

APHORISMS AS SMALL TEXT FORMS: LINGUISTIC, CULTURAL, AND EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

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Annotation

This article excerpt explores aphorisms as concise, semantically dense expressions rooted in human experience, philosophy, and cultural heritage. It traces their historical evolution from Hippocrates' medical aphorisms through medieval and Enlightenment collections, emphasizing their linguopoetic features like metaphor, antithesis, parallelism, and rhythmic structure, as analyzed by scholars such as Jakobson and Lotman. The text positions aphorisms within the broader system of small text forms (e.g., proverbs, epigrams, *sententiae*), highlighting shared traits—conciseness, imagery, multifunctionality—while noting aphorisms' distinct individuality and authorship compared to collective proverbs. It draws on thinkers like Nietzsche, Burkhardt, and Kundera to underscore aphorisms' role in global communication and modern linguistics, including textology and cognitive semantics. In an EFL context, the discussion advocates for aphorisms as pedagogical tools to boost figurative language comprehension, critical thinking, vocabulary, and cross-cultural awareness, citing Lazar and Carter & McCarthy. Overall, the piece establishes a theoretical framework for aphorisms' maximal semantic impact in minimal form, bridging literary, linguistic, and educational domains amid globalization.

Keywords

Aphorisms, Small text forms, Linguopoetics, Semantic density, Genre characteristics, Cultural codes, EFL pedagogy, Cognitive semantics, Discourse analysis, Metaphorical richness

In today's era of globalization, the need to deeply comprehend the intellectual and spiritual heritage of humanity is increasing more than ever. The rapid growth of information flow, the expansion of intercultural communication, and the intensification of various socio-cultural processes have enhanced the importance of short, concise, and conceptually rich forms of expression. One such form is the aphorism, which, since ancient times, has served as a concise and figurative means of expressing generalized conclusions derived from human experience and reflection.

Aphorisms are not only a literary genre but also an important unit analyzed in linguistics, stylistics, and pragmatics. Despite their brevity, they stand out for semantic density, artistic imagery, implicit meanings, and deep conceptual structure. Each aphorism reflects the philosophy of a certain era, the worldview of a people, cultural codes, and national modes of thinking. Therefore, the study of aphorisms is relevant not only as a literary phenomenon but also from the linguistic perspective – as a way to explore semantic potential, aesthetic nature of speech, and linguistic mechanisms of conceptual compression.

Throughout the history of human creativity and linguistic art, short but semantically profound expressions have always held a special place. Hence, analyzing the concept of aphorism, its linguopoetic and genre-specific features, and its relationship with other small-scale text forms is essential in literary and linguistic research. In the introductory part of this dissertation, these issues are addressed, including the concept of aphorism, its linguopoetic nature and genre characteristics, as well as the analysis of aphorism types within the system of small text forms alongside a systematic analysis of small text forms, their definitions, and their structural-functional properties. The research aims to establish a unified theoretical model for understanding how minimal verbal units generate maximal semantic density and operate within literary, philosophical, and everyday discourses.

In the context of global communication, cultural interaction, and rapid information exchange, aphorisms and other compact forms of expression have become important components of the communicative system. Thinkers such as K. Burckhardt³³, M. Kundera³⁴, and F. Nietzsche³⁵ emphasized that an aphorism allows the deepest meaning to be conveyed in the most concise form. Modern linguistics studies aphorisms in connection with textology, cognitive semantics, and discourse analysis. Although numerous studies exist on the place of aphorisms within the linguistic system, the investigation of their linguopoetic features within national-

³³ Kundera, M. *The Art of the Novel*. New York: Grove Press, 1986.

³⁴ Nietzsche, F. *Human, All Too Human*. 1878.

³⁵ Burckhardt, K. *Erinnerungen an Jacob Burckhardt*. Zürich: Oprecht Verlag, 1949.

cultural context and in comparison, with other small-scale genres remains relevant.

The concept, linguopoetic nature, and genre characteristics of aphorisms. Aphorisms have been a subject of philosophical and later philological analysis since ancient times, including the pre-Socratic era.³⁶ The term “aphorism” was first used in Hippocrates’ “Aphorisms,” a long series of statements concerning symptoms, diagnosis, treatment, and the art of medicine. The first aphorism, which serves as an introduction, reads:

“Life is short, Art long, Occasion sudden and dangerous, Experience deceitful, and Judgment difficult...”

This tradition continued through the Middle Ages, including the well-known collection composed in 1066 in Latin verse by Joannes de Meditano reflecting the principles of the Salerno medical school. Another notable collection is that of the Dutch physician Hermann Boerhaave, published in Leiden in 1709, summarizing the medical knowledge of its time.³⁷

From a linguopoetic perspective, an aphorism is a small text form characterized by broad meaning, short structure, generalizing function, and artistic-aesthetic impact. Its key feature is the maximum concentration of meaning, imagery, and expressiveness.³⁸ Aphorisms embody major features of artistic texts: metaphor, antithesis, parallelism, rhythmic structure, and semantic density. Jakobson highlighted that the “poetic function” of language finds its most concentrated form in such structures.³⁹ Lotman described the semiotic nature of aphorisms as a “cultural matrix,” conveying collective experience in a coded form.

Small text forms include aphorisms, proverbs, wise sayings, epigrams, and sententiae. Although all are aimed at conveying meaning in minimal volume, they differ in structure and function. Baranov and Dobrovolsky defined small text forms as “cognitive codes of long-term experience,” emphasizing their formulaic and communicatively efficient nature.⁴⁰

Common features include:

- *Conciseness*
- *Semantic density*
- *Imagery*
- *Multifunctionality*
- *Stability*

³⁶ Toshpo‘latov Z.D. Aforizmlarning janr xususiyatlari va badiiyati: Filol. fan. nomzodi diss. –Toshkent, 2006. – B.3.

³⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/search?query=what+is+aphorism>

³⁸ Mieder, Proverbs: A Handbook, 2004

³⁹ Jakobson, “Linguistics and Poetics”, 1960.

⁴⁰ Baranov & Dobrovolskiy, Idiomy: Kognitivnoe i Pragmaticheskoe Izuchenie, 2008.

Aphorisms differ from other short forms in their high degree of individuality and authorship, as opposed to proverbs, which reflect collective experience.⁴¹

Importance of the Thesis in EFL (English as a Foreign Language). In the field of EFL, small text forms serve as highly effective pedagogical tools. According to Lazar⁴² and Carter & McCarthy⁴³, short literary units enhance learners' abilities in figurative comprehension, lexical expansion, and discourse competence. Aphorisms, due to their metaphorical richness, help develop critical thinking, inferential reading, and cross-cultural awareness. Moreover, their universal themes—life, morality, human behavior—make them motivational materials for classroom interaction. Integrating aphorisms into EFL supports interpretation skills, promotes higher-order thinking, and exposes learners to authentic, culturally embedded English expressions.

Conclusion. Aphorisms and small text forms represent the most concise yet semantically profound units of language. Their ability to convey vast meaning in minimal linguistic space, create vivid imagery, and exert direct impact on the reader sets them apart. Proverbs, sayings, epigrams, and aphorisms encode a people's wisdom, experience, and artistic thinking in compact form; therefore, they play an important role in both linguistics and literature.

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⁴¹ Mieder, Proverbs: A Handbook, 2004.

⁴² Lazar, G. (2003). Literature and Language Teaching. Cambridge University Press.

⁴³ Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (2014). Vocabulary and Language Teaching. Routledge.

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