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IN SEARCH OF PROVERBIALITY: “THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL” CONSTRUCTION IN ROMANIAN

Abstract: The paper examines the Romanian construction *A este X tuturor Y* ‘A is the X of all Y’, as in *Iubirea de arginți e rădăcina tuturor relelor* ‘The love of money is the source of all evils’, from a corpus-based and probabilistic perspective on proverbiality. The study approaches the construction and its contextual instantiations as a productive network whose proverbial identity emerges from evaluative force, collocational strength and distributional constraint. Drawing on a small, curated corpus of 81 attestations spanning 1581 to 2008, the analysis describes and interprets the contextual syntagmatic dynamics across the three constructional slots (A, X, Y). The results show clear asymmetries: the A-slot allows controlled variation, while the X and Y slots display high degrees of lexical constraint and collocational convergence. The discussion maps the corpus findings onto a multidimensional model of proverbiality, addressing traditionality, stability, evaluativity, generality, grounding, symbolicity, and transferability. The study suggests that proverbiality is a probabilistic effect arising from recurrent structural alignment, semantic constraint and cultural reuse over time.

Keywords: proverbiality, corpus-based analysis, construction grammar, semantic clusters, Romanian proverbs.

1. Introduction

In everyday discourse, many things are designated as *the root of all evil*. A survey of several dictionaries of English proverbs shows an open set of items built on the same syntactic scheme:

Avarice is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 31).

Covetousness is the root of all evil (Tilley 1950: 124/ C746).

Crime is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 126).

Idleness is the root of all evil (Simpson and Speake 2004: 157; Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 324).

Honesty is the root of all evil (Taylor and Whiting 1967: 186, 230).

Lonesomeness is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 383).

Money is the root of all evil (Simpson and Speake 2004: 206; Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 186).

Pride is the root of all sin (Tilley 1950: 556/ P578).

Procrastination is the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 187).

Women are the root of all evil (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992: 186).

The striking feature of the inventory is not the meaning of each statement, but the ease with which the same syntactic model supports divergent fillers. This productivity is not language-specific. Turner (1991: 198–215) identifies this construction as an “xyz metaphor” specialized to evoke blending (Turner and Fauconnier 1999: 413–414). The proverb *Money is the root of all evil* instantiates the xyz metaphor by mapping an x constituent (*money*) in relation to a z constituent (*evil*) through the familiar relationship between the y constituent (*root*) and an unmentioned fourth constituent w (*plant*) to conceptualize riches as the hidden source of misfortune in the same way the root sustains the plant. The cross-linguistic productivity of the construction is well documented. Strauss (2012: II/678, no. 782) records modern European equivalents, while Singer (1995: I/405, no. 1.2) offers a more comprehensive diachronic picture.

Romanian proverb dictionaries typically include the proverbs *Beția este ușa tuturor răutăților* (Muntean 1984: 53, no.

1416) and *Trândăvia este muma tuturor răutăților* (Muntean 1984: 277, no. 7391), which translate to ‘Drunkenness is the door of all evils’ and ‘Idleness is the mother of all evils’, respectively. However, extended evidence suggests a larger family:

Banul este rădăcina tuturor relelor (Pop 1993: 11) ‘Money is the root of all evils’; *Ignoranța este rădăcina tuturor relelor* (*Realitatea Ilustrată* 1927: 3) ‘Ignorance is the root of all evil’; *Lăcomia este rădăcina tuturor răutăților* (*Letopiseșul Cantacuzinesc* 1988: 100) ‘Greed is the root of all evils’; *Lenea este muma tuturor viciilor* (Paschia 1970: 138) ‘Sloth is the mother of all vices’.

The construction originates in St. Paul’s Epistle to Timothy: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6: 10; Holy Bible 1982: 800). Here, the Apostle of Christ uses an “emphatic, rhetorical, statement” to warn against φιλαργυρία (philargyria), or the “miser’s sin”, which is defined as greed of riches (Bernard 1899: 96). St. Paul’s words echo the long-standing tradition of root metaphors that nourish the proverbial imagery of the Bible: “A man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous cannot be moved” (Proverbs 12:3, Holy Bible 1982: 435; see also Proverbs 12:12; Job 19:28; Matthew 3:10, and Luke 3:9). Such examples attest that the source domain of this potent metaphor is biological. While Alan Dundes (1999: 6) argues that the Bible is essentially codified oral tradition, Wolfgang Mieder (1990: 6) states that a book of such importance to the daily lives of the Christians has exerted a major influence on the languages and proverbs of the people.

The use of formulaic style, typical of ancient wisdom literature, predates Christianity. Consider the memorable saying of Diogenes the Cynic, a classical Greek philosopher from the fourth century BC, who famously said: “Philargyria metropolin pantōn tōn kakōn”, which translates as “Avarice is the mother-city of all evils” (Hard 2012: 36). Of lesser importance is the fact that the same construction has been attributed to such other philosophers as Bion of Borysthenes or Democritus (Hard 2012: 196). More importantly, it is worth noting that the idea of blaming avarice or greed as the cause of all ills has transferred

from philosophy and religion to historical chronicles such as the work of the Latin writer Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*. A contemporary of St. Jerome, who translated the Vulgate, the fourth-century historian explains the fall of Rome's military might by identifying a single moral cause, the appointment of corrupt commanders to defend the frontiers of the empire, as he writes "Their treacherous greed was the source of all our evils" (Ammianus Marcellinus XXXI: 4,9).

Singer (1995: I/405, no. 1.2) attests that the formula travels from St. Jerome's Vulgate into the vernacular literatures of medieval Europe, appearing in Old and Middle French, Provençal, Italian, Spanish and Middle English, from patristic commentary through Chaucer and into the early modern period. Across all these traditions, the syntactic scheme remains stable and accommodates lexical variation. Covetousness, greed and avarice alternate in the subject slot, while root, foundation and beginning compete in the metaphorical slot. From classical sources to present-day discourse, the construction formalized as *A este X tutor Y* invites closer scrutiny of the conditions under which such units of language, style, and culture are recognized as proverbs.

2. "The Perception of Proverbiality"

The present study revisits the scholarly literature to identify the dimensions of proverbiality that corpus-based analysis can measure, turning theory into practice. Within the extensive body of work devoted to proverbs, these artistic miniatures of wisdom (Permyakov 1979: 163) have been treated as sayings and socio-cultural resources (Ojo Arewa and Dundes 1964), as speech acts (Meschonnic 1976), textual artifacts (Norrick 1985), complex multi-layered signs (Grzybek 1987), verbal stereotypes (Lewandowska, Antos and Gläßer 2015: 162–182), and as blends (Andersson 2013).

Proverbiality has been interpreted as an incommunicable quality of some impersonal linguistic vehicles used for personal communication (Taylor 1962: 6; Ojo Arewa and Dundes 1964: 70) and "one of the major concerns of paremiologists is to get to the bottom of that" (Mieder 2014: 21). Correspondingly, proverb research has developed as a multifaceted field spanning ethnog-

raphy and folklore, philology, philosophy of language, rhetoric and stylistics, linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, and the cognitive sciences. The multiplicity of perspectives has had direct consequences for how scholars approach the object of research, and recent critique has shown that disagreements concerning proverb definition and use often reflect distinct, even colliding methodological choices. As Ferdinand de Saussure observed, “far from it being the object that antedates the viewpoint, it would seem that it is the viewpoint that creates the object” (Saussure 1959: 8). In this regard, Villers (2024) argues that “definition matters” not as a theoretical milestone but as an operational tool.

The following theoretical survey identifies seven dimensions of proverbiality that corpus-based analysis can integrate as statistical parameters. The present study does not seek to explore these major strands of research in paremiology, but to pinpoint the semiotic properties that will be put to a test as a proverbiality matrix. Frequency scores drawn from the corpus data will be integrated into this multidimensional index.

In the first issue of *Proverbium*, the flagship journal of proverb research, Shirley Arora (1984: 1–38) published an article entitled “The Perception of Proverbiality”. The article explores proverbiality as a salient effect of communicative experience. Specifically, Arora shifts the focus from the structural definition of the proverb itself to listeners’ perception of proverbiality. Beyond its linguistic and stylistic properties, a proverb is what the listener perceives it to be. Proverbiality can be “mimicked” or “fabricated” to a certain extent and features such as metaphor, rhyme, alliteration, and parallelism, along with other formal markers, serve as cues used to categorize and validate products of traditional wisdom. The “camouflage” of proverb-like utterances supports both the creation of new proverbs and the vitality of the genre. Arora argues that traditionality is a property of proverbiality, understood as the degree to which a construction is perceived as representative and empirically classified as a proverb. Statistically, the recruitment of the similar lexical choices to fill the structural slots of the construction *A este X tuturor Y*, regardless of source type and time frame, will be interpreted as distributional evidence of traditionality.

In order to survive and thrive within a tradition, a proverb must be memorable. Its structure must align with linguistic patterns that enable the human mind to easily process, store, recall, and adapt it. In this respect, Odlin (1986: 125–151) argues that stability, as a property of proverbiality, designates the dynamic preservation of simplicity, memorability, and adaptability of proverbs over time. From the standpoint of a corpus-based analysis, Odlin's perspective signifies that a given construction that has become stable over time should not allow a high degree of combinatorial freedom. The asymmetrical constraints across the structural slots of the construction *A este X tutoror Y* indicate the stability of the formula. The greater the combinatorial restrictions in a given slot, the stronger the syntagmatic stability.

Proverbs are readily available devices for evaluation. They function both implicitly and explicitly in serving this purpose (Čermák 2019: 128). Defined as “verbal stereotypes of knowledge”, proverbs enable individuals to evaluate situations “with the help of known social clichés” (Lewandowska, Antos and Gläßer 2015: 162). In a contrastive study on the equivalence of proverbs in translation, Frackiewicz (1988: 27–37) notes that no proverb is truly neutral in active communication because proverbs are effective constructions for judging, teaching, warning, and influencing. Norrick (1985: 22) formulates a similar conclusion: “Proverbs retain their fundamentally evaluative character even in allusions and otherwise alienated forms”. A corpus-based approach to evaluativity examines the semantic profile of the constructional slot fillers and considers whether they cluster around morally charged concepts. The authority of proverbs is essentially the manifestation of collective judgement.

Proverbs are commonly perceived as context-free, indisputable truths (Matta 1988: 75). The characteristics of a proverb reveal its generality: brevity, isolation, independence, closedness, fixed syntactic composition, a claim to general validity, and the semantic codification of a general thought that functions as a sentence of experience (Matta 1988: 81). In the present study, proverbial generality will be understood as the virtual applicability to a broad, non-specific class of situations rather than to a single case. Applied to corpus analysis, this property can be explored by observing such markers as abstract nouns, plural

forms, generic articles, universal quantifiers and their use across time and contexts.

Proverbs reveal a socially developed sense of practical reasoning (Goodwin and Wenzel 1981), and they are used to justify actions, warnings, and evaluations in everyday judgement of real-life situations. When a speaker invokes a proverb, they are not merely stating a belief but grounding a practical conclusion in socially authorized wisdom. As a proverbial property, grounding reveals that practical reasoning is legitimate without requiring further proof. In the present analysis, grounding statistically measures the degree of authority of the written sources used to compile the corpus, based on the assumption that proverbs are rhetorical carriers of legitimacy, or, simply put, they serve as undisputed arguments invoked to justify a certain pragmatic stand.

Proverbs communicate deeply entrenched symbolic values. Within a given culture, complex semantic, syntactic and pragmatic networks shape a proverb's semantic indefiniteness into culturally salient and conventionalized meanings (Grzybek 2021: 88), ensuring that it effectively communicates shared values. In this respect, the proverbial property labelled here as symbolicity defines the activation of a certain worldview. Datasets can reveal powerful images that recur in various contexts and encode relevant facets of a shared mentality.

Historical and philological research shows how authoritative sources produce phraseology that can differ in form and function across languages and contexts. For instance, Földes (1990: 57–75) examines the Bible as a significant source of idioms and concludes that biblical collocations, constructions, verses and scenes enter everyday language through multiple channels of translation and cultural adaptation. In a similar vein, Dundes states that transferability characterizes proverbs: “oral tradition by its very nature has variation as one of its principal defining characteristics” (Dundes 1999: 19). In a corpus-based approach, the circulation of proverbs across time, space and style of communication reflects the diffusion from talk to text and hypertext.

The seven dimensions, namely traditionality, stability, evaluativity, generality, grounding, symbolicity and transferability constitute a set of parameters through which proverbiality emerges as a probabilistic and productive property of formulaic

language in use. This multidimensional index of proverbiality will outline the extent to which the Romanian construction *A este X tuturor Y* functions as a proverbial resource by virtue of its contextual vitality.

3. Objective and research question

The Romanian construction under scrutiny is used in a grey area situated between canonical proverbiality, as traditionally asserted through glossaries, dictionaries and taxonomies, and productive, yet stereotypical language that, to our knowledge, has not previously been approached as an object of systematic inquiry. In paremiological scholarship, such items are treated as variants of a canonical proverb, or classified as biblicisms (Mokienko 2011: 91–100), stereotypes (Litovkina 2011) or equivalents (Frackiewicz 1988). Further difficulties arise from the apparent tension between variation and fixity, as the construction allows for considerable flexibility, yet this flexibility is constrained, and not all realizations are perceived as proverbial.

Given the breadth of each of the seven dimensions of proverbiality, one might expect that a corpus-based analysis would require large datasets in order to work out robust models or to identify trends. Fixity and variability in form and meaning, the functional and contextual effectiveness of stock phrases, as well as proverb origin, circulation and translation are complex phenomena. The present study, however, adopts a more modest yet unconventional objective, which is to test, on the basis of frequency, collocational strength and convergence scores, a multidimensional index viewed as a probabilistic representation of proverbiality. The construction of such a matrix does not require large amounts of data, but rather contrasting data. From the older attestations to more recent ones, from religious texts to historical chronicles, news and fiction, the contextual diversity becomes analytically meaningful when it reveals the dispersion between the central and marginal uses of proverbial language. Moreover, not all seven dimensions are equally accessible to large-scale corpus analysis. For instance, traditionality, grounding and symbolicity require a wealth of historical and contextual knowledge that is difficult to capture through automatic processing of large

datasets. Smaller, manually curated corpora allow the researcher to verify every token, check every source, observe every context, and assess each attestation both quantitatively and qualitatively. In other words, if larger corpora identify trends, smaller datasets identify mechanisms and reveal more granular differences that might otherwise go unnoticed in a broader statistical picture. Therefore, the present study acknowledges the limitations entailed by building and using a small, selective corpus, and it does not seek to capture a definitive inventory of proverbiality triggers or markers, but rather to approach frequency as a common denominator of the seven dimensions of proverbiality, regarded as measurable indicators.

What can a small, curated corpus of the Romanian language reveal about the interplay of the dimensions of proverbiality? More specifically, how do frequency and collocational strength highlight the perception of proverbial identity in the construction *A este X tuturor Y*? The aim of the analysis is not to redefine the proverb as a genre or to propose a new theoretical model, but to determine the productivity of a construction in the light of its contextual diversity. In what follows, section 4 presents the corpus design and methodological procedures. Section 5 presents the corpus analysis, section 6 discusses the findings, and the concluding section synthesizes the results and outlines directions for future research.

4. Methodology

The analysis uses a curated, small-scale corpus built around a single grammatical schema: “a simple NP as subject and a genitive (noun-noun) construction as predicate” (Mac Coinnigh 2013: 125): *A este X tuturor Y*. In Romanian, the A slot is occupied by the subject and is mostly realized as a definite noun phrase in the nominative case. The copula *este* functions as a linking verb. The predicate nominal consists of a head noun (X slot), also a definite noun phrase, followed by the genitival determiner *tuturor*, a plural quantificational form, and a genitival attribute (Y), realized as a plural noun phrase. Morphological verb variation [(*nu*) *este*/ (*nu*) *e*/ (*nu*) *a fost*/ *suntem*] and verb substitution (two tokens: *iată* ‘behold’, interjection, and *constitue* ‘constitutes’,

verb, present tense, third person, singular) confirm the stability of the genitival phrase *X tutoror Y*.

A total of 81 distinct textual contexts, extending from 1581 to 2008, were compiled in the corpus. Forty-five contexts were retrieved via the Arcanum platform, an online bibliographical database for historical press. The remaining contexts come from non-periodical sources: sermons, religious texts, chronicles, fiction, and lexicographic material.

Data collection combined targeted online searches with manual inspection. Searches were guided by the Y-slot, beginning with genitival plural noun phrases attested in the earliest 16th century texts, such as “tutoror relelor/ răutăților” ‘of all evils’ and “tutoror bunătăților” ‘of all good things’, to capture the diversity of A-slot and X-slot fillers. Candidate contexts were examined to exclude literal uses, and each context was treated as a single corpus token. Each context was further segmented into constructional slots: A-slot (focus) // X-slot (operator) // Y-slot (generic domain). Contexts containing coordination, reformulation, or parallel structuring contributed more than one instantiation of the construction. This procedure yielded a network of 101 lemmatized A-X-Y triplets. Once identical combinations were grouped together, these reduced to 85 distinct A-X-Y constructional types, which form the basis for quantitative analysis. All tokens were annotated for the three constructional slots, with both surface form and lemmatized forms recorded. Lemmatization and normalization were carried out manually to account for historical spelling variation, inflectional diversity, and lexical alternation. The corpus encodes multiple raw frequency layers: context frequencies, constructional token frequencies, slot-specific lemma frequencies, co-occurrence frequencies, and type frequencies. This layered frequency dataset allows the analysis to distinguish between attestation, productivity, distributional diversity, and slot constraint.

Three analytical instruments, evidenced in sections 5.4 and 5.5, are used to examine the distributional properties of the construction. The first is the convergence score. For each A-X-Y triplet, the score is calculated by multiplying two counts: the number of times the A lemma appears with that specific X lemma anywhere in the corpus, and the number of times the same

A lemma appears with that specific Y lemma anywhere in the corpus. The result shows how strongly a given A lemma is simultaneously attracted to both its X operator and its Y domain. If both counts are high, the score is high.

The second instrument is the LogDice score, reported alongside the raw co-occurrence frequency measurement. LogDice indicates how strongly each X-Y pairing is bound together, regardless of which A lemma fills the subject slot. The score ranges from 0 to 14, where 14 is the maximum possible value. In this corpus, scores range from 9.61 to 13.42, which means every attested X-Y pairing shows genuine attraction. However, one limitation is worth noting. In a small corpus, rare pairings can score artificially high, because the formula can reach its maximum when both items are infrequent and happen to co-occur even once. For this reason, raw co-occurrence frequency counts how many times a specific X lemma and a specific Y lemma appear together in the same attestation across the entire corpus. The two measurements work best read together, as raw co-occurrence frequency shows how often X and Y actually appear together, while LogDice shows how strongly they are drawn to each other relative to how often each appears independently.

The proverbiality matrix synthesizes the seven dimensions of proverbiality surveyed in section 2. Traditionality counts how many distinct publications contain at least one attestation of a given A-X-Y triplet. Each distinct publication adds one point to the score. Stability counts distinct A lemmas per X-Y pair. Each distinct A-slot lemma adds one point to the score. Evaluativity is measured at the level of the Y slot. Each Y lemma receives 1, 2 or 3 points depending on its semantic orientation. Y lemmas that denote evil or negative outcomes receive 3 points, as they carry the strongest moral charge, Y lemmas that denote good or positive outcomes receive 2 points, and Y lemmas that are semantically neutral receive 1 point. Generality counts distinct A-X-Y type combinations per X-Y pair. Each distinct combination adds one point to the score. To avoid confusion, stability measures how many different A-slot lemmas appear with the same X-Y pair, while generality measures how many distinct A-X-Y combinations with that same X-Y pair are attested across the corpus. Grounding assigns a weight to each source type according to its

authority as a repository of communal wisdom. Each attestation in a sermon, proverb collection or speech contributes 3 points. Each attestation in a biblical text, encyclical, chronicle or lexicographic source contributes 2 points. Each attestation in a literary or news source contributes 1 point. The grounding score of each triplet is the sum of all source type weights across all its attestations. Symbolicity is measured at the level of the X slot. Each X lemma receives a score on a scale of 1 to 5 according to the semantic class it belongs to, as described in section 5.3. Transferability measures how many distinct source types contain at least one attestation of a given triplet. Each distinct source type adds one point to the score. Unlike grounding, which weights sources by their authority, transferability simply counts how many different communicative contexts the triplet has reached. Once all seven raw scores are calculated, each is normalized to a scale of 0 to 100 by subtracting the minimum observed value, dividing by the range, and multiplying by 100. The seven normalized scores are then averaged to produce a single proverbiality index for each triplet.

5. *Corpus analysis*

The experimental, small-scale corpus compiled to explore the proverbiality of the Romanian construction *A este X tutoror Y* presents several findings that can be further tested against larger datasets. The 81 extracts were drawn from 41 distinct sources across 9 source types: news (38 contexts), sermons (19 contexts), lexicography (10 contexts), literature (4 contexts), historical chronicles (4 contexts), biblical verses (3 contexts), one educational brochure, one Synod encyclical and one speech. The database includes 22 newspaper titles, ranging from 1857 to 2008. The decision to explore biblical sources, in relation to collections of sermons and newspaper articles, aimed to capture the dimensions of proverbiality in some of the most dynamic sectors of proverb diffusion. The most important raw frequencies of the noun phrases that filled the structural slots of the construction *A este X tutoror Y* are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Most frequent A-, X- and Y-slot lemmas in the construction A este X tuturor Y (N = 101)

#	A lemmas	freq.	X lemmas	freq.	Y lemmas	freq.
1	lenea 'the laziness'	11	rădăcina 'the root'	20	relelor 'of evils'	37
2	iubirea de arginți 'the love of money'	5	mama 'the mother'	15	răutăților 'of evils'	31
3	păcatul 'the sin'	5	izvorul 'the spring/ source'	15	bunătaților 'of good things'	15
4	[persoană publică] 'public figure'	5	începutul 'the beginning'	10	neajunsurilor 'of shortcomings'	4
5	dragostea 'the love'	5	pricina 'the cause'	5	viciilor 'of vices'	3
6	lăcomia 'the greed'	4	capul 'the head'	5	afărilor 'of discoveries'	2
7	zavistia 'the envy'	4	obârșia 'the origin'	4	fericirilor 'of beatitudes'	2
8	gândurile rele 'the bad thoughts'	4	temeiul 'the foundation'	3	prigonirilor 'of persecutions'	2
9	avaritia 'the avarice'	3	ușa 'the door'	2	crimelor 'of crimes'	1
10	beția 'the drunkenness'	3	fântâna 'the fountain'	2	sărăciei 'of poverty'	1
11	diavolul 'the devil'	3	originea 'the origin'	2	invențiilor 'of inventions'	1
12	iață 'behold'	3	leacul 'the cure'	1	darurilor 'of gifts'	1
13	nevoia 'the need'	3	urzitorul 'the originator'	1	nenorocirilor 'of misfortunes'	1
14	rugăciunea 'the prayer'	3	temelia 'the foundation'	1		

15	trufia 'the pride'	2	vârful 'the peak'	1		
16	egoismul 'the egoism'	2	tatăl 'the father'	1		
17	minciuna 'the lie'	2	sursa 'the source'	1		
18	lenevia 'the sloth'	2	încetegarea 'the formation'	1		
19	pacea 'the peace'	2	doamna 'the mistress'	1		
20	libertatea 'the freedom'	2	focarul 'the focus/ hearth'	1		
21	munca 'the work'	2	autorul 'the author'	1		

The expected asymmetry across the slots is uneven. The A-slot lemma pool allows for the greatest lexical breadth, with one most frequent item and weak distributive constraint for the others. The X-slot lemma pool reveals a nucleus of four fillers and a tail of less frequent items. In the Y slot lemma pool only three lexical fillers are significantly more frequent than the others. This highly polarized distribution indicates that the proverbiality of the construction concentrates on the X-Y pairings. The uneven distribution also indicates that the proverbiality of the construction can also emerge in the absence of A-slot fillers. This selectivity attracts the adoption of international snowclones such as *mama tuturor bățăliilor* 'the mother of all battles', inspired by the speech of the Iraqi dictator, Saddam Hussein, delivered on the eve of the First Gulf War (Hartmann and Ungerer 2024: 610–615), widely reported in the Romanian media (Zafiu 1991: 4).

5.1. A-slot lemma pool

The 47 definite noun phrases identified across the 101 attested A-X-Y triplets cluster in ten semantic classes, shown in Table 2. The dominant class, labelled MORAL FAILINGS (55 occurrences, 54.46%), denotes faults or vices that foreground the evaluativity of the construction.

Table 2. A-slot semantic classes (N = 101), with lemma inventories, token counts and percentage distribution.

Class	A-slot lemmas	Total	%
MORAL FAILINGS	lenea ‘the laziness’ (11); iubirea de arginți ‘the love of money’ (5); păcatul ‘the sin’ (5); dragostea ‘the love’ (5); lăcomia ‘the greed’ (4); zavistia ‘the envy’ (4); avarifița ‘the avarice’ (3); beția ‘the drunkenness’ (3); trufia ‘the pride’ (2); egoismul ‘the egoism’ (2); lenevia ‘the sloth’ (2); [inacțiunea] ‘the inaction’ (1); amibiția ‘the ambition’ (1); mânia ‘the anger’ (1); viciul ‘the vice’ (1); invidia ‘the envy’ (1); zgârcenia ‘the stinginess’ (1); dragostea de lume și de bogăție ‘the love of worldly possessions and of wealth’ (1); cupiditatea ‘the cupidity’ (1); dezordinea ‘the disorder’ (1);	55	54.46
MINDSET	gândurile rele ‘the evil thoughts’ (4); minciuna ‘the lie’ (2); neștiința ‘the ignorance’ (1); inima ‘the heart’ (1); cugetul bun ‘the good conscience’ (1);	9	8.91
STATUS	nevoia ‘the need’ (3); pacea ‘the peace’ (2); libertatea ‘the freedom’ (2); sărăcie ‘the poverty’ (1);	8	7.92
DEVOTION	rugăciunea ‘the prayer’ (3); credința ‘the faith’ (1); legea lui Dumnezeu ‘the law of God’ (1); crucea ‘the cross’ (1); postul ‘the fasting’ (1);	7	6.93
ACTORS	[persoană publică] ‘public person’ (5); maghiarii (1) ‘the Hungarians’; [ziariștii] ‘the journalists’ (1);	7	6.93
INSTITUTION	inegalitatea socială ‘the social inequity’ (1); legea ‘the law’ (1); votul ‘the vote’ (1); centrul ‘the center’ (1); dreptul ‘the law’ (1); învățătura ‘the education’ (1);	6	5.94
SUPERNATURAL	diavolul ‘the devil’ (3)	3	2.97
DISCOURSE	iată ‘behold’ (3)	3	2.97

ACTION	munca ‘the work’ (2)	2	1.98
PLACE	Orientul ‘the Orient’ (1)	1	0.99
Total		101	100

Pragmatically, the A-slot fillers adapt the construction to communicative purposes such as evaluation, explanation, argumentation, guidance or warning. In sermons, for instance, the construction rhetorically assumes a gnomic function. Examples like “*Că izvorul și rădăcina tuturor realelor iaste păcatul*” (Coresi, 1581) / ‘For the source and root of all evils is the sin’ emphasize sacred precepts. In other contexts, assertive sayings serve as a basis for directive acts, when the evaluation is followed by an explicit exhortation that becomes the argumentative premise for action: “*putem dzice cu tot dreptul că lenea este începutul tuturor relelor. Luptați-ve, iubiții mei, contra lenei*” (*Telegraful Român*, 1891) / ‘we can rightly say that laziness is the beginning of all evils. Fight, my beloved ones, against laziness’. Furthermore, an expressive speech act, intensified by interjections, rhetorically amplifies the speaker’s emotional state: “*O, lăcomie fără de asemănare, începătura și rădăcina tuturor răutăților!*” (Miniat, 1742) / ‘O, greed with no compare, the beginning and the root of all evils!’.

In polemical discourse, the construction attributes responsibility to specific agents, approaching declarative functions through its effect of social labeling: “*sântem înfățișați ca niște agitatori înverșunați, aici noi sântem capul tuturor răutăților.*” (*Tribuna*, 1884) / ‘we are portrayed as fierce agitators; here, we are the head of all evils.’.

There is also evidence that the A-slot fillers can be substituted by deictic markers, such as interjections: “*Iată cauza relei stări a afacerilor în țară, iată rădăcina tuturor relelor de care suferim*” (*Românul*, 1888) / ‘Behold the cause of the poor state of affairs in the country; behold the root of all the evils from which we suffer’. Again, the examples reveal that the proverbial load of the construction is concentrated in the genitival phrase *X tuturor Y*. In the proverbiality matrix, the stability score of a given X-Y pair is determined by the number of distinct A-slot lemmas that combine with it across the corpus.

5.2. X-slot lemma pool

The 29 definite noun phrases identified across the 101 attested A-X-Y variants indicate that the slot fillers cluster into two major semantic classes, ranked by frequency. The X-slot lemmas were semantically labelled on the basis of their capacity to encode agency, or, alternatively, non-agentive grounding, as shown in Table 3:

Table 3. X-slot semantic classes (N = 101), with lemma inventories, token counts and percentage distribution

Class	Subclass	X lemmas	Total	%
AGENTIVE	AGENT	mama ‘the mother’ (15); capul ‘the head’ (5); autorul ‘the author’ (1); doamna ‘the mistress’ (1); făcătorul ‘the maker’ (1); tatăl ‘the father’ (1); urzitorul ‘the originator’ (1); zămislitoarea ‘the begetter’ (1)	26	25.74
	Agentive		26	25.74
NON-AGENTIVE	BASE	rădăcina ‘the root’ (20); temeiu ‘the foundation’ (3); temelia ‘the foundation’ (1)	24	23.76
	SOURCE	izvorul ‘the spring/source’ (15); fântâna ‘the fountain’ (2); sursa ‘the source’ (1)	18	17.82
	EMERGENCE	începutul ‘the beginning’ (10); încetegarea ‘the formation’ (1); începătura ‘the beginning’ (1); sămânța ‘the seed’ (1)	13	12.87
	CAUSE	pricina ‘the cause’ (5); cauza ‘the cause’ (1)	6	5.94
	ORIGIN	obârșia ‘the origin’ (4); originea ‘the origin’ (2)	6	5.94
	CONTAINMENT	focarul ‘the focus/hearth’ (1); matca ‘the matrix’ (1)	2	1.98
	ACCESS	ușa ‘the door’ (2)	2	1.98
	PEAK	vârful ‘the peak’ (1); culmea ‘the peak’ (1)	2	1.98

	CURE	leacul ‘the cure’ (1)	1	0.99
	ESSENCE	răul ‘the evil’ (1)	1	0.99
	Non-agentive		75	74.26
Total			101	100

The X-slot lemma pool is dominated by non-agentive fillers. Out of the total 101 A-X-Y constructional combinations, 75 occurrences (74.26%) belong to this class, while the agentive class accounts for 26 occurrences (25.74%). The asymmetry not only indicates a sharp polarization toward the non-agentive class, but also a strong concentration in three subclasses, labelled BASE, SOURCE, and EMERGENCE. This evidence confirms the expectation that *xyz* metaphors project “conceptual domains that we know very well” as “basic source domains for metaphoric understanding” (Turner 1991: 199). This semantic classification is particularly relevant for assigning values to the symbolicity dimension of the proverbiality matrix. Based on frequency, X lemmas belonging to the BASE, SOURCE and EMERGENCE subclasses receive 5 points. X lemmas belonging to the AGENT subclass receive 4 points. X lemmas belonging to the ORIGIN and CONTAINMENT subclasses receive 3 points. X lemmas belonging to the CAUSE, ACCESS and PEAK subclasses receive 2 points. X lemmas belonging to the CURE and ESSENCE subclasses receive 1 point. The two main semantic classes identified in the X-slot noun pool reveal two conceptual schemas: the ACTOR schema and the GROUND schema.

5.2.1. The ACTOR schema

The ACTOR schema unites interpretations in which the relation between X and Y is constructed as agentive and asymmetric. Within this schema, X is interpreted as an acting or controlling participant whose intervention brings about Y. The X-Y relation is framed in terms of action, responsibility, or generative authority. Statistically, the ACTOR schema is less frequently used to create *A este X tutorul Y* constructions. In some contexts, X functions as an agent whose action directly produces Y: “*Oricare i-a fost travestirea, el (diavolul - n.r.) a fost făcătorul tutorul relelor*” (*Voința Națională*, 1897) / ‘Whatever this dis-

guise, however, he [the devil] was the maker of all evils'. In other cases, X is presented in terms of responsibility of authorship, without reference to a specific act: "*Pentru noi, cari am susținut și susținem că autorul tuturor relelor în această țară este înaintea de toate M. Sa, nu ne miră deloc teoria expusă de ziarul francez*" (*Evenimentul*, 1895) / 'For us, who have maintained and continue to maintain that the author of all evils in this country is first and foremost His Majesty, the theory put forward by the French press does not surprise us at all'. Further examples present X as a generative source: "*Pace vouă*" - zice, „*Pace tuturor*". *Pentru ce? Pentru că pacea este mama tuturor bunătăților, pentru că ea este obiectul bucuriei și al veseliei*" (*Telegraful Român*, 1962) / "Peace be with you", the Lord says, "peace to all". Why? Because peace is the mother of all good things, because it is the object of joy and rejoicing'. The ACTOR schema defines one interpretive pathway made available by the construction, without exhausting its semantic potential.

5.2.2. The GROUND schema

The GROUND schema unites interpretations in which the relation between X and Y is non-agentive and asymmetric. Within this schema, X functions as a reference element relative to which Y is interpreted. In other words, Y is established as totality that rests on, emerges from, or is oriented by X. Statistically, the GROUND schema is most frequently used to create *A este X tuturor Y* constructions. BASE categorizes biological metaphors, as in "*Sgârzenia e rădăcina tuturor răutăților, eară resipirea e un pom încărcat cu poame amare.*" (*Telegraful Român*, 1857) / 'The stinginess is the root of all evils, whereas the wastefulness is a tree laden with bitter fruits.' SOURCE categorizes flow metaphors, as in "*Munca este izvorul tuturor bunătăților*" (*Voința Națională*, 1896) / 'The work is the source of all good things'; "*Neștiința și sărăcia sunt izvorul tuturor relelor*" (*Tim-pul*, 1897) / 'The ignorance and the poverty are the source of all evils'. EMERGENCE categorizes developmental metaphors, as in "*Dar lenea e și începutul tuturor răutăților, ea pe lângă aceea că aduce sărăcie și boale, și scurtează viața omului făcându-l neputincios*" (*Albina*, 1899) / 'But laziness is also the beginning of all evils; besides bringing poverty and illness, it shortens the

man's life by making him powerless'. CAUSE categorizes generative metaphors, as in "*Pentru aceste gânduri reutaciose i-a mustrat Iisus aspru, pentru că el știa, că gândurile cele rele sunt începutul și pricina tuturor răutăților și tuturor prigonirilor*" (*Telegraful Român*, 1902) / 'For those malicious thoughts Jesus rebuked them harshly, because he knew that evil thoughts are the beginning and the cause of all evils and all prosecutions.'. ORIGIN categorizes starting point metaphors, as in "*Legea repausului duminical este origina tuturor relelor; toți descreerații și resvrățitorii, fie evrei, greci, români au destul timp să se ocupe de asemenea distracție după ce s'au îmbătat*" (*Constituționalul*, 1897) / 'The law of Sunday rest is the origin of all evils; all the scatter-brained and rebellious people, whether Jews, Greeks or Romanians, have enough time to engage in such amusements after they have gotten drunk'. CONTAINMENT categorizes accumulation metaphors, as in "*o privire numai să aruncăm pe hărți, și vom vedea ca focarul tuturor răutăților nu este decât Orientul*" (*Românul*, 1887) / 'If we cast but a glance at the maps, we shall see that the focus of all evils is none other than the Orient'. ACCESS categorizes gateway metaphors, as in "*Beția este ușa tuturor răutăților*" (Anton Pann, 1852) / 'Drunkenness is the door to all evils.'. PEAK categorizes ascensional metaphors, as in "*Culmea tuturor relelor inse este ministrul-președinte Bánffy Dezső*" (*Tribuna Sibiului*, 1895) / 'The peak of all evils, however, is Minister-President Bánffy Dezső'. CURE categorizes healing metaphors, as in "*Țara glumește asupra maniei pe care o au unele ziare ca să susție că votul obștesc e leacul tuturor relelor, un fel de buruiană universală*" (*Universul*, 1894) / 'The country jokes about the mania some newspapers have for claiming that universal suffrage is the cure of all evils, a kind of universal healing herb'. ESSENCE categorizes identity metaphors, as in "*Dar un rău mult mai mare produce instinctul conservățiunii împins pînă la extreme, individualismul ajunge atunci egoism, răul cel mai mare și originea tuturor relelor*" (*Românul*, 1861) / 'But an even greater evil is produced by the instinct of self-preservation pushed to the extreme; individualism then becomes egoism, the greatest evil and the origin of all evils.'

5.3. *Y-slot lemma pool*

The 13 abstract genitival nouns identified across the 101 attested variants cluster into three semantic classes, shown in Table 4:

Table 4. Y-slot semantic classes (N = 101), with lemma inventories, token counts and percentage distribution

Semantic class	Y lemmas	Total	%
NEGATIVE	relelor 'of evils' (37); răutăților 'of evils' (31); neajunsurilor 'of shortcomings' (4); viciilor 'of vices' (3); nenorocirilor 'of misfortunes' (1); prigonirilor 'of persecutions' (2); crimelor 'of crimes' (1); sărăciei 'of poverty' (1)	80	79.21
POSITIVE	bunătăților 'of good things' (15); fericirilor 'of beatitudes' (2); darurilor 'of gifts' (1)	18	17.82
OBJECTIVE	afărilor 'of discoveries' (2); inventiilor 'of inventions' (1)	3	2.97
Total		101	100

The NEGATIVE class (80 occurrences, 79.21%) clearly dominates the Y-slot and highlights the strong evaluativity of the construction. Class membership concentrates around two high-frequency synonyms, *relelor* and *răutăților*. The POSITIVE class (18 occurrences, 17.82%), displays significantly lower frequencies, while the OBJECTIVE class (3 occurrences, 2.97%) appears only occasionally and marginally. Despite their statistical weight, the minor semantic classes indicate that the construction is not exclusively marked as negative.

5.4. *Collocational strength and convergence*

Beyond slot internal distributions, the *A este X tuturor Y* construction also displays systematic preferences at the level of X-Y co-occurrence. Certain X and Y lemmas combine more strongly than others, forming recurrent pairings that can be interpreted as statistical evidence of proverbiality. To capture this syntagmatic affinity, Table 5 ranks X-Y pairings within the construction ac-

cording to their associative strength. LogDice and the raw co-occurrence frequency highlight selective associations.

Table 5. Strongest X-Y associations in the genitival phrase *X tuturor Y*

X lemma	Y lemma	LogDice	raw co-occurrence frequency
rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	12.49	10
fântâna 'the fountain'	neajunsurilor 'of shortcomings'	13.42	2
obârșia 'the origin'	viciilor 'of vices'	13.19	2
rădăcina 'the root'	răutăților 'of evils'	12.13	7
temeiul 'the foundation'	darurilor 'of gifts'	13	1
mama 'the mother'	aflărilor 'of discoveries'	11.91	2
izvorul 'the source'	relelor 'of evils'	12.11	7
mama 'the mother'	răutăților 'of evils'	12.06	7
izvorul 'the source'	fericirilor 'of beatitudes'	11.91	2
mama 'the mother'	bunătaților 'of good things'	11.68	3
începutul 'the beginning'	răutăților 'of evils'	11.64	4
pricina 'the cause'	nenorocirilor 'of misfortunes'	12.42	1
temeiul 'the foundation'	bunătaților 'of good things'	11.83	2
capul 'the head'	bunătaților 'of good things'	11.68	2
începutul 'the beginning'	sărăciei 'of poverty'	11.54	1

LogDice shows how strongly X and Y are drawn to each other relative to how often each appears independently, while the raw co-occurrence frequency records how many times they actually appear together in the corpus. The main finding is that only three

pairings score highly on both measures simultaneously. The pairing *rădăcina-relelor* appears 10 times and scores 12.49 on Log-Dice. The semantically equivalent pairing *rădăcina-răutășilor* appears 7 times and scores 12.13. The pairing *mama-răutășilor* appears 7 times and scores 12.06. The pairing *izvorul-relelor* appears 7 times and scores 12.11. These are the combinations that Romanian speakers have used most consistently across centuries and genres.

The overall picture is clear. Four pairings carry most of the collocational weight and a handful of others contribute modestly. The rest are one-off coinages at the margins of the construction. By collocational strength, the prototypical candidates detach themselves from the group.

Table 6. The convergence scores in the construction *A este X tuturor Y*:

A lemma	X lemma	Y lemma	Score
lenea 'the laziness'	începutul 'the beginning'	răutășilor 'of evils'	35
lenea 'the laziness'	mama 'the mother'	răutășilor 'of evils'	28
iubirea de arginți 'the love of money'	rădăcina 'the root'	răutășilor 'of evils'	15
lenea 'the laziness'	începutul 'the beginning'	relelor 'of evils'	15
iubirea de arginți 'the love of money'	rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	10
dragostea 'the love'	temeiul 'the foundation'	bunătaților 'of good things'	10
avaritia 'the avarice'	rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	9
păcatul 'the sin'	izvorul 'the spring'	relelor 'of evils'	8
păcatul 'the sin'	rădăcina 'the root'	relelor 'of evils'	8
lăcomia 'the greed'	rădăcina 'the root'	răutășilor 'of evils'	8
lenea 'the laziness'	doamna 'the mistress'	răutășilor 'of evils'	7
nevoia 'the need'	mama 'the mother'	afărilor 'of discoveries'	6

lenea 'the laziness'	începutul 'the beginning'	sărăciei 'of poverty'	5
dragostea 'the love'	capul 'the head'	bunătăților 'of good things'	5
dragostea 'the love'	vârful 'the peak'	bunătăților 'of good things'	5

The convergence scores, shown in Table 6, measure how strongly a given A-slot lemma combines with a specific X-slot lemma and a specific Y-slot lemma across the corpus. One particular A-slot lemma, *lenea*, is frequently attracted to combine with three X-slot fillers, namely the nouns *începutul*, *mama*, and *rădăcina*, and with the most prominent Y-slot noun, which is *răutăților* 'of evils'. The convergence foregrounds the triplets that are most likely to be recognized and used as folk proverbs: *Lenea este începutul / mama / rădăcina tuturor răutăților*. A second recurrent A-slot lemma, the definite noun phrase *iubirea de arginți*, is attracted to combine almost exclusively with the X-slot noun *rădăcina*, and the Y-slot synonyms *răutăților* and *relelor* foreground the Biblical construction *iubirea de arginți este rădăcina tuturor răutăților / relelor*.

This statistical picture tells an interesting story. St. Paul's memorable words were accurately transmitted through various types of religious translations but, at the same, time they gave rise to a set of proverbial cognates mainly used in sermons. Drawing on the authoritative rhetorical model of the apostolic epistles, the Christian preachers have created an epideictic discourse used to condemn moral failings: "*Că izvorul și rădăcina și muma a tuturor păcatelor iaste*" (Coresi, 1581) / 'For the source, the root and the mother of all evils is the sin', and to praise theological virtues such as love: "*Că ca un temelie și vîrh iaste a tuturor bunătăților iubovul*." (Coresi, 1581) / 'For the foundation and the peak of all good things is love'. This discursive tradition has continued to the present day, as evidenced by occasional sermons published as newspaper articles: "*Trebuie să știm și să înțelegem că tatăl tuturor răutăților și izvor a tot vicleșugul este diavolul*." (Informația Zilei, 2008) / 'We must know and understand that the father of all evils and the source of all deceit is the devil.' vs. "Pentru că pacea este mama tuturor

bunătaților, pentru că ea este obiectul bucuriei și al veseliei” (*Telegraful Român*, 1962) / ‘Because peace is the mother of all good things, because it is the object of joy and rejoicing’. At the same time, the proverbial cognates originally created in sermons made their way into other texts such as the historical chronicles, and, after the 1830s, into the first Romanian newspapers and dictionaries of proverbs. This complex transfer gave rise to folk proverbial equivalents, empirically focused on human behavior, such as laziness, and built on the same *A este X tuturor Y* syntactic scheme. Even if larger corpora are needed to document the ramification process, there is little doubt that the path opened by the translation of the sacred texts led to the formation of folk proverbs, as advocated by Mieder (1990).

5.5. The proverbiality matrix

The multidimensional proverbiality index (PI) was assembled according to the description presented in the methodology (Section 4). The matrix shown in Table 7 produces a ranked inventory of 85 unique A-X-Y triplets with scores ranging from 10.7% to 92.9%. The distribution is strongly skewed towards the periphery. Sixty-four triplets score below 40%, 18 between 41% and 70%, and only two above 71%. The PI reveals that the network of constructions based on the syntactic scheme *A este X tuturor Y* has a small core of highly marked candidates, a middle zone of moderately stable variants, and a long tail of occasional coinages. The core includes instantiations with very strong collocational convergence, very high grounding and high traditionality scores, such as *avaritia-rădăcina-relelor* and *lenea-mama-răutăților*. The middle zone consists of triplets with high stability, generality and symbolicity, such as *sărăcia-izvorul-relelor*. The occasional coinages such as *munca* ‘work’ - *izvorul* ‘the source’ - *bunătaților* ‘of all good things’ score high on symbolicity, but low on the other parameters. At the end of the tail, triplets like *votul* ‘the vote’ - *leacul* ‘the cure’ - *relelor* ‘of all evils’ fail to achieve proverbiality, due to the very low rankings on six of the seven dimensions, although evaluativity still receives a high score. Structural conformity does not grant proverbial status. This comet-like model is consistent with a probabilistic approach.

Table 7: The corpus-based proverbiality matrix of the construction A este X tuturor Y

#	A slot	X slot	Y slot	TRAD	STAB	EVAL	GEN	GRND	SYMB	TRANS	PI
1	avaricia 'avarice'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	66,7	100	100	100	83,3	100	100	92.9
2	lenea 'laziness'	mama 'mother'	răutăților 'of evils'	100	55,6	100	40	100	75	50	74.4
3	iubirea de arginți 'love of silver'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	83,3	100	0	69
4	iubirea de arginți 'love of silver'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	66,7	66,7	100	60	83,3	100	0	68.1
5	inacțiunea 'inaction'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
6	inegalitatea socială 'social ineq- uity'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
7	păcatul 'sin'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
8	trufia 'pride'	rădăcina 'root'	relelor 'of evils'	0	100	100	100	0	100	0	57.1
9	lenea 'laziness'	începutul 'begin- ning'	răutăților 'of evils'	33,3	33,3	100	40	33,3	100	50	55.7
10	lenea 'laziness'	începutul 'begin- ning'	relelor 'of evils'	33,3	22,2	100	20	50	100	50	53.6
11	lenea 'laziness'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
12	păcatul 'sin'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
13	neștiința 'ignorance'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
14	sărăcia 'poverty'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
15	ambiția 'ambition'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
16	iață 'behold'	izvorul 'source'	relelor 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	100	0	100	0	52.4
17	zavistia 'envy'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	60	33,3	100	0	51.4
18	lăcomia 'greed'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	60	16,7	100	0	49.1
19	zgârcenia 'stinginess'	rădăcina 'root'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	66,7	100	60	0	100	0	46.7
20	zavistia 'envy'	mama 'mother'	răutăților 'of evils'	0	55,6	100	40	16,7	75	0	41

Interpreted through the statistical lens of frequency, the seven dimensions of proverbiality align differently for each of the 85 A-X-Y constructional types. As a usage-based dimension, traditionality (TRAD) reveals itself by shared recognition. On the one hand, the highest ranked triplet in the TRAD column brings forth the folk proverb *Lenea este mama tuturor răutăților*. Interestingly, this formula does not appear in Romanian dictionaries of proverbs. The lexicographic sources usually attest the proverb *Lenea este începutul răutăților / relelor*, which is also used to make reference to laziness. On the other hand, the biblical formula *Iubirea de arginți este rădăcina tuturor răutăților* also enjoys traditional recognition. A cognate formula, *Avariția este rădăcina tuturor relelor*, was most probably coined by men of the cloth and delivered in sermons as well as other types of religious sources. These findings validate Arora's (1984) insights on the perception of proverbiality.

Stability (STAB) is the statistical mirror of collocational strength and convergence scores. It reflects the frequency with which A-slot lemmas combine with X-Y pairings. It basically shows that the syntactic scheme has been in continuous use in Romanian language and culture since the sixteenth century. Despite the constructional asymmetries that have favored contextual plasticity, the formula is robust and it has a long tail of occasional coinages. Following Odlin (1986), the corpus analysis confirms the dynamic preservation of simplicity, memorability, and adaptability of proverbs over time.

Evaluativity (EVAL) is explicitly marked. The attraction between the dominant A-slot semantic class MORAL FAILINGS (54.46% of all tokens) and the prominent Y-slot NEGATIVE class members (79.21%) reveals that speakers capitalize on this evaluative potential, mostly to guise critical judgement in the proverbial wisdom of the folk. This finding aligns with both Arora's (1984) inference on the "camouflage" of proverbiality and Norrick's (1985: 22) remarks on the fundamentally evaluative character of proverbs.

Generality (GEN) measures how many distinct A-X-Y triplets with the same X-Y pair are attested across the corpus. A marked preference for abstract A-slot lemmas that single out MORAL FAILINGS, the prevalence of NON-AGENTIVE

X-slot items, and the dominance of NEGATIVE generic plural nouns that fill the Y slot build a semantic profile that favors moral axioms over event-based explanation. As argued by Grigas (2002: 149), proverbiality expands beyond a specific statement.

Grounding (GRND) measures the authority of the written sources used in the compilation of the corpus. This dimension reveals that the A-X-Y triplets attested in sermons, proverb collections and printed speeches score highest. Following Goodwin and Wenzel (1981), when speakers invoke a proverb, they do not merely state a belief but ground a practical conclusion in collective wisdom. This is the case with the top-ranking construction *Lenea este mama tuturor răutăților*.

The symbolicity (SYMB) scores are mainly assigned on the basis of the semantic profile codified by the X-slot fillers. Older, more stable and highly entrenched metaphors receive higher scores. This detail explains why the A-X-Y triplets containing the root (*rădăcina*), the source (*izvorul*) and the spatial origin (*începutul*) metaphors are more prominent than the parent metaphor (*mama*). In the early Romanian collections of sermons, the interference between the sacred words of St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy and the popular wit is already visible: "Că izvorul și rădăcina și muma a tuturor rălelor păcatul iaste" (Coresi, 1581)/ 'For the source, the root and the mother of all evils is the sin'. However, the parent metaphor is not as entrenched in the written sources as the other dominant X-slot fillers.

Transferability (TRANS) captures the use of the construction under scrutiny across sources. Out of the 85 unique A-X-Y triplets only two were attested in more than one source. Even if a larger corpus is needed to assess this dimension of proverbiality more adequately, the experimental matrix reveals that one triplet strongly connected with the apostolic quote (*avaritia-rădăcina-relelor*), and one triplet illustrating the folk model (*lenea-mama-răutăților*) rise to prominence. Therefore, one can conclude that the Romanian construction *A este X tuturor Y* gradually developed two poles of proverbiality, the biblical core and the vernacular nucleus.

6. Discussion

The main finding of this unconventional experiment is that two poles of proverbiality emerge from the matrix. The biblical quote “*rădăcina tuturor răutăților este iubirea de arginți*” and its cognates anchored in the Pauline tradition score highly on stability, evaluativity, generality and symbolicity. This convergence of dimensions highlights the creation, within the religious milieu, of an iconic moral stance on avarice as the cause of misfortunes, which progressively expands to refer to the deadly sins: pride (*trufia*), greed (*lăcomia*), envy (*zavistia*), anger (*mânia*) and sloth (*trândăvia*). This complex process of stylistic refurbishment deserves more attention in line with Mokienko’s (2011) distinction between direct and indirect biblicisms. It is equally important to notice that this core of widely known Christian maxims was selectively adopted by the folk. In Romanian culture, popular wisdom has pragmatically focused on the moralization of idleness, due to the striking antagonism with the praise of diligence, but this may not be the case in other cultures. The high scores on evaluativity and grounding converge with the moderate transferability of the proverbial template *Lenea este rădăcina / izvorul / începutul / mama tuturor răutăților*.

The speaker’s familiarity with the two poles of proverbiality should not overshadow another important finding. The X-slot nouns *rădăcina*, *mama*, *începutul* and *izvorul* act as “attractors” and metaphorical markers of proverbiality, the oldest, most stable and the most productive of them being *rădăcina*. Over time, the PLANT metaphor (*rădăcina*) gave rise to three additional codifications of cause: SOURCE (*izvorul*), SPACE (*începutul*) and PARENT (*mama*). This dispersion confirms Turner’s (1991) prediction regarding the prominence of basic source domains for the understanding of the xyz metaphors.

Another interesting finding concerns the productive synonymy documented in the sources. As the corpus and the matrix indicate, the constructional variants with the highest proverbiality index easily trigger equivalents. The concept of AVARICE, canonically instantiated by the archaic biblical collocation *iubirea de arginți* ‘the love of money’, which is undoubtedly a translation calque, proverbially equates with noun and noun phrases such as *iubirea argintului* (Coresi, 1851), *scumpeatea* (Flower of Virtue,

1592), *lăcomia avuției* (Varlaam, 1643), and *sgârcenia* (Telegraful Român, 1857). The notion of LAZINESS encompasses such lexical choices as *trândăvia*, *lenea* and *lenevia*. On the Y slot, the dominant NEGATIVE fillers *răutășilor* and *relelor* are interchangeable, despite their inherent denotative differences. At the other end of the spectrum of synonymic diversity, journalistic coinages score between 14% and 28% on the proverbiality index and the low rankings unveil the linguistic fashion of creating snowclones that “illustrate the interplay between flexibility and rigidity” (Hartmann and Ungerer 2024: 601). In the Romanian journalistic discourse, this process was particularly active at the end of the 19th century. When placed in a popular newspaper column titled “O cugetare pe zi” ‘A Thought for the Day’, a formula such as *Viciul e mama tuturor relelor* / ‘Vice is the mother of all evils’ creates a salient contrast with its stylistic twin, *Nevoia e mama tuturor invențiunilor* / ‘Need is the mother of all inventions’, as both statements appear within the same graphic box (Figure 1).

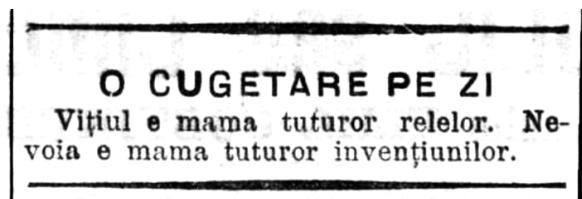


Figure 1. Newspaper column titled *O cugetare pe zi* ‘A Thought for the Day’, illustrating Romanian attestations of the construction *A is the X of all Y* (*Universul*, 1895, p. 3).

On the Y-slot, the stylistic contrast between the nouns *relelor* and *invențiunilor* sets the stage for constructional creativity. Unlike the abstract plural noun *relelor*, which is negatively marked, the plural noun *invențiunilor* does not carry an evaluative load. Within the contextual opposition, however, the plural form that designates inventions acquires a positive value, to compensate for the negativity of its parallel counterpart. From a diachronic perspective, the positive evaluative potential of the construction most likely originated in the religious discourse as an effective rhetorical device to blame sins and to praise virtues, since corpus data attests that the use of the proverbial formula in sermons has continuously maintained its grounding between 1581 and 2008.

The corpus also reveals that, in Romanian culture, early dictionaries of proverbs did not capture proverbial usage attested in the journalistic discourse. In fact, the lexicographic material included in the first Romanian dictionary of proverbs (Hintescu, 1877) is indebted to literary sources, and the dictionaries that followed up to the middle of the 20th century simply copied, re-framed and occasionally expanded that linguistic material. The sharp discrepancy between what proverbs are believed to be from a dictionary-like perspective and how proverbial language is actually used demands closer scrutiny. A wealth of proverbs used by journalists in their articles invites researchers to document and improve Romanian proverb lexicography. An excellent model for this future major scientific enterprise is Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder (1992).

7. *Conclusions*

The present study set out to investigate the Romanian construction *A este X tututor Y* in order to test how proverbiality manifests itself. More precisely, the research asks which semiotic traits make some instantiations more proverbial than others. To answer the research question, the experiment approaches proverbiality from a corpus-based perspective and regards frequency of use as the common denominator that allows the measurement of several key properties of proverbiality: traditionality, stability, evaluativity, generality, grounding, symbolicity and transferability. The targeted literature survey that precedes the analysis advocates that proverbiality emerges from the interplay of the seven dimensions. The corpus analysis of the 81 contexts extracted from various written sources, spanning 1581 to 2008, yields a network of 101 lemmatized triplets. The results show that across the constructional slots, the A slot allows more variation, whereas the X and the Y slots are progressively more constrained. Additionally, a limited set of lexical items repeatedly binds in strong collocational units, while the remaining constructional variants exhibit moderate or weak convergence scores. Taken together, such distributional patterns produce a proverbiality index (PI).

The proverbiality matrix traces uneven distribution, consistent with a probabilistic model. A very small set of combinations

score top rankings across several dimensions. A middle group of formulas shows high evaluativity, and moderate stability, generality and symbolicity, but scores low on traditionality, grounding and transferability. The long tail of occasional coinages ends with instantiations with the lowest scores on most dimensions. These non-proverbial illustrations prove that structural conformity with the syntactic scheme and a marked evaluativity are not sufficient to account for their acceptance as proverbs. In light of the corpus-based analysis, proverbiality emerges as a graded, multidimensional property. In other words, the proverbial status of a constructional variant is assessed through the different alignment of the seven dimensions that constitute the matrix.

The contribution of this paper is twofold. First, it articulates an empirical method for describing proverbiality by turning theory into practice, using corpus analysis tools. Second, the analysis focuses on proverbial language in use to validate long-standing theoretical assumptions in the rich field of paremiology. The findings ultimately support the view that communicative contexts can enhance or inhibit the markers of proverbiality. This approach connects proverb studies with corpus linguistics and construction grammar. Beyond the experiment envisaged in the present study, larger corpora could yield more robust statistical results. Additionally, similar constructions in other languages could be discussed for comparison, while more experimental work could test how speakers perceive and interpret the proverbial status of various language structures in speech, text and hypertext. Until further evidence suggests otherwise, the conclusion is that the probabilistic model of proverbiality fits the data.

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