assessment).

Insert constructions are not as often used in aphorisms as introductory words and combinations, but they are also in demand. Insert constructions are more frequent in cases where they complicate simple sentences as part of complex ones. It is in such aphorisms that there is a need for an additional message, for specification of something.

For example: Уровень **чести общества** зависит от уровня уважения (даже почтения, поклонения) **таланту**; нет большего удара по чести, чем торжество посредственности. (The level of **honour of society** depends on the level of respect (even reverence, worship) for **talent**; there is no greater blow to honour than the triumph of mediocrity.) (E. M. Bogat) [8].

It should be noted that in aphorisms that are syntactically expressed by a simple complicated sentence, quite often the basis for a syntactic complication is such a feature of the aphorism as paradoxicality.

## Results

When analyzing the corpus of Russian aphorisms in terms of syntactic characteristics of their structure, it should be noted that aphorisms expressed in a simple uncomplicated or complicated (semi-composite) sentence make up a little more than 10-11 %. Most often, the complicating elements of a simple sentence-aphorism are homogeneous parts of the sentence, then (in descending order): detached secondary parts of the sentence, direct addresses, introductory and insert constructions.

In the corpus of the *Dictionary of Aphorisms of Russian Writers*, most of the sayings consist of three sentences of different types, which can be explained by the semantic integrity and ambiguity of the sayings. Let us clarify that several key words, usually correlated with the concepts of Russian spiritual culture, in the utterance not only expand its semantics, but also require a corresponding more complex syntactic expression. Thus, there is a certain dependence of the syntactic embodiment of the aphorism and its subject matter.

Some aphorisms (and especially aphoristic utterances) are structurally and semantically constructed according to the scheme of a simple categorical syllogism, in which there are two judgements and a logical conclusion. There are quite a lot of such aphorisms, and they are syntactically expressed in three different sentences of a complex structure. This fact also explains the expansion of the scope of aphorisms.

However, it should be noted that there is no direct correlation between the number of syntactic units (sentences) and the semantics of aphorisms. For all the "striving" of aphorisms for brevity, their syntactic implementation is quite difficult and depends on the individual author's picture of the world and the conceptual picture of the world of the people in a certain historical period of time.

## Conclusion

The syntactic semantics of Russian aphoristics is closely connected with the personality of the author of the saying, his individual style, and literary direction.

On the one hand, the author of the saying reflects in synchrony the linguistic features of the syntax of a certain era, on the other hand, the aphorisms of different historical epochs (from the time of Old Russian literature to the XXI<sup>st</sup> century) have no fundamental differences in syntactic structure.

There is no direct pattern of changes in the syntactic structure of aphorisms in diachrony, as there are no fundamental quantitative differences in the use of different types of syntactic constructions by the authors of sayings to express aphorisms in different periods of the development of literature and language. It should also be noted that the semantics of an aphorism cannot be fully connected with the peculiarities of its syntactic structure.

**Конфликт интересов**

Не указан.

**Conflict of Interest**

None declared.

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