MOSAIC OR JIGSAW? PUBLISHING AN ARTICLE FROM ESTONIA IN THE “WEST”, 30 YEARS AGO, WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES WERE QUITE DIFFERENT FROM TODAY

The communication from April until November 1984 between Arvo Krikmann from Estonia and myself (at that time living in Germany) is from a time, when there was no electronic communication, neither written (be that by email or sms), nor spoken (via mobiles, skype, or similar media). It was a time, when “ordinary” letters or telegrams were written, and when “ordinary” telephones were used for spoken communication – provided there were open lines and connections, which was the case only to a very limited degree when communicating with members of the former Soviet Union. Despite such restrictions, particularly concerning communication across political boundaries, and despite analogical options and desires to control communication in our days, one advantage of the “old” communication media is that they are likely to be saved for a longer time than our modern ones, and that they thus can serve as documents not only of personal or inter-personal relations, but also of a specific period, both in political and academic respects.

I had been in Soviet Moscow, as an exchange student, with a grant for six months, in the first half of 1983. During that time, I established contact with Grigorij L’vovič Permjakov, the outstanding Russian paremiologist, whose works I had become acquainted with before. Permjakov lived some 25 km outside of Moscow, in the city of Žukovskij, which at that time was what was termed a “closed city”, because of some important aviation research center in that town, and, due to this fact, inaccessible for foreigners. At that time, Permjakov (who died shortly after my return to Germany on November 16, 1983) was already in bad health state, due to his head injuries he had suffered during World War II. It must have been some very special experience...
for him to talk to a young scholar, interested in his research probably more than many of his country (w)men, and coming just from that part of the world which ultimately was responsible for his personal state and for the fact that he could not leave his home any more. Yet, he was still able to talk to me by telephone, although sometimes not more than five minutes per day, and we had intensive phone discussions two or three times per week. Talking to him was not easy for me, too: doing this from a hotel was no good idea, since it was well-known that those telephone lines might be intercepted, and I had learnt quite fast that it was wiser to avoid any complications. As a result, after a Russian friend of mine had established contact with him per phone, and I had thus personally been introduced to Permjakov as a trustful person (i.e., I could reliably be identified as “one of ours”), I regularly gave him calls from a post office, and I made personal arrangements with his wife, Nadežda Iosifovna Raša, whom I regularly met at various subway stations in Moscow, to exchange unpublished research material. At that time I had already started to translate his seminal Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom from 1979 into German, an English translation of which unfortunately has never been published, the reception of Permjakov’s seminal work thus having remained limited to our days.

After my return to Germany, at the end of 1983, I was informed about Permjakov’s death by his widow, who gave part of his academic papers to the Institute of Oriental Research, which I later visited, and another part, namely, the entire scholarly part of his personal library, to the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu.

Immediately after hearing about Permjakov’s death, in the beginning of 1984, I made the first plans and negotiations to publish not only Permjakov’s Grammar, but also a whole book with translations from modern Soviet paremiology, at that time almost unknown in the Western world. The two most important books, in that respect, were the Russian collections Paremiologičeskiy sbornik [Paremiological Volume] (1978) and Paremiologičeskie issledovanija, [Paremiological Studies] (1984), both compiled and edited by Permjakov, who had made available to me all articles from the second of these books before they were published. Thanks to my work in Moscow, I had been able to read and make copies, among others, of Arvo Kriikmann’s paremiological works, which were, of course, present in the Lenin State Library in Moscow, where foreign students (of whatever professional rank) had good access not only to literature, but also to affordable copy services.

Hearing about Permjakov’s death, and starting to work on the special volume devoted to the semiotics of the proverb, I decided to contact Arvo Kriikmann from Tartu. For me, at that time, he was not from Estonia, but from the Estonian Republic of the Soviet Union. To write him in Russian seemed to me the most natural thing to do. During my stay in the Soviet Union, I had repeatedly been in contact with official institutions, and I had acquired, at least partly, the phraseology which was necessary and adequate in dealing with such institutions, or in writing letters to private persons, which might eventually be read by such institutions.

This explains, among other reasons, the highly official addresses in my first letter from April 4, 1984, which of course was not handwritten, but typewritten on official university stationary. This also explains why the letter contained appreciating and praising references to the “outstanding Soviet scholar” Permjakov, and to “important works and results from Soviet paremiology”. This also explains why, at the end of the letter, there is an explicit remark as to expecting some answer – this was not, of course, an indirect hint at the addressee’s possible laziness in answering, but a sign to make sure that the letter got through (whatever possible controlling and censoring instances) and arrived safely.

In his handwritten answer two weeks later from April 30 (which was not written on university stationary, but of course sent as a registered letter), Arvo Kriikmann took up the ball, referring to Permjakov, and although his initial address was quite formal, too, his letter would not only end analogically, i.e., with a quest to re-assure receipt, but also with “cordial greetings”, signaling that we were sharing a particular segment of the world. And it was clear to me that our correspondence was not undesired by the official organs, which was not completely unexpected to me, of course, after I had been tolerated in the Soviet Union for half a year, without any scandals, and after I had done my best to meet the official organs’ communicative desires.

After one intermediate letter, Arvo Kriikmann’s answer from September 6, again handwritten on ordinary stationary and sent
as registered mail, already contains the private address “Dear Peter”, starting with a confirmation that he got my letter, and ending with the almost colloquial wish “All the best to you”.

His letter from November 8, handwritten and registered, was just to inform me that his work progressed; on the one hand, this was a personal sign from him that I could trust his promise, on the other hand, this was an official sign saying that no letter, which might have been sent in the meantime, might not have gotten through, or might “wait” at some controlling instances.

I was then completely surprised to receive Matti Kuusi’s letter from November 30, along with a copy of Arvo Krikmann’s text. I had known, of course, that there had always been, for long times, special relations between Russia and Finland, on the one hand, and between Finland and the Baltic states including Estonia, on the other. But I had never been aware of this specific window from (or to) the Soviet Union. And Matti Kuusi’s phrase speaking of the “legal” copy to arrive some time makes me smile still today.

The official version of the text indeed arrived some time later, along with Arvo Krikmann’s official letter from November 30 accompanying it. It was written, of course, in a highly formal way. That can be seen not only from the addresses, but also from the fact that it was typewritten again, not handwritten. It was of utmost importance that the permission to publish it was given just for once, and that no remuneration would come into play, because else VAAP would intervene and ask for enormous money, or even refuse publication. Quite logically, the reference to the paper’s registration at that agency was not missing.

As can be seen, it took approximately half a year, and we had not only established personal friendly relations with Arvo Krikmann, but we had also made successful business negotiations over the Iron Curtain which fell only years later.

It would take many more years till I first met Arvo Krikmann personally. Our written correspondence in the meantime had been episodically, with a peak in December 1999, when we detected our common interests in quantitative paradigms of scientific research, particular with regard to paremiological questions. Our first personal meeting then took place in 2008, in Helsinki, after more than 20 years of our long-distance acquaintance.
Respected Arvo Arnol'dovič,

As you probably know, the outstanding Soviet paremiologist Grigorij L'vovič Permjakov died at the end of last year in Moscow. I wrote a small necrologue in honor of Grigorij L'vovič for the new yearbook Proverbium, and am just now about to publish a special issue of the journal Kodikos/Code – Ars Semiotica. An International Journal of Semiotics devoted to the memory of Grigorij L'vovič. In this volume, I would like to introduce the readers with important works and results from Soviet paremiology (in German or English translation). In this context, I would very much like to re-publish your work “Some Aspects of Semantic Indefiniteness of proverbs”, written in 1978, in German translation.

Before officially contacting VAAP, I would prefer to ask you first if you have any objections against the translation or against a re-publication.

I know, by the way, the following works of yours:

5. К проблематике исследования содержания и мировоззрения пословиц. АКД, Таллинн, 1975.
6. See above (Паремиологический сборник)
7. „K объяснению некоторых семантических механизмов пословиц.” (Abstract)

1 Addressing a person by first name and father’s name is the formal and official version in Russian oral and written communication; it would not be in Estonian. The original letter was written in Russian, however, the lingua franca not only in the Soviet Union, but all other East European countries of that time, so the official address was phrased correspondingly.

2 See fn. in the introductory text.
Рождённый Арок Аракалагов,

Как Вы наверно известно, в конце прошлого века в городе Москве умер известнейший советский учёный-перемещался Григорий Алексеевич.

Известен как исследователь в области грамматики в своих статьях "Превосходство" в те годы в собственном издательстве "Оде Экклесс" - это демиургический журнал "An International Journal of Demiurges" в честь его работы Григория Алексеевича. В этом сборнике вы потесните быть представленными многочисленными работами, результаты которых опубликованы в научных изданиях по теме "демиургический" в неясных и неясных вопросах.

В связи с этим мы очень хотели бы переписать Вас о нашей работе "Некоторые аспекты демиургической неопределенности" за 1998-1999 года и мы хотели бы:

До официального контакта с Вами и предпочитаем быть уверены в том, что у нас есть какие-либо вопросы или противоположные мнения.

И ниже, оставим для Вас заметку:

1. "Ошибки в демиургическом анализе" в издании "Оде Экклесс" - журнал "An International Journal of Demiurges" в честь его работы Григория Алексеевича.
5. "К проблеме мышления в демиургическом анализе" в издании "Оде Экклесс", 1995.
6. См. также "Перспективный обзор".
7. К объяснению некоторых замечательных демиургических посылок.
(Abtract)
Respected Dr. P. Grzybek

Tartu, 30. IV. 84

Some days ago I received your letter with very interesting information for me. Of course, I was familiar with Grigorij L'vovič for a long time, we had a regular correspondence, etc.; therefore I am very glad about any news, which concern attempts to perpetuate his memory, the dissemination of his works and the like. I am also very grateful for your suggestion to re-publish my article on the Semantic Indefiniteness of Proverbs. It goes without saying that I do not have (in principle) any objections against its re-publication, although, strictly speaking, I would suggest to write a completely new article for you, because that work of mine expresses my "mental state" somewhere of the early 1970s, and not at all the present – not even speaking what happened during that time in the fields of linguistic semantics, theory of metaphor, or paremiological theory itself. But I am afraid that you do not have enough time for this, particularly taking into account, additionally, formalities and the like. Otherwise I would be glad to know as soon as possible, how much time will be at my disposal. In that case I could offer immediately an English (or, if this is inevitable, German) text, the editing of which would waste much less time than a solid translation.

In the last years I worked more or less on questions of the geographical distribution of proverbs. To my mind, the works of this period are not of particular interest for you; nevertheless I quote some of them:


So, I will wait for your answer. 

With cordial greetings
Your

Arvo Kriikmann.

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1 A phraseologically correct equivalent of the Russian address "Уважаемый" would be "Dear", but this English translation would also include the much more intimate Russian "Дорогой" which is not used here.

2 Ultimately, this suggestion would result in the German translation and publication of Arvo Kriikmann's important article "1001 Questions on the Logical Structure of Proverbs", which unfortunately has never been translated to English.

3 The most important "formality" at that time was, of course, to get the publication permission from BAAPI (see endnote 1 in the introductory text).
Уважаемый д-р П. Грыйбек!

Несколько дней тому назад я получил от вас письмо с очень интересной для меня информацией. Конечно, я давно был знаком с Георгием Лежневым, т.е. великим географом-политиком, и я, вероятно, тоже выращивал трёх советских людей, касающихся моих успехов по картам, озеленения моих губ и т.д. Всё, что представлялось вам, может быть, маленьким пероформированием, но точно о значении определённых местностей, географии. Рассказывая у меня как пишем (и в принципе) выражения против её переформирований, как, собственное слово, предпочла бы начать статью про нее более вдумчивую, посвящающую это данному тексту название "географическое исследование" — но как начать статью, в статье не начиналось — не плохое, так было, так что, что произошло в этом направлении, включая теории формирования и проч., а также важные географические теории. Но описанный, что касается вас, мне кажется, неправильным, насколько мне известно, и т.д. (В этом, как я всегда бывал в более вдумчивых местах, где есть враги, многие видели, как я всё разумею, в этом случае я мог бы предполагать здесь определённые (или, если это не понятное, мое) текст, который бы были не неправильны, важные моменты указать в коротком письме в этом случае, что слишком перегружен).
Dear Peter,

Finally I succeed in answering your last letter, which I received already two weeks ago. I must say that you made me very happy: I mean your message that you achieved some prolongation in the publication of your issue or volume. From your last but one letter I read that you have such a small amount of time that I absolutely had no chance to write a new article (particularly if one additionally takes into account formalities and the like). Now for me arose some new hope.

You write that you are also planning to re-publish my “new” (that is, again some other old) article on semantic mechanisms of proverbs, which I wrote in fall 1975, but which came out only recently. I again, this time, too, do not have, and this goes without saying, any principle objection, except for, maybe, the following one: as an archivist, I do not like the existence of doubles. I got to know, completely post factum, that the first of my old pre-prints “On Denotative Indefiniteness of Proverbs” will be re-published in the first volume of the new yearbook Proverbium, and for the second volume the publication of its continuation “Some Additional Aspects...” is planned – but the text of these two works largely coincide with the text of my article “Some Aspects of Semantic Indefiniteness...”, which you intend to re-publish. Moreover, there were negotiations of Grigorij L'vovič (via Ben Amos or whom? – I do not know exactly) concerning the publication of some English translations of works from Soviet authors, who were represented in the volume Paremiologičeski sbornik and Paremiologičeskie issledovanija, among them both of my articles, which are mentioned in your letters. Wouldn’t this be too much? On the other hand, a Russian text will most probably be not very readable for a Western reader, so that probably this will not represent a special problem. So I leave this question completely for your decision.

Nadežda Iosifovna¹ just was my guest here, together will here small friend Anja (maybe you also know her, i.e. Anja?). On their way they visited Ñkov and Pečery, and from here they left some days to Tallinn. Cordial greetings to you from them and from myself.

All the best!

Your

Arvo Kriikmann

¹ Nadežda Iosifovna Rašba is the wife of the late Grigorij L'vovič Permiakov.
Пришлю письмо через несколько дней,
но в целом, ни у меня, ни у моих друзей
не было возможности обсудить вопрос о том,
каким образом можно было бы реализовать идею
молодежного движения. Тем не менее, я считаю,
что это важно для нашего общества, и что
мы не должны откладывать решение этой
вопроса неопределенную дату.

Мне кажется, что решение должно быть
новым и неожиданным, чтобы
было понятно, что мы
переходим к новому этапу.

Пожалуйста, дайте мне знать,
что вы думаете по этому
вопросу.

С уважением,
Петр Грыбек
Tartu
8 XI 1984

Dear Peter,

I am glad to inform you that my article is almost finished. Re-printing (i.e., typewriting) and some formalities will need some 10 days or maybe two weeks, and I hope very much that at the beginning of December (or even earlier) it will be on your desk. Judging from my handwritings, it will comprise ca. 30 (typewritten) pages. The article will be in Russian, and most probably it will be entitled "1001 Questions on the Logical Structure of Proverbs". I hope once again that all will end well and I do not cheat you.

With cordial greetings
Your
Krikmann.

P.S. I got both your letters, safely.
30.11.1984

Dr. P. Grzybek

On behalf of Arvo Krikmann I hereby send you his article. A legal copy will arrive some time.

With best greetings

Matti Kuusi
Professor Emeritus
Mr P. Grzybek
Editor of the Journal “Ars Semeiotica”

Deeply respected Mr Grzybek!

In accordance with your suggestion I am sending you my article “1001 Question on the Logical Structure of Proverbs” (39 pages) for publication in the journal “Ars Semeiotica. An International Journal of Semiotics”.

I give my agreement to publish the article once in Russian or German without any remuneration. No promise was made before to publish the given work in any other publication. All rights for the further use of the article will then be returned to the author.

The present manuscript is registered at VAAP (103104 Moskva, Bol’saja Bronnaja, 6-A).

With regards,

Krikmann

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Глубокомыслящий г-н Грибек!

В соответствии с Вашим предложением посвящаю Вам статью "ИОС" вопрос по поводу логической структуры позитивов" (39 с.) для публикации в журнале "Aira Semioticae. An International Journal of Semiotics".

Для согласования редакционной статьи без генерала на генерале или генерале генералов. Рекомендую дать обоснование на публикацию данной работы на одном из журналов. Все права на дальнейшее использование статьи сохраняются автору.

Приведу условия передачи публикации во Всемирную матрешку по авторским правам (ООО ИК "Комик", Большая В Bolshev, 6-4).

С уважением,

А. Кузнецов

Таллин, 16 ноября 2004 г.