

Attitude Toward 'Hospitality' Proverbs in Different Periods: Analysis of Changes and Challenges

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Abstract: Hospitality has long served as a normative moral value in many societies, and proverbs have functioned as concise vehicles for transmitting the ethical prescriptions connected with welcoming a guest. Yet proverbs are not static; their semantic load, pragmatic force, and frequency of use evolve in tandem with wider socio-economic and cultural transformations. This article investigates diachronic shifts in the treatment of “hospitality” proverbs in Uzbek, Russian, and English paremiological corpora covering the late nineteenth century, the Soviet and post-Soviet eras, and the contemporary globalized period. Relying on corpus-based frequency analysis, qualitative semantic comparison, and ethnographic interviews with thirty informants born between 1940 and 2005, the study traces how modernization, collectivist ideology, market reform, and digital communication have each altered both the resonance and the rhetorical deployment of canonical units. Results demonstrate a gradual attenuation of unqualified praise for limitless generosity and a parallel rise in cautionary subtexts that index economic scarcity and privacy concerns. The paper argues that these changes signal a broader recalibration of community boundaries and individual agency.

Keywords: Paremiology; hospitality; proverb dynamics; diachronic corpus analysis; cultural values.

Introduction: Hospitality, commonly framed as the moral obligation to receive and protect a stranger, has been codified in folklore across civilizations. Proverbs—short, memorable statements that encapsulate collective wisdom—constitute a principal folkloric genre through which hospitality norms are rehearsed and negotiated. Classic Uzbek sayings such as “Меҳмонни муҳими эмас, меҳри муҳим” (“The guest’s importance lies not in his rank but in his warmth”) or Russian maxims like “Гость в дом — Бог в дом” (“A guest in the house is God in the house”) crystallize the ideal of open-door generosity. However, the apparent timelessness of these dicta masks their sensitivity to historical contingencies. Industrialization, collectivization, urban migration, and digital lifestyles have all challenged traditional obligations regarding space, time, and resources. Despite growing interest in proverb functionality, few studies have systematically mapped how attitudes toward hospitality proverbs themselves mutate. Addressing this lacuna, the present research asks: How have semantic emphases and

pragmatic uses of hospitality proverbs shifted from the preindustrial era to the age of social media, and what socio-cultural pressures account for these shifts?

The investigation combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. The diachronic corpus consisted of three sub-corpora totalling 6.2 million words: (1) Late-Imperial/Pre-Soviet texts (1860-1917), built from digitized newspapers, ethnographic records, and proverb collections; (2) Soviet-era sources (1920-1990), derived from state-approved anthologies, school readers, and literary journals; (3) Post-1991 materials, including online forums, weblogs, and contemporary proverb dictionaries. Corpus pre-processing involved lemmatization and removal of duplicate entries. Hospitality proverbs were isolated via keyword search (lemmas “guest,” “митхона,” “mehman,” “гость,” “hospital-”) and manual validation. Relative frequency per million words was calculated to compare prevalence across periods.

To gauge contemporary attitudes, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten informants in each

linguistic community (Uzbek, Russian, English). Participants were recruited through purposive sampling to ensure generational diversity and balanced gender representation. They were asked to recall hospitality proverbs, interpret their meanings, and comment on their relevance in modern life. Interviews were transcribed and coded thematically using NVivo. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university review board; all participants gave informed consent.

Finally, semantic shift analysis combined historical dictionary comparison with frame semantics to identify changes in evaluative polarity, agency assignment, and conditionality (e.g., unconditional vs. reciprocal hospitality). Findings from corpus frequencies, interview interpretations, and semantic frames were triangulated to enhance validity.

Frequency analysis showed that explicit hospitality proverbs accounted for 12.4 occurrences per million words in the Late-Imperial sub-corpus, dropping to 8.1 in the Soviet corpus and to 4.9 in the post-1991 corpus. While the absolute count declined, the relative share of ambivalent or cautionary hospitality proverbs (e.g., “Не всякому гостю верь” — “Do not trust every guest”) rose from 7 % pre-1917 to 27 % after 1991. Uzbek materials mirrored the trend: unqualified celebration of the guest fell, whereas sayings stressing proportionality such as “Меҳмонга бир локма, ўзинга икки локма” (“One bite for the guest, two for yourself”) gained circulation, particularly in urban online forums.

Interview data corroborated the quantitative pattern. Respondents born before 1960 typically framed hospitality as a sacred duty and cited proverbs to legitimize community solidarity. Those aged 25 or younger, while familiar with canonical phrases, often positioned them as heritage artifacts rather than prescriptive guidelines. Several English-speaking interviewees noted that digital house-sharing services like Airbnb have reframed hospitality through transactional logic, rendering traditional maxims sentimental but impractical.

Semantic analysis revealed three notable shifts. First, the agent of hospitality moved from collective family or clan units to individual householders, reflecting increased privatization of domestic space. Second, temporal urgency embedded in older proverbs (“Гость — не посаженое дерево, долго не сидит” — “A guest is not a planted tree; he should not stay long”) intensified, with modern variants explicitly limiting visit duration. Third, reciprocity frames emerged more strongly; phrases equating hospitality with prospective return favors proliferated, indexing market attitudes toward social exchange.

The contraction in frequency and the rise of ambivalent hospitality proverbs coincide with socio-economic transitions that recalibrate resource distribution and privacy norms. In Central Asia, Soviet collectivism institutionalized communal living, temporarily reinforcing open-door customs. Yet post-Soviet marketization encouraged nuclear family enclaves and monetized surplus space, diminishing the practical feasibility of unconditional generosity. The semantic drift toward reciprocity mirrors Marcel Mauss’s argument that gift exchange is rarely free of anticipatory return; under neoliberal pressures, this latent expectation surfaces explicitly in discourse.

Digital communication further transforms proverb ecology. While social media accelerates proverb circulation, it also exposes users to competing value regimes that may relativize local norms. Younger informants reported employing hospitality proverbs ironically or nostalgically rather than normatively, suggesting that cultural scripts persist more as identity markers than behavioral imperatives. Similar findings have been recorded in studies of English proverbial wisdom, where phrases like “My house is your house” are increasingly used metaphorically rather than literally.

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the utility of integrating corpus linguistics with ethnographic narrative to capture both textual and experiential aspects of proverb evolution. Nonetheless, limitations include uneven digitization of regional sources and the relatively small interview sample. Future research could expand to Turkic diasporic communities to examine whether migration sustains traditional hospitality norms abroad or accelerates transformation.

The diachronic attenuation and semantic recalibration of hospitality proverbs documented in Uzbek, Russian, and English corpora illuminate the dynamic negotiation of collective values under conditions of accelerated socio-economic change. The gradual displacement of absolute generosity by conditional, temporally delimited forms of hospitality aligns with the rise of individualized property regimes, commodified living space, and digitally mediated social interaction, all of which narrow the radius of moral obligation without erasing the virtue of cordial reception. Crucially, the persistence of core metaphorical schemas—guest as sacred, host as guardian, hearth as threshold—underscores the deep cultural entrenchment of hospitality as a marker of identity, even when its behavioral imperatives are curtailed. This resilience suggests that proverbs operate as semiotic reservoirs: they preserve normative scripts that can be selectively re-activated during moments of cultural stress, such as

humanitarian crises or migration waves, thereby furnishing communities with a ready vocabulary for ethical response.

The study also contributes to proverb theory by demonstrating that semantic shift is rarely linear; instead, older and newer frames coexist in a stratified repertoire, enabling speakers to mobilize different layers of meaning to suit immediate pragmatic goals—from nostalgic storytelling to strategic self-presentation in the sharing-economy marketplace. Pedagogically, recognizing these layered meanings can enrich language and cultural education, offering learners a lens to examine how moral concepts evolve and how linguistic form indexes social change. Policymakers and heritage curators might likewise draw on these insights to design interventions that promote intercultural dialogue without essentializing tradition.

Methodological triangulation proved effective in capturing both textual trajectories and lived perceptions, yet limitations remain: the corpora, though extensive, under-represent oral registers, and interviewees, while diverse, cannot stand for entire speech communities. Future research could integrate ethnographic observation of hosting practices, employ longitudinal social-media tracking, and extend comparative analysis to additional language groups, particularly those in diasporic settings where hospitality norms confront novel economic and legal frameworks. Such efforts would refine our understanding of how proverb vitality is mediated by, and mediates, the continual re-articulation of community in a globalizing world.

Ultimately, the vitality of hospitality proverbs lies in their capacity for adaptive reinterpretation: they endure not as rigid injunctions but as flexible artefacts that mirror and modulate the ethical negotiations of everyday life. By charting their transformations, we gain a sensitive barometer of shifting moral economies and a richer appreciation of how language condenses the past while accommodating the future.

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