# FOLKLORE AS AN OBJECT OF PHILOLOGICAL RESEARCH: PRESERVATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FOLK CREATIVITY

# O FOLCLORE COMO OBJETO DE PESQUISA FILOLÓGICA: PRESERVAÇÃO, ANÁLISE E INTERPRETAÇÃO DA CRIATIVIDADE POPULAR

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Abstract: Different approaches in linguistics to the study of folklore make it possible to present this phenomenon as a complex and constantly changing system. Therefore, it is essential to interpret folklore from the cognitive, communicative linguistics and linguocultural studies standpoint. The article aims to establish the content and directions of folklore research in modern linguistics. Special attention is paid to the folklore concept, linguistic semiotics, and the study of the French folklore tradition. The research methodology is based on an integrated approach. The main ones are the descriptive method used to describe the theoretical aspects of the study, as well as the comparative and contrastive methods for studying folklore discourse and its representation in French folklore texts. The study's hypothesis assumes that folklore, as an object of linguistic research, is a diverse and multilayered phenomenon, presented as a cultural concept, a system of oppositions and paradigms that transforms the idea in diachronic and synchronic dimensions. It has resulted in the establishment of the terminological boundaries of the "folklore" concept in research practices. The paper has identified a number of promising areas of research on French folklore texts. A further study on the systematization of linguistic knowledge related to the study of folklore texts, the peculiarities of French folklore, and the prospects for the development of the folklore concept remains promising.

**Keywords:** Folklore concept. Folklore discourse. French folklore. Lingua-cognitive aspect of folklore research. Linguocultural aspect of french folklore research.

**Resumo:** Diferentes abordagens da linguística ao estudo do folclore permitem apresentar este fenômeno como um sistema complexo e em constante mudança. Portanto, é essencial interpretar o folclore do ponto de vista da linguística cognitiva, comunicativa e dos estudos linguoculturais. O artigo tem como objetivo estabelecer o conteúdo e os rumos da pesquisa folclórica na linguística moderna. Especial atenção é dada ao conceito de folclore, à semiótica linguística e ao estudo da tradição folclórica francesa. A metodologia de investigação baseia-se numa



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abordagem integrada. Os principais são o método descritivo utilizado para descrever os aspectos teóricos do estudo, bem como os métodos comparativos e contrastivos para estudar o discurso folclórico e sua representação em textos folclóricos franceses. A hipótese do estudo parte do pressuposto de que o folclore, enquanto objeto de investigação linguística, é um fenómeno diverso e multifacetado, apresentado como um conceito cultural, um sistema de oposições e paradigmas que transforma a ideia em dimensões diacrónicas e sincrónicas. Resultou no estabelecimento dos limites terminológicos do conceito de "folclore" nas práticas de pesquisa. O artigo identificou uma série de áreas promissoras de pesquisa em textos do folclore francês. Um estudo mais aprofundado sobre a sistematização do conhecimento linguístico relacionado ao estudo dos textos folclóricos, às peculiaridades do folclore francês e às perspectivas de desenvolvimento do conceito de folclore continua promissor.

**Palavras-chave:** Conceito de folclore. Discurso folclórico. Folclore francês. Aspecto linguístico-cognitivo da pesquisa folclórica. Aspecto linguocultural da pesquisa do folclore francês.

### 1. Introduction

The concept of folklore studies as a distinct area of knowledge originated in the XIX century. In 1846, W. Toms (Currie, 2021) coined the term "folklore" and emphasized the need for its meticulous collection and systematization. Toms established a clear distinction between folklore, literature, and antiquities. According to him, the discipline primarily focuses on the creative expressions of the rural population, who were predominantly illiterate at that time. Therefore, during the XIX century, recording and documenting folk art was necessary, which could otherwise be lost.

In the XIX century in France, the collection of folklore material even acquired the status of a state activity. For instance, in 1852, Hippolyte Fortoul, the Minister of Public Education in France, established a commission to manage the collection of folk poetry and songs (Berthou-Bécam and Bécam, 2010: 15-53). Such an emphasis on folklore in France and Europe at large helped to create not only extensive collections but also considerably influenced the development of folklore as a field of study. It caught the attention of scholars in various disciplines, including linguistics.

Linguists delved into folklore studies as a subject of linguistic research. The study of literary text and oral folklore as a linguistic phenomenon originated with scholars such as A. Potebnia, F. de Saussure, and W. Humboldt (Marabyan, 2016). Linguistic structure was further explored by C. Peirce, followed by the work of Ya. Mruzhkovskyi and Yu. Shevelev (Lisova et al., 2023).

For a number of French researchers, folklore was considered to be a correlation between nation formation, nationalism, and the way the world is conceptualized (Mélonio, 2001; Hopkin and Baycroft, 2012; Perek, 2015). Particular attention was paid to the linguistic dimensions of the

analysis. These included language and cultural relations, as well as folklore in multilingual nationstates.

For France, the study of folklore from a philological perspective was related to an interesting linguistic and cultural phenomenon. Studies of rural folklore and oral creativity required attention to dialects and regional languages. They turned out to be a significant and valuable repository of folklore, as they preserved traditions and beliefs better than the urban and central regions of France.

Another feature of the French folklore text is the translational nature of some materials. Original stories recorded in dialects and regional languages were translated into French and became part of the French cultural heritage. This also influenced the formation of the sociolinguistic and cognitive approach to the study of folklore in modern linguistics.

For modern linguistics, folklore texts are not only a means of storing encoded information and meanings for certain ethnic groups but are also interpreted as meanings in themselves, producing texts in national worldviews. The folklore text is interpreted as an open sign system and acquires the status of a folklore concept (Lemmens, 2015; Fried, 2010). It can also be presented as a component of the connection between folklore and meanings, which is the style of the text. As a result, this style becomes organic and acceptable for the entire integral structure of the conceptual sphere (<u>Tendahl and Gibbs, 2008;</u> Dovhan, 2011).

The importance of folklore as an object of linguistic research lies in the interpretation of a folklore text as an archaic textual formation interconnected with the linguistic and cultural worldview of an ethnic group. It is a way of categorizing meanings and conceptualizing the world. A special interest is represented by folklore as a narrative of emotional and psychological nature (Langacker, 1999; Noyes, 2003). An open discussion on the role of the status and further development of folklore as a worldview determines the scientific issues of this article. A priority is to review, analyze and systematize linguistic knowledge about folklore, its status and research prospects.

Modern theories have their own specifics, yet they are based on common cognitivefunctional and socio-cultural stances and views on the phenomenon of folk art, where the main argument is the way and form of its use. This approach to the study of folklore text and folklore concepts is relevant and fundamentally new in developing new approaches to the interpretation, use and creation of concepts, cultural scenarios and mythologies embodied in folk creativity.



Therefore, in the postmodern mainstream of folklore studies, the most promising approach is to consider the prospects of using folklore as a tool in research and visions of the future development of societies rather than working with theory and narrowly focused content.

The study aims to identify the main theoretical provisions and directions of folklore research in modern linguistics. Based on this goal, the following research tasks should be accomplished:

• to determine the history of the formation of French folklore studies;

• to establish the main theories of folklore research that are relevant to modern linguistics and the study of French folklore;

• to consider the terminology of contemporary folklore studies and its transformations in the linguistic space;

• to determine the specifics and prospects for further research on French folklore.

## 2. Materials and Methods

The folklore study as an object of philological research requires an integrated approach to the choice of research methods. A description and analysis of linguistic methods of folklore research is the basis for the study. The article employs a descriptive method, analysis and synthesis in order to study theoretical approaches to folklore text analysis in modern linguistics. A comparative method, as well as methods of synchronic and diachronic analysis of the history and theory of linguistic studies of folklore, are necessary to consider modern trends in the French folklore study of an interdisciplinary nature.

The paper examines the directions of studying folklore as an object of linguistic research from the standpoint of modern scientific theories (linguo-folklore studies, semiotics, cognitive science). The choice of methods is determined by the nature of the analyzed material and the essence of the problem being solved. The research strategy is based on impartiality, systematicity, and the unity of the historical and logical approaches. An interdisciplinary approach to the study has led to the use of the achievements in various fields of scientific knowledge.

## 3. Literature Review

The research on folklore in the world scientific practice has an extensive range of topics (Dovhan, 2011; Yáñez, 2021; Sytar, 2015). It is determined by the diversity of innovative approaches and the importance of studying the folklore of ethnic groups, nations, and societies for the further development of modern civilization. In the tradition of French folklore studies, proletarians (class populaires) and peasants (paysans) were considered the object of collection and research. The French folklorist Sébillot (1886) defined folklore as the study of the traditions, clothing, and housing of people's social groups or progressive nations, as well as their evolutionary movement (Sébillot, 1886: 293). In the history of French folklore studies in the XIX century, the creation of folklore anthologies was also popular. Thus, an anonymous reviewer of the Anthology of French Folk Tales noted that folklore is the oral creativity of peasants (X., 1885: 179).

Some researchers have developed new areas of interdisciplinary research based on linguistics (Dovhan, 2011; Synorub and Medynska, 2019). The following topics were considered:

• Analysis of French folklore texts from the perspective of linguistics and semiotics (Marabyan, 2016).

• The essence, methodological basis, and the necessity of applying an interdisciplinary approach in the field of linguistic folklore studies (Betsenko, 2015).

• Key concepts of linguistic semiotics according to the study of folklore discourse (Bazarbayeva and Chukayeva, 2021).

• Analysis of the effectiveness of various research approaches to collecting and systematizing folklore material and attitudes towards folklore as cultural and national heritage in modern digital technologies (Yáñez, 2021; Taylor, 2012).

The state and research priorities of the French folklore study in historical retrospect are being examined by a number of researchers (Haase, 2019; Hopkin, 2012). The focus remains on the conceptual perspectives of the formation of global culture, civilization, and ethnic groups, languages, and ethnicities. The challenges and specifics of French folklore as a combination of French (as the national language) and oral lore created by regional languages, dialects, and traditions of immigrants are explored in Currie (2021) and Lakoff (1993).

## 4. Results

Modern linguistic theories were based on the perception of the verbal text as a system of semantic paradigms and semiotic oppositions reflecting the foundations of society's national



consciousness and the nation's mental characteristics. They are represented as structures of collective consciousness and collective experience. From this point of view, the folklore text lies in the conceptual space of the latter's expression.

The study of French folklore should take into account the specifics of the formation of this research area in France and the peculiarities of collecting, systematizing, and social and cultural diversity of the material. The XIX century was the period of the development of folklore collections. Since then, this field has become international and acquired the status of a separate scientific area. In France, folklore was considered an essential part of the nation-building process through its culture and mentality, and it was carefully preserved and collected. Due to the colonial policy of France and the rich traditions of different French ethnic groups, the diversity of regional languages and dialects, the folklore traditions were defined by their diversity, mixing of different cultures, beliefs and traditions. However, all regional manifestations were subordinated to the titular language (French) according to their sociolinguistic status. As a product of rural culture, peasant folklore in France had a lower status than the elite French-speaking culture. However, it managed to preserve a wealth of themes and images, lively and creative themes, genre diversity, and linguistic richness. That is why the folklore heritage of France proved to be interesting for both researchers and the elite national culture. Most of the folklore texts collected in the XIX and early XX centuries originated from the territories where dialects of French and regional languages dominated.

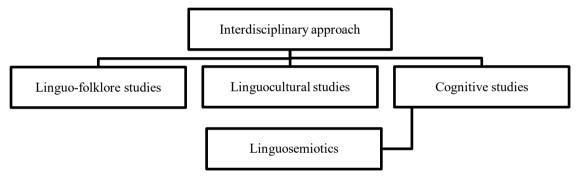
XXI century linguistics primarily considers the relevance of folklore for the digital era that humanity has entered. Although the attention to folklore studies is not decreasing, it is growing and popular, but it is in a time of change. Globalization and active immigration processes of the XX century have significantly influenced the vision and interpretation of folklore. First and foremost, it is a study of cultural diversity. For example, France has always been a treasure chamber of cultures that have coexisted for centuries, and folklore motifs have often been mixed to form fascinating combinations. However, the globalization process has accelerated this process. It has created new generations that have such mixed texts as their own folklore traditions. From this perspective, the study of folklore that was formed based on the work of different ethnic groups helps to understand the algorithms of creation and functioning of new cultural models.

Folklore stories show how communities view reality as a set of behaviours, rituals, and customs. Structural anthropology studies folklore through this lens. It examines the way cultural homogenization happens, changing the folklore landscape without erasing diversity. In reality, the

disappearance or alteration of stories in folk traditions expands the diverse cultural scenery globally and illustrates intercultural acceptance.

The crucial role of folklorists in the public eye, whose prominence has spread throughout France and received state funding for over two centuries, should also be acknowledged. These beginners and experts gather stories passed down among people, store them in museums and colleges, and record the gathered details. The language and cultural method of studying folklore has a critical application because it brings to light and illuminates the perspectives of social groups. Additionally, it aids in the creation of laws and policies to address these perspectives by the government.

Figure 1 – Interdisciplinary areas of folklore research involving linguistic tools



Source: compiled by the authors.

In the 1970s, such a direction of interdisciplinary approach as linguo-folklore studies emerged in European practice, as well as in Ukraine. From this perspective, the natural language conveys various facts of folk art and the realization of an ethnic group's mentality in the verbal plane. This particular area of linguistic studies focuses on the language of folklore texts representing ethnic reality in all its diverse forms and genres. This is an attempt to systematize and develop an algorithm for linguistic analysis of a folklore composition (from a folk song to a meme), where the diversity, ambiguity, and complexity of the facts of national reality require a set of approaches to the study.

Understanding interdisciplinary studies, where the folklore text has been considered both by applying linguistic tools and using folklore materials, is an ideological basis of structural anthropology. The main approaches in linguo-folklore studies include:

• determining the function of language for the formation of a folklore work, language structures as a way of organizing a text;

• integration of folklore and linguistic research methods.

As an interdisciplinary field, linguo-folklore studies the patterns of figurative structure of folklore texts, as well as mono-structural and linguo-stylistic features of folklore as a collective aesthetic activity of the speaker.

Another area of folklore studies that is closely related to databases and their ability to preserve and systematize folklore texts, and from a linguistic perspective, which contributes to the concentration and categorization of the linguistic and cultural worldview through the folklore concept, should be considered separately.

The emergence of digital technologies has also made it possible to create databases of folklore texts. Large electronic databases allow researchers to take a broader look at the folklore phenomenon. From a semiotic perspective, the folklore system consists of oppositions in conceptualizing and categorizing the world. In fact, it corresponds to the concept of a binary world and the binary thinking of the computer age.

The theories of structural linguistics of the XX century are now an essential part of research methods in folklore studies. Semiotic oppositions of a folklore nature, such as Life – Death, Left – Right, Top – Bottom, and Light – Darkness, have long been actively studied by linguists. As a result, structural linguistics is now the focus of active attention. The hypothesis that folklore exists as a dynamic tension between traditions and their variations forms the functional field of concepts and shapes the structure of the folklore concept.

A separate problematic issue of modern approaches to the folklore study from the standpoint of linguistics is an analysis of the terminology system existing in folklore studies and such concepts as "folklore", "folklore discourse", and "folklore concept".

The term "folklore" itself carries a broader meaning than the concept of folk creativity. For the scientific approach, it includes not only folk art in all its manifestations but also daily life, medicine, beliefs, etc.

From the linguistic perspective, the concept of "folklore" is not a simple sum of all traditions. It also includes generalizations and patterns in the formation of verbal and non-verbal texts. Folklore appears as a dialectical unity of worldview, aesthetic, social and psychological constants in its regional variants' diversity.

From the standpoint of linguistic and cultural studies, folklore is seen as an oral form, an art of words, where the word is combined with music, narrative, and image in a syncretic unity. The folklore concept is the product of several art forms, where the word has merged with beliefs, human needs, and poetic sound since ancient times.

A folklore text is a form of storing basic meanings, and, at a certain stage, it is a formant of the mentality of an ethnic group and turns into a formant of new meanings. From the semiotic perspective, folklore is a complex sign system of an open type, united by semantic paradigms and a system of semiotic oppositions. Archaic textual formations are formants of the linguistic and cultural worldview. They shape the emotional and mental space of an ethnic group through a system of concepts.

From this perspective, there arises the question of the folklore text, defined as a holistic, indivisible work of speech, which is also a product of culture, society, and human creativity. From this standpoint, a folklore concept is a dialectical combination of ideas about the world represented by various verbal and non-verbal units in linguistic formations. It reflects the perspectives of the linguistic worldview of native speakers.

An interest in analyzing, interpreting and understanding French folklore texts contributes to its comprehension in terms of language units and an integral composition resulting from cultural and social interaction.

## 5. Discussion

A generalization of the main provisions of linguocultural studies and cognitive science, as well as their linguistic basis, have been presented in numerous contemporary studies (Levinson, 2003; Takimoto, 2020; Tendahl and Gibbs, 2008). All of these findings are based on a set of key concepts:

• categorization (the cognitive ability to conceptualize experience through alternative means);

• conceptualization (the nurturing of an idea formalized in a myth and based on experience);

• generalization (it is implemented in a system of prototypes, stereotypes, and concepts).

The aforementioned points of view imply a linguistic analysis at the linguistic and structural-semantic levels. Moreover, they are relevant for the study of oral compositions and speech activity as formants and representatives of linguistic concepts.

The analysis of linguistic units has been used in the studies of French folklore researchers to invent the idealization of ethnic and social groups, to identify those speech scenarios, themes and concepts that are constantly present and discussed in everyday life and by imaginary communities, which are a dream and exist alongside as a potential for realization, a standard and

an opportunity. In fact, such folkloric concepts are, on the one hand, a stabilizing force in a society. On the other hand, they push for change and variation (Noyes, 2003). However, such an opinion is controversial because the definition of a system of folklore images is based on concepts and a system of binary oppositions. Typically, one part of a binary pair assumes a dominant role, occupying more space and most of the semantic field in the conceptual domain. The categorization within the folklore concept is often value-free and ethnocentric.

Database-related studies note that folklore artefacts are being recorded, and huge electronic databases and collections are being created. The existence of large collections of folklore texts forces researchers to look for new ways of collecting and processing the data and to pay attention to new folklore genres and their transformations. For example, the emergence of phenomena in folklore, such as computer humour and memes, emerged from traditional forms of genres and anecdotes. In the postmodern era, folklore as an artistic method is also undergoing transformations. Therefore, following new trends, it is necessary to pay attention to new genres, as well as linguistic and stylistic innovations in the field of folklore text generation.

## 6. Conclusions

An active application of the ideas and guidelines of modern linguistic theories is an essential part of the development of folklore studies. The study of French folklore, in particular, is no exception. The main interdisciplinary research areas in the study of folklore texts are linguofolklore studies, linguocultural studies, linguo-semiotics and pragmatics, etc.

Folklore texts in the modern world can be studied thanks to the ability to create databases and work with the entire range of folklore texts.

These texts provide semantic connotations that form a linguistic and cultural picture of the world through a system of meanings and models of discourse. They realize and transform the semantic potential of linguistic action, thereby forming new linguistic and structural-semantic realities of language and culture. Such processes are ongoing and constitute the object of study of linguo-semiotics and linguoculturology.

In the future, it will be necessary to continue describing and recording new interdisciplinary research models emerging in folklore. An essential aspect of French folklore studies is the search for, recording, and systematization of new means of language modelling and speech genres, as well as the encoding and conceptualization of reality in French folklore texts.



The study of the structure of contemporary French folklore's linguistic and cultural dimensions is promising. In the era of globalization, the mutual influence of different cultures and societies, and the technological revolution, oral lore and its linguistic and stylistic constants are changing. The components of the linguistic image of the world of the French folklore tradition and the forms of its realization in the folklore text give us perspectives to see the vectors of movement of society, community and nation.

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