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ASPECTS OF THE RECOVERY OF CONTEXT AND PERFORMANCE IN A HISTORICAL POETICS AND PRAGMATICS OF WESTERN SOUTH SLAVIC RITUAL FOLKLORE

Artykuł jest próbą określenia korzyści płynących z zastosowania interdyscyplinarnej metodologii wypracowanej przez etnolingwistykę i etnopoetykę dla określenia poetyckiego, magicznego i kulturowego funkcjonowania tradycyjnych rytualnych tekstów Słowian Bałkańskich. Ilustracją oferowanych możliwości jest zastosowanie niektórych pojęć i założeń do analizy dwóch przykładów należących do obszaru językowego Bośniaków, Chorwatów i Serbów. Analizy te zmierzają do ukazania różnych korelacji (indeksowych lub ikonicznych) między poetyką, stylizacją i strukturą tekstów o charakterze rytualnym a szerszym kontekstem socjokulturowym. Analizy prowadzą do wniosku, że ponieważ teksty te zawierają wiele elementów z rytualnego i socjokulturowego kontekstu w jakim są wykonywane, badanie tradycyjnego folkloru rytualnego może być użyteczne dla precyzyjniejszego określenia historycznej i etnograficznej specyfiki danej kultury.

1. Introduction

The typology, morphology, structure, semantics and pragmatics of traditional ritual texts and practices have received extensive attention in Slavic ethnolinguistics in recent years. Due to a predominant inclination toward comparative-Slavic lines of inquiry a substantial amount of relevant local Balkan Slavic and/or South Slavic text materials as yet remains open to closer examination in this perspective (on incantations and the world view of folk magic, however, see Radenović 1996a–b). At the same time, researchers in both Slavic ethnolinguistics and folklore studies (the latter having been either mainly oriented toward formal and

aesthetic aspects of ritual folk genres, or prevalently focused on epic genres) are acknowledging the need for a more in-depth poetic and contextual (re)analysis of ritual folk texts, more in particular of the interrelation between stylistic, compositional, referential and functional properties of ritual-magic poetry (cf. e.g. Ajdačić 1994; Gusev 1998; Judin 2001). In cognate Western currents of ethnopoetics and linguistic anthropology, elaborations of (among others) Roman Jakobson's work on linguistics and poetics in combination with Peircean semiotics have led to an intensified study of the diverse processes and contextual anchorings of social and cultural meaning, notably the verbal 'performance' and (re)production of cultural concepts and ideologies, through the analysis of texts and speech events in their ethnographic-communicative settings. Ritual has always formed a privileged focus of these investigations (e.g. Hymes 1972, 1981, 2003; Bauman 1977, 1992; Bauman & Briggs 1990; Silverstein 1976, 1996, 2003; Duranti & Goodwin 1992; Silverstein & Urban 1996). The present article will examine the possible benefits of an integrated ethnolinguistic and ethnopoetic theoretical-methodological framework for a reevaluation of the poetic, magic and cultural 'performativity' of Slavic and Balkan traditional ritual texts. It will do so by applying some of the key concepts and guidelines provided by such combined framework in a microanalysis of two (types of) formulaic ritual texts from the Western South Slavic — i.e. 'štokavian' Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian — linguistic and ethno-cultural 'dialect zone'.

2. Poetics, Pragmatics and the Analysis of Verbal-Ritual Performance¹

In an ethnopoetic approach that builds on the Slavic ethnolinguistic study of ritual folklore as a source for the reconstruction and interpretation of folk cultural signification, the tight interconnection between poetics and pragmatics (defined as the study of functional and motivated meaning use in context) may be accepted as a basic premise (cf. Friedrich 1986, 1991). Here, the tenet of Jakobson that "any significant poetic composition implies a goal-oriented choice of verbal material" (1981d) applies. In addition, the observation that folk poetry and ritual as modes of cultural expression are mostly about the effectuation — through figurative mechanisms, i.e. the 'play of tropes' — of strategic movements (of 'selves' and 'others') within culture as a space of qualities or values (Fernandez 1986), can be adopted as an important perspective and methodological tool for the interpretation of ritual texts. These poetic-pragmatic views, moreover, can be meaningfully related

¹ The theoretical-methodological framework discussed here is largely similar to the one provided in an outline of ethnopoetic research on models of 'alienation' and 'familiarization' in verbal-ritual genres of the Western Balkans; see Plas 2005.

to ‘indexicality approaches’ in linguistic anthropology (see below). One way to conceptualize ‘goal-oriented movements’ in verbal-ritual text, then, is as the realizations/expressions of semantic and pragmatic models/motifs — co-dependent, of course, on the theme and functions of the ritual genre in question —, which often make up the ‘magic’ strategy of the text (e.g. distancing, expulsion, appropriation, familiarization, propitiation, demonization, etc.; for a systematic ethnolinguistic treatment of Slavic apotropaic texts, which employs a somewhat different terminological apparatus but basically adopts a similar pragmatic perspective, see Levkieskaja 2002).

Within the general interdisciplinary context outlined so far, our concrete manner of textual analysis may fruitfully be based on the principles of ethnopoetics elaborated by Dell Hymes (e.g. 1981, 2003). These essentially consist in a contextual, structural linguistic (in effect, largely Jakobsonian) analysis of oral literary texts, in which form (stylistic and structural properties), content (referential meaning) and (pragmatic, indexical) functions are constantly considered in terms of each other (covariation). Previous applications of this approach, notably in the analysis of Montenegrin ritual proclamation formulae in the context of birth customs (Plas 1998) and of traditional songs accompanying the Serbian and Croatian ritual of *vučari* (processions with a dead wolf: Plas 1999b), have demonstrated that stylistic and structural devices (e.g. rhyme, parallelism, chiasmus), as seen in combination with figurative language use, referential functions and performative context, establish metaphorical-associative and metonymical-causative relations, eliciting (magical) strategies and effectively accomplishing “movements” (thus, proclamation formulae at birth effectuate the movement of newborn male children towards ‘health’ by metaphorically identifying them with wolves, while *vučari* songs verbally perform the gradual ‘expulsion’ of wolves — as dangerous ‘others’ — along spatially and socially marked semantic continua, etc.). To use Peircean semiotic terminology, these and other verbal-ritual texts are culturally relevant and ritually performative because they *indexically* (contiguously, metonymically) as well as *iconically* (analogously, metaphorically) represent/presuppose and entail/create resp. their performative contexts (including the normative social and cultural value system that feeds into these contexts) and the effects intended by their performance. A thorough textual analysis in this sense becomes particularly important in cases where elements of situational and performative context have not, or only partly, been recorded with the texts in ethnographic description. The ‘cultural-pragmatic’ information contained in, and elicited from these texts may moreover form a further critical evaluation of the ethnographic and ethnological discourse surrounding their attestations (Hymes 1981; Bauman 1992; Parmentier 1993; Silverstein 1996, 2003; for an example of how ethnopoetic textual analysis may challenge ethnological interpretation, see Plas 1998: 56–58).

Indexical iconicity has been recognized by Michael Silverstein and others as the semiotic mode of ritual *par excellence*, a mode of signification which accounts for most of the performative efficiency of verbal-ritual activity and traditional oratory (Silverstein 2003: 203, 2004: 627–633; cf. Tambiah 1985: 155–157; Parmentier 1993: 281–284). It consists in the intended figurative (iconic, metaphoric) and implicative (indexical, metonymic) relation between, on the one hand, the poetic structuring and stylization of the denotational verbal-ritual text and, on the other, the ‘interactional text-in-context’ and the strategy/aim of ritual performance, including, by extension, the cultural concepts, valorizations and ideologies (or world views) that inform it (cf. Silverstein 2003: 203ff.; 2004: 627–633). Rather than merely adding terminological sophistication to a discussion on the poetics-pragmatics interface and form-meaning-function covariation in ritual text/performance (see above, and cf. Bauman & Briggs 1990: 79), ‘indexical iconicity’ can usefully serve as an overarching concept for the various ways in which poetic language/style in verbal ritual purposefully articulates socio-cultural values and strategies (in further covariation and interaction, of course, with other performative ‘codes’ of ritual) — in other words, represents ‘discursive cultural action’. Thus, it may incorporate Fernandezian views on ritual as the (poetic) acting out of culturally relevant metaphoric predications, which, in turn, are seen to function as plans for meaningful ritual behavior (Fernandez 1986; cf. the notion of ‘performative blueprints’ proposed by Tambiah [1985: 2–4]). It is in indexical iconicity as well that the ‘illocutionary force’ of ritual texts as ‘speech acts’ can be taken to reside (compare Bauman & Briggs 1990: 63–64; for linguistic-pragmatic ‘speech act’ approaches to ritual-magic folklore in Slavic ethnolinguistics, see e.g. Tolstaja 1992, Judin 2001, Levkieskaja 2002).

A ‘Hymesian’ contextual analysis of the covariation of form, meaning and function, it is argued here, may reveal the workings of this indexical iconicity in the ritual text, i.e. in both its (poetic) entextualization and (pragmatic) contextualization. If we consider ritual-magic texts as blueprints and expressions of a cultural ‘quality space’ in which, by means of poetic-pragmatic processes, goal-oriented movements (motifs/motives, strategies) take place, these movements may explicitly or implicitly appear at any level of the text and the context of its performance. The following interrelated aspects of content, form, and context should then be studied as to their ‘functional meaning’: (1) figurative language use: metaphoric and metonymic predications, the ‘play of tropes’ in the verbal-ritual text (Fernandez 1986); (2) stylistic devices in the service of semantic relations: sound likeness, rhyme, parallelism, chiasmus, emphatic processes, *figurae etymologicae*, iconicity, etc. (Jakobson 1981a–c; cf. Sikimić 1994); (3) composition, verse structure, rhythm/meter (Hymes 1981, 2003); (4) explicit pragmatic/indexical text elements/markers: deixis, performatives, imperatives, optatives, prohibitives etc.

(Silverstein 1976, 1996, 2003; Hanks 1992; Tolstaja 1992; Judin 2001; Levkieskaja 2002); (5) situational and performative context, in particular the interaction of the verbal text with actional, objectival and other components/codes of ritual (in Slavic ethnolinguistics, see esp. Vinogradova 1993); (6) metapragmatic discourse: folk interpretations of ritual texts/actions, as well as ethnographers' interpretations of recorded texts (where attested; see Vinogradova 1993, 1995; Tolstaja 2002; cf. Silverstein 1993, Hanks 1993); (7) generic intertextuality: elements of implicit or explicit 'dialogue' between (ritual) folk genres (cf. Bauman 1992); and (8) the broader folk cultural context: larger ritual or customary complexes and folk discourses or domains of knowledge, which indicate further inter- and metatextual relations. In the remainder of this article, through an examination of two sample cases from the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language area, I attempt to demonstrate at least partially how an analysis along these guidelines may prove fruitful for the revalorization of the poetic, performative, social and cultural efficiency of verbal ritual, and thence for a recovery of the sociocultural 'memory' of ritual texts.

3. The Performance of Ritual-Magic Formulae: Two Cases from Western South Slavic Folk Tradition

As is sufficiently well known from the ethnographic and ethnolinguistic literature, principal ritual-magic genres for the Western South Slavic (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian — štokavian) area include — but are not limited to: ritual formulae (proclamations, blessings, formulaic dialogues etc.) and songs in the context of birth, wedding, and funerary customs (pertaining to the socialization and protection of newborn children, the detachment/alienation of the bride from her own family vs. appropriation/ acquisition by the groom, alienation of/detachment from the deceased e.g. as measure against vampirization); calendrical and occasional procession songs and other calendrical ritual folklore (for the stimulation of fertility and prosperity and protection from harmful entities: Christmas songs, spring songs for St. George, 'Jeremiah songs' for chasing off snakes, etc.; ritual blessings and formulaic dialogues performed on holidays, and so on); folk medicinal incantations (expulsion/alienation of disease and the acquisition/appropriation of health); apotropaic formulae/texts against harmful entities of various kinds; etc. A historical poetic-pragmatic revaluation of such texts, spanning mainly the 1880–1960 period (in which traditional ritual folklore has extensively been documented), should be conducted per text genre, dealing with representative groups of variants per ethnocultural, confessional, geographical and/or dialectal subzone, and, where needed, per subperiod. In the present article, however, our focus will be on two specific types of formulaic ritual texts from traditional štokavian 'wolf folklore' (Plas

2003), considered within their corresponding performative contexts and respective domains of folk culture, notably wedding ritual and (calendrical and occasional) apotropaic magic.

3.1. In the Western South Slavic area, the metaphoric association of grooms and brides with wolves resp. cattle (i.e. the *bride-taker* : *bride* :: *wolf* : *cattle* metaphor) is largely characteristic of marriage ritual and wedding folklore in Dinaric traditional cattle-breeding cultures (Plas 2004). As a token actualization of this cultural predication, let us consider one ritual formula from the region of Knin in the Dalmatian hinterland, which is shouted out by the groom's wedding guests (*svatovi*) outside the bedroom of the newlyweds during the first wedding night. Adopting the segmentation of the ethnographic attestation (Bonifačić-Rožin 1954: 6), the text may be rendered as follows:

- (a) *Ujede vuk junicu za guzicu*. The wolf bites the heifer's butt.
- (b1) *Junica je iz drugog sela*, The heifer is from another village,
- (b2) *a vuk je iz našega sela*. and the wolf is from our village.

As has been noted elsewhere, the metaphoric expression of the alliance between groom and bride in terms of 'the wolf biting the heifer' in this formula (as opposed to other variants from the same region) is enhanced with a reference to the motif/semantic dimension of 'alienation — familiarization', which is accomplished by means of an added parallelly constructed opposition 'other village : our village', i.e. 'we' as opposed to the 'other party' from the perspective of the 'bride-takers' (Plas 2004: 286). Our ethnopoetic comments in the present analysis will elaborate on the various ways in which the poetic and figurative stylization and structuring of the verbal text correlates (indexically and iconically) with its meanings and functions within the performative (actional-ritual) and broader sociocultural context.

The formula can be seen to comprise three verses or lines, here labeled '(a)', '(b1)' and '(b2)', with (a) providing the ritual metaphor that expresses — i.e. represents and verbally performs/effectuates — the matrimonial union/consummation, and (b1–b2) forming a distich that further develops the metaphor and qualifies the actors and the process in question. In (a) (*Ujede vuk junicu za guzicu* 'The wolf bites the heifer's butt'), the physical alliance of bridegroom and bride is represented and 'indexed' (presupposed/entailed) iconically in the syntactic and denotational structure of the text, notably by the direct contiguity of *vuk* 'wolf' (subject) and *junicu* 'heifer' (object), both being 'trapped' between the action verb *Ujede* 'bites' and its qualifier *za guzicu* 'by/in the butt', which jointly form the (explicit and poignant) metaphor for sexual intercourse. Note how *za guzicu* grammatically and semantically fulfills the double function of adverbial adjunct on the one hand (qualifying the verb *Ujede*), and of predicative adjunct or object complement of *junicu*

on the other, forming a metonymic ('locative') specification of the 'heifer/bride'. The assonances (*u*-sounds, *junicu* — *guzicu*) make for further 'textural' stylization. In this way, (a) constitutes a poetically stylized metaphorical observation and confirmation of 'marital union' in definitive and physical terms (the initial verb *Ujede* moreover conveying 'perfective' and 'constative' modality), as it refers to, and coincides with, the defloration of the bride.

▣ Syntactic parallelism between (b1) and (b2) — respectively qualifying the 'patient' and the 'agent' of the action in (a) — is complete. Note also how the extended form *našega* in (b2) (instead of *našeg*, compare *drugog* in (b1)) compensates the syllabic deficit of *a vuk* in (b2) vis-?-vis *Junica* in (b1), making for an equal amount of nine syllables for each of the two verses/lines. Parallelism of construction here correlates with the conveyed referential and pragmatic meaning of the intended alliance between two 'equal but opposed social/ritual parties', the opposition between 'other' (*drugog*) and 'own, ours' (*našega*) being marked in a trivial (i.e. grammatico-semantic) sense by the adversative conjunction *a* that initiates (b2). In addition, however, when considered in their cultural-conceptual connections, the denotational (semantico-referential) segments between (b1) and (b2) are linked chiasmically as well: thus, both verse-initial *Junica* as a cattle term ('heifer, young cow') in (b1) and verse-final *našega sela* 'our village' in (b2) index or connote sociocultural values of 'domesticity, familiarity' (*našega* forming at once a deictic reference to the speaker and a referential index of 'possession' and 'proximity'), while the 'wolf' (verse-initial *vuk* in (b2)) as an otherwise common cultural metaphor of 'otherness' (cf. Plas 2003) may correspondingly be linked with verse-final *drugog (sela)* 'other (village)' in (b1).

▣ Constructed and regimented poetically as an indexical-iconic expression of the cultural pragmatics of wedding ritual, the linear sequence of verses (b1–b2) — *Junica je iz drugog sela, a vuk je iz našega sela* — in performance verbally accomplishes the 'transition' and 'familiarization/appropriation' of the heifer/bride, as it moves from 'other village' to 'our village' through the agency of the 'wolf' (with *vuk* in a medial position between 'other village' and 'our village' in the sequence). This performative effect is largely signaled by the chiasmic relations described above. 'Wolf' here, in its capacity of metaphor for the groom, at the same time represents a metaphor of 'otherness' appropriated for the purpose of 'bride-taking'. The metaphoric predication put forward in (a) in turn informs and coordinates the process in question, explicating the concrete mechanism of transition and appropriation: the 'heifer' has become 'ours' by being 'bitten in the butt by the wolf'. Also, the simultaneity of reference to 'familiarity' and 'otherness' made in and between (b1) and (b2) regarding both parties involved (viz. heifer/bride and wolf/groom) forms a verbal-poetic index of the ambivalent conception of weddings/marriages as processes of 'alienation' (from the perspective

of the bride's family) and 'familiarization' (from the perspective of the groom and his family).

In sum, this verbal formula can be seen to 'encode' much of the ritual and sociocultural context of its performance. If extensive knowledge of that context is essential to a correct interpretation and appreciation of the formula's poetic-pragmatic qualities, it is equally clear that parameters of the situational and cultural context are provided by and 'unfolded from' the very formula in verbal performance (cf. also Vinogradova 1993). In other words, the text implies its context in 'presupposing' as well as 'entailing' ways. The performative efficiency of the formula lies in its capacity to furnish salient metaphoric predications which, through their textual-poetic modeling, (1) function as an indexical-iconic plan (blueprint, reproductive scheme) for the organization of ritual behavior, and (2) indicate and articulate the relevant sociocultural concepts and values at play in wedding ritual. As part of the broader folk cultural context of the verbal-ritual text, the latter pertain to 'inhabitable categories of identity', including 'partitions of social space' and the values associated with these partitions (cf. Silverstein 2003: 201). Partitions of social space in this case are represented iconically in the parallelly constructed opposition in (b1–2) between 'other village' and 'our village'. In turn, the spatial differentiation in question indexes 'normative exogamic distance', while concomitant differential social and gender roles are ascribed to the actors/parties in metaphoric terms (normative masculine 'wolf' vs. normative feminine 'heifer'; cf. Plas 2004: 305–306), with 'textual juxtaposition' in (a) (*vuk junicu*) appropriately signaling/effectuating 'ritual conjunction'.

As a preamble to the next case, a few final remarks regarding metrics and rhythm are apposite. Other than the ethnographer's statement that the formula is 'shouted' (*viču*: Bonifačić-Rožin 1954: 6), we have no further information as to the exact manner of verbal text performance in terms of rhythmic recitation or declamation, nor does the unusual syllabic measuring of the respective lines/verses as logical units of structure and content — viz. one line of eleven syllables followed by two nine-syllable lines — offer any overt indications of conventional 'genred' ritual versification. Closer investigation, however, reveals reasonable pointers to a 'heptasyllabic metricalization': the formula, it seems, is rhythmically textured at least in part by an underlying heptasyllabic metric design, governing several overlapping layers in the verbal text. This applies in particular to verse (a), where the syntagm *Ujede vuk junicu* 'The wolf bites the heifer' in itself would form a typical heptasyllable or *sedmerac* (with a caesura after the fourth syllable) stating the basic metaphor of the ritual text, while the extension *za guzicu* in its double grammatico-semantic capacity (see above) is co-referential with both *Ujede* (as an adverbial adjunct qualifying the action) and *junicu* (as a specifying predicative adjunct/object complement), which virtually yields *Ujede*

za guzicu and *junicu za guzicu* as further regular heptasyllabic syntagmata. As such, verse (a) would appear to be a layered metrical composition, consisting of three *sedmerci* collapsed into one eleven-syllable line. In a more speculative vein, lines (b1) and (b2) — each counting nine syllables — may be conceived of as two sides of a metrical ‘equation’ (mirrored by the syntactic parallelism between them), where the deletion of either of the shared identical segments/terms (*je iz* and *sela*, respectively) would result in heptasyllabic verses without drastic semantic/pragmatic loss. We may visually summarize these comments as follows:

(a) [Ujede vuk *junicu*] *za guzicu*

(b1) [Junica je iz drugog] *sela*

(b2) [A vuk je iz našega] *sela*

In this rendition, the layered heptasyllabic syntagmata per line are respectively bracketed and underlined; the italicized *junicu za guzicu* constitutes an additional heptasyllable in (a). The use of the *sedmerac* as meter in Western South Slavic oral tradition is largely restricted to ritual and ceremonial contexts; it is highly characteristic of magic text genres (for examples from ‘wolf folklore’ as well as for further references, see Plas 1998: 51; 1999b: 93–94; see also below).² The evidence of heptasyllabic metricalization found here suggests intertextual and generic ties to other forms of ritual folklore and lends the text a further ritual-magic cachet, which also adds to its performative efficiency.

3.2. Heptasyllabic versification is more overtly present in štokavian apotropaic formulae, of which the following type of texts from ritual-magic ‘wolf folklore’ forms a representative example. This second case also provides more direct illustrations of ‘intersemiotic’ and ‘metapragmatic’ aspects of the functional and cultural meaning of formulaic ritual texts (i.e. the interaction between the verbal and other codes in ritual, and folk motivations of the text and its performance), as well as of meaningful mutual reference and ‘dialogue’ between ritual texts and other folklore genres.

In calendrical as well as occasional protective measures against wolves in Western South Slavic folk tradition (as in Slavic folk culture in general), ‘shutting the wolf’s mouth’ undoubtedly represents one of the principal motifs. In the object-actional code of ritual, this motif is expressed most obviously through the shutting or closing — at the beginning of holidays or periods deemed dangerous on account of wolves — of objects which are associated with (the biting of) mouths and teeth on the basis their appearance and utilitarian functions. Cards — *grebeni*, i.e. pairs of wooden blades set with iron or copper ‘teeth’, between which wool fibers are combed or pulled (carded) so as to disentangle and clean them for spinning, and

² The generic and intrinsic properties and functions of the *sedmerac* as ritual-magic metre in Western South Slavic oral tradition still await serious folkloristic and ethno poetic investigation.

which after work are hooked up together — figure most prominently among these ritualized objects (see Plas 1999a: 186, 191–193). Corresponding object-actional ‘shuttings of the wolf’s mouth’ — typical rituals in this respect involve the herdsman or the mistress of the house driving the cattle through between two cards and then hooking the cards together — may be enhanced by the simultaneous declamation of verbal-magic formulae which parallel the action semantically/referentially as well as pragmatically/functionally. The verbal text then serves as a more or less complete ‘intersemiotic’ indexical icon of the object-actional text, and as such constitutes an emphatic reiteration/translation and additional glossing of the ritual action, and its purpose; this corresponds to the various modes of formal and semantic parallelism in the interaction between text and action in ritual as distinguished by Ljudmila Vinogradova (1993). The performative figurative-metaphoric (iconic) and causal-metonymic (indexical) association between the shutting of the cards and the shutting of the wolf’s mouth in verbal ritual formulae may be accomplished, for instance, by means of correlatives and syntactic parallelism: *Kako ? grebene ? tako ? usta*, e.g. *Kako ja zaklapao grebene, tako se sklopila kurjakova usta, te ne mogao moje stoke klati* ‘As I hook up the cards, so let the wolf’s mouth snap shut, lest he be able to kill my cattle’ (in Western Serbia, Blagojević 1978: 379).

Metrical regimentation may further increase the poetic and magical efficiency of this type of text. Thus, in the formula *Grebeni se sklopiše, vuku se usta zatvoriše* (‘The cards have been closed, the wolf’s mouth has been shut’; shouted three times as the cards are joined after the cattle has passed through, in Eastern Herzegovina: Bratić 1902: 157), one notes that the same purposeful homology between the ‘shutting of the cards’ (proposition, described ritual action) and the ‘shutting of the wolf’s mouth’ (the function of the ritual and intended effect of the speech act) is articulated in successive parallelly constructed verses, signaling formal as well as semantic ‘equivalence’ between the respective members of the association. The text can be metrically analyzed as consisting of two rhymed heptasyllables (*sedmerci*), of which the second has been initially extended with the segment *vuku*, referring to the wolf as the target of apotropaic action:

Grebeni se sklopiše,
[*vuku +*] *usta se zatvoriše.*

Omission of the segment *vuku* — upon which the enclitic *se* logically moves to second position — results in two entirely regular heptasyllables with caesurae after the respective fourth syllables, and the ictus running as follows: *Grébeni se sklópiše, / ústa se za-tvóriše*. Apart from this, the ‘constative’ use of aorist forms (*sklopiše, zatvoriše*) in the text achieves the pragmatic effect of an ‘accomplished fact’ (on the illocutionary force and pragmatic meaning of constative formulae in magic texts, see Tolstaja 1992: 37).

In the same ritual-performative context, we now turn our attention to the variants of an imperative formula, also in rhymed *sedmerci*, attested in the neighboring regions of South-west Serbia and Eastern Montenegro; it is traditionally shouted by herdsmen on Christmas Eve, after the cattle has been driven through between the cards:

Sklopi baba grebeni, zubi su ti gvozdeni!

(‘Shut your cards, woman, your teeth are made of iron!’; Blagojević 1978: 380);

Sklopi baba grebeni, zubi su ti medeni!

(‘Shut your cards, woman, your teeth are made of copper!’; Kostić 1988–89: 76);

Sklopi baba grebeni!

(‘Shut your cards, woman!’; Vlahović 1933: 51)

The attestation of the ‘short’ variant from Kolašin in Montenegro — also the earliest recorded version of these ritual formulae — includes the following motivation by the ethnographer: “Ovo se čini, da bi tako vuk sklopio vilice kad dođe u brave” (‘This is done so that *likewise the wolf would shut its jaws* when he comes among the sheep’: Vlahović 1933: 51), which elucidates the figurative and pragmatic meaning of the text in unequivocal terms. In both Kolašin and Eastern Herzegovina, the same variant is also used as an occasional protective measure against wolves: when a wolf is spotted near the cattle, herdsmen may magically shut its mouth by declaiming this formula while simultaneously *clasp*ing their hands (Vlahović 1933: 50; Mićović 1952: 252). Interestingly, the logical subject of the imperative, *baba* (‘pej.) woman’, here comes to serve at least partially as a metaphoric reference to, and term of address for, the target and logical subject of the intended effect of ritual action, viz. the wolf whose jaws must be closed. This may be seen in connection with other ethnographic data from neighboring regions in Western Serbia, however scarce, which indicate that the term *baba* has functioned locally as a euphemism for the wolf.³

As to referential content, the respective second ‘verses’ in the extended variants of the formula (*zubi su ti gvozdeni* and *zubi su ti medeni* — *gvozdeni* and *medeni* rhyming with *grebeni*) represent descriptions of the (‘woman’s’) cards as ‘toothed’ objects.⁴ The metaphoric association ‘cards — mouth/jaws’, then, is additionally

³ Natalija Blagojević’s ethnographic materials from the Užice region contain a single attestation of the term *baba* for the wolf in connection with ritual prohibitions for children (1978: 393), as well as the curious local name *Baba Juka* for Saint Sava’s Day as one of the principal ‘wolf holidays’ (ibid.: 383). The latter, in fact, is a derivation from *bajuk/bauk*, another local euphemism for the wolf (cf. ibid.: 375), with an initial reduplication of the *ba-* syllable and the subsequent addition of the female *-a* ending.

⁴ Indeed, the hooks or teeth of the traditional card are typically — and ‘stereotypically’ — made of either iron or copper, cf. RJAŽU, s.v. *greben*: “sprava s gvozdenijem ili mjedenijem zupcima kojom se češlja vuna, lan itd.” (emphasis added).

emphasized through the contiguity of *grebeni* ‘cards’ and *zubi* ‘teeth’ in the text’s linear sequence, while the intended effect of the verbal ritual (‘shutting the wolf’s mouth’) is underscored by the suggestion of a parallelistic linking of *Sklopi* and *zubi* between the two heptasyllabic lines that make up the ‘distich’. As part of the broader ritual context of its performance (including its indexical-iconic interrelations with object-actional and ‘personal’ codes), the formula contains obvious reference to carding as a traditional female domestic activity, and in particular to the ban on carding as one of the most frequent calendrical prohibitions observed against wolves (cf. Plas 1999a: 186). Indeed, in the causal-logic and denotational sense, the ‘shutting of the wolf’s mouth’ here is effectuated through a literal command to shut the cards (i.e. to let them rest, not to work with them), directed by herdsmen (it is they who perform the text) to women. The pragmatic-indexical and sociocultural meaning of this verbal-ritual text, however, acquires an extra dimension through its intertextual connections with the variants of an otherwise rather opaque proverb about female laziness, namely:

Otpor babi grebeni da su joj zupci mjedeni.

(‘The copper teeth are the woman’s [pej.] reason not to card’; Karadžić 1965 [1849]: 230);⁵

Uzrok babi grebeni.

(‘The cards are the woman’s (pej.) reason’ — followed by the clarification *da ne može ići na grebenanje* ‘for not being able to go carding’; *ibid.*: 296)

Here we have a clear instance of intergeneric dialogue, in which the ritual-magic and the paremic text (intertextually) ‘model’ and (metatextually) ‘comment upon’ each other. Rather than treating this as a case of unidirectional ‘borrowing’ in which one of the texts would have to be marked as the original folkloric prototext, we may think of this relationship as a ‘synchronic’ cross-influencing of motifs and formal features between two texts that share the motif of ‘not working with the cards’ as an instantiation of ‘inactivity’ — either in the neutral sense of ‘exemption from work’ or in the pejorative sense of ‘laziness’ —, while otherwise functioning independently within their respective genres.⁶ In addition to aspects of structure and composition, important factors to be taken into consideration in analyzing the processes of mutual intertextual modeling are ‘intelligibility’ and ‘context of use’. Apart from the lexical correspondences, it is primarily the elliptic and heptasyllabic composition of the proverbs — compare *Otpor babi grebeni/Uzrok babi grebeni* ([*da*] *su joj zupci mjedeni*) with *Sklopi baba grebeni (zubi su ti medeni)* — that suggests transposition and prosification (as well as ironization?) from ritual

⁵ Literally, ‘To the woman [pej.] the cards are the impediment [to carding, the reason being] that her teeth [i.e. the teeth of her cards] are made of copper’ — or, in other words, ‘The woman [pej.] claims she cannot card because her [cards’] teeth are made of copper’.

⁶ On the diachronic and synchronic-paradigmatic character of small folkloric forms, and on borrowings and correlations between ritual resp. paremic texts, cf. Sikimić 1996: 21–24.

to paremic discourse. Conversely, it is equally plausible to assume the partial adaptation and transformation, from the paremic to the ritual text, of the proverbial-narrative motif/theme of ‘a woman justifying her unwillingness to work with the cards (which, concomitantly, are closed or kept closed) with the nonsensical reason that the teeth are made of copper’. As an argumentative part (it contains the explanation for the ‘unwillingness to work’), the segment *da su joj zupci mjedeni* is indispensable for a correct understanding of the proverb and of the context of its use; the explanatory note which accompanies the abridged — and therefore obscure — variant *Uzrok babi grebeni* in Karadžić’s proverb collection is telling in this respect. The presence in the ritual-magic text of a corresponding verse *zubi su ti medeni (gvozdjeni)* as the second half of a formulaic distich, on the other hand, *in se* does not necessarily enhance the performative efficacy of *Sklopi baba grebeni!*, much of which is in the terseness of expression, while the greater part of its pragmatic function is immediately understandable from the actional context. The second heptasyllabic line does, however, become pragmatically meaningful when seen (as well as experienced by the performer) as the poetic incorporation, in the ritual text, of the ironic-argumentative part of the proverb in question: *zubi su ti medeni (gvozdjeni)* then assumes the function of a motivational/causal clause in relation to the first line, forming an additional justification of the imperative (‘Shut your cards [i.e. You may stop carding], woman, for your teeth are made of copper/iron’).

Considered in its intertextual and metatextual ramifications, the text under discussion encodes (and in performance, reproduces) sociocultural information that outreaches the direct (situational) context of ritual as goal-oriented multimodal (verbal, object-actional, personal etc.) semiotic action. Thus, apart from serving as a poetically optimized magical speech act for protection against wolves, the formula represents an index of the cultural value attached to female domestic works and the ritual responsibility that is correspondingly assigned to women, but also conveys the idea of a double normative (and ‘gendered’) sociocultural valuation of ‘inactivity’ as ‘authorized exemption from work’ vs. ‘unwarranted laziness’.

4. Conclusions

In the preceding analyses, we hope to have shown how micro-revaluations of the ways in which content (including figurative language use) and formal (co-textual) poetic composition in texts of ritual folklore correlate and interact at different levels with pragmatic functions, may contribute to our ‘historical-ethnographic’ understanding of ritual-performative contexts, domains of folk cultural knowledge and practice, and (folk) cultural concepts in general. Through the

indexical and iconic relations they articulate and crystallize, these texts become (or remain) important sources for verifying and critically evaluating the ethnographic context of their attestations, and valuable sources for the study of 'culture' in their own right. Poetics- and pragmatics-oriented microanalyses of the kind proposed in the present article may no doubt further enrich the ongoing ethnolinguistic study of Slavic ritual texts and practices as exemplary expressions of folk lingual and cultural worldview. What they demonstrate *a fortiori* is that no 'textual' aspect of traditional forms of ritual discourse should ever be dismissed as a mere 'verbal by-product' of ritual or custom. As we have seen, it is precisely textual and stylistic devices that may purposefully code interconnections between more concrete ritual metaphors and strategies ('our wolf biting their heifer', 'women shutting mouths with cards') on the one hand, and more encompassing sociocultural concepts and concerns (spatial differentiation and social distance, exogamy, processes of alienation and familiarization, gender roles and responsibilities) on the other.

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ASPECTS OF THE RECOVERY OF CONTEXT AND PERFORMANCE IN HISTORICAL POETICS
AND PRAGMATICS OF WESTERN SOUTH SLAVIC RITUAL FOLKLORE

The author examines some of the possible benefits of an integrated ethnolinguistic and ethno-poetic theoretical-methodological framework for a revaluation of the poetic, magical and cultural 'performativity' of Slavic and Balkan traditional ritual texts. He does so by applying a number of concepts and guidelines provided by this combined framework in a microanalysis of two sample cases from the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language area. The presented analyses focus on the various ways in which the poetic and figurative stylization and structuring of verbal-ritual texts correlates (indexically and iconically) with their meanings and functions within the performative (actional-ritual) and broader sociocultural context. As these texts can be seen to encode much of the ritual and sociocultural context of their performance, ethno-poetic micro-revaluations of this kind prove useful, by focusing on traditional ritual folklore, in enriched studies of historically and ethnographically situated 'cultures'.