

## Superstition and Society

Nailya Ivanovna Fedorova and Nailya Nurikhanovna Fattakhova  
Kazan (Privolzhye) Federal University, 18 Kremlevskaya Str., Kazan, Russia

**Abstract:** Superstitious omens were formed hundreds of years ago, however, they continue to prevail and currently to varying degrees, affect people's behavior as well as their expectations. The article discusses the concept of superstition within the frame of specialized literature as well as the performed survey aimed at the modern idea of the phenomenon. The purpose of the survey was to determine the current status of superstitious omen and to identify the attitude to such phenomena of the present generation. The survey included the following questions: what are superstitions do you believe in superstitions? Name the most popular superstitions. The researchers considered the definitions of the phenomenon under investigation obtained by survey. The data obtained allow to divide the existing definitions into two types: an omen as a certain sign and omen as a complex of specific signs and events following it. The researchers also identify key components of the concept. Attention is drawn to the superstitious functioning reasons with this aim the respondents were asked who and what for created the omens? Answers to this question showed that this response indirectly reveals the attitude to the analyzed concept. The most popular superstitious omens, various arguments regarding the current popularity of these superstitions are shown below.

**Key words:** Superstition, anthropology, omens, paremiological fund, generation

---

### INTRODUCTION

In the course of the evolution people are constantly faced with certain phenomena of reality. In the case of a repeated sequence of events the human mind develops a certain regularity of the occurrence of a particular chain of events. It is natural to assume that initially similar observations related to agriculture and meteorology due to the nature of human life in the early stages of evolution. Each of the designated area had special significance for humans: the desire to determine the weather for the day is dictated by the need to plan activities for the next day, farm signs made possible to determine the quality of the harvest and the favorable time for agricultural work.

Superstitious signs that predict a positive or negative outcome of the event, action, perform any act aimed at improving something or prevent something undesirable developed in parallel with the above mentioned signs. For example, signs helping to avoid quarreling to retain or attract happiness.

Such phenomena that reflect the logic of national thinking specificity data verbalization of thoughts could not attract attention of scientists studying linguistics, linguistics, psycholinguistics.

Thus, the researches by Kulkova and Shaimardanova (2014) and Fattakhova and Kulkova (2014) were devoted

to the comprehensive analysis of weather signs. These researches presented syntax constructions that implement forecasting semantics in folk superstitions.

Superstitious signs differ from weather signs and do not contain logical connection between proposition-condition and proposition-consequence. For example, how a fallen spoon or fork can be directly linked to the arrival of the man's house at some time? However, despite the lack of logical connections between the observed and predicted events superstitious beliefs are quite popular and this fact can not leave various researchers indifferent. First of all, researchers have linked the presence of such signs with the level of religiousness of the society and the presence of remnants of the past. In this regard, Dahl (2005)'s definition of superstition: "erroneous, empty, false belief in anything; belief in the miraculous, supernatural, fortune telling, divination, omens, signs, belief in cause and effect where no causal link can not be observed looks quite logical. Popov (2010), reflecting on the notion of superstition, claims that the basis of all superstition is a priori idea of the presence of supernatural forces and the power of such forces. Or the superstition is a relic of religion existed before (Popov, 2010). Popov (2010) also states that superstition is a superstition only for those who does not exist in the system of knowledge and values in which the belief was formulated and was considered true.

All of the above given definitions of superstitious contain an indication of the reasons for their formation and development.

Despite all of the above given definitions of superstition, the analysis of the relationship of superstitious and modern business solutions in various fields is being continued. For example, Gabriel Lepori in his research studies the question of important economic decisions taking conditionality depending on the phenomena observed in the sky: "We conjecture that the occurrence of an eclipse encourages non informational superstitious investors to momentarily give up or delay their purchases of risky assets" (Lepori, 2009).

This study, analyzes the superstitions in the diachronic aspect to analyze the attitude to signs, specifics of their functioning in time continuum.

### **Main part**

**Superstitious belief as a sign:** Belief as a whole can have two interpretations:

- Sign only as a sign, an event that predicts the occurrence of any event
- Sign as the aggregate of any conditions and consequences

Each of these definitions is logical, since on the one hand, the fixation of some fact of reality gives us reason to anticipate another event. Thus, we find that people in the course of their livelihoods notice certain events that seem important to them: black cat, sprinkled salt, fallen spoon, etc. Forecasting in its turn is less clear in terms of symbols because it predicts something indefinite (happiness/unhappiness, joy/sorrow, strife/friendship, etc).

Let us dwell on the situation-condition. If one perceive this situation as a certain sign, it is logical to ask whether all and everywhere know and understand this sign?

We can assume that the same sign may be understood differently in various information systems. This assumption is confirmed by the domestic beliefs of English and Russian peoples. Thus, the Russian people have such belief: take an old broom to the old house do not whistle in the house or there will be no money. And English belief is: never bring old brooms into new houses (remember a broom becomes attached to house always leave the old one behind).

The presence of such opposite beliefs will makes us wonder why the same act is interpreted in different cultures in different ways. Of course, the reason is in the existed tradition of moving to a new home or

representations of mythological beings. Russian culture was characterized by the presence in the house brownie who helped the household and it was necessary to take him with to the new house. English culture gives a different, more rational interpretation of the broom treatment-old thing is tied to the old home. Given arguments allow on the one hand, to reconstruct part of the common perceptions that existed, attitudes governing behavior in everyday life; on the other hand show the importance of the process of moving in the life of different cultures.

At the same time, each of the cultures has unique features: thus many foreigners find strange the belief: do not whistle at home there will not be any money. While Russians find strange the belief: it is said that a new broom should sweep dirt out of a house only after it has swept something in.

The above mentioned differences emphasize that every culture has its own specific transmission codes of various symbolic meanings which is reflected in today's verbal and non-verbal communication that was lit by Mardieva (2014) and Feng and O'Halloran (2012). These beliefs show that in addition to general signs, each culture has its own unique signs which for unknown reasons were important within a particular culture.

On the other hand, taking into account the fact that the Sumerian and Maya writings also represent certain signs which we can not understand now, we can suppose that some signs may also go into history for various reasons and become obscure to the members of other generations. So, pea cooking in the oven is irrelevant now as the cooking in the oven is somewhat rudimentary phenomenon to find a horseshoe to find happiness. Due to the fact that horses are not the most popular kind of transport, the ability to find a horseshoe becomes unlikely.

It is possible that the objects themselves in certain propositions continue to exist but the skill of differentiation of any quality characteristics is lost: Cuckoo cries on a dry tree-frost; who sees a crow in the woods shall see a wolf; first pancake on Christmas Eve is given to sheep.

The belief expressed in recommendation: a spit in the doorstep protects from evil men became impossible from the point of view of the modern home decoration where the spit is not natural in a life of modern man.

The speculation given in this study aim to show that in the course of evolution each culture has set a number of facts of reality which can contain some forecast. This forecast is motivated by some mythological, religious or other views. And as we have seen, the same sign in different cultures may have different meanings.

Paying attention to religion as one of the factors determining the degree of belief in signs is determined by the studies aimed at exploring the interdependence of religion and knowledge. So, the terms of comprehension of science within Islam are presented in the study "impact of the separation of science and religion: review". Researchers "Natural Science is very much related to religion if it is viewed from the positive perspectives without conflict" (Awang *et al.*, 2014).

In addition, formed superstitions carry an emotional charge, positive or negative that can also cause quite a long existence in the minds of the people. Confirmation of this can be Collins (1975, 1981)' researches.

On the other hand, the sign can be understood as a set of some fact of reality and action that should come then as a logical continuation of the first one. Currently, there are plenty of beliefs that predict the onset of a particular action. Most often are beliefs that deal with important human stages of life: birth, marriage, death. Important is the fact that there are beliefs aimed at domestic regulation of human behavior: every dish must be covered at least by a splinter, so that the devil couldn't posses it. Also, one must not knock the keys and put them on the table, this leads to conflicts.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

For the development of this issue we used the method of open questionnaire: respondents were asked a series of questions about the concept of superstition and general functioning in modern life: What is superstition? Why and when superstitions were created? What superstitions De you known? What is your attitude to superstitions? The results ranged from brief answers to major reasoning. The respondents were students of Kazan Federal University at the age of 18-23 years. The total number of survey participants 100 people. We would also note that according to personal data, respondents are Muslim, Christian or do not consider themselves to any confession ant this fact sometimes was reflected in the proposed issues.

## RESULTS

**Superstition and modernity:** It's hard to say which definition is more important for the collective mind and that is more important to notice an event or to think what is forecasts. We took another question: what is the relation to the beliefs today when a person is given a huge amount of information of various kinds.

The respondents were boys and girls between the ages of 18-23 years. We have proposed a few questions

the first of which was "Give the definition of superstition". The results can be divided into two types. Determination of first type firs of all support the existence of superstitions as such, since, it does not contain in its composition characteristics aimed at debunking of this category and attempt to give the most concise and clear definition. We assigned the following definitions to this group: something inexplicable, subconscious belief in something; people's faith in the action of some higher power (not God!) in their fate; belief in superstitions in any signs from above, otherworldly phenomena; folk mystical signs which in my opinion have nothing to do with reality; believing in something unexplainable, magic.

How we can see each of definitions represented contains an indication of the presence of some, uncertain faith into action of some mystical, inexplicable forces. These definitions do not contain objective causes of this believing but contain a presupposition of supernatural forces existence.

Definitions of the second group can be described as rational, reasoned faith in signs, supernatural forces, the repetition of certain rituals, faith without reason and evidence in any consequences (of negative character) following a certain event. Something from which you need to get rid of. An error belief associated with fear, groundless; peoples beliefs of certain meaning; biased and historically established assessing of recurring events (matches) sustainability in nature, life, etc. given by ordinary people.

The definitions of the second group gave an analytical assessment of the basis concept of superstition periodic repetition of actions that have a negative consequences; constant attention to the observed phenomena. Groundless fear is called the cause of beliefs. In our opinion, the latter definition, contains a description of the nature of occurrence of the phenomenon under investigation: there is an indication of the historic nature of the phenomenon, the data on its dislocation and authorship-ordinary people. We dare to assume that under ordinary people were understood people who have no special education that can not observe an objective logical connection between any of the events.

The percentage represented by the definitions can be shown as follows: 85% first type definitions; 15% second type definitions.

For a more detailed assessment of the respondents' ideas regarding superstitions the following question was asked: why were the superstitions created.

The answers were quite contradictory. The most frequent answer was of the following nature: to explain what frightens them; they were created by superstitious

people who believed in various signs, so that everything that happens in life had an explanation; people tried to give an explanation of some inexplicable in terms of logic and common sense phenomenon.

We believe that this argument is quite comprehensive as for the naive person who is not familiar with the laws of functioning and relationship of natural phenomena, it is important to explain to himself and others the cause of a phenomenon because ignorance breeds fear. These responses in our opinion, complement the notion that there is some unreasonable belief in the relationship of events (this is stated in the analysis of given definitions of superstition), we see that the fear caused by lack of knowledge of natural causes of observed events is lying in the basis of a superstition.

The answer “the beliefs were created to warn people against something” shows the desire to comply with certain obligations in order to preserve own or someone else’s safety in advance. This response indicates that a naive person, according to respondents had not only fear but the desire to keep some order in which there was no doubt.

Another group of responses which presents a rational understanding of superstition represents different group of answers: people like to believe in miracles in extraterrestrial beings; grandmother from excessive free time (seriously from paganism when people believed in the weather changes in nature), they were created by supporters of false religion because true religions do not believe in superstition, they are considered wrong to keep people in fear or to explain strange phenomena.

These replies indicate not previously mentioned base for superstitions development false religion. In this case, it should be noted that the response has been received from the representative of Islam, although the survey was attended by representatives of both Islam and Christianity. It is important to emphasize that the question of the relationship of religion and superstition within Christianity and Islam has been considered in the study “Religious and cultural changes in agricultural activities of Padi tribe in Sarawak (Malaysia).” The researchers noted the change in the perception of nature as a result of the change of religion: “these taboos had be abandoned because they now believe that everything that happens is up to God’s will” (Uchoh *et al.*, 2014). In her study Heinich (2014) also analyzed the concept of religion in terms of impact on society and the ability to influence people’s behavior: “Religious analogy seems to be used by some scholars as an exclusive interpretative tool, transforming the research object into a mere projection of their cognitive categories”.

Thus, the concept of superstition besides of the concept of faith, the presence of fear, desire for safety is complemented by the level peoples religiousness.

**Popular superstition of today:** As part of our study, we asked a question, the purpose of which was to determine the most popular superstitions among respondents. The most frequent superstition was associated with the black cat. The responses described the following modifications this superstition: a black cat ran across the road; black cat; one should three times surpass over shoulder or go back when a black cat runs away; if a black cat ran across the road the day will be unsuccessful; black cat brings bad luck; it is bad when the a black cat runs across the road; cat crossed the road; not to cross the black cat’s way; one should throw a ring or coin when he saw a black cat.

Presented variants show all theoretical considerations regarding superstition in general. For example, references to black cats in general without any concretization proposition-investigation indicates that the respondent has a black cat superstition. In this case, we do not find verbalized propositions, corollaries which suggests that in the opinion of the respondent, the proposition has a well-known consequence and does not require verbalization. And in this case even an action of a black cat is not indicated. Black cat brings bad luck is more explicate as in this case, we see that a black cat is a sign that predicts something negative.

The form black cat ran across the road narrows the sphere of superstitious sign and indicates a certain type pet’s activity.

On the whole, given formulations presented a definite sign that can predict some action in the future. The definition of event predicted (misfortune) was given rarely that perhaps shows the confidence of the respondents in the notoriety of this superstition, so that otherwise we would have met some additions, comments.

Forms if one saw a black cat he should throw a ring or coin to surpass three times to over the shoulder or go back when the black cat ran away give some instructions for what to do to prevent any consequences. Therefore, we meet again with an implicit reference to the bad luck which is confirmed by the fact that respondents give the different ways to keep safety.

The question how the sign which was introduced in the Russian culture, many hundreds of years ago is still relevant in the Russian culture is very interesting. Why the change of life of man his lifestyle has not transformed this belief or even erase it from the cultural memory of the people?

In addition, frequent were the following signs: broken mirror, one should not come back, empty buckets; broken crockery to good luck; sprinkled salt.

These signs are associated with fairly common household items that perhaps, indicate that superstitious beliefs that are associated with household objects continue to exist in modern culture.

On the other hand, we can observe a decrease in the degree of fear related with signs as evidenced by the fact that humorous signs are created artificially: if relatives do not call often they are fine; if you forget the rain umbrella you'll definitely get wet. These beliefs has slender logic and some irony about the relationships in the family or household.

### **DISCUSSION**

The presented experimental data and literature review allow us to say that the phenomenon of superstition is quite common among people now, although, many people today know the reasons for the formation and existence of beliefs. We can only assert that the degree of fear changes at observing certain phenomena of reality as evidenced by the appearance of humorous superstitions. The question that is still interesting us: why some superstitions keep functioning for quite a long time and how the selection of popular superstitions is performed.

### **CONCLUSION**

In addition, an important factor in shaping attitudes towards superstition is the religion of the person as each religion has its own relation to superstitions and therefore, it is able to form a person's attitude to the concept of the supernatural in advance.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The study was prepared within the frameworks of implementation of the "Plan of measures on implementation of the Program of improving the

competitiveness of the FSAEI HVE "K(P)FU" among the leading international research-educational centers for the years 2013-2020.

### **REFERENCES**

- Awang, R., K. Yusoff, B.M. Nasir, M.N.B. Ripin, Z. Haron and H. Salamon, 2014. The impact of separation between science and religion: An observation. *Social Sci.*, 9: 37-41.
- Collins, R., 1975. *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science*. Academic Press, New York, Pages: 584.
- Collins, R., 1981. On the microfoundations of macrosociology. *Am. J. Sociol.*, 86: 984-1014.
- Dahl, V.I., 2005. *Dictionary of Russian Language*. Volume 4. Olma-Press, Moscow, Pages: 576.
- Fattakhova, N. and M. Kulkova, 2014. The formation of paroemiology in Russia and Germany. *World Applied Sci. J.*, 31: 935-939.
- Feng, D. and K.L. O'Halloran, 2012. Representing emotive meaning in visual images: A social semiotic approach. *J. Pragmat.*, 44: 2067-2084.
- Heinich, N., 2014. Limits of religious analogy: The example of celebrity. *Soc. Sci.*, 3: 71-83.
- Kulkova, M.A. and M.R. Shaimardanova, 2014. Evaluative conceptualization in paroemiology language (on examples of Russian and English languages). *Life Sci. J.*, 11: 485-487.
- Lepori, G.M., 2009. Dark omens in the sky: Do superstitious beliefs affect investment decisions? [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1428792](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1428792).
- Mardieva, L.A., 2014. From sensual framework of a word to social stereotypes of consciousness. *Life Sci. J.*, 11: 634-637.
- Popov, V., 2010. Nature and essence of superstition. *Analysis of Cultural Studies Magazine* No. 16. <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/priroda-i-suschnost-sueveriya>.
- Uchoh, D.U., S.A. Gapo and N. Lyndon, 2014. Religion and cultural change in paddy farming among native in Sarawak, Malaysia. *Social Sci.*, 9: 335-339.