

**ARTICLES****Aspects of Historical Poetics and Pragmatics of Slavic Charms**

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**Abstract**

Although traditional verbal charms and incantation rituals have received extensive attention in Slavic ethnolinguistics and folklore studies, the need still exists for a more in-depth poetic and contextual (re)analysis of ritual texts, especially of the interrelation between their stylistic, compositional, referential and functional properties. In this context, the article points towards the possible benefits of an integrated pragmatic and (ethno)poetic text analysis that centers on the semiotic concepts of iconicity and indexicality. Through an examination of a number of South and East Slavic samples the authors discuss the various ways in which poetic and figurative stylization and structuring in verbal charms correlates (indexically and iconically) with their meanings and functions within the performative (actional-ritual) and broader sociocultural context. In doing so, they attempt to demonstrate how an analysis along poetic-pragmatic lines may prove fruitful for the revalorization of the poetic, performative, social, and cultural efficacy of charms and incantations as verbal rituals, and hence for a recovery of the sociocultural “memory” of these ritual texts.

Traditional verbal charms and incantation rituals have received extensive attention in Slavic ethnolinguistics and folklore studies as regards their typological, morphological, structural, semantic, and pragmatic aspects.(1) At the same time, the need still exists for a more in-depth poetic and contextual (re)analysis of ritual folk texts, in particular of the interrelation between their stylistic, compositional, referential, and functional properties. Commenting on a renewed interest in the poetics of magical folk texts, folklorist Viktor Gusev, for example, has pleaded for the collaborative folkloristic, linguistic, and anthropological study of the “aesthetic essence” of folklore forms in connection with their functions [Gusev 1998: 365-366; see also Ajdačić 1994]. Slavic ethnolinguists, for their part, have long acknowledged the

fundamental importance of context, function, and (linguistic/cultural) motivation in the interpretation of ritual texts and actions; in particular, ethnolinguistic research in recent years has shown a noticeable rise of interest in the application of insights from linguistic pragmatics in the analysis of verbal (ritual, magic) texts as speech acts or “performatives” [e.g. Tolstaia 1992; Yudin 2001; Levkiewskaia 2002].

In cognate poetics-oriented approaches to language and cultural meaning in Anglo-American 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. Most notable have been studies of 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 and magic folk genres have always formed a privileged focus of these investigations.(2) The present article intends to point out some of the possible benefits of this poetic and semiotic-anthropological framework for a historical and pragmatic reevaluation of verbal charms in Slavic folk traditions. In particular, it will investigate the uses of an ethnopoetic text analysis that centers on the semiotic concepts of iconicity and indexicality. Our discussion will be based on a number of relevant Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, as well as Russian, text samples drawn from “classical” ethnographic and folkloristic literature.

The question that will interest us, then, is this: How can the texts of magical charms (including the descriptions of their performance) be reassessed or reevaluated with respect to, on the one hand, their iconicity and, on the other, their indexicality? Iconicity, as we use this term, bears broadly upon the ways in which analogies between described situation and intended effect (of the magical text/action) are established with poetic means. Indexicality is used to mean the way in which texts “pragmatically” imply (presuppose, entail) the situational, social, cultural, historical context(s) of their performance. As will be clear from the start, these two main aspects are closely intertwined. Indexical and iconic properties in magic charms are in constant interaction with each other. Many features of poetic/iconic design have a pragmatic/ indexical function and vice versa. The ultimate question is: how do “poetics” and “pragmatics” constitute each other in the “indexical iconicity” of verbal charms?

1. Preamble: poetics, pragmatics and the anthropological analysis of verbal-ritual performance.(3)

In a historical- and philological-anthropological reevaluation of Slavic charms that builds upon existing ethnolinguistic and folkloristic research on Slavic traditional culture, the tight interconnection between poetics and pragmatics (defined as the study of functional and motivated meaning in context) may be accepted as a basic premise [cf. Friedrich 1986, 1991]. In charms and incantation rituals,(4) perhaps more than in other verbal folk genres, “saying something” in a particular way and in a particular setting equals “doing something” to a particular end. Here, the tenet of Jakobson that “any significant poetic composition implies a goal-oriented choice of verbal material” [1981d] applies in full force. In verbal-ritual texts such as magical charms one may observe poetic expressions of semantic and pragmatic models/motifs which make up magic “strategies” consisting in goal-oriented “movements of selves and others in the space of cultural values” [Fernandez 1986]. These include “distancing,” “expulsion,” “appropriation,” “familiarization,” “propitiation,” “demonization,” etc.(5) In many cases, moreover, the verbal realization of these motifs refers to, complements, and runs parallel to their expression in actional, objectival and other modes within ritual as a multicode text [in Slavic ethnolinguistics, see Tolstoi and Tolstaia 1978, 1994; Vinogradova 1993].

A textual analysis that meaningfully addresses most aspects of this poetics-pragmatics interface may be based on the principles of ethnopoetics as stated and applied by Dell Hymes [e.g. 1981, 2003]. In essence, these principles involve the consideration of form (stylistic and structural properties), content (referential meaning), and (pragmatic, indexical) functions in terms of each other (covariation). Previous applications of this approach 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, certain Montenegrin proclamation formulae at birth effectuate the movement of newborn male children towards “health” by metaphorically identifying them with wolves [Plas 1998; see also below], while Serbian and Croatian *vučari* songs (performed during processions with a dead wolf) verbally bring about the gradual “expulsion” of wolves, as dangerous “others,” along

spatially and socially marked semantic continua [Plas 1999]. Paraphrasing and summarizing Michael Silverstein's adaptation of Peircean semiotic terminology on this point we may state that such verbal-ritual texts are culturally relevant and ritually performative because they *indexically* (contiguously, metonymically) as well as *iconically* (analogously, metaphorically) represent and entail their performative contexts (including, by extension, the normative social and cultural value system that feeds into these contexts) and the effects intended by their performance respectively [cf. Silverstein 2003: 203ff.; 2004: 627-633]. Thorough textual analysis in this sense becomes particularly important in cases where elements of situational and performative context that should accompany texts in ethnographic or folkloristic description have not been recorded, or were recorded only partially. 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].

Ethnopoetic analyses in which due attention is paid to the covariation of content, form, and function may reveal the articulations of this "indexical iconicity" at any level of the ritual-magic text-in-context. The following interrelated aspects of content, form, and context may then be studied as to their "functional meaning:"

- figurative language use: metaphoric and metonymic predications [the "play of tropes" in the verbal-ritual text: Fernandez 1986];
- 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];
- composition, verse structure, rhythm/meter [Hymes 1981, 2003];
- explicit pragmatic/indexical text markers: deixis, performatives, imperatives, optatives, prohibitives etc. [Silverstein 1976, 1996, 2003; Hanks 1992; Tolstaia 1992; Yudin 2001; Levkiewskaia 2002];
- situational and performative context, in particular the interaction of the verbal text with actional, objectival and other components of ritual [in Slavic ethnolinguistics, see esp. Vinogradova 1993; Tolstoi and Tolstaia 1994; Tolstoi 1995: 63-65];
- metapragmatic discourse: folk interpretations of ritual texts and actions, as well as ethnographers' interpretations of recorded texts [where attested; see Vinogradova 1993, 1995; Tolstaia 2002; cf. Silverstein 1993, Hanks 1993];
- generic intertextuality: elements of implicit or explicit

“dialogue” between (ritual) folk genres [cf. Bauman 1992]; and  
 - 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 a number of South and East Slavic samples, we attempt to demonstrate how an analysis along these lines may prove fruitful for the revalorization of the poetic, performative, social, and cultural efficacy of charms and incantations as verbal rituals, and hence for a recovery of the sociocultural “memory” of these ritual texts. Our ethnopoetic comments 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.

## 2. Iconicity and the imposition of likeness

The “iconic” aspect of indexical iconicity broadly concerns the ways in which poetic and discursive means establish and express analogies or parallelisms between “described situation” and “intended effect.” Metaphoric and figurative language use is of special significance here, as are stylistic devices, composition, verse structure, and rhythm/meter (see above). Pragmatic markers or text elements, however, also come into play. Thus, for example, in a ritual-magic text from Montenegro which is shouted out by the midwife when a male child is born, we have observed how various poetic devices operate to articulate the cultural association of “wolves” with “health,” and simultaneously to act out the metaphorical (and magical) association of the male newborn child with a wolf:

Čuj, puče i narode!	Hear, folk and people!
Rodi vučica <u>vuka</u> ,	The she-wolf has borne a wolf,
Svemu svijetu na znanje,	to the knowledge of the whole world
	[or: all the people],
A <u>detetu</u> na <u>zdravlje</u> !	and to the health of the child!
[Karadžić 1965 [1849]: 311]	

Ethnopoetic analysis in this case started off with the recognition that a formula which had been attested in prosaic linear form (and included as a paremical item in Vuk Karadžić’s collection of proverbs), was in fact a

ritual-poetic text consisting of four heptasyllabic verses, grouped into two distichs. The intended magical effect of “lending health to the child by means of its association with a wolf” is expressed and actualized through parallelistic constructions, chiasmic composition and rhyme that link up “wolf,” “child” and “health” in a triangular relation, with the wolf as a mediating factor. The intentional verbal performance of this relation is enhanced by many other direct and indirect poetic and textual means, one of which is the metaphorical association of the mother with a she-wolf. This type of “proclamation ritual” was performed to ensure children’s lasting health in cases where previous children had died shortly after birth, and in general historical circumstances of high infant mortality in rural areas [for the full analysis, and on how it challenges earlier mythological interpretations, see Plas 1998]. Similar factors motivated the ritual act of pulling newborn children through the so-called “wolf’s mouth” (the skin cut from around a wolf’s jaws), which has been widely attested in the Southern West South Slavic (i.e. štokavian Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian) area. In eastern Bosnia, this ritual act was accompanied by the exclamation of the following formula:

Kako se kurjak lako othranio,      As the wolf has nurtured itself with ease,  
 Onako se i dijete lako othranilo!    So may this child be nurtured with ease!  
 [Dragičević 1907: 491](6)

The charm is built upon complete syntactic parallelism which places “wolf” and “child” on the same level, while the semantics of “nurturing” (*othraniti* “raise,” lit. “feed off”) in the verbal code correlates with the passage through the “mouth” in the object-actional code of ritual. Poetic modeling makes this text into an iconic (figurative) sign and blueprint of the intended magical (perlocutionary) effect of the verbal ritual which, at the same time, elicits the *indexical* (metonymical-causal) link between the two members/verses of the magical distich. The use of correlatives in combination with syntactic parallelism (*Kako ... kurjak → onako ... dijete*), it seems, is a widespread device for achieving such pragmatic effect. In fact, the poetic structure of this formula itself illustrates (i.e. iconically represents!) the double semiotic operation of “indexical iconicity.” Within the text, parallelism, analogy, and metaphor constitute the iconic relation between the two parts of the formula, while the contiguity between the two parts (as they follow each other directly in the “linear” sequence of verbal performance) *iconically* articulates the *indexical* – namely, metonymic-causal – relation between the performance of the text and its intended magical outcome.

Longer medicinal-magic incantations also illustrate the workings of iconicity in various ways. An interesting East Slavic example in this respect is a Russian incantation against impotence (*ot plotskoi nemoshchi*) from a 17th century juridical book:

Встану яз, раб Божий (имя рек) благословясь и пойду перекрестясь в чистое поле под красное солнце, под млад светел месец, под частья звезды, мимо Волотовы кости могила. Как Волотовы кости ни тропнут, не гнутся, не ломаются, так бы и у меня, раба Божия (имя рек), ... фирс не гнулся, не ломился против женския плоти и хоти и против памятных кости. И возьму яз, раб божий (имя рек), свой черленой вяз и пойду я в чистое поле, ажно идет в чистом поле встречу бык третьяк, заламя голову, смотрится на небесную высоту, на луну и на колесницу. И подойду яз, раб Божий (имя рек), с своим черленным вязом и ударю яз быка третьяка по рогу своим черленным вязом, и как тот рог ни гнется, ни ломится от моего вязу, так бы и у меня, раба Божия (имя рек), ... фирс не гнулся, не ломился против женския плоти и хоти и против памятных кости отныне и до веку. [Maikov 1994: 56, nr. 130]

[I, God's servant X will stand up, and asking blessings and crossing myself I will go into the open field under the fair sun, under the bright young moon, under the numerous stars, passing the grave-mound of [the giant] Volot's bones. Just as Volot's bones do not soften, do not bend, do not break, may my, God's servant X's [member] not bend, not break against the woman's flesh and lust and against her [lit.] memory bone. And I, God's servant X, will take my red bough [lit. elm wood] and go into the open field; suddenly a three-year old bull in the open field comes towards me, throws back its head, looks into the heavenly heights, at the moon and at the Wagon [Big Dipper]. And I, God's servant X, will walk up to him with my red [elm] bough, and with my red [elm] bough I will hit the three-year old bull on its horn, and just as that horn does not bend, does not break from my [elm] bough, may my, God's servant X's [member] not bend, not break against the woman's flesh and lust and against her [lit.] memory bone, now and for eternity.]

The text displays a whole series of iconic elements that are pragmatically relevant. First there is the epical introduction,(7) which contains a description of the actions of the speaking subject. This description may, but need not necessarily, correspond to operations in the "actional code": the actual performance of the actions referred to was not obligatory; their enunciation was sufficient in itself. In other words, the magical text acts as a "performative" utterance (in the Austinian sense) in which the words that describe the action may entirely replace the action as its functional equivalent. Moreover, descriptions of actions taking place in the "real" world in these texts often fluidly merge with actions in the "other," magical world. In descriptions of the latter, principles of so-called contagious and imitative magic can be seen to

operate. In this case, the text recounts how the subject beats a bull on the horn with his (metaphorically designated) phallus; obviously, physical contact with the bull's horn must ensure that qualities of hardness and steadfastness are conferred to the male member. These qualities are further enhanced through the simultaneous use of the metaphorical appellation “bough” (*viaz*) and the corresponding association of the male member with a wooden stick. Finally, the text contains the standard formula of magical parallelism *как... так...*, which enables the transfer of properties from one object to the other and whose description of the desired state of the world performs and creates that very state. This is much like the *kako... onako...* construction in our previous text sample.

It is important to stress that such correlative-comparative formulae allow for direct reference to the extratextual object (in this last case, a fantastical bull) and, in this sense, also function indexically. The use of person deixis – pronouns referring to speaker and addressee – also fulfills and further underscores this function [deictics are, after all, referential indexes: Silverstein 1976; Hanks 1992]. In another Russian example, the verbal text addresses actual ants used in the performance of the charm, comparing them to sheep:

Чтоб овцы не дохли, ты сходи в лес да муравьища принеси. Да берешь как муравьища-то, говори: Царь Муравей, царица Муравьица, как вы водитесь да копитеся, да добрых людей не стыдитесь, так же бы мои рыжанюшки, беланюшки, чернанюшки копились, плодились, добрых людей не стыдились. [RZZ: 180, nr. 993]

[To keep sheep from dying, go to the woods and bring back a bunch of ants. Collect the ants saying: Tsar Ant, tsarina She-ant, as you multiply and assemble, without feeling ashamed in front of good people, so may you, my little red ones, white ones, black ones assemble, multiply, without feeling ashamed in front of good people.]

As has become clear, the typical procedure consists in the juxtaposition and rapprochement of descriptions of two actions, the structures of two situations, or the properties of two phenomena, one of which serves as a model for the other. Similar devices of “comparison and correlation” also serve as a blueprint for numerous shorter Russian formulae, e.g. *Стань кровь в ране, как вода в Иордане* “Stand still, blood in the wound, like the water in the Jordan” [PZ: 176]. As seen perhaps most clearly in the Bosnian example treated above, it serves as a hands-on tool for iconic (and indexical) articulation of the intended pragmatic effect of magical texts. In general, however, any charm or incantation formula can be seen to operate iconically to the extent that it



describes, in one or other way, a desired state of the world surrounding the speaking subject.

### 3. Indexicality: textual waymarks to extratextual reality

When the analytical emphasis shifts to the “indexical” side of indexical iconicity, various contextual, intertextual, and metatextual aspects come into view. Three main aspects will be touched upon in this section: the interaction between verbal and other codes in the (situational) context of ritual performance; “metapragmatics” and folk motivations for the text and its performance; and intergeneric dialogue, i.e. meaningful mutual reference between ritual texts and other genres of folklore. We will then look at the ways in which charms may index broader sociocultural and historical contexts.

#### 3.1. Text and action in context: indexical iconicity

First, there is the question of the interaction of the verbal text with the non-verbal components and codes of ritual, a topic already broached several times in our discussion. The verbal components of charms may parallel or complement the ritual act (including manipulations of objects, by persons) to various degrees, ranging from non-correspondence to complete “synonymy”. Thus, the plot or situation of the verbal text may poetically be constructed as a metaphor or icon of the ritual act (i.e. the actional co-text), or the verbal text may form a partial or complete description or “glossing” of the ritual act [a point investigated on several occasions by Slavic ethnolinguists, e.g. Vinogradova 1993; Tolstoi and Tolstaia 1994]. Also, the connection between the verbal text and its actional co-text (and situational context) may be signaled by the use of deictics. The “iconic” text samples discussed above are also “indexical” in this sense because their intratextual parallelisms (comparisons, correlations stated in the text) simultaneously form icons and indexes of the parallelism between text and extratextual reality, thus setting up a direct link with the text’s performative context. Closely related to previously cited “correlative” bipartite formulas of the type “as X, so Y” are formulas of the type “not X, but Y,” which usually consist in the description of an actual action and its subsequent purposeful magical re-orientation or reconceptualization by the speaking subject. The following, for example, is a highly poetical text, the function of which is to ensure love and happiness for women in their marital life. The text

sample also includes the introductory (metatextual) instructions for the charm's practical use:

Как спать с мужем ляжете, да как начнет он - - -, говори потихоньку, чтоб он не слышал: Не похоть отдаешь, а сам свое тело мне, рабе Божьей (имя). Предаешь тело в тело, кровь в кровь, сердце в сердце, любовь в любовь. Аминь. [RZZ, nr. 818, 156]  
 [When you and your husband lie down to sleep, and when he begins to [...], then say quietly, without him hearing you: not your lust, but your own body you give to me, God's servant X. You surrender body into body, blood into blood, heart into heart, love into love. Amen.]

Parallelism between text and extratextual reality, however, is not necessarily expressed through the use of particular formulaic syntactic constructions. This is illustrated by the following charm from the Kirov region aimed at ensuring the fertility of cattle. Its record also contains fragments of metatextual/metapragmatic (8) commentary as attested by the informant:

Мужики стайку обкладывали: - Давай, Павловна, носи всяких щепочек на оклад. *Чтоб скотина велась, чтоб каждая коровушка мастью велась - и черная, и красная, и всякая.* Чтоб какую ни привела, каждая велась. Для этого щепки кладут сосновые, еловые и разные. [RZZ, nr. 994, 180].  
 [The men would lay [wood chips] around the stable: - Come on, Pavlovna, bring all kinds of wood chips to lay in a circle. *So that the cattle may multiply, so that cows of every color may calve - the black one, the red one, and every one.* So that whichever color she calves, may thrive [and multiply]. Therefore they lay chips of pine wood, fir wood, and various other wood.]

### 3.2. Metatext, motivation, and metapragmatics: indexes of normative stance

The last two text samples direct our attention to the problem of folk motivations and the metapragmatic discourse of charms and to the question of the relationship between the magical text and its "metatexts." Due analytical attention to indexical relations in charm performance may shed further light on the ethnographic conditions in which magical texts have been recorded [as well as on the "folk worldview" itself that frames the attestation of such texts: cf. Vinogradova 1995; Tolstaia 2002]. In the last example, the rendition of discourse by the ethnographer-folklorist and/or editor of the charm collection constructs the second sentence (italicized) as the verbal charm "proper" and the surrounding discourse as a descriptive, metatextual, and metapragmatic "frame" for the charm. At the same time it unites the two as co-texts in a higher-order text of the

genre “written folkloric record.” While it is questionable whether this editorial rendition accurately conveys the boundaries between the original charm text and its metatextual environment, it is clear that the described ritual-magic act as a whole consists in the verbal and object-actional equation of wood chips (of various kinds) with cows and calves (of various colors). A closer look at the structure and composition of descriptive discourse in its entirety (i.e. the published folkloric record that unites the text and metatext of the charm) discloses several orders of communicative and interactive interpersonal relations, indexed by that very structure and composition, each of which entails corresponding metapragmatic frames or stances with respect to the verbal charm “proper”:

- the communicative relation between the woman informant (named as “Pavlovna”) and the ethnographer-folklorist to whom she addresses a description as well as a motivation of ritual practice (i.e. a metapragmatic commentary in the last sentence); the act of “reporting,” in which the reporter may or may not have modeled her narrative to the perceived needs of the addressee – in this case, the folklorist as a passive non-participant in the ritual described;

- the “present” metatextual stance of the informant towards past ritual action and discourse in which she was a participant (i.e. a relation between a self in the present and a self in the past), a fact which grants authority to her status as informant and lends reliability to the direct quotation provided (of discourse addressed to her by others, as well as of the magic formula in question) as well as to the “folk motivation” offered (at the moment of attestation);

- the interactive relation between two types of participants in the described ritual performance, which forms the direct co-textual (within the reporting discourse) and contextual (in the related performative situation) frame of the verbal charm proper; here, the quoted verbal instructions of the men to the woman in itself metapragmatically frame and motivate the ensuing magical formula (performed also by the men), while the sentence immediately following the charm may be regarded either as an extension of the original formula (misread in that respect by the folklorist/editor) or as an explicating paraphrase by the informant;

- ultimately, the interpretive metatextual relation between the editor and the published folkloric record and its particular visual rendition.

Verbal instructions on how to perform charms or incantations represent a particular genre of folkloric metatexts. Usually they consist

of short recommendations such as “Repeat three times and spit after each time” or “Speak over the potion, then let the person drink.” Complex magical procedures have also been attested, e.g. with instructions to catch a frog, leave it in an ants’ nest to be eaten away, and retain from its carcass certain bones that will serve as ingredients in love magic. Such descriptions usually pertain to actions that are not represented in the verbal texts of the charms themselves. These highly interesting and informative metapragmatic texts of East Slavic and South Slavic folk magic, it seems, have not yet been the object of special study. One of the main problems with such enterprise is that it is hard, especially in older folkloric collections, to distinguish between “original” folk discourse as recorded from informants and the folklorist’s own descriptions and explications of the verbal ritual in question as they appear in metatextual commentaries. More often than not, collectors of folklore materials have omitted indications as to the exact provenance of the metapragmatic instructions and recommendations included with verbal charms. In the case of texts of charms and incantations from old notebooks written by the “bearers of folklore” themselves, however, it is reasonable to assume that the instructions are provided directly by the performers of the charms and that they describe – and thus also transmit – the actional part of the charm or incantation ritual. Even then, these performers may have omitted parts of the verbal performance that they themselves considered obvious, such as customary introductory prayers. As our discussion above of the folkloric record from the Kirov region demonstrates, one should be careful to at least take into account the different possible communicative and interactional layers indexed by the texts or text records. Acknowledging the inevitable formative influence of folklorists and editors on informants’ performances or reproductions of the magical text, and including their commentaries and metatextual monitorings in an evaluation of the integral textual “space” of the resulting folkloric record, may certainly hold more interpretive value than preemptively excluding such “second-order” interlocutors and co-participants from analysis. Taking the latter course would yield nothing more than the delusion of dealing with an “original and undiluted verbal expression of traditional folk culture.”

Apart from this, there are other, formally distinct types of “metapragmatic formulae” which have the verbal charm itself as their object, framing and articulating its performance on the metalevel while at the same time forming a further constituent part of the ritual text. These are, as it were, “charm enhancing charms.” The following type of

confirmative formula, for example, is frequently found in the final part of Russian charms:

Словам моим ключ и замок; Что переговорила или недоговорила, что мастер переучил или недоучил, слова мои будь наперед поставлены. [e.g. RZZ, nr. 557]  
 [My words be under lock and key; Should I have said aught too much or too little, should my teacher have taught me [to speak] too much or too little, then let my words take precedence [lit. be put forward].]

Interestingly, written charms and incantations that contain such final formulae are not infrequently found at the end of charm notebooks or collections [A. L. Toporkov, oral communication]. The formulae may thus function as “closures” not only for individual texts of charms, but for entire corpuses as well.

Finally, referring back to the range of iconic-indexical relations between verbal text and non-verbal components in charm and incantation rituals, we may take note of the peculiar metapragmatic potential of charm texts *themselves* to incorporate the rules and the actional context of their performance. This is best illustrated by those types of ritual-magic procedures in which the text runs parallel to the action, progressively describing it and stating its magical aims by explicating its metaphorical meaning. Thus, many Slavic incantation rituals involve acts of tying or knotting that are “glossed” by the verbal charms accompanying them. Serbian incantations used by women to gain control over their husband’s or lover’s sexual potency present a salient example. One such spell from northeastern Serbia requires spinning a thread of about 15 centimeters from hemp unto which the woman has previously transferred some of her partner’s semen after sexual intercourse. The woman then progressively ties nine knots in the thread while declaiming the following charm:

Zavezujem konac.	[I am tying the thread.
Ne vezujem konac već vezujem X;	I am not tying the thread, I am tying X;
vezujem mu pamet, vezujem mu misli,	I am tying his mind, tying his thoughts,
vezujem mu ruke, vezujem mu vene,	I am tying his hands, tying his veins,
vezujem mu k[urac] i m[uda].	I am tying his c..k and his b...s.
Kada drugoj bude iš‘o -	When he goes to another woman-
k[urac] nek mu splasne!	May his c..k droop!]
[Divac 1989: 88]	

From the perspective of historical-pragmatic text analysis, what is important to note here is that information and instructions concerning the accompanying actional components of ritual performance (apart from the actional prelude to the charm) are encoded largely by the verbal text itself. It describes the concrete manipulation of the thread and measures its verses or verse parts (syntagmata of *[za]vezujem* + object) by the tying of individual knots in the actional code, the number of knots corresponding to the number of object-accusatives mentioned in the text. Apart from this, the text obviously contains the necessary thematic and motivational reference to sexual activity, male sexual (im)potency and (the prevention of) adultery, which conveys the aim of the entire incantation. In this coding of performative rules by the verbal text, two orders of indexical iconicity can be seen to operate. The text does not merely connect to its performative context by describing, translating, and co-constructing the deployment of the “actional text” (of which it forms a structural metaphor); most importantly, it does so both on the “token” level – i.e. for this particular instance of its performance, as recorded by the ethnographer-folklorist – and on the “type” or generic level, indexing the performative rules for the ritual genre in question. The latter sign function is distinctly metapragmatic and normative: the text in this capacity holds a blueprint for its future performances, in which the corresponding object-actional components and surroundings – the performative (as well as social) context in which it is to be embedded – can at least partially be (re)constructed and generated from the formulaic expression in the verbal code.(9)

### 3.3. Intertexts: indexing cultural values through the dialogue of genres

Apart from metatextuality, there are also intertextual relations to be taken into account. Dialogical relations between verbal charms and other genres of verbal folk culture represent a further aspect of indexicality. This aspect is interesting in itself, but also informative with respect to the broader “social universe” in which these texts originate and operate. To illustrate this we turn to the realm of protective magical measures against wolves in Bosnian / Croatian / Serbian folk tradition. A widely attested traditional protective measure against wolves and other wild animals in the Western Balkans is the periodical prohibition of domestic textile works, notably operations with wool (as a metonymic sign of sheep), often accompanied by the ritual shutting or closing of objects that are associated with mouths and teeth. Carding boards figure most

prominently among these ritualized objects. These are the pairs of wooden blades set with iron or copper “teeth” between which wool is combed to disentangle it for spinning – and which are hooked up together after work. In this context, consider the variants of an imperative charm formula in heptasyllabic verse form, attested in southwest Serbia and eastern Montenegro. It is traditionally shouted by herdsmen on Christmas Eve as they or the mistress of the house hook up the cards after the cattle have been driven through between them:

Sklopi baba grebeni!  
[Vlahović 1933: 51]

[Shut your cards, woman!

Sklopi baba grebeni,  
zubi su ti medeni!  
[Kostić 1988-89: 76];

Shut your cards, woman,  
your teeth are made of copper!]

The attestation of the first variant from Montenegro is accompanied by the ethnographer’s note that the ritual is performed “so that *likewise the wolf would shut its jaws* when he comes among the sheep,” which elucidates the figurative and pragmatic meaning of the text – i.e., its indexical-iconic function – in unequivocal terms. The second “verse” in the extended second variant represents a description of the (“woman’s”) cards as “toothed” objects. The metaphoric association “cards – jaws” is additionally 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 a parallelistic linking of *Sklopi* and *zubi* in the two heptasyllabic lines that make up the distich. As part of the broader ritual context of its performance, the formula contains obvious reference to carding as a traditional female domestic activity and to the ban on carding as one of the most frequent calendrical prohibitions observed against wolves. 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.

So far, nothing much is new. The sociocultural meaning of this ritual-magic formula, 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],(10) and *Uzrok babi grebeni* [The cards are the woman’s [pej.] reason] (followed by the clarification *da ne* FOLKLORICA 2009, Vol. XIV

*može íci na grebenanje* [for not being able to go out to card]; *ibid.*: 296). Here we have a clear instance of intergeneric dialogue, in which the ritual-magic and the paremical text (intertextually) “model” and (metatextually) “comment upon” each other. The two share the motif of “not working with the cards” as an instantiation of “inactivity.” This “inactivity” is played out in its neutral sense of “exemption from work” in the protective magic charm and in the pejorative sense of “laziness” in the proverb. Considered in its intertextual and metatextual ramifications, the ritual-magic text under discussion encodes sociocultural information that reaches beyond the direct (situational) context of ritual as goal-oriented, multi-modal (verbal, object-actional, personal etc.), semiotic action. Thus, apart from serving as a poetically optimized magical speech act for protection against wolves, the formula ultimately represents an index of the cultural value attached to female domestic work and the ritual responsibility that is correspondingly assigned to women. It also conveys the idea of a double normative (and “gendered”) sociocultural valuation of “inactivity” as “authorized exemption from work” vs. “unwarranted laziness.”(11)

#### 3.4. Magic charms and/in history: social hierarchies and symbolic geographies

Charm and incantation texts, as has become increasingly clear, contain an abundance of pointers to the situational, social, cultural, and historical contexts of their performance. As a further aspect of socio-historical context, charms also provide materials for the description and, from the performer’s point of view, construction of social hierarchies. One way in which social hierarchies can be presented in charm texts is as parallels to hierarchies in the animal world. A typical example is the following Russian text, which was pronounced before entering court or before confronting the authorities: *Вставайте, волки и медведи, и все мелкие звери, лев-зверь сам к вам идет* [Stand up, wolves and bears, and all small wild animals, the lion-beast himself is coming to you] [Maikov 1994: 154, nr. 348]. Evidently, by comparing himself to the “king of animals” (the lion), the utterer of the charm placed himself at the top of the social ladder, thus hoping to bend the authorities to his will. Another formula pronounced in similar contexts involves the comparison of the performer to a wolf: *Я волк, ты овца; съем я тебя; проглочу я тебя, бойся меня!* [I am wolf, you are sheep; I will eat you; I will swallow you down, fear me!] [Maikov 1994: 155, nr. 353]. No less interesting and indicative are enumerations of categories of “dangerous”



people, encounters with whom are considered to be unfavorable on account of the evil eye and other afflictions. These most frequently included are priests and monks, dissipated (“loose-haired”) girls and women, witches, and persons with peculiar (anomalous) physical characteristics. In essence, these lists inventory the people that were “alien,” “strange,” or “suspect” from the perspective of traditional peasant society in a given period of history. A case in point is the following text, in which the Archangel shoots at wasting disease and illnesses:

[...] напущенныя от мужика, от волхуна, от кария, от чорныя, от черешныя, от бабы самокрутки, от девки простоволоски, от еретников, от клеветников, от еретниц, от клеветниц, от чистых и нечистых, от женатых и неженатых, от глухих, от слепых, от красных, от черных, от всякаго роду Русских и не Русских, от семидесяти языков. [Maikov 1994: 82, nr. 211]

[...] inflicted by man, by a sorcerer, by brown eyes, by black eyes, by cherry eyes, by the licentious woman, by the dissipated girl, by evil wizards, by slanderers, by sorceresses, by slanderers [f.], by clean and unclean folk, by the married and unmarried, by the deaf, by the blind, by the red, by the black, by any kind or race, Russian and non-Russian, of the seventy nations [of the earth].]

Finally, as indexes of historical context in their own right, one may consider references to monarchs and other rulers (such as Ivan the Terrible and the pope of Rome) in incantation texts. From the same texts, it is easy to reconstruct lists of historically important towns and cities (for the East Slavs: Moscow, Kiev, Novgorod, Murom, Kazan’, Astrakhan, etc.), as well as the sacral geography of (Orthodox) Christian world view, viz. Palestine, Jerusalem, Zion, Sinai, Tabor, Golgotha, Kiev as the religious center of Rus’, etc. [see Yudin 1997].

## Conclusions

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 efficacy of verbal-ritual activity and traditional oratory [Silverstein 2003: 203, 2004: 627-633; cf. Tambiah 1985: 155-157; Parmentier 1993: 281-284]. In technical poetic-performative terms, indexical iconicity consists in the intended figurative (iconic, metaphoric) and implicative (indexical, metonymic) relation between the poetic structuring and stylization of the denotational verbal-ritual text on the one hand and, on the other, the FOLKLORICA 2009, Vol. XIV

“interactional text-in-context” and the strategy of ritual performance. By extension indexical iconicity includes the cultural concepts, valorizations, ideologies and world views that inform the ritual text [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 [cf. Bauman & Briggs 1990: 79], “indexical iconicity” can usefully serve as an overarching concept for the various ways in which poetically stylized language in ritual performance – in further covariation and interaction with other semiotic modes of expression – purposefully articulates socio-cultural values and strategies, or represents “discursive cultural action.” As such, it may incorporate ethnolinguistic and ethnosemiotic analyses, as well as broader poetic- and symbolic-anthropological views on ritual as the (poetic) acting out of culturally relevant metaphoric predications. These, 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]].(12)

One of the original objectives of this paper was to show how ethnopoetic “indexical-iconic” analyses and revaluations of verbal charms may prove fruitful for the recovery or reconstruction of elements of (situational, performative, social, cultural) context which have not been recorded alongside texts in ethnographic description. Does a poetic-pragmatic reanalysis of these texts help to bring hidden aspects of the context to light, or does it enable us to further critically evaluate folk motivations and existing ethnographic descriptions of verbal charms? Even with our cursory discussion of less than a fraction of the available empirical material, we hope to have shown that such revaluations may indeed help to qualify and reassess the attested contexts and metatexts of verbal charms, depending on the degree of their (in)congruence with the poetics and pragmatics of the magical text itself. In many cases, it may remain unclear whether the available contextual and metatextual information was provided by the original performer or a “folk” informant (in which case, in fact, it also becomes co-text), or whether it constitutes the ethnographer’s or folklorist’s objectifying explanation. Due sensitivity to mechanisms of indexical iconicity and to metapragmatic indexicality in particular may unveil aspects and dimensions of sociocultural and historical context which are encoded in the style and structure of formulaic discourse itself, and which thus form part of the sociocultural memory of these magical texts. Attentive poetic-pragmatic readings of charm and incantation records may also disclose various

layers and orders of communicative and interactive relations that help to widen our discourse-analytic and sociohistorical perspective on the folkloric and folkloristic (co)construction of the “traditional ritual-magic text”.

In light of this, Slavic charms and incantations represent a challenging and rewarding corpus for further in-depth investigation into the value of ritual-magic texts as poetic artifacts and as documents of social history. If nothing else, the material presented in this paper has provided us with the opportunity to stress and reiterate the importance of studying the poetics *and* pragmatics (i.e. the pragmatic poetics) of texts for an apt understanding of their performative and sociocultural contexts. Because of their obvious practical and goal-oriented nature, magical charms represent a privileged site for the observation of the functional interplay of poetic form and content as situated in, and connected to, contexts. Moreover, this manner of analysis of magical texts may ultimately provide insights into the pragmatic workings of verbal discourse that are applicable to the study of other speech and literary genres.(13)

#### NOTES

1 See e.g. Toporov 1993; Radenković 1996a-b; Yudin 1997, 2001; Tolstaia 1999a-b, 2005; Vel'mezova 2004; Toporkov 2005; Agapkina 2005; Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska 2007. In Anglo-American scholarship, see Conrad 1991, 1999; Ryan 1999.

2 Among others, see Hymes 1972, 1981, 2003; Bauman 1977, 1992; Tambiah 1985; Fernandez 1986; Bauman & Briggs 1990; Silverstein 1976, 1996, 2003; Duranti & Goodwin 1992; Silverstein & Urban 1996.

3 The theoretical-methodological framework described here is largely similar to the one provided in a previous article on South Slavic ritual folklore, see Plas 2006: 249-253.

4 We will make no special analytical distinction here between “charms” and “incantations”, loosely reserving the term “incantation” for more elaborate ritual-magic texts, or procedures that may contain several shorter “charm” texts.

5 For an ethnolinguistic treatment of Slavic apotropaic texts which employs a somewhat different terminological apparatus but basically adopts a similar pragmatic perspective, see Levkiewskaia 2002.

6 This and the previous text sample are drawn from the empirical corpus of a larger research project on wolf symbolism in Western Balkan ritual folklore, an outline of which is given in Plas [2003].

7 The introduction is usually of the type “Стану я, раб Божий, благословясь, пойду перекрестясь...”

8 The terms “metatextual” and “metapragmatic” will be used as interchangeable synonyms here, metatextual discourse being also metapragmatic insofar as it concerns aspects of the use or performance of verbal text – by speakers/performers – in actional contexts, rather than just being “text about text”.

9 To be clear, it is not our intent here to downplay the meaningful role of other object-actional components of the incantation ritual which the verbal text does not describe or index, and which, in this case, were conscientiously recorded by the ethnographer. Thus, in a second phase of the ritual, the woman pulls the knotted thread through a tube she has crafted from elderwood for the purpose. She then stops both ends of the tube with sheep’s dung while uttering the formula “Zatvorila sam povez,/ i seme/ ovčijom balegom/ kurac nek mu smekša!” [“I have closed what has been tied up,/ and the semen/ with sheep’s dung/ may his cock become slack!”]. The tube is eventually hidden and left to be forgotten above the front doorpost of the house [Divac 1989: 88]. Note that our commentaries as to the first verbal part of the ritual apply just as well to the formula performed in this second part.

10 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”.

11 For additional (technical) commentary on the mechanism of mutual intertextual borrowing between these two text types, see Plas 2006: 259-261.

12 Incidentally, 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. Tolstaia 1992, Yudin 2001, Levkiewskaia 2002]. As Silverstein [1979: 208-216] as well as Bourdieu [1982: 25n4, 69-73] have reminded us, “illocutionary force” is not intrinsic to the words of the performative utterance as such. This performative quality consists in the utterance effectively indexing situational and sociocultural context, in particular: 1) the framework that organizes the relations between the

participants in communicative/discursive interaction and gives authority to the performer to use texts authoritatively; and 2) the set of poetic/pragmatic (and linguistic) rules by which the text can be judged to be a fitting ritual-magic tool for the given situation.

13 Thus, similar pragmatic goal-oriented uses of poetic and rhetoric devices may be observed in political-ideological speeches or pamphlets, to name just one productive genre in the Slavic world. On indexical iconicity in political rhetoric, see especially Parmentier [1993]

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