

# DILIGENCE BRINGS DELIGHT

A Festschrift in honour  
of Anna T. Litovkina on the  
occasion of her 60th birthday

Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt  
Melita Aleksa Varga  
Wolfgang Mieder (eds.)

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**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**  
JOSIP JURAJ STROSSMAYER UNIVERSITY OF OSIJEK

## ANNA T. LITOVKINA



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## Preface

Even though Anna T. Litovkina is only turning sixty on July 29, 1963, she has gained an international reputation as a scholar of folklore, linguistics, and paremiology. The list of her publications contains at least fifteen authored or co-authored books, eleven co-edited volumes, and way over one hundred scholarly articles. One wonders how she has been able to amass such an impressive scholarly record in addition to her heavy teaching loads at various Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, and Kazakh universities. All of this untiring labor has now earned her a professorship in the Department of English Language and Literature at the J. Selye University in Komárno, Slovakia, where she will doubtlessly continue to present exciting lectures in her vigorous teaching style to her eager students. Obviously, she will also add much life to professional conferences in Europe and beyond, with the scholarly world looking forward to many additional scholarly publications.

All of us who know Anna T. Litovkina personally will find it difficult to realize that she has now reached the end of six decades of a most fulfilled and successful life. Considering her energetic and vivacious personality, one might well think of the proverb “Life begins at forty” that had its beginning with Walter B. Pitkin’s best-selling book *Life Begins at Forty* (1932) that was popularized by the 1935 motion picture starring Will Rogers. After all, how could she possibly be older than forty? Realizing that she is world-renowned for her groundbreaking work on anti-proverbs, it would be best to state the modification “Life begins at sixty” in her case. Not that she has not experienced a most active and fulfilled life thus far, but clearly she will continue her engaged scholarly career for many years to come.

Of course, there is another age-related proverb that fits her perfectly without having to be tempered with, namely “Age is just a state of mind” that has been traced back to 1930. It is unimaginable that Anna T. Litovkina is in any shape or form thinking about getting older. As a

trained psychologist with an expertise in goal setting, motivation, and time management she will not become a victim of procrastination but rather push forward with vigor and commitment. Perhaps she will even think of John Lennon's short song from 1980 that begins with the two proverbs mentioned thus far: "Life begins at forty / Age is just a state of mind." But as a folklorist, she would naturally be reminded of a third proverb since all good things come in threes: "Age is just a number." This relatively new piece of proverbial wisdom was first recorded in 1957 and expresses the wish to stay young and healthy as long as possible or, even better, to forget about getting old altogether. The following lines from Carl Joseph Roberts' proverb poem "Age is just a Number" (2015) suit Anna T. Litovkina very well:

*Age is just a number  
So refuse to act your age  
Pick the path that you take  
The one that's best for you  
Do all the things that you want  
And begin to have some fun.*

All of this fits Anna T. Litovkina's self-image that she has expressed with a youthful picture on her personal website: "I am energetic, goal-oriented, passionate, enthusiastic, efficient, and reliable. One of my favorite proverbs is: Work hard and play hard. I am a great leader and motivator for people around me" (<https://hu.kinkedin.com/in/annalitevkina>). Of course, her well-chosen proverb "Work hard and play hard" also brings to mind the modern proverb "Go big or go home". Working hard and reaching for new knowledge without letting go is exactly what characterizes Anna T. Litovkina as a most remarkable scholar, professor, colleague, and friend.

Wherever she has taught or participated in conferences, Anna T. Litovkina leaves an unforgettable impression. Luckily for the academic world, she does not mind long trips to participate in meet-



ings, to do research, and to teach. She has added life and enthusiasm to conferences in Europe and the United States. And she has taught at Hungarian, Slovak, Polish, and Kazakh universities. Her research trips started with a Fulbright scholarship at the University of California at Berkeley. In later years she was engaged in research at the University of Houston, Purdue University, the University of Vermont, and others. In Europe she worked in libraries at Oxford, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Florence, and numerous other places. Doubtlessly she will continue with her impressive international schedule. Being outgoing, pleasant, and engaging, she has been welcomed everywhere and will always be received with enthusiasm and excitement.

Having described herself as a motivator and innovator, she has surrounded herself with colleagues and friends to produce books and articles on folklore, linguistics, and paremiology, with an emphasis on humor studies and especially on proverbs and anti-proverbs. Whatever project she undertakes, it will be brought to fruition with colleagues and friends at her side or alone in her study at home. As such, she has had a major impact on paremiology in particular, making her a respected, admired, and treasured friend.

The attached publication list bears witness to her multifaceted scholarly production as a collegial team player or on her own. There is no need to mention many of her books in this short preface, but here are just a few English titles to illustrate her incredible productivity: *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs* (1999, with Wolfgang Mieder), *A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away* (2000, conceived as a successful foreign language textbook), *Once Upon a Proverb: Old and New Tales Shaped by Proverbs* (2004), *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs* (2006, with Wolfgang Mieder), *Anti-Proverbs in Contemporary Societies* (2007, edited with Carl Lindahl), *Humor and Folklore* (2010, edited with Péter Barta), *Linguistic Shots at Humour* (2010, edited with Péter Barta), *Hungarian Humour* (2012, edited with Judith Sollosy, Péter Medgyes, and Dorota Brozowska), *Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* (2015), *Stereotyped Lawyers and Politicians in Anglo-American Jokes and Anti-Proverbs* (2016), *Women*

*through Anti-Proverbs* (2019), *Marriage Seen through Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* (2019, with Wolfgang Mieder), and *Anti-Proverbs in Five Languages. Structural Features and Verbal Humor Devices* (2021, with Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Péter Barta, Katalin Vargha, and Wolfgang Mieder)

Is Anna T. Litovkina a workaholic? Perhaps, but if so, she is a very happy person with a positive obsession for her scholarly endeavors. Yes, as she has said, she works hard but also plays hard. She knows how to go on a hike, to enjoy a party, and to have fun. She does what she undertakes because she loves it! She serves the “fröhliche Wissenschaft” (joyful scholarship) and spreads good will throughout the academic community.

Realizing that her “Diligence brings delight”, as the proverb says, all of us represented with contributions in this *Festschrift* wish our beloved colleague and friend Anna T. Litovkina the very best on her sixtieth birthday. We applaud her accomplishments, we are looking forward to additional scholarship from her, and we thank her for enriching us all by being such a wonderful and exemplary person.

Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt  
Melita Aleksa Varga  
Wolfgang Mieder

**The world through  
proverbs and  
anti-proverbs**



SABINE FIEDLER

## “KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON” – FROM WARTIME SLOGAN TO ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY MODIFIED PROVERBS

**Abstract:** This paper deals with the origin and present use of the expression *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON*. Originally a slogan created to dispel people’s fears before the Second World War, and rediscovered in 2001, it has evolved into a proverb that is now used with manifold modifications in everyday life and has been borrowed by several languages. The paper presents examples in words and pictures from around the world (e.g. *KEEP CALM AND DRINK TINTO DE VERANO*, *KEEP CALM AND LOVE PARIS*). It also takes this phenomenon as a point of departure to discuss criteria for delimitation between phraseological subtypes such as proverb, slogan, catchphrase, cliché and meme.

**Keywords:** proverb, modification of phraseological units, anti-proverb, wartime slogan, catchphrase, cliché, intertextuality, borrowing, anglicism.

### 1. Introduction

Phraseological units are lexicalized polylexemic linguistic units which are characterized, in principle, by semantic and syntactic stability, and to a great extent by idiomaticity. They cover both word-like and sentence-like fixed expressions, such as binomials, stereotyped comparisons, proverbs and catchphrases. Their features, especially the complex structure and stability make them an ideal basis point for modifications. Language users expand them in playful ways or exchange some of their elements to create humour. This demonstrates the ubiquity of phraseology in our languages and simultaneously contributes to its currency in society. It is above all the proverb that undergoes creative manipulation, as Anna Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder have shown impressively by their collection “Proverbs never die, they just diversify”, which provides an excellent point of

departure for further research and not least a wealth of material for language teaching.

This article intends to throw light on said phenomenon using the slogan *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* as an example. It will describe its origin and how it was rediscovered after more than sixty years before starting its triumphal procession to become one of the most frequently used and modified catchphrases all over the world. This article presents a classification of types of modifications and addresses grapho-stylistic features as well as sociocultural aspects of usage.

## 2. *The origin of the slogan*

The *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* poster was designed and produced by the United Kingdom's Ministry of Information from April to July 1939 on behalf of the British government in preparation for the Second World War to boost the morale of the British population in the face of the threat of air raids and the suffering and deprivation they would cause. It was part of a series of three "Home Publicity" posters, each bearing the stylised Tudor crown, which was used on coats of arms, buildings, logos and other insignia as the official symbol of the Crown from 1902 to 1953. The contents of the other two posters were:



Printing of the posters began on 23 August 1939, the day Nazi Germany and the USSR signed their non-aggression pact, and they were to be available for placement within 24 hours of the outbreak of war (Irving 2014; Lewis 2017). *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* was available in 2,500,000 copies, but it was decided to keep this third poster as a reserve in case of particularly devastating air strikes. It remained in this role until April 1940, when the stocks were destroyed as part of the wartime paper salvage campaign. However, the poster campaign had already ended in October 1939 following criticism of its effectiveness (Walker 2012).

In 2000, Stuart Manley, co-owner of Barter Books Ltd in Alnwick, Northumberland, found an original of the poster while sorting through a box of second-hand books bought at auction. It was framed and hung on the bookshop’s till, where it attracted so much attention that Manley began selling copies. Others did the same, thus beginning the spread and simultaneous commercialisation of the slogan.

*KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* embodies a number of quintessentially British qualities such as self-discipline, even stoicism, calmness, strength and composure even in times of adversity. Thus the slogan was used not least as a reaction to the terrorist attacks in London in 2016 as well as in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Walker (2012: 45) writes: “The poster is seen now not only as a distillation of a crucial moment in Britishness, but also as an inspiring message from the past to the present in a time of crisis”. Compared to the slogans on the other two posters in the series, *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* is not only shorter, catchier and thus easier to remember, it is also less clearly related to the historical event. There are simply too many situations in life where it is wise to maintain calm and composure, and where a lovingly tongue-in-cheek dig at our British neighbours is perhaps permitted. This probably explains the triumphant progress of *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* in its countless guises.

### 3. Modifications

#### 3.1. Topics

The modification of phraseological units is a form of playful language use, whereby certain recurring forms can be found (Fleischer et al. 1993). To achieve special effects, elements are exchanged (substitution), added (expansion), omitted (reduction), phraseological units are combined with each other (contamination), or conversions of linguistic elements are made (permutation). Regardless of language, substitution is the most frequent type of modification (Fiedler 1999; 2007; Sabban 1998). In *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON*, the innovative use refers almost exclusively to this type: the second element, *CARRY ON*, has to give way to an almost endless series of elements. In a non-representative collection of 150 randomly selected modifications compiled for this article by means of internet research, the largest proportion of the modifications are devoted to hobbies and leisure activities (46), as in *KEEP CALM AND RIDE HORSES/... DO YOGA/... GO CAMPING/... QUILT ON*. This is followed by 30 occurrences of the expression of attitudes to life, which often contrast with the strict *CARRY ON* of the original, as in *KEEP CALM AND SMILE/... JUST RELAX/... DON'T FORGET TO BE AWESOME*, followed by culinary preferences (17 occurrences), as in *KEEP CALM AND EAT CHOCOLATE/... DRINK BEER/... EAT A BURGER*. Occasionally, however, individual professional groups also make use of the saying, as in

*KEEP CALM AND LAWYER UP*

*KEEP CALM AND BECOME an EDUCATOR.*

And local patriots resort to it just as much (*KEEP CALM AND LOVE ZARAGOZA/... LOVE COLOGNE*) as football fans (*KEEP CALM AND HALA MADRID/... LOVE BARCELONA*).

*KEEP CALM AND LET ... HANDLE IT* can be found as a specific subgroup, as in *KEEP CALM AND LET KLOPP HANDLE IT*. To increase recognition, combinations of verb + prep. *on* are created: *KEEP CALM AND DANCE ON/... DREAM ON* or *KEEP CALM AND BLOG ON*.



Modification types other than substitution are rare. The isolated use of KEEP CALM in the design of the poster could be considered a reduction. Phrases that deviate strongly from the original are more likely to be interpreted as witty allusions to the saying: *I WILL NOT KEEP CALM AND YOU CAN FUCK OFF* or *I CAN'T KEEP CALM. I'M HUNGARIAN*.

In only ten instances does the altered part semantically follow on from the original by encouraging the recipient to persevere in pursuing a task even though it involves effort or willingness to make sacrifices, as in *KEEP CALM AND STUDY ON/... FINISH UNIVERSITY /YOUR THESIS*, etc. These include the following posters encouraging people to observe precautionary measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:



With the exception of these ten examples, the effect of the described modifications is mostly based on contrastive intertextuality. Two hardly compatible frames are associated with each other (Au-

erbach-Kutscher 2017): that of encouragement for the population to persevere in the difficult times of war and that of a wide variety of leisure activities and preferences. This contrast between the sublime and the banal is not likely to escape the recipient even if they are not familiar with the history of the original, which is not infrequently the case. This also applies to the humorous intention with which the baking of cupcakes, or the activity in the dance or bowling club, is elevated to the rank of the morally valuable. Most of the manipulations mentioned here are intended to be fun.

### 3.2. Graphostylistic features

The poster slogan (or meme, as they say in the internet age) is a bi-medial sign. Of crucial importance for its recognition and the inter-textual effect based on it, is its typographic presentation. We have come to expect a two-colour design with capital letters and a symmetrical dichotomy achieved by an AND set in a smaller font size. This is adhered to in most of the examples, despite altered text, but this does not mean that authors cannot deliberately deviate from it by inserting passages of excess length, as in *KEEP CALM AND Be Supercalifragilistic expialidocious*.

Occasionally, they also play with the poster itself or its striking design:



Indispensable to the authenticity of the design is the Tudor crown. Including it in the alienation is therefore effective. In addition to the intertextuality between the original poster as a pre-text and the phenotext, there is a reference here between the verbal and the visual modification. This can be observed in 65% of the occurrences in our dataset. Thus we find cupcakes, beer glasses, chef’s hats, footballs, hockey sticks, crochet hooks and wedding rings in place of the crown, as well as a stylised Harry Potter, a hemp plant and the logo of the Green Party, so that the deviation almost becomes the expected. See also the coronavirus, hands below a tap, and syringes in the pandemic-related posters.

Occasionally, however, the function of the image replacing the crown goes beyond that of illustration and has a meaningful effect. For example, the textual change in the posters of the gun lobby can only be understood in combination with the image. (The replacement of *CARRY ON* by the nearly homophonous *CARRION* is probably mainly due to the play on words.)



These two examples are not only evidence of how minimal textual changes in the pre-text can bring about maximum semantic changes. They also illustrate the importance of the interplay of verbal and

visual elements in the phenotext in contrastive intertextuality and the cognitive processes they trigger in the recipient.

### 3.3. *Transcultural aspects*

Against the background of the slogan's history as outlined above, a spread beyond the borders of the United Kingdom hardly seems likely on the one hand. On the other hand, it is known from humour research that with the internet, for example, jokes in translation spread extraordinarily quickly across national and cultural borders and, as Shifman et al. (2014) show, have become the “secret agents of globalization”. Intertextual references that play with the visual and the verbal at the same time, as in the case of the false logo or meme, have become part of everyday culture today and can be found practically everywhere. The following snapshots from holidays to Iceland and Spain are a quick illustration of this for the saying dealt with here.



Our small collection of material is also multilingual. There we read:

*KEEP CALM AND SHABBAT SHALOM, RESTEZ CALME et PENSEZ EN FRANÇAIS, κίτ καιμ AND GO GREEK*, or under the symbol of the

three Swedish crowns we are urged not to slacken our efforts in waste separation: *KEEP CALM AND FORTSÄTT KÄLLSORTERA*. Some German-English creations are very reminiscent of Macaronic poetry:

*KEEP CALM AND EAT PLÄTZCHEN*  
*KEEP CALM AND TRINK SCHORLE*  
*KEEP CALM AND TÖLT ON.*

And if even Esperanto speakers, not exactly known for their love of English, do not shy away from using it, I think we have to admit that the saying has caught on everywhere.



**RESTU  
TRANKVILA  
KAJ  
PAROLU  
ESPERANTON**

*4. Terminological problems: slogan, proverb, catchphrase, routine formula, cliché, meme?*

Throughout this article a variety of terms have been used to denominate *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* – slogan, proverb, phraseological unit, catchphrase, and in reference books on the topic more still could be found, such as cliché or adage. Terminological inconsistency is typical of phraseology research, which is heterogeneous as regards its terminology both concerning its subject of investigation (phraseological unit, phraseologism, phraseme, set expression, idiom, etc.) and the

various subtypes of phraseological units (Burger et al. 2007). There are often no clear borderlines, particularly as regards sentence-like phraseological units such as proverbs, catchphrases and routine formulas. The term proverb is used to refer to a concise, well-known sentence which expresses a general truth, shared experience, a piece of advice, or a moral principle in an easily memorized form and is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder (2004: 1-9).

Catchphrases (also called winged words) are usually defined by their origin. They can be traced back to an author or a historical source (e.g. the Bible, Greek mythology, Shakespeare, or well-known politicians). In modern times it seems to be above all the world of entertainment and advertising that provides the basis for potential catchphrases. The term can be applied as an umbrella term for slogans, sententious remarks, and quotations that enjoy currency in the language community and many contexts of speech. However, it is not always easy to differentiate catchphrases from proverbs or routine formulas, for language users are often oblivious to the fact that they are quoting or alluding to a previous textual occurrence. An example is *Speak softly and carry a big stick*, which is commonly attributed to Theodore Roosevelt (Rees 1997: 460), as he used it in a speech in 1901. However, we know from a letter that he did not claim authorship:

(...) I shall not feel real easy until the vote has actually been taken, but apparently everything is now alright. I have always been fond of the West African proverb: "Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far." If I had not carried the big stick the organization would not have gotten behind me (...). (letter to Mr. H. L. Sprague, Union League Club N.Y. City, written by Th. Roosevelt on 26 January 1900)

This makes both designations – proverb and catchphrase – seem justified. In a similar way, the origin of the expression *A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle / A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle*, from c. 1975 (Mieder 2021: 133), often attribut-

ed to Gloria Steinem, deserves closer scrutiny. In a letter to *Time Magazine* (September 2000), the feminist writer referred to another originator:

(...) you credit me with the witticism ‘A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle’. In fact, Irina Dunn, a distinguished Australian educator, journalist and politician, coined the phrase back in 1970 when she was a student at the University of Sydney. She paraphrased the philosopher who said, “Man needs God like fish needs a bicycle.

This was confirmed by Irina Dunn. She had scrawled the slogan on the inside of two toilet doors that were already covered in graffiti slogans, one at the University of Sydney and another in a bar in a southern suburb of the city. Whether in Dunn’s formulation or as a variant such as *A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle*, in the guise of bumper stickers, T-shirt lettering or postcards, the slogan quickly became famous, and at the latest after René Magritte’s visual depiction of a fish on a bicycle, the slogan became commonly known among speakers, justifying the name proverb.

Whereas the term ‘proverb’ is preferred to focus on the tradition and currency of an expression, and ‘catchphrase’ to focus on its origin, the term ‘routine formula’ is applied to stress its pragmatic character. Routine formulas (also called rhetorical formulas) are conventionalized utterances that the language puts at our disposal as ready-made units for recurrent situations. However, the assignment of a phrase to the group of proverbs, catchphrases or routine formulas again depends on whether a speaker is familiar with its origin. Most people will recognize *Life is like a box of chocolates* or *There is no such thing as a free lunch*, when used as comments in discourse, as something familiar and fixed. Only few, however will be able to attribute them to the film *Forrest Gump* and Milton Friedman’s ideas of free markets respectively.

The term cliché emphasizes the overuse of linguistic elements to the point of losing their effect. As regards *KEEP CALM AND CAR-*

*RY ON*, such a danger could exist in view of the mass distribution of the motto and the existence of phrase generators and apps, although most of the modifications shown, some of which also include visual redesigns of the crown, testify to particular originality and creativity.

*KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* has recently been discussed in the context of computer-mediated communication and memes, which is not at all surprising given the fact that intertextuality, creative reproduction and humour are major characteristics of this genre. A meme can be described as a complex system of three dimensions (content, form, and stance) representing a cultural unit that is rapidly taken up and spread from person to person (Shifman 2013). Dainas (2015) presents a detailed analysis of *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* as a meme, considering both its linguistic form and distinctive graphic format.

Depending on the context of use, the objective of research (from a phraseological point of view or that of computer-mediated communication), and the emphasis (either on function, originality, frequency of use or origin, on linguistic form or visual presentation), different terms can be applied. A brief review of reference works shows that *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON* has not been widely included so far. Because of its popularity it is definitely a worthy candidate for contemporary dictionaries and new editions of existing proverb collections, which should then also provide background information on its path from a wartime slogan that was never officially used to one of the most successful memes in history.

## 5. *Final remarks*

Today, intertextuality is by no means limited to literature. As a consciously used stylistic tool, playful references have found their way into everyday communication, often making use of the interaction of verbal and visual means of expression, as shown by the example of *KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON*. Through the internet and social media, the corresponding pre-texts (as well as the phenotexts for them) spread rapidly and appear at the swipe of a screen. In addition, mod-



ifications can be generated relatively easily today by dedicated apps – in the form of group-distinctive slogans, advertising slogans or even congratulations on special holidays and anniversaries. Such a slogan will also form the conclusion of this article: *KEEP CALM, ANNA, AND EMBRACE BEING 60*.

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GÉRÓ GYÖRGYI

“AZ ASSZONYNAK ALÁBB EGGYEL”:  
NEMI SZEREPEK A MAGYAR ÉS SPANYOL  
KÖZMONDÁSOK TÜKRÉBEN<sup>1</sup>

**Absztraktum:** Korunk egyik viharosan zajló társadalmi jelensége a nemi szerepek átalakulása. A történeti háttér alapos feltárása, megértése nélkül ezek szinkrón formálása, átalakítása csupán felszíni, illuzórikus lehet. Vizsgálatomban azokat a jellemzőket kívánom felfedni, amelyek sok esetben (több) évezredes távlatban meghatározóak a nő és a férfi társadalmi szerepeiben. Forrásaim a közmondások, mivel bennük sűrítetten megjelennek a társadalmi nemekre vonatkozó közösségi normák. Európában a késő középkortól, kora újkortól rendelkezünk írásos forrásokkal a korban használt proverbsokról, amelyek a szóbeli hagyományozás jellegéből fakadóan felmérhetetlenül nagy megelőző korszakot is dokumentálnak. A közmondásokban kirajzolódó értékrendet ugyanakkor fontos összevetni egyéb korabeli forrásokkal, hogy ne a jelen gondolati háttérét vetítsük rá vizsgálatunk tárgyára. Ez interdiszciplináris megközelítést kíván, amit kulturális nyelvészetnek nevezhetünk. Az Ibériai-félsziget és Magyarország Európa két ellentétes végvidéke. Milyen hasonlóságok és különbségek rajzolódnak ki a közmondások alapján? Hol húzódnak Európa kulturális határai?

**Kulcsszavak:** nemi szerepek, kulturális nyelvészet, kontrasztív frazeológia

**Abstract:** One of the key social phenomena of our time is the shift in gender roles. It's impossible to change or shape these in any deep or meaningful way without a thorough study of their historical background. In my research, I am focusing on identifying traits that have been prevalent to the male and female gender roles often over - several - thousands of years. My chosen source material are proverbs, as they truly encapsulate social gender norms. In Europe, the first written sources relating to proverbs used at

<sup>1</sup> A tanulmány egy nagyobb vizsgálatból vett rövid „mutatvány”, a szerző PhD értekezése alapján készült.

the time date from the Late Middle Ages/Early Modern Age. Due to the way these proverbs were passed down the period they document is immeasurably long. When it comes to the social norms gleaned from the proverbs, it's important that we check these against other contemporary sources so we don't end up viewing them from a present day angle. This process calls for an interdisciplinary approach, which we could refer to as cultural linguistics. The Iberian Peninsula and Hungary represent two, opposite frontiers in Europe. What similarities and differences can we conclude from their proverbs? Where do we find the cultural boundaries within Europe?

**Keywords:** gender roles, cultural linguistics, contrastive phraseology

### *1. A közmondás helye és funkciója a késő középkori – kora újkori európai társadalmakban*

A vizsgálat célja a nyelvi jel - jelen esetben a proverbium - mögött meghúzódó magatartásformák megismerése, és megfordítva: a verbális eszközök szerepének feltárása a viselkedés- és gondolkodásformák kialakításában és reprodukálásában.

A vizsgált korszak és helyszín a középkori és kora újkori Európa, mivel ebben a korban a társadalom egészében meghatározó szerepet töltött be a nyelvi jelek kiválasztott osztálya, azaz a közmondások és szólások. Ennek egyik fő oka, hogy a kor társadalmában nem húzódik éles határ az elit és a népi kultúra között; a hagyományozás módja, a mindennapi kultúra létformája a társadalom minden rétegében a szóbeliséghez kötődik. E megállapítást főképpen a következő tényezők alapján látjuk bizonyítottnak:

- az írott nyelv használati területei (*domainjei*) korlátozottak;
- a nyelvhasználat diglossziás jellegű: a magas kultúra és az írásos dokumentumok nyelve a latin, az anyanyelv a szóbeliségben él;
- az írott forrásokhoz való hozzáférés lehetősége erősen korlátozott a társadalom túlnyomó része számára;
- az intézményes oktatás elterjedtsége alacsony;
- a kommunikációs csatornák – elsősorban az alacsony alfabetizációs szint miatt – szóbeliek és képiak (Géro 2008:92).

Mindezek alapján kirajzolódik, hogy ebben a történelmi korban a szóbeli hagyományozás közegében élő közmondáskincs a társadalom egészének egységes tulajdona, és mint ilyen, annak értékrendjét reprezentálja.

Másfelől az előbbieik alapján az is valószínűsíthető, hogy a proverbsok nem csupán tartalmazzák a jellemző értékrendet, hanem egyúttal a közösségbe való beilleszkedést szolgáló, a társadalmi normákat közvetítő, integráló szabályrendszerként is működtek, azaz a proverbsok elsődleges használata (Szemerényi 1994:71) az anyanyelvi kultúrába való szocializálást célozta. E feltételezést erősíti, hogy több természeti népnél leírták a proverbsoknak ezt a funkcióját, a klasszikus nyelvek (görög, latin) oktatásának évszázadokon át alapvető részét képezték, és az európai anyanyelvű iskolai tankönyvekben is sokáig szerepeltek mint a gyereknevelés fontos eszközei (Szemerényi Ágnes 1994:77-79).

A hagyományos közösségekben az ismeretek átörökítésének csatornáit a szóbeliség, a rítusok, szokásszerű cselekvések és a képi ábrázolás jelentették. A közmondásokat, szólásokat a szokásszerű cselekvések csoportjába sorolhatjuk, mivel létrejöttük alapja ugyanúgy a begyakorolt, változatlan formában való ismétlések sorozata, így - bizonyos értelemben - „nyelvi szokás”-nak is nevezhetők. Tehát szóbeli létformájuk mellett működés módjuk is alkalmassá teszi a proverbsokat a szocializációs funkcióra azokban a társadalmakban, amelyekben még nem működnek a szocializáció intézményes formái.

A szóbeliséghez kötődő létforma és a szokásszerű működés mellett a proverbsok tartalmi szempontból is eleget tesznek a szocializációs szerep követelményeinek. A közmondások, szólások változatossága felöleli a tradicionális társadalomban élő ember egyéni és közösségi életének teljességét; ismeretanyaga a természettel és az emberi viszonyokkal kapcsolatos problémákra egyaránt megoldást kínál. Az emberi lét teljességét átfogó tematika mintegy kijelöli a közmondásokat arra a szerepre, hogy bevezessék az egymást követő nemzedékeket az adott környezet és közösség körében szükséges legfontosabb ismeretekbe.

Hogyan írható le a proverbiumok működése a preindusztriális társadalmak életében? A közmondások használati alkalmait vizsgálva alapvető különbséget találunk a folklór egyéb műfajaival összehasonlítva: a közmondás használata nem kötődik semmilyen alkalomhoz, nem kell hozzá külön autoritás, sem előadó, sem közönség. Míg a népdalok gyakran a munkavégzést kísérik, egy hagyományos közösségen belül rendszerint vannak mesemondók, a mesemondás közönséghez szól, addig a közmondások elsődleges használata a mindennapi interakciókhoz kötődik, nem különül el a hétköznapok kommunikációs eseményeitől, jelenléte időben folytonos.

Ahogy időben, úgy térben is folytonosnak tekinthető a proverbiumok jelenléte a kevésbé szegmentált társadalmakban. A preindusztriális korban a magánélet és a munka világa egy egységet alkotott, így az új nemzedék tagjai egységes közegben, a családban, a háztartásban, a gazdaságban egyidejűleg sajátítják el a felnőtt élethez szükséges teljes tudást, ez az elsődleges szocializáció színtere. E tudás megszerzése a nyelv elsajátításával párhuzamosan megy végbe, részben a modellül szolgáló interakciók révén, részben a nyelvi megfogalmazott szabályok alapján. A tanulás folyamata így nem különült el, hanem beágyazódott a hagyományokon alapuló háztartás működésébe, melyet elsősorban nemi és nemzedéki különbségeken alapuló szabályrendszer irányított. A proverbiumokban megfogalmazott értékrend elfogadása, az azzal való azonosulás, a közösségi normák betartása az egyén szempontjából segíti a társadalmi kapcsolatokat és az együttműködést. Ugyanakkor a közösség szempontjából is előnyös, mivel egyúttal az normarendszer fenntartásához, a társadalmi struktúra stabilitásához is hozzájárul.

A középkor első századainak jellemzője a szimbolikus gondolkodás, amely során kellő tudományos eszközök híján a megfoghatatlan megragadására transzcendens és érzéki eszközök útján törekszenek. A gondolkodás metaforikus, tehát minden konkrét megjelenítés egy mögöttes tartalmat hordoz. Ugyanakkor fontos azt is kiemelni, hogy a kor gondolkodását a példa uralja. „A középkori elmék igyekeznek minden – akár költött, akár történelmi- eseményt kikristályosítani,

példabeszéddé, bizonyítékká tenni, hogy általános igazság példája legyen. Hasonlóképpen minden állításból mondás, szállóige, idézhető szöveg lesz.” (Huizinga 1979:227) A közmondás ezért műfaji sajátosságai révén a kor gondolkodásmódjához is jól illeszkedik.

## 2. A közmondás érvényes értelmezésének kérdése

A proverbiumok jelentéstana a kutatások egyik legvitatottabb területe. Ahogy láttuk, a proverbium olyan összetett nyelvi jel, amely több szinten vizsgálható:

A szint: az elvont, általános alak, ehhez kapcsoljuk a változatokat

B szint: a konkrét változat konkrét szó szerinti jelentése – szintaktikai szint

C szint: az elvont jelentés – szemantikai szint

D szint: a proverbium használata, funkciója – pragmatikai szint (Szemerényi 1994:83).

A közmondások jelentése tehát többretegű: „szótári formájában” igazságtartalma időtlen, helytől és helyzettől független. Ugyanakkor évszázadokat, sokszor évezredek átívelő létezése csak azért lehetséges, mert „időtlen” jelentése nagyon is rugalmasan alakítható korhoz, térhez, szituációhoz, azaz éppen általánossága folytán aktualizálható.

A proverbiumok forrásként általában gyűjteményekben jelennek meg (A szint), ehhez egy elvont jelentés kapcsolható (C szint). Mivel a gyűjtemények általánosságuk folytán nem tartalmazhatnak kontextust, a használat során létrejövő jelentés eléréséhez (D szint) rekonstruálni kell a valószínűsíthető kontextusokat, ez a pragmatikai szint. A proverbium jelentésének kettős természetéből adódóan a környező összefüggésrendszerrel elvonatkoztatva az éppen aktuális jelentés meghatározhatatlan, mivel az mindig a helyzet függvénye. Ugyanannak a közmondásnak a jelentése más szöveggörnyezetben megváltozhat, ezeket nevezi Voigt Vilmos szituacionális jelentésvariánsoknak. (Voigt 1971:32)

Akadályozza a megbízható értelmezést az a körülmény is, hogy a gyűjtemények nem rögzítenek hanglejtést, gesztust, sem kontextust, márpedig a szóbeli műfajok esetében a nemverbális információk szerepe meghatározó. A verbális anyag alapján a kutatónak csak mondattani, illetve szövegelemzésre nyílik módja, ugyanakkor a korabeli jelentés létrejöttének elengedhetetlen feltétele volt, hogy a közmondás a befogadó számára a használat közegébe ágyazottan jelent meg, azaz épített a nyelvi és nem nyelvi közös háttérinformációkra. A szituáció, a használat kontextusa visszamenőleg reprodukálhatatlan az elsődleges használat szintjét tekintve.

Másfelől a proverbium adott korban érvényes jelentésének megállapítását a mai kutató számára az időbeli távolság azért is nehezíti, mivel ismeretlen számára a vizsgált kor közös képzetrendszere is, amelybe a szólások, közmondások beágyazódtak. Ez a háttér a korabeli történeti, egyházi, jogi, művészeti források ismeretében felrajzolható, értelmezési keretrendszerként erre támaszkodhatunk. A korabeli társadalom uralkodó eszméinek, értékeinek, szimbólumainak körülhatárolását kell tehát megkísérelnünk a következőkben ahhoz, hogy sikerüljön elkerülni egy gyakori csapdát: a jelen gondolati háttérének visszavetítését.

### *3. A társadalmi nem a történelemben*

Vizsgálatunk tárgya a proverbiumkincs egy kiemelt szelete: a női és férfi szerepekre vonatkozó közmondások. A társadalmi nem mint elemző kategória a XX. század végén jelenik meg. A tudományos vizsgálatok nyilvánvalóvá tették, hogy a társadalmi nem fogalmát nem lehet ahistorikusan megközelíteni, a férfi/nő fogalma nem inherens jelentésű, változatlanul újratermelődő, hanem történetileg meghatározott kategória. Ezért a következőkben röviden összefoglaljuk választott korszakunk, a középkori és kora újkori Európa nemekhez fűződő uralkodó eszmerendszerét, amelyben a közmondások megfelelő, „korhű” értelmezést kapnak.



### 3.1 A nő megítélése a középkori – kora újkori Európában

A nő-kérdés az egész európai középkor központi problémája volt. Más kisebbségekhez hasonlóan (idegenek, mórok, zsidók, cigányok, tótok stb.) a nők a kora középkortól kezdve kiemelten fontos szereplői a latin nyelvű, majd később a vernakuláris frazeológiai gyűjteményeknek. A proverbiumok egyaránt tükrözik és átörökítik azt a klaszszikus görög–latin és a későbbi zsidó–keresztény hagyományt, amely pontosan kijelöli a nő helyét, megengedett, illetve előírt tevékenységi körét, viselkedési normáit a kor társadalmában. Mindez meghatározóan megjelenik más korabeli műfajokban is: a fabulákban, énekekben, krónikákban, bírósági jegyzőkönyvekben és leginkább a női nem természetét taglaló vitairatokban.

A középkort az egyház Szentíráson alapuló nőfelfogása uralja. A Bibliában a Teremtés könyvének legalaposabb, Szent Ágostoni kommentárja szerint az egész teremtett világ hierarchikus szerkezetű, az egyik, jelen esetben a férfi, irányít, a másik, vagyis a nő, engedelmessékedik. A ratiót más néven virilisnek (vagyis férfiasnak) mondják: az ész férfiúi princípium, a női pedig az appetitus, a vágy. A nőben az állati, a vágyódó rész van túlsúlyban, míg a férfiban az ésszerűség, vagyis a szellem kerekedik felül. Következésképpen a férfi uralkodik; afféle közvetítő Isten, a bölcsesség forrása, akinek engedelmességgel tartozik és a nő között, akit irányítania kell (Duby 2000: 249).

A kereszténység egész világméretű alapvetően meghatározza az eredendő bűn gondolata. Ennek alapját az anakronisztikus időfelfogásban találjuk meg. A Biblia történései örökérvényűek, tehát Ádám és Éva vétke, Krisztus megfeszítése nem pusztán a múlt egy-egy eseménye, hanem a jelen minden pillanatában egyidejűleg jelen vannak. Ezért az egymást követő nemzedékek, minden egyes ember felelős és vétkes. Egészen a XX. századig ívelő motívuma ez a művészetnek és a nőről való gondolkodásnak. Férfi és nő viszonyát, szerepét, a nemekhez kötődő alapvető, elidegeníthetetlen tulajdonságokat a Szentírás értelmezése során fogalmazták meg. Ezen az alapon épültek be – tudatosan, deklaráltan, vagy észrevétlenül – az európai mentalitásba. A bűnbeeséskor az Ádám megtestesítette szellemi

megismerésen diadalmaskodott az érzéki megismerés, az Éva képviselte anyag. Ezért a középkori egyházi felfogás a nőt mindig az érzékiséggel, a csábítással, az anyagi léttel azonosította, míg a szellemi szféra a férfi terrénuma. Ugyanakkor minden egyes nő Évát, minden egyes férfi Ádámot testesítette meg, azaz ugyanannak a bűnnek az ismételt elkövetésétől kellett tartani. Emiatt férfi és nő viszonyának felügyeletét az egyház kiemelten fontos feladatának tekintette, ezért a XII. században a felvette a házasság intézményét a szentségek sorába, amivel a bűnös testiség szabályozása volt a célja. „A férfiak és nők kapcsolatának megváltoztatása az európai kultúra egészén mély nyomot hagyott, következményei pedig mind a mai napig éreztetik hatásukat. (...) Hosszú csata volt. Azzal végződött, hogy a papsághoz vándorolt az apák hatalma: lányuk kezét ők tették a leendő vő kezébe, a férj és hitvese közé pedig gyóntatót iktattak.” (Duby 2000: 242-243)

A középkort követő korszak másik fő forrása a klasszikus ókori irodalom, elképzelései a női és férfi közötti különbségekről sok tekintetben még az ókori alapokon nyugodtak. A Hippokratészi gyűjtemény szerint a nő fizikailag alsóbbrendű a férfinál, biológiailag nem olyan fejlett, közelebb áll az állatokhoz. A fizikai tökéletlenség kihatott a nők észbeli képességeire is, intellektuális visszamaradottsággal is jár. A nőgyűlölet nagyon erős tendenciája a görögöknél Hesziodosz után jelenik meg, mely szerint a nő minden rossz forrása és oka, jó példa erre Euripidész Médeája (de los Ángeles Durán López: 48). Hasonló képet mutatnak a latin szerzők (Vergilius, Ovidius) művei is, éppúgy, mint az ókori közmondások.

A protestantizmus látszólag enyhít a női nem szegregációján, közelebből való kizártságán, amennyiben férfiak és nők együtt vesznek részt a gyülekezet életében, ugyanakkor a férfi és női szerepek elkülönítésében kifejezetten és kimondottan a konzervatív hagyományt erősíti meg. Luther azt mondja Katekizmusában: „Az asszonyok engedelmeskedjenek ő tulajdon férjeiknek, mint az Úrnak. Mert a' férjfiu feje az asszonyi állatnak.” (Kis János 1860: 39) A házasság katolikus és protestáns felfogása között volt azonban egy alapvető elvi különbség: míg az előbbi szerint a nőtlenség a férfi ideális állapota

és a férfi-nő együttélést szükséges rossznak tekintette, melyet szigorú egyházi felügyelettel igyekezett korlátozni, addig a protestáns házasság-eszmény alapja a férfi és a nő közötti kölcsönös barátság, szeretet és tisztelet, illetve a közös gyermekek nevelése. Ez a változás az esetek többségében elvi síkon maradt, hosszabb távon azonban új távlatokat adott a nőkről, és a férfi-női viszonyról való újfajta gondolkodásnak.

A nőgyűlölet az ellenreformáció idején újra fellángol; úgy látszik, ez mintegy természetes velejárója az erkölcsi köntösbe bújtatott hatalmi harcot vívó felekezetek, azaz a férfiak küzdelmének.

### *3.2. A nőkről való gondolkodás meghatározó jegyei*

A kora középkorban a keresztény világ életét meghatározó létélmény a végítélet várása volt. Az egyház legfontosabb feladatának azt tekintette, hogy a közeli üdvözülésre felkészítse híveit. A földi életnek ezt a célt a lehető legjobban kellett szolgálnia, az egyház pedig, hogy ebben segítséget nyújtson, az emberi élet legintimebb magánszféráját is ellenőrzése alá kívánta vonni. Férfi és nő kapcsolatának megfelelő irányításáról a vallatók/gyóntatók gondoskodtak. A számukra készült „segédkönyvekben” felsoroltnak a legfőbb női bűnök: a nő a halál hordozója: férjeik, szeretőjük, magzataik, apró gyermekeik, szolgálóik mind kiszolgáltatottak a nők praktikáinak, boszorkányságainak; a nő démoni csábítás a férfi számára, ő viszi a szexualitás bűnébe, amire női alaptermészete sarkallja (Duby 2000).

A középkorban az élet minden területét áthatja a vallás. Az egyház nemcsak intézményesen szabályozza a társadalom életét, a vallásos gondolkodás az emberek életének mindennapjait, konkrét eseményeit, minden részletét befolyásolta. Férfi és nő viszonya a kor központi kérdése, a nőkről a Biblia alapján kialakított kép az egyház egyre közvetlenebb beavatkozása révén bekerül a közgondolkodásba. A középkori jog is ehhez a képhez igazodik: a nő bűneiért a férfi a felelős, mivel ő irányítja a nőt. Engedelmisséget kell követelnie, a nő pedig engedelmisséggel tartozik urának, az ő alávetettje. Pontosan

azok a kötelességei férjével szemben, mint a hűbéresnek hűbérurával szemben.

A reneszánsz idején az ókori görög és latin irodalom remekművei széles körben elterjedtek, ez a nőgyűlölet újabb forrását jelentette. A férfi és nő biológiai alapokon nyugvó hierarchiájának ókori elmélete a középkor gondolkodóira is nagy hatást gyakorolt (Huarte de San Juan, Aquinói Szent Tamás). Különösképpen népszerűek voltak a proverbiumok különböző válfajai és, mivel hosszú évszázadokon át a görög és a latin nyelv oktatásának elengedhetetlen didaktikai eszköztárához tartoztak, hatásuk máig kimutatható. A sírás, a pletykálkodás, a megbízhatatlanság, az asszony mint szükséges rossz, az asszonyverés az ókortól levezethető toposzok, amelyek a közös európai kultúra részévé váltak, és így vélhetően a legtöbb európai nép szólás- és közmondáskincsében is tovább élnek.

Napirenden volt a nőkérdés a világi irodalomban is, a querelle des femmes-ként ismert vita a XVI. század közepén lángolt fel Franciaországban. Az egész középkort foglalkoztató kérdés ekkor csúcsosodott ki, és ezután több évszázadon át foglalkoztatta a francia, angol, itáliai és spanyol közvéleményt. A vita a házasságról, a nők természetéről, szellemi képességeiről és marginális társadalmi szerepéről folyt. Két szemben álló irányzatot szokás megkülönböztetni: a gall hagyományra, mely végigvonul az egész középkoron, erőteljesen hatott az aszketikus középkori keresztény gondolkodás, ezért a nő eredendően bűnös természete mellett teszi le a voksát. Ezzel ellentétben a nőt magasztaló idealizáló hagyomány, amelyet a középkori lovagi költészet folytatásának tekinthetünk. A vitában természetesen a társadalom szűk felső, írástudó rétege vett részt, így az nem hozott jelentős változást a nők megítélésében, társadalmi helyzetében.

#### *4. A társadalmi nemmel kapcsolatos magyar és spanyol közmondások vizsgálata*

Az előbbieken nagy vonalakban jellemeztük a középkori Európa gondolkodásának, értékrendjének meghatározó jegyeit, amelyek

nagyon erőteljesen meghúzott határok közé szorították a női és férfi szerepeket, és az egyház és az állam ugyancsak erős kézzel és alaposan kiépített felügyelettel őrködött ezek betartásán. A továbbiakban a kontinens két végvidékére, az Ibériai-félszigetre és Magyarországra szűkítjük a közmondások vizsgálatát, hogy ezen keresztül számba vegyük az európai kultúra közös alapjainak, az egységes vallásnak, a kultúra közös nyelvének a különböző etnikai, nyelvi és kulturális szubsztrátumra gyakorolt egységesítő erejét olyan nyelvek és kultúrák esetében, ahol közvetlen kontakthatással nem kell számolnunk.

Terjedelmi okokból itt nem jellemezzük részletesen a két terület korabeli kultúráját, társadalmi és jogrendjét. Az Ibériai-félsziget az arab hódítás miatt politikailag és vallási tekintetben is megosztott az egész középkorban. Ez a megosztottság a századok múlásával és a keresztény visszahódítás győzelmeivel azonban egyre inkább az európai, keresztény, feudális hatalom javára tolja el a területi, hatalmi arányokat és a félsziget ezen, egyre nagyobb részén kialakuló államok szorosan kötődnek az európai fejlődéshez.

A magyar kultúrtörténetet a kereszténység X. századi felvétele határozta meg. A kereszténység államvallássá tétele pedig a hagyományok, a gondolkodás, az egész szellemi világ megváltozásának kényszerét hozta magával. A kereszténység első időszakától kezdve jelen vannak a szerzetesrendek, amelyek az egyház befolyásának zálogaként egyre nagyobb számban terjesztik az új társadalmi rend ideológiáját (részletesebben l. Géro 2008:144-147).

A társadalmi nemekre vonatkozó közmondások részletes elemzését Litovkina Anna: Magyar közmondástár (2005), illetve Juana G. Campos - Ana Barella: Diccionario de refranes (1993/1975) című gyűjteményének felhasználásával készítettem. A két mű több fontos kritériumnak tesz egyidejűleg eleget: jelentős történelmi gyűjtemények anyagait veti egybe a korszak fontos irodalmi műveivel, kizárólag a dokumentált használatú közmondásokat veszi fel a korpuszba, és csak a nyelvterületen leginkább elterjedt közmondásokat tartalmazza, eltekint továbbá a regionalizmusoktól és a korpuszt tudományos kritériumok mentén állítja össze.

## 5. A társadalmi nemre vonatkozó magyar és spanyol közmondások tematikus alcsoportjai

Az alcsoportok illusztrálására a bőséges anyagból csupán egy-egy magyar és spanyol közmondást választok ki az alábbiakban.

### 5.1. A férfi és a nő viszonya

A közmondások között bár sok a metaforikus, némelyek nagyon is egyértelműek, pl. „a férfi és a nő soha nem lehet egyenértékű”. Nem egyszerűen különbség, hanem félreérthetetlen értékkülönbség olvasható ki az alábbi közmondásokból:

*Az asszonynak alább eggyel.*

*Más vale un hombre de paja que una mujer de plata.*

A természet rendje szerint a férfi az úr a háznál:

*Nem jól foly a ház dolga, hol az asszony visel gatyát.*

*En casa de Gonzalo más canta la gallina que el gallo.*

A közösség által előírt magatartást, az engedelmisséget el nem fogadó asszonyt meg kell leckéztetni és a korabeli jogalap szerint ez a férj joga, kötelessége.

*Dió törve, asszony verve jó.*

*Asno, mujer y nuez, a golpes dan su fruto.*

A beszédhez való jog az európai civilizációban a hatalmi pozícióhoz kötődik. A férfi és nő közötti viszony, és egyúttal a nő társadalmi helyzetét is jelző fontos pont, hogy az előírt és elvárt hallgatás az egyik sarkalatos női erény:

*Az asszony neve hallgass.*

*La mujer ha de hablar cuando la gallina quiera mear.*

### 5.2. Erkölcsi magatartás

A közmondásokban a szüzesség a legfőbb női erényként jelenik meg. Miért mondtuk, hogy női erény? A következő két közmondás egyér-

telművé teszi a két nem szüzesség kérdéséhez fűződő viszonyát:

*Ha a legénynek leesik a kalapja, (az) fölveszi, de ha leánynak leesik, az föl nem tudja venni.*

*El hombre haga ciento, y a la mujer no la toque el viento.*

A szüzesség elvesztése nők esetében egyet jelentett a tisztesség elvesztésével, ugyanakkor a család és különösképpen a férfi (férj, apa) becsületén is foltot ejtett, hiszen jogilag és erkölcsileg a férfi felelt a hozzá tartozó nők cselekedeteiért. Az apának, testvérnek, férjnek tehát elemi érdeke volt őrködni családja nőtagjainak tisztessége fölött:

*Lovat, borotvát, asszonyt sose bízz másra.*

*El caballo y la mujer, al ojo se han de tener.*

Középkori felfogás szerint a női természetet két jellegzetes vonás határozza meg: a gyengeség (infirmetas) és az érzékiség hatalma, amely lefelé húzza őket. A szüzesség elvesztéséhez vagy a házasságtöréshez vezető bűn elkövetésére a nő csábítja a férfit, aki nem kér, csak elfogad, azaz oda megy, ahol kap:

*Esendő az ember, hajlandó a pendely.*

*El hombre propone, y la mujer dispone.*

### 5.3. Külső és belső tulajdonságok

A külső a két nem esetében más elbírálás alá esik, a nőknél számít, a férfiaknál nem:

*Elég szép a férfi, csak azért, hogy férfi.*

*El hombre, que espante; y la mujer, que encante.*

Jellembeli hiányosságokról szóló közmondásokat kutatva gyakorlatilag csak nőkről szólókat találunk, azokat viszont bőséggel. A közmondások e csoportjában fogalmazódnak meg leginkább a férfiak nőktől való félelmei, melyek szerint azok kiismerhetetlenek és megbízhatatlanok:

*Úgy higgy az asszonynépnek, mint az áprilisi időjárásnak.*

*Febrero y las mujeres tienen en un día diez pareceres.*

A nő kijátssza a férfit, fegyvere a nyelve:

*Nyelvével vitézkedik mind az asszony.*

*De mujer parlara ningún bien se espera.*

Ugyancsak nyugtalanító, mert ellenőrizhetetlen volt a nők egymás közötti beszéde. Az ellenőrizhetetlen beszéd és az asszonyokkal szembeni alapvető bizalmatlanság összekapcsolódik és megszületik a pletykálás, a megbízhatatlanság, a mindent kibeszélés mint alapvető női tulajdonság:

*Asszonyra ne bízd a titkot, mert a könnyökén is kiszalad.*

*La mujer y el niño sólo callan lo que no han sabido.*

A közmondások általában ravasznak tartják a nőket, de okosnak nem. A női intelligencia hiánya közhelynek számított:

*Az asszonynak hosszú a haja, rövid az esze.*

*En caso repentino, el consejo de la mujer, y al de pensado, el del más barbado.*

#### 5.4. Házasság

A lányok kiházásítása komoly anyagi áldozatot kívánt a családtól, így a lányutód születése nem volt felhőtlen öröm. A pártában maradt lányok terhet jelentettek a háznép számára:

*A kinek hat lánya van, búkézni ne menjen máshoz.*

*Tres hijas y una madre, cuatro diablos para el padre.*

A lányok életének legnagyobb vágya és eseménye a házasság volt, ez volt a társadalomba való bejutás egyetlen útja. Nő egymagában, férfi nélkül nem létezhetett a középkor világában:

*Örül, mint a férjhez menő leány.*

*Sea marido, aunque sea de palo.*

A férfiak esetében ugyanakor a házasság inkább a szabadság részleges vagy teljes elvesztésével jár:



*Gyöngyélet a legényélet.*

*Te casaste, te enterraste.*

Bár a párt férfi és nő alkotja, a pár megválasztása a férfi joga. Erről győz meg a közmondások sora, amelyek kivétel nélkül a nő helyes megválasztásához adnak szempontokat. Ismét igazolva látjuk azt a következtetésünket, hogy a közmondások „szerzői” a férfiak, a hagyományos társadalom értékrendje férfi-értékrendet képvisel:

*Asszonyt, vásznat ne végy gyertyavilágnál.*

*La mujer y la tela no se ha de escoger a la candela.*

Kiemelt fontossággal bír a jövőbeli származása, amely a kor szokása szerint leginkább az azonos társadalmi helyzetű személyek szentesített kapcsolatát jelenti:

*Suba a subához, guba a gubához.*

*Cada oveja, con su pareja.*

A házasságon belüli szerepek is megjelennek a közmondásokban:

*Ügyes gazda megszerzi, okos asszony megőrzi.*

*Los hombres ganan y las mujeres guardan.*

A következők egyben a társadalmi munkamegosztást is megjele-  
nítik. A közélet a férfi, míg a család a nő területe:

*Kutyának, gazdának kint a helye, asszonynak, macskának bent.*

*El hombre, en la plaza, y la mujer, en la casa.*

Újabb házasságkötésre a tridenti zsinat határozatai után már csak az özvegyeknek volt lehetőségük. Az ő újraházasodásukat azonban az egyház és sokszor a közösség sem nézte jó szemmel, számos közmondás figyelmeztet annak veszélyeire:

*Legjobb olyan asszonyt elvenni, akinek az első urát felakasztották.*

*Que se casa con viudo, rival tiene en el otro mundo.*

Előfordulnak a második házasság előnyeit hangsúlyozó mondások is:

*Első gyerekeknek, második asszonynak aranyos a segge.*

*La primera mujer, escoba, y la segunda, señora.*

## 6. Lexikai elemzés

A közmondások szókincse alapján mindkét nyelven hasonló témakörök bontakoznak ki. Első helyen a gazdasszonyi szerephez kötődő szavak szerepelnek: *főztje, olajoskorsója, fazékoldal, vászon, kötény, ing, kávéfőzés, rántotta, habarta* illetve *hilar* ‘fonni’, *delantera* ‘kötény’, *tocino* ‘szalonna’, *olla* ‘fazék’, *escoba* ‘seprő’, *sardina* ‘szardínia’, *ceniza* ‘hamu’, *pera* ‘körte’, *gallina* ‘tyúk’, *cibera* ‘lucerna’, *camuesa* ‘almaféle’, *huevo* ‘tojás’, *tela* ‘szövet’.

Nem érdektelen megfigyelni azt sem, kihez-mihez hasonlítják a nőket. A magyar közmondásokban *ló, lúd*, girhes *disznó, eb* fordul elő, a spanyolokban leggyakoribb a *mula* ‘öszvér’, de előfordul *caballo* ‘ló’, *potro* ‘csikó’, *picaza* ‘szarka’, *galga* ‘agár’, *gallina* ‘tyúk’, *perro* ‘kutya’. A hasonlóság alapja a magyarban mindig negatív tulajdonság, a spanyolban megoszlik, három esetben pozitív, négyszer pedig negatív.

### 6.1. Magyar közmondások

Litovkina Anna közmondásszótárában, ha a beszédaktuselmélet kritériumait alkalmazzuk, akkor a beszélő szándéka szerint az értéktételeket kifejezők vannak túlsúlyban (46), ezt követik a megállapítást közlők (31), és a közvetlenül megszólító, tanácsot adó típusúakból található a legkevesebb (16).

Az *asszony* címszóhoz kapcsolódó magyar közmondásokban előforduló leggyakoribb pozitív tartalmú jelzők: *szép, jó, szemérmes, friss, csendes, mosolygós, okos, serény*, a negatív jelzők száma ezt jóval meghaladja: *mérges, kurva, egyszeri, részeg, tanyai, vén, szóbeli, kurafi, rossz, lusta, haragos, szakállas, süveges*.

A nőkkel kapcsolatos legfontosabb társadalmi problémának tehát erkölcsi magatartásuk látszik: hűtlenségük, szemérmetlenségük, in-

gatagságuk. Mindez természetesen szoros kapcsolatban van a gyakoriság szempontjából második helyen álló szépséggel, ami mint tulajdonság természetesen már nem feltétlenül ítéltetik meg negatívan.

A közmondásokat legtovább őrző közösségben, a paraszti társadalomban a familiáris közösség boldogulása szempontjából alapvető kérdés volt a családi gazdaság sorsa, vagyis az, hogy az asszony kellően dolgoz és szorgalmas legyen. Így a női restséget, lustaságot mélyen elítélve, nevelési kérdésként is felvetik annak megelőzését.

A társadalomnak a patriarchális családi értékrend és modell szerint kellett szerveződnie, a családfő tiszte mindenkor a férfit illette. Ahol a *szakállas* nő hordta a *süveget/kalapot/gatyát/nadrágot*, azt természet ellen valónak ítélték és könnyörtelenül kigúnyolták.

A nőket jellemző alapvető tulajdonságként a pletykálkodást, a megbízhatatlanságot, a veszekedős, morgós természetet, a könnyű és sokszor céltudatos sírást emelik ki. Az így kibontakozó negatív nőfigurával szemben pedig egyetlen célravezető nevelési módszert javasolnak: a verést.

## 6.2. Spanyol közmondások

A Campos-Barella közmondásszótárában szereplő, nőkkel kapcsolatos közmondások száma nyolcvanhárom, a beszélő szándéka szerint arányosan megoszlanak a tanácsot adó, értékítéletet és megállapítást közlő típusúak.

A leggyakoribb pozitív jelzők: *hermosa* ‘szép’, *rica* ‘gazdag’, *honestá* ‘becsületes’, *honrada* ‘tisztességes’, *casta* ‘erényes’, *buena* ‘jó’, *compuesta* ‘ápol’, *pulida* ‘kiszépitett’, *apuesta* ‘jó külsejű’. A legfontosabb negatív tulajdonságok: *liviana* ‘könnyűvérű’, *jimia* ‘majom kinézetű, csúnya’, *vocinglera* ‘nagyhangú’, *desenfadada* ‘szemérmetlen, gátlástalan’, *brava* ‘vad’, *loca* ‘bolond’, *algarera* ‘nagyszájú’, *artera* ‘ravasz’, *placera* ‘csavargó, tekergő’.

A magyar közmondásoknál leírt témák ismétlődnek, bizonyos arányeltolódással, ugyanis az erkölcsi magatartás a spanyol társadalomban még fontosabb helyet foglalt el. A legtöbb, 12 magyar mon-

dás foglalkozott ezzel, a spanyoloknál a számuk 20-ra emelkedik. A becsület és a tisztesség a spanyol irodalom arany századának központi témái, fő műfajuk a *dramas de honor*, vagyis a becsületdráma. A spanyol nőktől nem csupán a szemérmességet kéri számon, hangsúlyos helyet kap az erényesség, tisztesség, becsületesség; a tisztességes nő egyik alapvető tulajdonsága, hogy otthonülő. Minderre a Lorca-drámák nőalakjaiban is találunk egészen a XX. századig ívelő párhuzamokat.

A szorgalom is fontos tulajdonság, amely nem csupán a gazdaság előrevívőjeként, hanem az erkölcshöz kapcsolódva, az elfoglaltság a tisztesség zálogaként is megjelenik, míg ezzel ellentétben a tétlenség a bűn melegágya lehet.

A férfi családfői szerepe a spanyol nyelvű példákban is megkérdőjelezhetetlen, ugyanúgy négy közmondás ostromozza azt a házat, ahol az asszony parancsol. A főbb női tulajdonságok éppúgy a pletykálkodás, a veszekedős természet és a megbízhatatlanság. Nagyobb szerepet kap azonban az ész, vagyis inkább az asszony észbeli korlátai, mivel képességei csupán a mindennapi élet apró problémáinak megoldásáig terjednek.

## 7. A társadalmi nem, avagy Európa kulturális határai

A magyar és a spanyol közmondások és szólások összevető vizsgálata során egyaránt találtunk különbségeket és hasonlóságokat.

Az eltérések részben időbeliek: spanyol területen évszázadokkal korábban dokumentált a közmondások másodlagos, szépirodalmi használata, az elsődleges használat pedig közvetve az anyanyelvű, élő hagyományból gyűjtött közmondásgyűjtemények révén ugyancsak korán, már a XIV. században megjelenik. A későbbiekben gyűjtemények sora áll rendelkezésünkre, a spanyol közmondás- és szóláskészlet tehát jól felgyűjtött és rendszerezett, valamint pontos képet ad a korabeli használatról.

Ezzel szemben Magyarországon a XVI. századig, a magyar nyelvű szépirodalom kialakulásáig és az anyanyelvű írásbeliség elterje-

déséig kell várni az első közmondás vagy szólás dokumentált előfordulására. Ekkor jelenik meg az első proverbiumgyűjtemény, amely azonban Erasmus művének magyarítása, tehát a magyar nyelvű használatról inkább áttételes és nem feltétlenül megbízható adatokkal szolgál. A másodlagos, szépirodalmi előfordulások megjelenése is erre a korra tehető.

Ugyancsak eltérő a proverbiumkészlet nagysága, pontosabban a magyar nyelvűe kevésbé ismert, mivel átfogó gyűjtés nem történt, és a kisebb gyűjtemények feldolgozása is várat magára, így csupán becsléseink lehetnek.

A társadalmi nemekkel kapcsolatos közmondás- és szóláskincs elemzése nyomán kimondhatjuk, hogy a két nép erkölcsi és viselkedési normáiban, tilalmaiban és előírásaiban nem találtunk különbségeket. Ugyanakkor kifejezett párhuzamok rajzolódnak ki mind az előforduló témákban, mind a megközelítésben, a társadalmi szerepekben és az értékrendben egyaránt.

A női és férfi szerepeket konstituáló szabályrendszer mindkét területen az európaihoz igazodik. Ennek alapja, hogy az Ibériai-félszigeten a kereszténység az északi tartományokból a visszafoglalás vonalát követve fokozatosan húzódik dél felé. Attól kezdve, hogy a pápaság keresztes háborúvá nyilvánítja a *Reconquistát*, a római kánon jelenléte folyamatosnak tekinthető ebben a térségben. Magyarországon pedig a kereszténység felvételét követően az új vallásnak és társadalmi rendnek kellett érvényt szerezni. A szerzetesrendek eredményes működésének köszönhetően a Biblia női képe az egyház egyre közvetlenebb beavatkozása révén nálunk is bekerül a közgondolkodásba.

Az Erasmus *Adagia*-ja által elindított ókori bölcs mondások, majd az ennek mintájára készült újabb gyűjtemények anyaga jelentősen formálja az európai köztudatot. Baranyai Decsi Csímor János 1598-ban megjelent *Adagiorum Graecolatinoungaricorum Chiliades quinque* azaz *Ötezer görög-latin-magyar szólás gyűjteménye* alig néhány évtized elteltével eljut a magyar olvasóközönséghez, majd elsősorban a pré-

dikátorok révén a nem olvasó rétegekhez is. A papoknak, szerzeteseknek a nép nyelvén kellett prédikálniuk. Az egyszerű, írástudatlan tömegeket könnyen érthető, megjegyezhető fordulatokkal tudták a leghatásosabban megszólítani, ezért gyakran éltek közmondásokkal, szállóigékkel, maximákkal. Az alapvetően orális kultúrákban a szállóigék is gyorsan betagozódnak a közös proverbiumkészletbe, sokszor elkülöníthetetlenül összevegyülve az anonim közmondásokkal. Ezeket a kategóriákat nehéz – legalábbis történetileg – megnyugtatóan szétválasztani. Vagyis a közmondások jó részéről valószínűsíthető, hogy az európai kultúra közös forrásaiból kerültek be az egyes európai nyelvekbe, azaz ún. kulturális europeizmusok.

A nőről és férfiról való ókori vélekedés a reneszánsz közvetítésével betagozódik a kora újkori európai társadalmak gondolkodásába, megerősíti és újratermeli a nemek értékkülönbségének elméletét és gyakorlatát. A magyar és a spanyol közmondásokból kirajzolódó társadalmi nemi szerepek egybecsengenek a patriarchális kultúrák nyugat-európai hagyományban továbbélő évezredes normáival. A kereszténység mint közös vallás és egyházi intézményrendszer, valamint a kontinenst egységbe fogó műveltségi nyelv, a latin a társadalmi nemi modellek tekintetében is az európai fejlődéshez kapcsolta mindkét területet.

A proverbiumkincs e szeletének vizsgálata arról tanúskodik, hogy egyrészt az Ibériai-félsziget, másrészt a Kárpát-medence is beilleszkedik az európai kultúra egészébe. Bizonyos tehát, hogy odáig mindenképpen kiterjednek kontinensünk kulturális határai, a végső vonalak megrajzolása azonban további kutatások sorára vár.

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ANNA KONSTANTINOVA

## “IS A WOMAN’S PLACE IN THE HOME?”: THE (ANTI-)PAREMIOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES

**Abstract:** The focus of the paper is on the gendered proverb “A woman’s place is in the home” and its current adaptive use in Anglo-American discourse. The goal of the study is to describe the role the proverb and its modifications have played in reflecting and constructing attitudes towards women’s place in society. The material comprises 120 sampled examples including texts from online articles, blogs, social media posts, and multi-modal texts (memes). The research methods applied were critical discourse analysis and multi-modal critical discourse analysis complemented by lingua-cultural method, stylistic analysis, sampling and corpus methodology. The study explores the linguistic and cognitive-discursive profiles of the proverb while focusing on its discursive modifications, multi-modal dimension, and metalinguistic function. The findings suggest that “A woman’s place is in the home” is crucial for the construction and interpretation of Anglo-American discourse on gender equality and women’s rights; while it is still used to transmit gender stereotypes, its recycled versions play significant role in encapsulating and promoting social change.

**Keywords:** gendered proverbs, gender stereotypes, gender equality, discursive modification, political activism, metalinguistic function

### 1. Introduction

“Women’s rights are human rights” is a maxim whose authorship is still tightly connected to the name of Hillary R. Clinton (Clinton 1995, Mieder 2019: 211-214) in the minds of contemporary speakers of English. It, nevertheless, has all the prerequisites for becoming a proverb in its own right. One could assume that it sprang from the feminist tenet that “any continued systematic inequalities” between men and women must be stopped which “doesn’t equate with an arbitrary political goal, but to human rights” (Jule 2018: 20). Gender in-

equality and gender justice for women are part and parcel of current Anglo-American (and global) sociopolitical agenda. These issues are being addressed with varying degree of success in different spheres of sociopolitical interaction. Scholars from multifarious domains offer insights into the problem as well, linguistics making its own generous contribution.

Idiomatic language has been instrumental for the sociopolitical discourse on gender inequality. For instance, “glass ceiling”, “glass labyrinth”, “glass cliff”, and “glass escalator” are gendered idioms naming some aspects of male privilege in the professional sphere and allude to the myriad of problems women still have to face when pursuing their careers.

The study of the “language-gender” dyad is now a truly interdisciplinary field. Although purely linguistic aspects still present certain scholarly interest, “the interdisciplinary investigation of *discourse-level* (*cursive added* – A.K.) phenomena, always a robust area of language and gender scholarship, has become the central approach of the field”. (Buholtz 2003: 43)

The main focus in this paper is on the gendered proverb “A woman’s place is in the home” (1844) and its current adaptive use in Anglo-American discourse. The proverb encapsulates one of the gender stereotypes about women’s inferior position in society and, therefore, holds significant relevance for the study. My article is an attempt to provide a perspective on how paremiological inquiry can contribute to the investigation of the discourse-level phenomena of the “language-gender” dyad. The goal of the paper is to describe the role the gendered proverb “A woman’s place is in the home” and its modifications have played in reflecting and constructing attitudes towards women’s place in society.

## *2. Methods and empirical data*

The research has been carried out within the cognitive-discursive framework of linguistics as an integral approach that aims to explain the role language units (in the present study - proverbs) play in production and structuring of discourse and optimization of communicative impact.

I applied the corpus linguistics methodology (the iWeb corpus search); Google and Yahoo searches for sampling the examples of discursive use of the proverb “A woman’s place is in the home”, its variants, and modifications. The empirical data mainly include texts from online articles, blogs, and social media posts; memes, and some random examples of internet communication (ca 500 contexts). For the purposes of the research, I limited the sampled material to a hundred and twenty examples representative of the diversity of contexts and variations of the proverb.

The methods used for studying the practical material were critical discourse analysis (CDA) and multi-modal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) (for multi-modal texts) complemented by lingua-cultural method and stylistic analysis. In general terms, CDA is a critical linguistic approach that focuses on institutional, political, gender and media discourses which testify to “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control”. (Wodak and Meyer 2001: 2) As R. Wodak points out, “CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled (sic!), constituted, legitimized and so on by language use (or in discourse)”. (ibid)

Multi-modal texts from our material, i.e. texts created with the use of several semiotic modes (e.g., verbal and visual, like in Internet memes) were studied through the lens of MCDA which seeks to elicit the answer to the fundamental question: “What semiotic resources are drawn upon in communication, or discourse, in order to carry out ideological work?” (Ledín and Machin 2018: 60).

### 3. *Theoretical framework*

As has been stated above, the research into discourse and gender is an interdisciplinary endeavor which pursues the following two lines of investigation: 1) “the linguistic resources individuals draw on to present themselves as gendered beings in relation to other aspects of the self within the constraints of their communities; and 2) “the discursive construction of gender and its many components through *words* and *image* (*cursive added – A.K.*)” (Tannen 2015: 639). Gender biased words and expressions that tend to reinforce gender stereotypes (“gendered language”), therefore, present significant scholarly interest in both aspects.

When dealing with gendered phraseology and paremiology, one enters the domain of complex cognitive constructs. From a cognitive linguistics perspective, proverbs can be treated as verbalized, culturally approved frames (Lewandowska and Antos 2015: 162), i.e., mental structures and linguistic symbols of recurrent life situations. The cognitive function of the proverb is indispensable from its cultural function, i.e., conveyance of cultural meanings, prescriptions, and *stereotypes* (Konstantinova 2021: 369). My previous research has shown that proverbs serve as discursive *metalinguistic* vehicles which enable the audience to move from the known and familiar to the unknown and unfamiliar (Konstantinova 2021; Konstantinova 2022). Such metalinguistic use of proverbs consists in resorting to traditional well-known and typically recognized key wording and imagery (elements of imagery) backed by vast cultural background to introduce and explain new sociopolitical phenomena.

The overview of paremiological literature shows that there has been extensive research into women and proverbs. Wolfgang Mieder’s catalogues of paremiological publications (Mieder 2009) as well as his tirelessly assembled yearly bibliographies for *Proverbium* list hundreds of scholarly papers on the matter. Online social networking platforms for scholars register a slew of recently published items. They cover cultural, ideological, linguistic, stylistic, socio-lin-

guistic aspects of the problem in a plethora of lingua-cultures. Anna T. Litovkina has demonstrated keen scholarly interest in this area of paremiological inquiry as well, her recent book offering insight into different dimensions of womanhood as reflected through American anti-proverbs (Litovkina 2019).

#### 4. *Analysis of the material and discussion*

##### 4.1. *Linguistic profile of the proverb*

It is a phraseological truism in itself that phraseologisms, proverbs included, are prone to variation, i.e. they have variants – diligently registered in dictionaries and references by lexicographers – as a part of their canonical repertoire. The entry for the proverb “A woman’s place is in the home” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* lists no variants (Speake 2004: 338). *The Dictionary of American Proverbs* gives the following variations: “A woman’s place is in the hay”, “Woman’s sphere is in the home” none of which seems to be in frequent use (Mieder et al. 1992: 666). Quite expectedly, the proverb itself, its precursors, and variants have been scrutinized by several etymologists and language enthusiasts who cite “A woman’s place is in the *house*” and “A woman’s place is in the *kitchen*” as the variations of the traditional proverb (Popik 2009; Martin). My study has also shown that the versions in question enjoy discursive popularity and can be treated as bona fide variants of the proverb.

##### 4. 2. *Discursive profile of the proverb*

###### 4.2.1. Stylistic and pragmatic aspects of the proverb

According to G. Martin, “A woman’s place is in the home” “has undergone a change in meaning and acquired ironical ring to it” (Martin) – hence, presumably, its scarce use in the original form in my material. As my analysis demonstrates, creative play with the proverb and ensuing modifications is what defines its circulation in modern discourse on women’s rights. **Lexical substitution** is the most widely used stylistic modification device, the lexemes “home”, “house”,

and “kitchen” being replaced by the words marking a slew of places modern women belong in. Not only does it testify to the currently prevailing idea of the dictum being wrong and discriminatory, but also captures numerous changes societies have undergone and are still undergoing in terms of the issue of gender equality. As the majority of the studied examples show, the “recycled” phrases serve as conspicuous verbal devices for registering women’s trailblazing experiences in the professional sphere. Thus, women are seen as belonging in a variety of

- stereotypically male-oriented professions or occupational roles: “A woman’s place is in the courtroom”, “Women belong in the lab”, “A woman’s place is in the market”, “A woman’s place is in the US counterterrorism”, “A woman’s place is on the front lines” (reference to female troops), “A woman’s place is in the wild (reference to female outdoor adventurers), “A woman’s place is in the brewhouse”, “A woman’s place is behind the bench, in the press box, on the field, everywhere in sports”,



Fig. 1

- managerial jobs: “A woman’s place is in charge”, “A woman’s place is on top”, “A woman’s place is in the front office”, “A woman’s place is in the boardroom”, “A woman’s place is in the kitchen... as the head chef at a 5-star restaurant”;
- top government jobs: “A woman’s place is in the House of Representatives”, “A woman’s place is in the House of Commons”, “A woman’s place is in the House and the Senate”, “A woman’s place

is in the House and the Senate and the Oval Office”, “A woman’s place is in the White House”, “A woman’s place is in the House. And Senate. And Governor’s mansion. And, Supreme Court”.

It should be noted that the proverb appears to be firmly associated with the names of two American trailblazing female politicians Hillary R. Clinton as the first ever female presidential nominee of major US political party and Kamala Harris as the first female, first black and first Asian-American serving as vice president of the USA:



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

A truly remarkable instance of substitution that yielded an anti-proverbial gem is the maxim “A woman’s place is any place she wants to be” (1918). The phrase has been in discursive circulation for more than a century and – as it is frequently the case with significant anti-proverbs – has found its way into the *Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* in the status of a bona fide proverb! (Doyle et al. 2012: 279). The anti-proverbs enumerated above enjoy immense popularity and constantly re-emerge in different discursive situations. They, too, appear to possess the potential to become proverbs in their own right. Their common precursor “This woman’s place is in the House... the House of Representatives” originated as a political slogan for Bella Abzug’s campaign for office in the US Congress in 1970. The motto has thrived in the propitious socio-political context since then and yielded successive modifications encapsulating unprecedented progress women have achieved in politics.

#### 4.2.2. Actional dimension of the proverb

Based on my previous research, I can state that sociopolitical reality can be channeled through proverbs in *reflective* and *actional* ways. The former presupposes (con)texts that engage in processing of human experience, its evaluation, and transmission while the latter includes (con)texts that compel to sociopolitical action or try to engage in political activism to make change happen (Konstantinova 2021: 377). Numerous examples from my empirical material are actional texts. Proverbial language can be seen as a discursive strategy, or a mechanism, that helps create “discourse of action” thus enabling that change. Consider the use of the following modification turned popular feminist slogan in the examples from my empirical material:

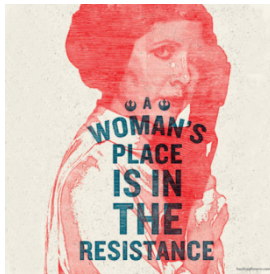


Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Figure 5 features a poster created by the artist Hayley Gilmore for the Women’s March on Washington in 2017. Women’s March was a protest that took place worldwide on January 21 after the inauguration of Donald Trump as US president. The poster presents a multi-modal combination of the portrait of the *Star Wars*’ character Princess Leia, famed for her exploits, and the anti-proverbial appeal to women to join the resistance. The other poster (Figure 6) shows a feminized image of the Argentinian Marxist revolutionary Che Guevara to stress the effort and commitment to the cause. In both multi-modal texts creators rely on the authority of the legendary personae they reference.



Apart from compelling to action, actional texts are aimed at creating and maintaining awareness about significant social phenomena. Analysis of such contexts can play a certain part in changing gendered divisions or be beneficial to the cause of bringing about social change precisely because it reveals hidden problems and issues. The truncated phrase “A woman’s place” – still preserving close bonds with the original and its connotations – has been systematically chosen as the name of organizations and campaigns striving to help women who find themselves in difficult situations. For instance, “A Woman’s Place” (AWP) is the only domestic violence community benefit organization in Bucks County, Pennsylvania or “A Woman’s Place-CARE Program” offers transitional Housing for up to 18 months available for HIV-positive women (including transgender women) residents of San Francisco.

#### 4.2.3. Multi-modal dimension of the proverb

A cursory glance at a number of multi-modal media texts (memes) from the practical material with the anti-proverbs (Figure 7-8) or just an allusion to the traditional proverb (Figure 9-12) reveals a playful recycling of “A woman’s place is in the kitchen” variant for purely entertainment purposes, i.e. creating a joke for the sake of joke:



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

A closer inspection, however, uncovers the fact that the memes capture the broader sociopolitical context and offer misogynistic commentary on the social changes, that some men might not be welcoming or be defying.

A number of the studied examples showcase a tendency in the media to depict women/girls as hostile or even aggressive characters:



Fig. 13

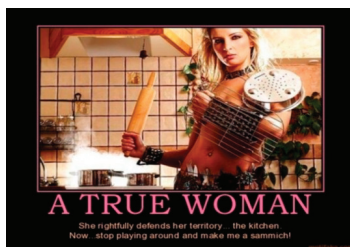


Fig. 14

The meme in Figure 13 suggests that women are taught feminist principles from childhood years and illustrates, in a jokingly exaggerated manner, that they are capable of actively resisting oppression by men.

On the other hand, Figure 14 is one of a series of “make me a sandwich” memes, and belongs to the pool of texts from my material conveying a negative attitude to women’s emancipation and reinforcing (somewhat aggressively) the old gender stereotype about a woman’s place. The effect of the visual element (an image of a woman warrior) is dissipated by the verbal element – the caption that con-

tains the intentionally misspelled derogatory catchphrase “Make me a sammich”, which has been increasingly deployed by male internet users to spread contempt for women’s empowerment and mockery of their high aspirations (Burnes 2013).

#### 4.2.4. Metalinguistic dimension of the proverb

The instances of “*proverbsplaining*”, i.e. metalinguistic application of the proverb, are quite numerous in the collected material as well. In Figure 14, for instance, the proverbial stereotype sustained through visual allusion serves as a shrewd guideline on how to mold a good woman. The social status of a woman as a housewife is time and again framed as eminently desirable:



Fig. 15

Due to its succinctness and vibrant cultural connotations, the proverb (and, occasionally, its truncated form) serves as an effective titling instrument. A number of social events like exhibitions and media projects have received the proverbial title. To mention a few, “A Woman’s Place: The Changing Picture of Women in Britain” was a 1984 British Council exhibition (accompanied by the eponymous book) celebrating British women’s multifarious achievements. “A Woman’s Place Is in the House” became the title of the photoshoot of 27 female members-elect to the U.S. House of Representatives devised to commemorate this unprecedented milestone in 2018.

Significantly enough, the proverb has been chosen for titling a number of printed works. These include books exploring women’s

successes, e.g. “A Woman’s Place: The Inventors, Rumrunners, Lawbreakers, Scientists, and Single Moms Who Changed the World with Food” by Deepi Ahluwalia who writes about the trailblazing women that changed the world FROM their kitchens or “A Woman’s Place Is in the Brewhouse: A Forgotten History of Alewives, Brewsters, Witches and CEOs” by Tara Nurin who explores the female imprint in brewing business.

More importantly, however, the proverb has provided the socio-cultural background for scientific research. The article “A woman’s place is in the ‘home’? Gender-specific hiring patterns in academia in gender-equal Norway” investigated women’s hiring patterns in academia (Moratti 2021). “A Woman’s Place: Equality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” is the title of the research series from the abrdn Research Institute that sought to find what drives differences in female participation in the workforce and highlight why diversity and inclusion policy is of importance for investors. Another noteworthy example is a BA thesis in Environmental Studies entitled “A Woman’s Place is in the Resistance: An Ecofeminist Response to Climate Change” which addresses the unique impacts of climate change on women and gender diverse people throughout the world (Jonson 2022)

## 5. Conclusion

The study of the popular gendered proverb “A woman’s place is in the home” has explored its linguistic and cognitive-discursive repertoire.

The linguistic profiling of the phrase and its equally popular variants “A woman’s place is in the kitchen” and “A woman’s place is in the house” allows me to conclude that they have enjoyed a long and fascinating history of effective use in English-language discourse surrounding the problem of women’s rights and gender equality. Their employment in the traditional (canonical) form or sense is conspicuously scarce. The most frequent stylistic modification device is lexical substitution which helps to encompass the wide array of places in society modern women belong in. These include stereotypically

male-oriented professions or occupational roles; managerial jobs, and top government jobs. The significant milestones for women in politics (notably in the USA) are epitomized by the ingenious anti-proverb coined as a political campaign slogan “A woman’s place is in the House of Representatives” and a number of its successors.

In my empirical material, the actional dimension of the proverb under analysis is realized via its use as political slogans and names of social campaigns, events, and non-profit organizations assisting women in need and raising awareness about gender inequality.

The multi-modal dimension of the proverb is of special interest. Memetic effect relies on visual and verbal components of media products; so familiarity with the proverb becomes a clue for interpreting their message. My analysis demonstrates that in the practical material multiple memes built on the proverb’s wording and/or imagery convey the still existing gender prejudice about women’s social roles and offer misogynistic commentary on the significant changes that some men don’t welcome or even defy.

The study also concludes that the metalinguistic function of the proverb “A woman’s place is in the home” is crucial for the construction and interpretation of the discourse on gender equality and women’s rights. As much as the proverb still reflects and contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes about women, its recycled versions play a special role in encapsulating and promoting change. As the examples overwhelmingly demonstrate, they fixate social change by verbally monumentalizing it and, thus, giving it a chance to last. My research is another testimony to the fact that language use is highly imaginative and flexible throughout time and discourse. Proverbs, in their turn, lend themselves well to language play and do it smoothly, eloquently, and authoritatively. It is my hope, therefore, that the present study can be a stepping stone towards our better understanding of traditional proverbs as custodians of stereotypical ideas and – which is of paramount importance – their multiple retooled uses that name existing problems, show ways to resolve them, identify changing attitudes, and facilitate transition through change.

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WOLFGANG MIEDER

“FREEDOM IS NOT GIVEN, IT IS WON”:  
DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES IN MODERN  
AMERICAN PROVERBS

**Abstract:** There exist older and newer proverbs as well as modern anti-proverbs that express in general terms the American political worldview. Some were coined by or are attributed to American presidents, but most of them are anonymous bits of wisdom about the world of American politics on the national, state, and local level. The most important proverbs deal with democracy and freedom, but there are also significant proverbs that reflect the American preoccupation with business and social politics. Examples (with their dates of origin) are cited in context from the writings and speeches of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Harry S. Truman, Martin Luther King, Barack Obama, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and others. Together the proverbs and anti-proverbs based on existing proverbial structures mirror the American mentality regarding socio-political matters.

**Keywords:** American, anti-proverb, democracy, freedom, politics, worldview.

There are a number of older proverbs that belong to the American political worldview. It so happens that several of them are attributed to Abraham Lincoln, the country's most revered and quite proverbial president (Mieder 2000). Before the Civil War, he made the Biblical proverb “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Mark 3:25) a slogan in his plea to keep the young union intact (Mieder 2005: 90-117). When he ran for reelection, he did employ the proverb “Don't change horses in mid-stream” on June 4, 1864, as an argument for keeping him in office, but it has been found in print as early as 1834 (Mieder 2008: 205-250). And there is also the lengthy tongue-twisting proverb “You can fool all of the people some of the time; you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time” that the witty president is supposed to have

uttered during the late 1850s. However, the earliest published record dates from 1887 with many humorous anti-proverbs having followed ever since (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 340-341; Litovkina 2013: 99-100 and 2015). And more importantly, there is the proverbial triad “Government of the people, by the people, and for the people” with some slightly different precursors. Most significant is clearly the rendering with the emphasis on “all” by the abolitionist Theodore Parker from May 29, 1850: “Government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people.” President Lincoln cited it at the end of his famous “Gettysburg Address” of November 19, 1863: “Government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” He unfortunately dropped the all-inclusiveness from his statement, realizing that the country was by far not ready to include African American men or let alone women in the political process. (Mieder 2005: 15-55). But just the same, his variant represents perhaps the best short definition of democracy!

Even though Archer Taylor, the doyen of international paremiology, argued already in his classic study *The Proverb* (1931) that “all ascriptions [of proverbs] to definite persons must be looked at with suspicion” (38), it remains a fact that Lincoln’s name will remain affixed to these proverbs. A more modern case is President Harry S. Truman’s repeated use of the proverb “The buck stops here” (DMP 28; such references refer to the entries in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* by Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro 2012) of which he had a sign on his desk, as most Americans know, to remind him since 1945 that as president following the sudden death of Franklin Delano Roosevelt he carried the ultimate responsibility for major governmental decisions. As one of the most proverbial American presidents (Mieder and Bryan 1997) he referred to this sign in two speeches in the early 1950s. The utterance of the proverb (here cited as the proverbial phrase “to pass the buck”) during a speech on October 14, 1948, stands out, since he employed it as an answer to the omnipresent question of why he decided to drop the atomic bomb at the end of World War II:

*As President of the United States, I had the fateful responsibility of deciding whether or not to use this weapon for the first time. It was the hardest decision that I ever had to make. But the President cannot duck hard problems – he cannot pass the buck. [...] I decided that the bomb should be used in order to end the war quickly and save countless lives – Japanese as well as American. But I resolved then and there to do everything I could to see that this awesome discovery was turned into a force for peace and the advancement of mankind.*  
(Mieder 1997: 96-97)

More often than not, this proverb, with its earliest appearance in print in 1942, is stated with the introductory formulas “as Truman said”, assuring that his name will remain attached to it, even though he most certainly did not originate it.

Things are much more straightforward with President Theodore Roosevelt’s imperialistic proverb “Speak softly and carry a big stick” that he coined in a letter of January 26, 1900: “I have always been fond of the West African proverb: ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far’” (DMP 238). On several later occasions Roosevelt repeated the proverb, without the last clause and without the West African ascription. Not having found the proverb in the numerous African proverb collections, it must be assumed that Roosevelt, who had traveled to Africa, added the ascription to add clout to his invention. It too is often used with Roosevelt’s name attached to it and varying the first verb with “talk” or “walk”, expressing a controlling mentality or worldview (Dundes 1972, Hakamies 2002, Mieder 2004 137-139). A quarter century later, President Calvin Coolidge said on January 18, 1925: “After all, the chief business of the American people is business.” He repeated it shortly before the beginning of the Great Depression on August 28, 1928, in a slightly varied formulation as “The business of America is business” (DMP 30) that quickly became proverbial. The next president who came up with a memorable statement was John F. Kennedy who in his inaugural address on January 20, 1960, uttered the following words with enthusiastic vigor: “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can

do for your country” (*DMP* 45-46). He most likely had help from his sophisticated speech writer Theodore C. Sorenson who might have based the statement on a remark by Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. of May 30, 1884: “It is now the moment [...] to recall what our country has done for each of us, and to ask ourselves what we can do for our country in return” (Mieder 2005: 172-173). Just the same, he coined the proverbial motto as it is known today. However, his father Joseph P. Kennedy did not invent the popular “When the going gets tough, the tough get going” (*DMP* 106) as yet another proverbial slogan for energetic action. It has been attributed to him since about 1960, after having its start with the football coach Frank Leahy in 1954. Such motivating phrases bring to mind the modern proverbs “Push, pull, or get out of the way” (1909, *DMP* 273) and “Lead, follow, or get out of the way” (1912, *DMP* 273) that were not picked up by the presidents. That leaves the modern Russian proverb “Trust but verify” (*DMP* 264) that appeared in English in the press in 1966 and was quoted by President Ronald Reagan at a campaign rally in Springfield, Missouri, on October 23, 1986 (Shapiro 2021: 676). It continues to be attributed to Reagan, even though he stated that he had learned it from Mikhail Gorbachev. And President Donald Trump? Nothing at all from him as his talks and twitter messages are basically void of metaphorical language. But there is the relatively new proverb “Love trumps hate” (Doyle and Mieder 2018: 30-31) from 1996 that has acquired a special satiric application in light of “Trump” as a menacing political phenomenon.

With this the American political scene with its intricacies has been reached for which the nineteenth-century proverb “Politics makes strange bedfellows” (1832; Shapiro 2021: 662) is the appropriate descriptor and which originally might well have been an anti-proverb of “Misery makes strange bedfellows” from the seventeenth century that in turn probably goes back to William Shakespeare’s “Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows” in *The Tempest* (1611; Mieder, Kingsbury, Harder 1992: 413 and 472). This old proverb is as popular today as ever, but of much greater significance for a democracy is the relatively recent proverb “Politics is not a spectator sport” that comes

from Nelson Rockefeller's statement on November 17, 1963: "And I think we would arouse a lot of participation on the part of the public. Politics is not a spectator sport. We need public participation" (DMP 113). It is possible that Rockefeller based his remark on the slightly earlier "Life is not a spectator sport. We are all on the team" (1958, DMP 143) that shows that the "spectator sport" metaphor alludes to the ever-present world of sports. As if to prove this obvious point, there is the proverb "Politics is a contact sport" (1960, DMP 203) expressing that it takes serious involvement to make democracy work. Frederick Douglass, the renowned former slave and abolitionist, clearly had this in mind when he uttered the proverbial words "No struggle, no progress" (Mieder 2021a: 172) during one of his memorable anti-slavery speeches on August 3, 1857:

*The whole history of the progress of human liberty shows that all concessions yet made to her august claims, have been born of earnest struggle. The conflict has been exciting, agitating, all-absorbing, and for the time being, putting all other tumults to silence. It must do this or it does nothing. If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground, they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters. This struggle may be a moral one, or it may be a physical one, and it may be both moral and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. (Mieder 2001: 456-457)*

It should be noted that "Power concedes nothing without a demand" (Mieder 2021a: 149) has also become proverbial, quite an accomplishment by Frederick Douglass, in rhetorical prowess Abraham Lincoln's equal, to create two proverbs within a short paragraph!

Yet this moral high road is clearly lacking in the more pragmatic proverbs from the modern world of American politics. Thus, the proverb "In politics a man must learn to rise above principle" (1927, DMP 202-203) seems to argue that in certain situations politicians have to push ethics aside to gain the upper hand. This probably ap-

plied especially to political campaigns with their aggressive and at times questionable tactics. Of course, such behavior and also the fair play in politics are subject to the vicissitudes of political life that is fittingly expressed in the proverb “A week is a long time in politics” (1961, *DMP* 274). It has been attributed to former Prime Minister Harold Wilson, but he appears not to have used it until several years after its first appearance in the *New York Times* of December 3, 1961. How much the media influences politics especially during important election campaigns is tellingly expressed in the proverb “In politics perception is reality” (1975, *DMP* 203). That is not exactly a very uplifting piece of wisdom, but there is plenty of truth to it. Maybe the proverb “(All) Politics is local” (1905, *DMP* 203) puts a more positive spin on the matter, since things are more easily controlled on that regional level. The proverb has come to be associated with the popular Massachusetts Congressman Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill Jr. who was known for his straight-shooting politics. Of course, there is also the proverb “You can’t fight city hall” (1933, *DMP* 40), indicating that local politics can also go array. But the proverb can also be interpreted more broadly in that “city hall” can stand for any controlling organization. Informed voters make democracy function properly, and in this regard the proverb “Signs don’t vote” (1981, *DMP* 231) is a solid piece of folk wisdom against voter coercion, arguing that campaign signs posted on road-sides and front yards do not vote, but people do! Finally, there is the proverb “The personal is political” (1970, *DMP* 196) and its anti-proverb “The political is personal” (1975, *DMP* 202) that are often cited in tandem as a chiasmus, indicating how intertwined the individual is or should be with the political process in a democratic society.

Speaking of local proverbs brings to mind a few modern texts that refer to specific states. Unfortunately, there is the negative stereotype “Thank God for Mississippi” (1929, Doyle and Mieder 2016: 100-101). That southern state has the misfortune of being one of the poorest and underprivileged in the United States, as can be seen from these three references:

1929: *"They used to say whenever a list of illiteracy according to States was published, in which North Carolina ranged next to the bottom, 'Thank God for Mississippi'."*

1947: *"'Thank God for Mississippi' was a favorite expression formerly used by some educators in Florida, the thanks being due to the fact that Mississippi kept Florida from being at the bottom of the education system in the United States by occupying that lowly position itself."*

1976: *"'Thank God for Mississippi,' they say up North, meaning that no matter how bad things get up there, there's at least one place that's worse."*

The invective is still heard today, and it is an indication of the still lingering feeling of superiority of the northern states towards the deep South. And it should be noted that within states, for example my state of Vermont, such local stereotypes also exist, as for example "Thank God for Winooski" by which other low-income cities like Milton state that they are not at the very bottom because things are even worse in the town of Winooski. Such unkind and prejudiced proverbs die hard, and it behooves people to avoid using them.

As is well known, the large state of Texas considers itself to be a special power-house and enjoys playing out his trump card with the proverbial slogan "Don't mess with Texas" (1985, *DMP* 251). It started as a theme line of a campaign for a clean environment, but it was re-interpreted as a somewhat belligerent declaration of state pride and can also be cited to refer to the insistence of avoiding problematic issues affecting the state. This somewhat obnoxious self-promotion is also expressed in the proverb "You can take the man out of Texas, but you can't take Texas out of the man" (1944, *DMP* 162) that is an adaptation of the considerably older proverb "You can take the man (a boy) out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the man (a boy)" (Mieder, Kingsbury, Harder 1992: 119). Of special interest are also three proverbs that express how the political decisions of one state affect another. An early proverb is "As Maine goes, so goes

the union” from around 1840 that was changed to “As Maine goes, so goes Vermont” (Shapiro 2021: 263) during Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first reelection of November 4, 1936, since only these two states did not vote for him. With Pennsylvania gaining more importance in the late 1850s, the variant “As Pennsylvania goes, so goes the union” took a hold on the political scene. But since California dominates the United States as an economic power and trend setter in modern life, it comes as no surprise that the modern proverb “As California goes, so goes the nation” (1940, *DMP* 32) appeared on the horizon shortly after the beginning of World War II. Finally then, there is the quite new proverb “What happens (goes on) in Las Vegas stays at Las Vegas” (2002, *DMP* 137; Bock 2014). It started as an advertising slogan as described on November 25, 2002 in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* to lure visitors to the infamous casinos of that city in the state of Nevada:

*The Las Vegas Visitors and Convention Authority, meanwhile, continued its saucy come-to-Vegas-baby advertising campaign with six new spots filmed over a three-day period last week. Depicting the theme “what happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas,” the national commercials, produced by Hungry Man Productions, feature Vegas visitors indulging fantasies in locations ranging from a limousine to a tattoo parlor.*

By now the structure underlying the slogan turned proverb has produced many anti-proverbs, as for example “What happens at home, stays at home” or more generally “What happens in the group (at the meeting, in the bar) stays ...” Actually, the original proverb has become the proverbial structure “What happens at X, stays at X”, and there is literally no limit to creating ever new variants, and it might well be that one of them could eventually become a new proverb (Doyle 1996).

Speaking of cities or even just towns, there is the heart-warming proverb “Small town, big heart” (1982, Doyle and Mieder 2016: 118). Since I live in the small town of Williston in Vermont, I feel there is



some basic truth to this observation, even though the anti-proverb "Small town, big ears" puts a negative spin on it all by referring to the fact that people will listen to gossip and rumors too much. In any case, it must not be forgotten that the United States does not consist only of major large cities known throughout the world but rather of many average-sized cities, small towns, villages, and hamlets of but a few families. This leads to the insightful proverb "It takes a (whole) village to raise a child" (1981, *DMP* 268). It is not of African origin, as has often been claimed, but had its start with the African American author Toni Morrison during the early 1980s (Speake 2008: 336; Mieder 2014b: 201-203). It was popularized by way of former US Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton's book *It Takes a Village and Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (1996: 5) with the first chapter being entitled "It Takes a Village" and the following comments:

*Children exist in the world as well as in the family. From the moment they are born, they depend on a host of other "grown-ups" – grandparents, neighbors, teachers, ministers, employers, political leaders and untold others who touch their lives directly and indirectly. Adults police their streets, monitor the quality of their food, air, and water, produce the programs that appear on their television, run the businesses that employ their parents, and write the laws that protect them. Each of us plays a part in every child's life: It takes a village to raise a child. (Mieder 2019: 214-217)*

In a way the proverb "Think globally, act locally" (1942, *DMP* 256) relates to these thoughts. Having originated in the early 1940s, it is older than one might have expected. Also current is the still shorter variant "Think global, act local". It has gained an international distribution in English and loan translations due to globalization and an ever more interconnected world with citizens being concerned about migration, the environment, natural resources, and quality of life in general. The world and certainly America face an ever-increasing gap between the rich and the poor, leading the socially conscious US Senator from Vermont Bernie Sanders to state:

*Let's take a hard look at some of America's major problems:*

*While the rich get richer, almost everyone else gets poorer; the standard of living of most Americans is in decline; democracy is in crisis, and oligarchy looms; what we know is determined by the corporate media; our health care system is in shambles; our educational system is facing a crisis.*

There is still hope that the American proverb “The rich get richer, and the poor get poorer” from the early 1840s and more recently popularized by Sanders will one day be invalidated (Mieder 2019; 235-239). In the meantime, most Americans with their generally positive worldview expressed in numerous modern proverbs (Mieder 2020 and 2021b) might well respond to Bernie Sanders with the proverb “Never (Don't) sell America short” (1922, *DMP* 5-6) or even the jingoistic proverbial slogan “Love it [America] or leave it” (1901, *DMP* 152). This type of nationalistic viewpoint comes to the fore when there is a political or economic crisis. In addition, it is also coupled with the claim that the United States is simply an exceptional country in all respects. Unfortunately, there often is the insistence that America is the best and the rest of the world is a few notches below. A proverb that expresses this viewpoint in a number of variants is “When the United States (U.S., America, Wall Street, etc.) sneezes, the world catches (a) cold (pneumonia).” It is interesting to note that the earliest reference found actually contradicts the America centeredness: “It was once said that ‘when the United States sneezes, the world catches pneumonia.’ A more fitting expression would perhaps be that ‘the world is like the human body, if a part aches, the rest will feel it’ (1977, Doyle and Mieder 2020: 84). In any case, the proverb appears primarily in financial contexts, and it is noteworthy that quite a few modern American proverbs relate to monetary matters, as I have shown in my study “‘Money Makes the World Go Round’: The Pecuniary Worldview of Modern American Proverbs” (Mieder 2020: 155-184). The capitalist society is reflected in such proverbs as “Another day, another dollar” (1907, *DMP* 50), “You can only spend a dollar (spend money, spend earnings) once” (1913, *DMP* 60), and “A dollar

in the bank is worth two in the hand" (1904, *DMP* 59), with the latter having originated as an anti-proverb based on the fifteenth-century English proverb "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" that is known since the Middle Ages in most European language (Paczolay 1997: 194-202). Nevertheless, speaking of capitalism, there is the corporate proverb "What is good for General Motors is good for America (the country)" (1953, *DMP* 95). It had its start as a misquotation of testimony that Charles E. Wilson, former president of General Motors, gave at a US Senate hearing: "For years I thought what was good for the country was good for General Motors, and vice versa. The difference did not exist." In its later use the proverb usually satirizes the idea that the flourishing of large corporations is related in a positive way to the well-being of the county and its population.

A similar concept is expressed in the newer proverb "What's good for Main Street is good for Wall Street" (1995, Doyle and Mieder 2016: 107) that sometimes is expanded to "What's good for Main Street is good for Wall Street is good for America" (1995, Doyle and Mieder 2016: 118-119). The money managers and hedge fund investors came up with the reversal of this proverb that emphasizes the importance of the financial world: "What's good for Wall Street is good for Main Street." The variant "If it's good for Wall Street, it's good for Main Street" seems to argue even stronger for the well-being of the population being dependent on the success of the financial markets. But is this really true or, to speak with Bernie Sanders one more time, are the rich getting richer and the poor poorer? Barack Obama used both proverbs repeatedly during speeches as he campaigned for the presidency. On November 24, 2008 at Chicago, now already as President, he paraphrased the first proverb in his emphasis for joint efforts by members of both streets to stand on solid and fair financial footing: "Even as we are doing whatever's required to stabilize the financial system [...] we [must] also recognize that a strong Main Street will reinforce and help a strong Wall Street, and that we can't separate those two things" (Mieder 2009: 259). And in the same speech, he also alluded to the second proverb, stressing once again the need for people of

both streets having to work hand in glove together for the benefit of all: “I’ve sought leaders who [...] share my fundamental belief that we cannot have a thriving Wall Street without a thriving Main Street; that in this country, we rise and fall as one nation, as one people” (Mieder 2009: 334). What delight to reread these words of the remarkable President Barack Obama, whose uplifting sociopolitical and humane ideals are expressed so convincingly in his book with the appropriate title *The Audacity of Hope. Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream* (2006). It is there where he stated: “There are some things I’m absolutely sure about – the Golden Rule, the need to battle cruelty in all its forms, the value of love and charity, humility and grace” (p. 224). Indeed, an adherence to the Golden Rule “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12) that is present in the major religions of the world, should be the foundation of all human interaction and should guide us to a better world for everybody. Here are President Obama’s unforgettable words spoken on June 4, 2009, in front of thousands of students at Cairo University in Egypt:

*It’s easier to start wars than to end them. It’s easier to blame others than to look inward. It’s easier to see what is different about someone than to find the things we share. But we should choose the right path, not just the easy path. There’s one rule that lies at the heart of every religion – that we do unto others as we would have them do to us. This truth transcends nations and peoples – a belief that isn’t new; that isn’t black or white or brown; that isn’t Christian or Muslim or Jew. It’s a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions around the world. It’s a faith in other people, and it’s what brought me here today.* (Mieder 2014b: 193)

Many American presidents have cited this humane rule, but, not at all surprising at all, it has not been heard from former President Donald Trump.

In a world that is plagued by wars, terrorism, and ill-suited leaders, it is difficult at times to keep up Obama’s high spirit. The modern American proverb “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” and its reversal “One man’s freedom fighter is another

man's terrorist" (1970, *DMP* 162), originally anti-proverbs of the sixteenth-century proverb "One man's meat is another man's poison" (Mieder, Kingsbury, Harder 1992: 408; Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 250-251), illustrate the complex power struggles that overshadow valiant attempts at making sure that we are our bothers' and sisters' keepers (Genesis 4:9), as Barack Obama stressed repeatedly (Mieder 2009: 180-181). Of course, this presumes a willingness to see where change and improvement are necessary and then to act upon such recognition. This is well expressed in the interesting proverb "Seeing is freeing" (1942, *DMP* 225) that clearly had its start as an anti-proverb of "Seeing is believing" from the early seventeenth century (Mieder, Kingsbury, Harder 1992: 530). It appeared as a headline of a short article in the *Washington Post* of May 2, 1942: "Seeing is freeing - Before Pearl Harbor, Ray and Robert Graham, twins, tried to join the Navy to 'see the world'. [...] On their seventeenth birthday, the twins returned. 'This time we want to help free, not just see, the world,' they chorused." This brings to mind the proverb "Eternal vigilance (by the people) is the price of liberty" (Mieder 2021a: 188) that was coined by President Andrew Jackson in his farewell speech of March 4, 1837. It is also current in the variant "Eternal vigilance is the price of freedom" (Mieder, Kingsbury, Harder 1992: 232), and it is four modern American "freedom" proverbs that will bring these deliberations to a conclusion.

There is first of all the proverb "Freedom is not free" (1943, *DMP* 85) that had its start as a more explicit advertisement for war bonds in the middle of World War II: "Freedom is not free - It is priceless." A few months later the *New York Times* of September 23, 1943 had a similar call for the purchase of war bonds: "Freedom is not free. We must fight for it." These calls for financial support of the war efforts and a call to arms for freedom are today lost in the employment of the short proverb "Freedom is not free" that signifies rather generally that freedom has a price of engagement, commitment, and belief in democracy. The proverb "Freedom is not for sale" (1949, *DMP* 85) and its older wording "Freedom cannot be bought" expressing the

same idea as early as 1830 contain the message that money is not or should not be the determining factor in a free and democratic society. While this uplifting proverb has gained general currency, this is not so much the case with the rather depressing proverb “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose” (1969, *DMP* 85) that stems from the song “Me and Bobby McGee” by Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster: “Freedom’s just another word for nothin’ left to lose, / Nothin’ ain’t worth nothin’, but it’s free” (Shapiro 2021: 464).

Three African American voices have perhaps expressed best what the eternal struggle for freedom entails. In the nineteenth century, Frederick Douglass, as a freed slave, repeated his claims that “Who would be free themselves must strike the blow” and “Better die free, than to live slaves” numerous times during his long life to call for the freedom of all people. Here is but one example from a speech of March 21, 1863:

*Action! Action! not criticism, is the plain duty of this hour. Words are now useful only as they stimulate to blows. The office of speech now is only to point out when, where, and how to strike to the best advantage. There is no time to delay. The tide is at its flood that leads on to fortune. From East to West, from North to South, the sky is written all over: “Now or never.” Liberty won by the white men would lose half its luster. “Who would be free themselves must strike the blow.” “Better even die free, than to live slaves.” This is the sentiment of every brave colored man amongst us. (Mieder 2001: 230)*

This somewhat belligerent outburst does not mean that Douglass took up arms as a violent revolutionary. His weapon remained his voice that led to friendships with Abraham Lincoln and the two early American feminists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (Mieder 2014a) who all like Douglass used proverbs and proverbial expressions to add expressiveness to their political agitation.

No wonder that later civil rights champions took rhetorical lessons from them. A. Philip Randolph, African American compatriot of Martin Luther King, is generally credited with having coined the

proverb "Freedom is never granted: it is won" in his speech on "A Vision of Freedom" delivered on his eightieth birthday on April 15, 1969 at New York:

*Salvation for the Negro masses must come from within. Freedom is never granted: it is won. Justice is never given: it is exacted. But in our struggle we must draw for strength upon something that transcends the boundaries of race. We must draw for strength upon the capacity of human beings to act with humanity towards one another.* (Summerville 2020: 305)

However, Martin Luther King, known for his proverbial prowess, had actually written less than two years earlier "Freedom is not given, it is won" in his book *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (1967: 19; Mieder 2010: 313 and 2021a: 88), a widely distributed book that Randolph most assuredly had read. Clearly King coined the proverb with Randolph as his comrade and friend in the struggle for freedom throughout America helping to spread the good word. In any case, the prophetic voice of Martin Luther King, who popularized the proverb "God can make a way out of no way" and its secular variant "Making a way out of no way" (Mieder 2010: 171-186 and 2021a: 95; Doyle 2014), from the concluding message of his famous "I have a Dream" speech on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. is best suited to end these proverbial deliberations:

*Let freedom ring [...]. And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring in every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children – black and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last."*

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POLINA OLENEVA

## ENGLISH MONEY ANTI-PROVERBS AS STYLISTIC DEVICES

**Abstract:** This paper intends to analyse the stylistic elements of structural transformations in a group of English money anti-proverbs. The study specifically makes use of a dataset of 370 English anti-proverbs that are related to the subject of money which were collected from various sources. The examination focuses on how frequently proverbs are transformed, and how people utilize them to convey thoughts or feelings by altering the original proverb's structure. The patterns of each type of transformation may exhibit a stylistic tendency. To learn how these changes disclose the stylistic preferences of speakers, a bigger sample of anti-proverbs in English, Russian, and other languages should be researched in the future.

**Keywords:** Anti-proverbs, proverbs, money, transformations, stylistics, foregrounding.

### *1. Introduction*

Language is a common tool for expressing emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, and proverbs are often used in daily communication. Proverbs have various functions, such as persuasion, reinforcement, and advice. They are short, well-known sentences that contain wisdom, morals, and traditional views, passed down from generation to generation (Mieder 2004). However, since languages are constantly changing, the form and function of proverbs can also evolve over time.

Language users can alter traditional proverbs to produce anti-proverbs that serve a variety of functions. A proverb that has been altered, parodied, changed, or broken is known as an anti-proverb. An anti-proverb can be a satirical or hilarious short sentence that was coined by an individual or group, whereas a proverb is a well-known sentence that contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional val-

ues (Mieder 1983). Anti-proverbs are less frequent than proverbs and frequently depart from the fixed and memorably transmitted form.

The history of anti-proverbs research commenced in the 1980's with the collection of German anti-proverbs which was compiled by Wolfgang Mieder in his publication *Antispruchwort*. In 1999, the first collection of English anti-proverbs was also conducted by Wolfgang Mieder with Anna Tóthné Litovkina in a book titled *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs*. Later, the research of anti-proverbs has been attempted in other languages such as Hungarian (e.g., T. Litovkina and Vargha 2005), French (e.g., Mignaval 2004), and Russian (e.g., Walter and Mokienko 2001, 2005). Moreover, there were more attempts to examine anti-proverbs in English (e.g., T. Litovkina and Mieder 2006) and German (Gossler, 2005).

These modifications of the original proverbs, which form patterns or different sorts of proverb conversions, represent tendencies stylistically. Proverbs in general can serve as a model for creating original sentences (Valdaeva 2003: 379). Van Peer et al. (2007) assert that in order to draw generalizations, it is necessary to identify patterns that can help us identify tendencies through empirical research. The goal of the current paper is to identify trends in the anti-proverbial or "new proverbial" transformation of proverbs, as Valdaeva referred to them (2003: 390). Typically, language users change the original proverbs to emphasize their own ideas for their listeners or readers through textual patterning, also known as foregrounding. The ways in which specific elements of a text can be made to stand out or appear prominent by textual patterning are described as this stylistic method (Gibbons & Whiteley 2018: 16). For instance, the anti-proverb *Money cannot buy happiness, but it may corrupt it!* was developed from the original proverb {*Money cannot buy happiness*} to highlight the harmful effects of money through deviance by adding additional elements to the proverb.

According to Stockwell (2002: 14), foregrounding in language can be achieved through various devices such as repetition, syntactic structures, and rhyming. These same devices are also used in the

creation of anti-proverbs, which are modifications of original proverbs that make certain ideas stand out. By deviating from the expected proverb, anti-proverbs can grab the attention of readers or listeners and make ideas more prominent. This can be achieved by putting the anti-proverb in the foreground while the original proverb remains in the background. The use of anti-proverbs can be ironic or satirical and may have functions in discourse beyond the current scope of research. Further investigation into the use and functions of anti-proverbs is needed in any future attempt.

Busse (2014: 112) stated that deviation is the departure from language conventions. Thus, proverbs are more traditional for people, whereas anti-proverbs are more innovative. As a result, the main principle behind foregrounding as a stylistic device is to make certain units of language “appear uncommon, deprived of automatization, deautomized,” and so on (Havranek 1964: 10). As far as anti-proverbs are concerned, this kind of automatization in a proverb can be violated according to Valdaeva (2003: 383) by inserting unpredictable words or phrases or changing its constituents which reflects the basis of forming the anti-proverbs i.e., “defeated expectancy”. Language users who prefer an unpredictable presentation of traditional proverbs cause the change in the original proverbs. This type of unconventionality in reiterating well-known proverbs in a novel way seeks the attention of listeners and/or a better or stronger message delivery. The current paper will attempt to demonstrate these novel ways of altering these commonly used proverbs pertaining to the money theme.

The objective of this research is to examine anti-proverbs in English from a stylistic viewpoint. The study will focus on the structural features of anti-proverbs, and how these characteristics can enhance their persuasiveness. Additionally, the study will analyse the frequency of various types of anti-proverbs to determine the most prevalent transformations. The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that speakers’ choices can reveal tendencies in discourse by utilizing specific textual patterns, namely structural transformations.

## 2. *Data Collection and Methodology*

There exist various methods of modifying proverbs that have been studied by famous paremiologists. However, there are some commonly used types of alterations, such as addition, omission, substitution, blending of proverbs, punning, among others. These types of transformations have been extensively researched by scholars, including Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina (1999), T. Litovkina & Mieder (2006), Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Barta & Vargha (2018), T. Litovkina et al. (2021), and others. The following section will present the most common types of transformations with illustrative examples.

The source of data for this study is the book *“Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs”* (2006) by Anna Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder, which includes 370 English anti-proverbs that cover the topic of money. The researcher specifically selected anti-proverbs related to this theme. Additionally, the anti-proverbs were classified based on their structural transformation, and only those with a single type of structural change were included in the categorization. Anti-proverbs that had more than one type of transformation were not included in the sample. The analysis will focus solely on the structural aspect of anti-proverbs and will not delve into other rhetorical devices like metaphor, allegory, or pun, as the primary objective is to explore how the formal changes in anti-proverbs contribute to communication.

## 3. *Discussion and Data Analysis*

The different ways in which proverbs can be altered are diverse. This paper will focus on the most frequently used forms of transformation, each of which will be presented separately in the following section. Through representative examples, it will be shown how speakers of English utilize anti-proverbs as stylistic devices. Furthermore, the paper will discuss the frequency of transformation types to demonstrate how certain patterns reflect common tendencies

among English speakers when they modify conventional proverbs to create new sayings with new structures and meanings. The author will provide justifications for these tendencies.

The researcher was compelled to conduct both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the anti-proverbs due to the selection criteria explained in the previous part of the paper. The frequency of different types of transformation used in the anti-proverbs is crucial to understanding how speakers use them as stylistic devices. Table 1 shows the frequency of different types of proverb transformations in the data. The most prevalent transformations found in the anti-proverbs are altering the second part of the original proverb and the blending of proverbs, and replacing two or more words, with 23%, 22%, and 20%, respectively.

*Table 1. Frequency of transformation types in data*

Type of Transformation	Frequency	Percentage
Addition in proverbs	36	9.7
Replacing of one word	44	11.9
Replacing of two or more words	74	20.0
Changing the second part of the original proverb	86	23.2
Blending of proverbs	82	22.2
Repetition of identical words	48	13.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### *3.1 Addition in proverbs*

Several proverb transformations include the original proverbs along with certain modifications. As a result, the anti-proverb may contain an additional word or phrase. Generally, these changes give the original adage new ironic or satirical meaning. The following examples demonstrate how proverbs frequently contain additions of one sound, two or three sounds, a new word, phrase, or sentence, or a number of phrases.

- (1) *Money talks, and it also stops talk {Money talks}<sup>1</sup>;*  
 (2) *Money cannot buy happiness – but it can corrupt it! {Money cannot buy happiness};*

In examples (1) and (2), it is apparent that the proverbs' original meanings are elaborated by new portions at the end, leading to the creation of anti-proverbs. The purpose of this stylistic elaboration is to highlight the influence of money in the anti-proverbs. Also, the anti-proverb, which is an extension of the original proverb, might convey information that the proverb is unable to express.

The diverse stylistic methods of adding new elements to original proverbs demonstrate the adaptability of these proverbs and how they can be modified to suit different communication needs. Speakers use this structural flexibility to express their ideas, opinions, and emotions more clearly. The addition of new elements to the beginning, middle, or end of the original proverb also reveals certain tendencies that can create patterns leading to the creation of new proverbs or anti-proverbs.

Sometimes, there can be a truncation of the original proverb when only one part of the proverb is used (mostly the beginning). Hence, the shortened (or clipped) proverb can be applied as a note to the whole version. Usually, the speakers rely on the common knowledge that they share with listeners. This sort of shared knowledge provides a common ground which makes communication smoother. Besides, this reduced form of the proverb is a technique by interlocutors to grab attention to an expressed idea relying on the listeners' knowledge.

### 3.2 *Replacing of one word*

Another common way of altering proverbs is the replacement of one word. This type of alteration usually involves replacing the first or last word of the proverb, as illustrated in the example below:

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<sup>1</sup> All original forms of anti-proverbs in the current paper will be presented within {} brackets.



(3) *Avarice is the root of all evil {Money is the root of all evil};*

Moreover, there are instances of anti-proverbs where a single word is replaced with another rhyming word. This substitution of words creates an anti-proverb that conveys a message which is different to the original proverb, as demonstrated in the example (4).

(4) *Honey talks. /says Pooh/ {Money talks};*

As a result, this kind of proverb transformation that involves replacing a key word from the original proverb demonstrates a strategy used by speakers to change the topic by changing that phrase. By using other words to change the content of the proverb and create a new proverb or anti-proverb, speakers can demonstrate their proficiency in language. This proficiency undoubtedly serves as the driving force behind such style shifts in speech or writing.

### 3.3 Replacing of two or more words

Another technique used to transform proverbs is the substitution of two or more words in the original proverb. This can result in the anti-proverb having a different number of words than the original proverb. A common example of this transformation is the Anglo-American proverb “*Old soldiers never die; they just fade away*”.

(5) *Old accountants never die; they just lose their balance;*

(6) *Old salesman never die – they just get out of commission;*

These instances pertain to professions that handle finances on a regular basis. Individuals working in such occupations often receive humorous comments about their daily work. These anti-proverbs showcase the speaker’s comprehension of the original proverb and how they can apply it to any profession.

### 3.4 Changing the second part of the original proverb

Altering the second part of the original proverb is also a frequently used transformation. In some cases, the entire second part of the

proverb is replaced. One of the most commonly altered proverbs using this method is “*If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again*”, which has undergone 65 transformations in T. Litovkina and Mieder’s (2006) collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs. However, none of these anti-proverbs mention the theme of money. Here are a few examples of the transformations from the corpus about money:

- (7) *Money makes the mean {Money makes the man};*
- (8) *Take care of the pennies and the dollars will take care of your heirs and their lawyers {Take care of your pennies and the pounds [the dollars] will take care of themselves};*

### 3.5 Blending of proverbs

Blending or contamination is the process of mixing two or more proverbs, which is a common type of proverb transformation. This can be described as a twisted proverb that incorporates more than one phraseological unit, with at least one of them being a proverb or proverb pattern. In essence, certain components of the original proverb are replaced by a part of a different proverb or proverbs, while in some cases, another proverb is added to the entire original proverb.

- (9) *A penny saved gathers no moss {A penny saved is a penny earned; A rolling stone gathers no moss};*
- (10) *Two in a bush is the root of all evil {A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; Money is the root of all evil}.*

### 3.6 Repetition of identical words

This type of transformation in anti-proverbs demonstrates various forms of repetition. According to Neal Norrick (1991: 121), repetition creates parallelism which is a unique characteristic of proverbs. This repetition can involve aspects of pronunciation, vocabulary, and meaning, making proverbs more memorable and aiding speakers in persuading listeners. Repetition can be considered a type of prov-

erb transformation, where one example is the repetition of a single word within the anti-proverb. This occurs when the original proverb remains unchanged, but the repetition of the word happens in an additional part, usually after the original proverb. The following examples illustrate this type of transformation:

- (11) *Money cannot buy happiness, but then happiness cannot buy groceries {Money can't [doesn't] buy happiness};*
- (12) *Money doesn't grow on trees, but it grows on many family trees {Money doesn't grow on trees}.*

#### 4. Conclusion

The present research focused on Anglo-American anti-proverbs, which are intentional variations, parodies, transformations, and alterations of conventional proverbs. The aim of the study was to demonstrate the foregrounding feature of English anti-proverbs, which is achieved through the transformation of original proverbs. The study investigated the most frequent types of proverb transformations, including addition, omission, word replacement, substitution of multiple words, changing the second part of the proverb, blending, and repetition. These transformations were explained and exemplified in the third section of the paper.

According to the analysis, the most frequent types of proverb transformations were blending and changing two or more words. This may be because speakers want to convey multiple ideas by combining different proverbs or modifying key words in the original proverb. While the grammatical structure of the original proverb is generally preserved, the anti-proverb deviates from the conventional meaning to create a striking effect on the listeners.

The alterations in English proverbs can serve as stylistic devices in communication, as they deviate from the conventional norms and make the ideas more noticeable to the listeners or readers. Further research using a larger sample and diverse genres may provide

additional insights into the significance of anti-proverbs as stylistic devices.

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GRZEGORZ SZPILA

## PROVERBS IN THE POLISH CORONAVIRUS DISCOURSE

**Abstract:** The health crisis provoked by the COVID-19 virus since its very beginning has affected the human condition on many a level. Public discourses have been impacted by the pandemic on a local and global level in equal measures. In discussing the multi-aspectual nature of the pandemic frequent references have been made to the proverbial lore. Paremiias have been employed in canonical and modified forms in a diversity of contexts related to the COVID-19 crisis. The present paper looks into the COVID-19 related discourses dominating in the Polish public sphere in the first months after the outbreak of the pandemic. The author discusses the discursive functions of proverbs in some selected contexts, by showing how paremiias are used in construing respective discourses. The paper illustrates the utilization of proverbs with examples (collected in the first months of 2020) from selected Polish press sources.

**Key words:** proverbs, discourse, COVID-19 pandemic, Polish

What do paremiologists do in the time of cholera, or in the time of another more or less deadly crisis? Most likely they are unexceptional in their endeavours to survive and continue their lives; but they also want to satisfy their scientific curiosity and look at the grim situation through their paremic magnifying glasses. That is to say, they essay, as they always do, to take an opportunity to talk about proverbs and their contribution to the description of novel and unprecedented circumstances, such as pandemics, wars, natural disasters, as well as man-made catastrophes. There are many questions that proverb researchers may ask themselves in this connection (with each of the selected questions branching into more specific queries disclosing distinct aspects of proverbial use in modern times): are we proverbially protected against such situations?, that is, do we have a pandemic orientated-paremic repertoire which can be taken

advantage of in order to describe and explain a health crisis, as well as providing the necessary advice and guidance?; is the old paremic wisdom enough to tackle the problem or do we need novel formulas (proverbial or not in nature)?; how do we adapt the proverbial lore to new situations; how do we employ proverbia in emerging or developing discourses? This contribution is a result of my scholarly observations of the Polish paremiosphere and is an attempt to shed some light on the use of proverbs in Polish COVID-19 related discourses in the first months following the outbreak. My aim is to highlight certain selected discourses or discourse motifs in the formation of which proverbs partake.

The research into proverbs from the time of the COVID-19 pandemic is still in an embryonic form and it may take us some time to arrive at more general conclusions regarding local instantiations of paremic wisdom and discern particular regularities of proverb use on a more global scale. Although scholarly interest in “the folklore of COVID-19” was aroused immediately after the outbreak (Haas 2022: 26) we cannot say the paremiologist’s work has been completed, in part because of the long-term and still unknown consequences that may motivate the use of proverbs in the future. So far proverbs have been discussed as “framing of the crisis” devices in the context of the synergy between individual and collective paremic performances (Haas 2022); Menshakova *et alia* (2021) talk about Russian anti-proverbs concerning the pandemic; Fournet-Perot (2021) looks at proverb modifications and anti-proverbs in Spanish as a response to the virus, while Raji-Oyelade (2022) examines “post-proverbial responses to COVID-19” (227) across Africa. These studies all present both normative and innovative use of proverbs, as well as their adaptability potential, showing them to be stimuli to all types of paremia-like creations. This paper offers a similar overview of paremic manifestations within the Polish context.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected virtually all spheres of life both locally and globally. It (has) impacted, amongst others, the political and economic domains as well as, of course,



frustrating the health service structure. It is well-nigh impossible to divorce one of the impacted areas from another when discussing the Polish coronavirus discourse, nor is it feasible to cover all the aspects framed paremically in a short essay. For the sake of simplicity and clarity I will focus my presentations on the most conspicuous discourse motifs including: health issues, lockdown and restrictions, politics, religion, the Polish Catholic Church, as well as factual and potential consequences of the pandemic.

### *Paremic material*

The proverbs and the contexts of their embedding in discourse come from the author's private proverb corpus, which consists of all the types of paremia manifestations that I have accessed as a proverbial culture participant. The short presentation below is based on COVID-19 pandemic discourses (enumerated above) that took a verbal shape shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic. The examples come from a selection of representative Polish press sources, such as the politically liberal *Polityka* and *Newsweek*; the liberal-leftist *Przełąd*; the conservative, right-wing *Wprost*, *Do Rzeczy* and *Sieci*; as well as the leftist, anticlerical and satirical weeklies, such as *Nie* and *Fakty i mity*. The corpus used in this study includes as well Internet memes circulating immediately after the outbreak.

The material under scrutiny consists of 36 proverbs as types and 59 tokens of their contextual use. Out of the 59 instantiations, 36 represent modifications and 23 represent canonical shapes. In my corpus there are two proverbs that can be regarded as Anglo-American paremic borrowings, namely *You can't have your cake and eat it* and *Don't change horses in midstream*; cf. "Jarosław Gowin chciał zjeść ciastko i mieć ciastko" (*Sieci* 16/2000, 62; Eng. "Jarosław Gowin wanted to eat a cake and have it") and "Nie zmienia się konia podczas przepawy przez rzekę" ("You do not change horses in midstream", *Wprost* 12/2000, 46). One example may be classified as a structural proverb, based on the most common pattern "Jaki..., taki..." ("as..., so..."), for example "Jaka muzyka, taki taniec" (see below).

### *Health issues*

In my corpus only one text addressing the fake news about the virus was written during the pandemic. The article in question is from the respectable *Plus Minus* magazine (18/2020, 6) and is entitled “Gdy influencerzy zawodzą” (Eng. “When influencers fail”). The text is inspired by the author’s experiences with the fake news regarding the COVID-19 virus spread by social media influencers. The author, very critical of the negative impact on their followers, encourages the readers to learn how to distinguish fake news from scientifically motivated research, inviting parents and teachers to participate in the process of educating young people about the significance of factual knowledge and ways of accessing it on the Internet or elsewhere. The conclusion of the article is summarized as follows: *Chcieć to móc* (Eng. *Where there is a will there is a way*), which emphasizes the author’s appeal to the reading audience, that is to “realize how important facts are, have a desire to ascertain them, and find a way to access them”.

In the pandemic/vaccine discourse, opinions about the vaccines’ effectiveness were voiced from opposite sides of the pro- versus anti-vaccine spectrum. To some commentators, it was unthinkable that medical doctors should be amongst the advocates of the anti-vaccine movement. In my corpus there is one reference to proverbs in this connection, namely a short text in the *Do Rzeczy* magazine (1/2021, 12) entitled “Lekarzu, zaszczep się sam” (Eng. “Physician, get thyself vaccinated”), whose author, Domink Zdort, criticises in the strongest terms those doctors who, instead of promoting vaccination, refuse to be vaccinated themselves. The title of this piece is a transparent reference to the Latin adage *Medice, cura te ipsum* (Eng. “Physician, heal thyself”).

Another paremically framed belief is challenged through the modification of the proverb *Częste mycie skraca życie* (Eng. “Frequent washing cuts your life short”), which clearly is discouraging too frequent washing, to the innovative “*Mycie ratuje życie*” (Eng. “Washing

saves lives”) in the *Polityka* weekly (5/2021, 38). This clever modification, semantically a counter-proverb, is the title of an article about the role of soap, and more generally the maintenance of personal hygiene, as means to stop the spread of the COVID-19 virus. The same Polish proverb is used in a slightly modified form (“Mycie skracca życie”) in the *Do Rzeczy* weekly (19/2020, 62-64). It was selected for a subsection of the article aimed at drawing parallels between people’s reactions to pandemics now and in the distant and not-so-distant past. The author seems to imply that nowadays many people still follow the advice in the anti-hygienic proverbs, as he writes “A comparison of the present pandemic with those of the past confirms that times change, but people not so much” (62).

Another important factor in preserving health and fitness is participating in sports. Since all sports facilities were closed during the pandemic, being outdoors, taking a walk or jogging was recommended to those wishing to stay physically and mentally healthy. To emphasise the importance of being physically active, the authors of the article “How not to go crazy during the pandemic” (*Przegląd* 5/2021), selected the proverb *Sport to zdrowie* (Eng. “Sport means health”) for one of the text’s subtitles, that is: “Sport to zdrowie, także psychiczne” (Eng. “Sport means health, also mental health”, 16). As we can see, the modification by extension allows the authors to underline the multifarious positive effects of sport on a person’s well-being. Similarly, the demotivator below (Fig. 1), showing how people tried to eschew lockdown restrictions by walking their dogs and shopping at the same time in local shops, emphasises the need to breach the restrictions at all costs.



Fig. 1. “Oooho... Człowiek znowu chce iść na spacer do “Żabki”. “Jak trwoga, to do czworonoga” (Eng. “Oooho, the human wants to go for a walk to “Żabka”, “Fear is near, a quadruped is near”), <https://demotywatory.pl/4988399/Jak-trwoga-to-do-czworonoga>, by Kyrie, access 14.4.2020.

On a humorous note, protective masks, the wearing of which is considered either a blessing or a curse, or both at the same time, have been shown to have at least one allegedly positive effect. The *Przegląd* weekly (7/22, 64) reports a study on the attractiveness of masked men carried out at Cardiff University. According to the scientists, women find men wearing (preferably blue medical) masks more attractive

### *Politics*

The pandemic with its consequences and the restrictions imposed on mobility happened in a presidential election year in Poland (scheduled for mid-2020). This topic preoccupied the government, which was in favour of organizing the election during the pandemic

and even had prepared the so-called “wybory kopertowe” (“envelope elections”) to secure Andrzej Duda (the then and also the current president of Poland) a second term. As the “wybory kopertowe” bill was constitutionally dubious, bordering on the illegal, the coalition of the time disintegrated and finally the idea to hold the election during lockdown was abandoned. The democratic opposition in Poland was against this form of election and did everything to stop the process. They denounced the government for ignoring the restrictions and the seriousness of the situation and even of taking advantage of it to pursue their political goals without thinking seriously of the political and non-political consequences. The editorial in *Przegląd* (19/2000, 3) accuses the leader of the governing party, Jarosław Kaczyński, of violating all democratic and moral principles in his endeavour to organize the election, as well as noting his reluctance to declare a national state of emergency which would have precluded any chance of having the presidential election for a foreseen, or indeed unforeseen, period of time. The state of impunity is described by Jerzy Domański in proverbial terms when he uses the modified proverbium “Hulaj, każda duszyczko, piekła nie ma” (Pol. “Hulaj, duszo, piekła nie ma”, Eng. “Play, you soul, hell does not exist”, that is *Do what you like*). In the context of the confusion during the 2020 pandemic Polish journalists once again blamed Jarosław Kaczyński for intentionally disorganizing Polish society. By way of example, in *Przegląd* (16/2000, 29) Roman Kurkiewicz uses the proverb (or better to say, a proverbial structural template) to describe the government’s policies (Kaczyński’s policy or lack thereof): “Jaka muzyka, taki taniec” (Eng. “As is the music, so is the dance”). To understand the proverbial reference, we need to believe in the journalist’s metaphor or simile, comparing Kaczyński to a (untalented) musician, and the people’s confusion to a *dance macabre*. On even a more unforgiving note, I would like to add a very eloquent comparison between the pandemic and Jarosław Kaczyński, the official leader of PiS and the unofficial ruler of Poland. In the late Daniel Passent’s article entitled “Nieszczęścia chodzą parami” (*Polityka* 15/2020, 96; *Nieszczęścia chodzą parami*, Eng. *Misfortunes come in pairs/never come singly*),

the journalist draws parallels between the coronavirus and Jarosław Kaczyński, explaining his opinions with reference to Kaczyński's insistence that the elections take place at the most unfortunate, to say the least, moment of the pandemic. *Nota bene*, the satirical weekly *Nie* (4/2022, 9) compares the PiS government to the Ebola virus in the title of article, "Jaka władza, taka Ebola" ("As the government, so the Ebola virus"), and disapproves of this party's inefficiency in dealing with the virus using the same metaphor.

In the context of the "wybory kopertowe" it is worth mentioning another political actor involved in the dispute over the elections, namely Jarosław Gowin, the then leader of the Porozumienie party, a small party that together with two other, more numerous and more powerful parties, formed the ruling coalition called *Zjednoczona Prawica* (the United Right). He was responsible for the government abandonment of the idea to hold the elections in May 2020. Gowin was against the government's decisions and left the coalition in consequence. Praised by the opposition for his unrelenting criticism and objection to the Prime Minister's decisions and criticised by the United Right for breaking the coalition, Gowin was the centre of attention at that time. In the right-wing weekly *Sieci* (16/2020, 62) Stanisław Janicki looks at Gowin's decisions and states that the politician wanted to eat his cake and have it, of course using as a model the proverb *You cannot eat a cake and have it*. In this way Janicki claims that Gowin wanted to cancel the "envelope elections" of May 10, 2020, change the constitution and at the same time remain part of the coalition, a coalition of people who, in their entirety, were initially in favour of the May elections, believing in the proverb *Co kraj, to obyczaj* (Eng. *Every country has its own customs*), which was used in *Gość Niedzielny* (21/2020, 48) in order to justify the "wybory kopertowe".

Agnieszka Wołk-Łaniewska in the weekly *Nie* (15/2020, 5) castigates, for her part, the opposition which seemed completely unprepared for the presidential elections scheduled for 2020. The journalist encourages the opposition to unite and vote for one candidate in case PiS manages to organize the elections during lockdown. She

claims that “Każdy jest kowalem swojej urny” (Eng. “Everybody is responsible for their ballot box” versus *Każdy jest kowalem swego losu*, Eng. “Everybody is a blacksmith of their own fate” versus *Every man is the architect of his fortune*) and emphasises the importance of fighting till the end even in the face of the presidential elections, whose organization would be tarred by the illegality and non-constitutionality of the new electoral regulations.

The pandemic related discourses did not overlook a Polish bone of contention, that is the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Polish ruling party (PiS). The latter has always been castigated for too close a link, in opinions of some, with the Vatican, or to be more precise, for their unhealthy relations with the Polish Catholic Church. Unfavourable comments upon the dynamics between the state, religious beliefs, and the freedom of their expression, as well as the subservient role Polish officials play regarding the Polish Catholic Church are not infrequent in the corpus.

The comment in *Przegląd* (14/2000, 5) runs as follows: “Jak trwoża, to do Częstochowy. Prezydent niczym Kmicic, udał się na Jasną Górę, gdzie modlił się przed obliczem Matki Bożej o zakończenie pandemii” (“When in fear, Częstochowa is near. The president, similarly to Kmicic, has gone to Jasna Góra, where he prayed to the Mother of God for the end of the pandemic”). This mocking commentary criticises Andrzej Duda for – on the one hand – aligning himself once again with the Polish Catholic Church, manifesting publically his religious beliefs, and, on the other hand, his incompetence in the fight against the coronavirus.

By the same token, but in more general terms, another journalist writing in *Przegląd* (19/2000, 24-26) looks at the reactions of the Catholic Church in Poland to the pandemic and examines its close ties with the ruling party in this connection. On the one hand, Jarosław Makowski celebrates the less than obvious participation of Catholic officials in the presidential campaign of Andrzej Duda; on the other, the journalist criticises the clerical officials for offering no guidance to believers regarding the elections. In the article entitled

“Powściągliwość biskupów, szaleństwo władzy” (Eng. “Bishops’ restraints, the madness of the authorities”) he uses the proverb “Panu Bogu świeczkę i diabłu ogarek” (Eng. “A candle for God, a stump for the devil”, cf. Eng. *Run with the hare and hunt with the hounds*), which shows both aspects of the Church’s reactions: not being engaged in the political campaign, on the one hand, and yet on the other, their reluctance to criticise the government for organizing the election in the first months of a deadly pandemic.

The proverb *Jak trwoga, to do Boga* had a significant career not only in discourses related directly to the Catholic Church, but also in those related to the state and its citizens. As such, the proverb is used a few times in my COVID-19 paremic corpus, once as *Jak trwoga, to do państwa* (“When in fear, the state is near”; *Przegląd* 14/200, 9), in an article on how “almost all business associations, industrial groups and lobbyists” appeal to the government for all kinds of assistance. Secondly, also in *Przegląd* (11/2020, 6), the proverb is modified as “*Jak trwoga, to do... lekarzy. I do pielęgniarki*” (“When in fear, doctors (and nurses) are near”), which underlines the government’s praise for doctors and nurses, in fact hospital staff in general, during the health crisis, yet otherwise ignoring their demands, requests and appeals for help. The short article demonstrates the double standards of the ruling party regarding health service personnel, that is demanding a lot of them when in need, but at the same time paying no attention to or even scorning their postulates. Last but not least, Tomasz Jastrun in *Przegląd* (13/2020, 37) modified the proverb as “*Bo jak trwoga, to do Boga lub do władzy*” (Eng. “When in fear, God and/or the state are near”) to emphasize people’s trust both in God and the government. The demotivator below expresses the same idea with religious undertones.





Fig. 2. “Jak trwoga, to do naukowców” (Eng. “When in fear, science is near/scientists are near”), <https://demotywatory.pl/4983517>, by Elfinas, access 14.4.2020.

As already noted, it is impossible to attempt to separate national politics from European politics, and Europe’s policies regarding the pandemic. Politically speaking, without going into great detail, pandemic discourses naturally contained criticism towards the EU, as well as a strong belief in the strength of a united Europe. Sentiments of the first type were expressed unsurprisingly by right-wing political actors whose views were given a voice in the extremely conservative right-wing press. In *Sieci* (18/2020, 87), in the short text “Sprawdzam”, Lech Makowski considers the pandemic a test for the EU and more generally for international solidarity in a time of a crisis. His conclusions are in line with the weekly’s political orientation. Namely, the journalist criticises Europe for the lack of said solidarity, the abdication of the European Parliament in the face of the crisis and the

organization's attempts to meddle in the Polish state's affairs. This criticism is reflected in a proverb cited in the text, which is "Umiiesz liczyć? Licz na siebie" ("Can you count? Count on yourself", Eng. *It's every man for himself*), which does not emphasise the importance of the European community's common efforts in the battle against the virus, but instead accentuates the significance of small "national states ruled by powerful and smart leaders". (The text is a eulogy to the PiS government and its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński).

The opposite view is expressed in a very short text in *Przegląd* (16/2000, 61) entitled "Jak trwoga, to Angela Merkel" (cf. *Jak trwoga, to do Boga*, Eng. "When in fear, Angela Merkel (is near)"). The author, unlike the previous journalist, criticises the idea of nation states in Europe, an idea that is part of the Polish nationalist discourse, and advocates the notion that Europe needs strong states (such as Germany) with experienced leaders to help Europe to weather the crisis.

Speaking of national solidarity, it was a postulate of the government's pandemic discourse that the Polish nation should face the crisis together, united in solidarity, while it was the role of the opposition to claim that PiS had always contributed to the disintegration of Polish society, as well as to the social, political and religious rifts and discords. This still current problem was discussed in depth in the renowned *Polityka* (17/2020, 20-22) by Łukasz Pawłowski in the article "Rząd daje i zabiera". The title alludes to the proverb *Kto daje i zabiera, ten sie w piekle poniewiera* (Eng. "Who gives and takes away languishes in hell", cf. *Give a thing, and take a thing, to wear the devil's gold ring*). In this article the author talks about „rozbiecie społecznej solidarności” ("wrecking social solidarity"), so indispensable at the time of any pandemic. Moreover he criticizes the government for lying to the Poles regarding all the social transfers that the PiS government had introduced. According to Pawłowski, people were lied to as all such transfers are a burden on the country's budget and, as the title of the article says, literally when money is given to somebody, it first has to be taken from somebody else, so after all the concept of transfers was (although it does not have to be) based on a deception:

the government behaved as if they had received money from God, to be distributed throughout the whole population without any detriment to the country's finances.

### *Consequences*

The most immediate and tangible consequence of the pandemic was the partial or complete confinement, as well as the serious restrictions imposed on mobility, places of work, freedom of congregation, places of worship and many others.

As for violating the lockdown restrictions in 2020 I would like to briefly discuss two cases and two proverbs used in this connection. First, the proverb *Hulaj dusza, piekła nie ma* ("Revel away, hell does not exist", cf. Eng. *When the cat's away, the mice will play*) was used as the title of an article in *Newsweek* ("Hulaj dusza!", 28/2020, 28-31) about the comportment of Polish vacationers at the seaside who ignored all the specific restrictions. The other proverb, *Ryba psuje się od głowy* (Eng. *The fish rots from the head down*), was utilized to talk about the police who failed to lead by example as they themselves found it difficult to take all the necessary sanitary precautions while at work ("Pandemia na łowach"; Eng. "Police on the hunt", *Polityka* 17/2020, 23-25).

The Catholic Church was almost immediately affected by the restrictions. The number of dominicantes dropped straight away, which led to a considerable reduction in the Church's finances as in Poland the Church is supported to a considerable extent by the members of the community participating in the services and through paying for the sacraments. In this connection, Marcin Choduń in *Tygodnik Powszechny* (16/2020, 34, 37) in the article "Taca w chorobie" (Eng. "Collection in sickness") discusses the financial problems of many a parish in Poland as a result of the pandemic, but also of the non-transparent and informal system of the Church's finances, which should possibly be changed after the pandemic. The proverb used in this text does not refer directly to the pandemic itself but

describes the *modus operandi* of Polish parishes, namely each and every parish collects its money and manages its finances in an idiosyncratic manner, not following any specific regulations.

The Catholic weekly *Gość Niedzielny* manages to introduce another proverb into the pandemic discourse. Writing about the impact of lockdown on Catholics in France, in the article “Kościół pod kluczem” (Eng. “The Church under lock and key”), the proverb *Nie samych chlebem człowiek żyje* (Eng. *Man does not live by bread alone*) is used in a shortened form “Nie samym życiem...”. The proverb is used to convince everybody that “hungry Catholics” (“hungry” for the Eucharist and not only those in France) should be given access to what they need in the same way as others need access to food, education, science, arts and sports (50) and should be treated equally when it comes to the lifting of lockdown restrictions.

One of the consequences of the pandemic, in the long-term, could be the abuse of civil liberties. The text in the *Sieci* weekly (“Nowy gorszy świat”, Eng. “New worse /lesser world?”, 4/2021, 35-37) imagines a scenario in which people’s freedoms are limited due to “the illegal use of modern technology, concentration of capital, growing inequalities and consequently impoverishment of numerous social groups”. This opinion is summarized in the final subsection of the article, whose title *Okazja dla złodzieja* (Eng. “Opportunity for a thief”, 37) is a slight modification of the proverb *Okazja czyni złodzieja* (Eng. *Opportunity makes a thief*). According to Konrad Kołodziejcki, the author of the text, the pandemic is not to blame directly for the potential negative consequences but is a perfect opportunity for those wishing to erode our individual and civil liberties.

I would like to conclude this overview of paremic reactions to the pandemic on a happier, more optimistic note. One such example is in an article in *Newsweek* (7/2020, 40) which talks about certain valuable e-commerce innovations motivated by the pandemic crisis. The text discusses the functions of the services Connected Retail and Esize used by Zalando and eobuwie.pl respectively. The services offered are supposed to, on the one hand, consolidate online and offline

shopping and, on the other, aid in measuring the client's shoe size. The article about how this creativity is correlated with the health crisis is aptly titled "Pandemia matką wynalazków" (Eng. "The pandemic is the mother of invention", cf. *Potrzeba matką wynalazków* and *Necessity is the mother of invention*). It seems that many more of the "innovations" introduced during and after the pandemic could be successfully called the children of such a necessity.

### *Changing habits*

Some proverbs attested in my pandemic corpus have been used in texts devoted to the changing habits of the lockdowned. One such informative text appeared in the *Przegląd* weekly (5/2021, 36-37) and talks about, amongst others, a study of the change in drinking habits in the UK before and during lockdown. According to the researchers, the British drank more in the January of 2021 compared to the previous year. We are informed that similar studies in other countries confirm the tendency (also in Poland). The article is entitled "Wirus lubi pływać" (Eng. "The virus likes swimming", cf. *Good eating deserves good drinking*) which is a modification of the proverb *Rybka lubi pływać* (Eng. "A little fish likes swimming"). The Polish proverb has nothing to do with viruses, bacteria, diseases or a pandemic; it is a recommendation to eat small amount of fish when drinking vodka. At the same time it alludes in its context to the idiomatic expression *zalewać robaka* (Eng. "flood the worm", *drown one's sorrows*). So the title in the final analysis is a contamination referring, on the one hand, to alcohol and, on the other, to sorrows. The title summarizes the gist of the text, that is that people in lockdown drown their sorrows (stress, worries, depression) in alcohol.

To finish on a lighter note I would like to quote a modification of the proverb *Co za dużo, to niezdrowo* (cf. Eng. *Enough is as good as a feast, Enough is enough*). In *Przegląd* (16/2020) the original was reshaped as "Co za dużo, to rozwodowo" (Eng. "Too much means (more) divorces"), informing the readers in a short text about the increase in divorce cases in Xi'a, a Chinese city. The reasons given

are twofold, according to the researchers. Firstly, many public institutions (including those that grant divorces) were closed during the pandemic, secondly, too much time spent confined together led to many a family problem, with many relationships ending eventually in divorce. Interestingly, the modification focuses on the second reason provided in the text. By the same token, in the *Nie* weekly (12/2020, 2) we read: “The Manchester and Southampton football teams have played an ersatz noughts and crosses game on Twitter. There was no foul play. The plaque soothes the savage” (2). The modified proverb *Music soothes the savage* (*Muzyka łagodzi obyczaje*, Eng. “Music soothes manners”), that is “Zaraza łagodzi obyczaje” (Eng. “A plague soothes manners”) is humorously used with reference to the two teams’ potential foul play on a football field.

### *Religion and the Catholic Church*

It comes as no surprise to me as a paremiologist that during a health crisis, with the ensuing confusion and loss of bearings, amongst the pandemic-related reactions one particular proverb was utilized more frequently in my corpus than the other paremias. The proverb in question, relatively current in Polish, is *Jak trwoga, to do Boga* (Eng. *When in fear, God is near*), which is normally used to refer to when people resort to praying in times of need in order to achieve a particular pragmatic purpose (cf. Kłosińska 2004: 218). In its unmodified form and most canonical sense it is used by the anticlerical university philosophy professor Jan Hartman in *Polityka* (18/2020, 96), when he refers, using the paremia, to the allegedly Polish characteristic feature of seeking refuge in deities in a time of crisis. In this sense the proverb is also used in *Polityka* (15/2020, 98) in a short text about *Ruch Globalnej Odnowy w Duchu Świętym, Maryi Zawsze Dziewicy i Ojcu Zawsze Dyrektorze* – in short, about Catholic extremists. The latter firmly believe that logical reasoning is valued more than God-sent wisdom and lament that God’s role is being taken over by “experts and scholars”, whose opinions threaten our civilization (98). Similarly, the weekly *Gość Niedzielny* (18/2020, 24-26) uses the prov-

erb to encourage the readers to pray to the Mother of God. The title is a slightly modified version of *Jak trwoga to do Boga*, namely “Jak trwoga, to do... Matki” (“When in fear, the Mother (of God) is near). This right-wing Catholic publication foregrounds in the article the importance of the Mother of God in protecting people from diseases (24). The author, Agata Puścikowska, notices the close relationship between our prayers and the earthly intervention of the Mother of God and suggests praying to five selected Mothers of God (the Gracious Mother of God, Licheń Mother of God, Passaw Mother of God, Salus Populi Romani and Ostrabrama Mother of God).

The *Polityka* journalist, Sławomir Mizerski, critically, and perhaps even a little quizzically, comments on the conflict between religious beliefs and science. *Tygodnik Powszechny* (13/2020, 38-40) less orthodoxly employs the proverb’s wisdom in the article “Nie każda trwoga prowadzi do Boga” (Eng. “Not all fears lead to God”, which is a semantic and formal allusion to both *Wszystkie drogi prowadzą do Rzymu*, Eng. *All roads lead to Rome* and *Jak trwoga to do Boga*, Eng. *When in fear, God is near*). The author, the Jesuit Jacek Prusak, examines the Polish proverb *Jak trwoga to do Boga* in the context, as he writes (38) of the pandemic and the believers’ reactions to the crisis as a strategy to cope with the threat. The article is unequivocally motivated by the virus crisis but it seems a more general commentary on separating “magical thinking from religious reasoning” (8).

The reverse observation is made by Joanna Senyszyn in *Fakty i mity* (14/2020, 31). According to the market research professor, people’s reaction to the pandemic did not reflect the Poles’ adherence to the proverb *Jak trwoga, to do Boga*. She claims Catholics instead of participating *en mass* in religious services prefer to stay indoors in order to avoid exposing themselves to the virus. It has to be remembered that the text (entitled “The Church in the times of cholera”) appeared in a satirical, anticlerical, atheist weekly. The danger of congregating together in places of worship without any protection was also eloquently presented in the demotivator below (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. “Wiara covid przenosi” (Eng. “Faith carries the COVID virus”), <https://demotywatory.pl/5039364/Wiara-covid-przenosi>, by Venkman, 27.11.2020.

The creator of this demotivator uses a modification of the proverb *Wiara góry przenosi* (Eng. “Faith moves mountains”, Eng. *Faith will move mountains*). The original paremia is typically used with reference to God as well and this contextual use is taken advantage of here in order to criticise the Church authorities for their reluctance to comply with the COVID-19 restrictions.

The last two proverbs which I would like to discuss are *Hulaj dusza, piekła nie ma* (“Revel away, hell does not exist”, cf. Eng. *When the cat’s away, the mice will play*) and *Za wysokie progi na twoje nogi* (Eng. *It’s out of your league*), both of which are used to strongly criticize the Church’s responses to the pandemic and also the restrictions. The Polish Catholic Church was accused of ignoring the restrictions concerning religious services and all kinds of celebrations during the pandemic. The proverbs were used in the two weeklies *Nie* (23/2020)



and *Fakty i mity* (14.2020), the first of which criticizes bishop Jerzy Mazur for organizing three day-long festivities at the end of May 2020 while Poland was in full lockdown. By the same token, the *Fakty i mity* weekly considers the Polish Catholic Church “untouchables”, as if exempted from the obligation to follow the official regulations. The afore-mentioned Joanna Senyszyn describes the clerical impunity using the proverb *Za wysokie progi na twoje nogi* in “Za wysokie progi na policyjne progi” (“The threshold too high for police boots”). The author refers to the unwillingness of the police to financially punish priests for violating the then current laws.

### *Concluding remarks*

The present article has touched upon a few important issues proverb-wise. First and most importantly, it demonstrates how traditional proverbs (which are the lion’s share of my COVID-19 paremic corpus) can partake in dominating contemporary discourses due to their polysemanticity and polyfunctionality. To boot, the use of proverbs in this particular type of discourse shows how proverbial structures (both canonical and non-canonical) serve to encapsulate pervasive discursive motifs. Secondly, this short study testifies to the discursive adaptability of traditional shapes to better target modern issues.

As we consider the proverbs used to discuss the health crisis, it becomes instantly obvious that they are not medical proverbs, which might be expected in the context of a pandemic. If we follow the distinction between genuine medical proverbs from proverbs used with reference to “physiological conditions” (cf. Elmquist 1934, *Fialkova* 2010) we conclude that, with one particular exception, that is *Częste mycie skraca życie* (Eng. “Frequent washing cuts your life short”), all the paremias belong to the latter group. This is easily explicable in terms of how diverse the pandemic discourse has been (health issues being only part of it) and, of course, because Polish medical proverbs, as with medical proverbs in general, do not offer solutions but only very general suggestions (cf. *Dobre lekarstwo, ale w porę*, Eng. “Good medicine, but in time” or *Lekarz leczy, Bóg uzdrawia*, Eng. “A

doctor treats, God heals”), and such proverbs, themselves obsolete to say the very least, were not used in my corpus.

The proverb that was used the most frequently in my corpus is *Jak trwoga, to do Boga* (Eng. When in fear, God is near), which has 17 manifestations (30% of all the 59). This result reflects the opinion of a Polish journalist, Olaf Osica, who remarked in *Tygodnik Powszechny* (23.03.2000, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/jak-trwoga-to-donunii-ale-dlaczego-162713>) during the very early stages of the pandemic that “It would seem that the proverb describing the times of the pandemic most suitably would be “*Jak trwoga, to do Boga*”. Looking around, however, it becomes apparent that the most up-to-date modification <<*Jak trwoga, to do państwa*>> does the job better”. As it transpires the proverb appears in 12 modifications in my corpus. I am far from saying that this is the most prolific of all the proverbs used in this connection, but it is worth noting its frequent use in COVID-19 pandemic discourses and also to notice its multifarious modifications disclosing the vitality of the proverb both in its canonical and non-normative shapes.

This study is limited as far as the paremic data are concerned and also as it examines only the most discursively prominent motifs, as well as the specific role of proverbs in signalling or encapsulating them. Further research should take into account more representative samples of proverbs, offer a thorough analysis of the formal, semantic and pragmatic aspects of paremic modifications and transformation, as well as demonstrate the significant roles proverbs perform in cohesively and coherently structuring a discourse.

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ХАРРИ ВАЛЬТЕР – ВАЛЕРИЙ МОКИЕНКО

**ЯЗЫКОВОЕ АНТИМИРИЕ В ЗЕРКАЛЕ  
РУССКИХ АНТИПОСЛОВИЦ  
(КРЫЛАТЫЕ СЛОВА ЛИТЕРАТУРНОГО  
ПРОИСХОЖДЕНИЯ)**

**Абстракт:** Анна Тотне-Литовкина – одна из продолжательниц идей проф. Вольфганга Мидера по лингвокультурологическому исследованию такого креативного жанра малого фольклора, как антипословицы. Ее монография и статьи на эту тему (особенно – на венгерском материале) ярко воспроизводят динамику этого популярного теперь языкового явления.

В нашей статье показывается, как антипословицы отражают так называемую «языковую картину мира». Эта картина в зеркале антипословиц предстает в искривленном, «перевернутом» виде, хотя при этом тематические доминанты таких паремий остаются почти неизменными. Предлагаемая интерпретация антипословиц демонстрируется реакцией русских антипословиц на «бич Божий» нового времени – коронавирусную пандемию. На многих примерах иллюстрируется актуальность таких антипословиц, выявляются их первоисточники, классифицируется типология их варьирования. Особое внимание будет уделено такому важному свойству анализируемых пословиц и поговорок, как их частотность в речевом узусе, литературном языке и средствах массовой информации. Тем самым делается попытка ответить на вопрос о влиянии паремиологической частотности (resp. паремиологической «минимальности») на способность к антипословичным преобразованиям.

**Keywords:** Пословицы, поговорки, антипословицы, смеховая культура, трансформированные пословицы и поговорки

**Abstract:** Anna Tóthné Litovkina is one of the successors of the ideas of prof. Wolfgang Mieder on the linguoculturological study of such a creative genre of small folklore as anti-proverbs. Her monograph and articles on this topic (especially on Hungarian material) vividly reproduce the dynamics of this now popular linguistic phenomenon.

Our article shows how anti-proverbs reflect the so-called “linguistic picture of the world”. This picture in the mirror of anti-proverbs appears in a twisted, “inverted” form, although the thematic dominants of such proverbs remain almost unchanged. The proposed interpretation of anti-proverbs is demonstrated by the reaction of Russian anti-proverbs to the “scourge of God” of the new time - the coronavirus pandemic. Many examples illustrate the relevance of such anti-proverbs, identify their primary sources, classify the typology of their variation. Particular attention will be paid to such an important property of the analyzed proverbs and sayings as their frequency in speech usage, literary language and the media. Thus, an attempt is made to answer the question of the influence of paremiological frequency (resp. paremiological “minimality”) on the ability to perform anti-proverb transformations.

**Keywords:** Proverbs, sayings, anti-proverbs, laughter culture, transformations of proverbs and sayings

Активизация употребления пословиц, поговорок и крылатых выражений в современных средствах массовой информации и живой русской речи – явление, подмечаемое многими исследователями. В современной же публицистике и других средствах массовой информации из-за «раскованности» стиля и острой потребности в повышении экспрессии этот малый жанр русского фольклора расцвел буйным цветом в буквальном смысле слова: в этом легко убедиться, пробежав глазами по заголовкам любой газеты, журнала или по страницам Интернета.

Сравнивая традиционное благоговейное отношение к пословичной мудрости с подчеркнуто ироническим её «выворачиванием наизнанку» – «стёбом» в наши дни, можно подумать, что это – совершенно новое явление, так сказать, кризис жанра. Однако это далеко не так. «Шутливая или серьёзная игра с пословицами отнюдь не нова, – подчёркивает один из наиболее активных современных американских паремистов проф. В. Мидер, – но можно констатировать, что критическое противостояние старой мудрости принимает в наши дни особо заметные масштабы» (Mieder 1998, VI). Эта диагностика, сделанная им на материале немецкой и англоязычной прессы Европы и США, вполне

соответствует и наблюдениям славистов. «То, что находит отражение в языковом фольклоре, – это гипертрофированная форма действительности, – справедливо замечает исследовательница современного польского молодёжного жаргона Е. Невзорова-Кмеч. – На примере рифмованных выражений можно отметить нарушение создаваемых обществом табу, нормы, чувство которых закладывается в детстве. Молодые люди бросают вызов, употребляя даже в повседневном общении рифмованные выражения вульгарного содержания, что лишь говорит о желании продемонстрировать свою социальную значимость, утвердиться в какой-либо из социальных групп» (Невзорова-Кмеч 2002, 26). Аналогичную «вульгаризацию», а точнее – демократизацию пословичного жанра, отмечают обычно те современные исследователи, которые проводят широкое анкетирование и опросы носителей языка. Показательны в этом смысле многочисленные чешские «антипословичные» трансформы, выявленные в процессе такого рода фронтальных исследований Ф. Шиндлером и Д. Биттнеровой (Schindler 1993; Schindler, Bittnerová 1997). Многие из них не только типологически, но и генетически перекликаются с антипословицами немецкого, английского и русского языков (Мокиенко 1996).

Интенсификация «осмеяния» пословиц объясняется В. Мидером фактом, что сейчас уже всем известно, что они не выражают какой-либо абсолютной истины и не представляют собою неких универсальных общечеловеческих или специфично национальных установлений. Вот почему пословичная система ценностей вступает в конфронтацию со здоровым юмором, едкой иронией или острой сатирой.

Если в прошлом веке основной целью собирания и изучения пословиц и поговорок было познание “духа народа”, то теперь многих (особенно лингвистов) интересуют и чисто языковые особенности этих единиц, их употребление в художественной речи, взаимодействие с фольклорным фондом других народов, проблемы перевода на другие языки. Для современной паремиологии, как кажется, одной из актуальных задач становится регистрация не только традиционных и новых паремий, но и фиксация и функционально-стилистическая интерпретация их трансформ. Народная речь – живая и диффузная стихия, где

пословицы, поговорки и меткие ходячие выражения многих поколений активно воспроизводятся, заново обрабатываются и переосмысляются.

Сопоставляя такого рода паремиологическую неологику с традиционной, народной, можно заметить как общность той и другой, так и их некоторые функционально-семантическое различие. Информация, заключенная в традиционных пословицах, как правило, имеет двойную направленность. С одной стороны, пословицы – это назидания, афоризмы, краткие рекомендации и философские констатации о различных сторонах жизни. С другой стороны, пословицы – это кладовые прошлого уклада жизни, истории, культуры, слепки исчезнувших образов и представлений – т.е. единицы, говоря современным методическим термином, с высокой квотой «кумулятивности». С этой точки зрения очень важна их оперативная «словесная расшифровка», которая и способствует их пониманию.

Известность, «хрестоматийность», стереотипизированность традиционных пословиц, следовательно, – одна из причин паремиологического «сопротивления». С одной стороны, высокочастотность обеспечивает моментальное узнавание паремии, с другой стороны – повышает искус сопротивление ей и стоящей за нею хрестоматийной мудрости, что и является экстралингвистической мотивацией «стёба». Несмотря на очень широкий функциональный диапазон такого «осмеяния» пословиц, все его регистры входят в арсенал «смеховой культуры», ставшей предметом анализа и литературоведов, и лингвистов (Бахтин 1965; Лихачев, Панченко 1976 и др.) В новых условиях – условиях моментального распространения информации через современные массмедиа, включая и Интернет, не признающий языковых границ и цензурных запретов, – смеховая культура особенно претендует на право приоритетности, языковой новизны. При этом переделки пословиц столь же древни, как и сами пословицы. Они родились не только как уже отмеченный протест против банального здравого смысла и назидательного тона традиционной «народной мудрости», но и как весёлая языковая игра, очищающий катарсис, карнавальная речевая маска уставшего от «серьёзностей» и трагедий повседневной жизни Человека.



В современной Европе жанр антипословиц становится, как и в России, всё более и более популярным. Но корнями своими он уходит в прошлое. В разные эпохи этот жанр то затухал, то вдруг выплёскивался на подмостки народной речи или большой литературы. Так, в XVIII веке многие светлые умы Европы вдруг поставили (как и в эпоху античности) традиционную народную мудрость под большое сомнение. Г.Х. Лихтенберг, Э. Кант, Й.В. Гёте, Ф. Шиллер, Вольтер и многие другие писатели, поэты и философы, задумываясь нас пословицы, превращали их в антипословицы, которые столь же легко переносились из уст в уста, как и их прототипы.

При всей древности жанра антипословиц этот термин и в фольклористике, и в этнографии, и в лингвистике является новым. И лишь специальное лексикографическое описание паремиологических трансформаций как особого языкового материала привело и к попыткам их терминологически обозначить. Именно В. Мидер, издавший несколько больших собраний немецких паремий данного жанра (Mieder 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002), называет такого рода паремии антипословицами (нем. *Antisprichwörter*, англ. *anti-proverbs*) или перекрученными (исковерканными, искажёнными) мудростями (нем. *verdrehte Weisheiten*, англ. *twisted wisdom*). Наша Юбилейница Анна Тоте-Литовкина еще в прошлом веке не просто приняла этот термин, но и вместе с В. Мидером во многом способствовала его популяризации. Она посвятила русским, венгерским и английским антипословицам свои креативные публикации (Litovkina 2005; Litovkina, Vargha 2005; Litovkina, Vargha 2005a; Tothé-Litovkina 1999). При этом, конечно же, самые вдохновенные очерки на антипословицную тему ею были написаны совместно с автором термина для этого паремиологического жанра проф. В. Мидером (Litovkina, Mieder 2005; Litovkina, Mieder 2005a; Mieder, Tóthe-Litovkina 1999).

В процессе обработки и специализированного исследования антипословиц возникла и необходимость отдельного лексикографического описания и терминологического разграничения антипословиц и антипоговорок. Последние В. Мидер называет антипоговорками (*Antiredensarten*) или перекрученными (исковерканными, искажёнными)

ными) фразами (нем. *verdrehte Phrasen*) или размолоченными (опустошенными) фразами (*verdrischte Phrasen*). Такие метафорические наименования вполне соответствуют духу соответствующих единиц – тем более что они смыкаются с группами фразеологии, созданными по «формуле невозможного» (Taylor 1934; 1948-1949; Богатырев 1962; Рязановский 1997) и удачно обозначенными В. Айсманом как фразеологизмы-бессмыслицы (Айсман 1988).

Термин антипословица обозначает, судя по опыту издания названных немецких и английских собраний этого жанра В. Мидером, языковые единицы весьма широкого круга: пословицы, являющиеся смысловыми антиподами традиционных паремий (*Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt – Der Mensch denkt, der Computer lenkt; Einem geschenkten Gaul schaut man nicht ins Maul – Einem geschenkten Panzer schaut man nicht in die Kanone; Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold – Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Karriere*); библейские сентенции (нем. *Auge um Auge, Zahn um Zahn, Geben ist seliger denn Nehmen; Wer nicht arbeitet, soll nicht essen*); вывернутые наизнанку афоризмы и крылатые выражения знаменитых людей (*Geld stinkt nicht – Geld stinkt nicht, aber Ratten; Irren ist menschlich – Irren ist männlich; Wissen ist Macht – Wissen ist Ohnmacht*); обценные и бранные паремии (*j-n am Arsch lecken [können] – Wer mich am Arsch leckt, kann mich bestimmt nicht mehr riechen; etw. ist zum Schießen – Das Leben ist zum Schießen, sagte der Mann und enthängte sich*); веллеризмы («*Aller Anfang ist schwer*», *sagte der Dieb, da stahl er einen Amboß*; «*Was ist nicht weiß, macht nicht nicht heiß*», *sagte der Ochse, als er gebraten wurde*).

В. Мидер справедливо подчёркивает трудности точного разграничения собственно антипословиц и антиафоризмов, отстаивая широкое понимание термина антипословица и аргументируя при этом необходимость включения афористики паремиологического типа в издаваемые им собрания (Mieder 1998, VII). Характерно при этом, что при переиздании своего сборника антиафористики он разделил его на две книги – антипословиц (Mieder 1998) и антипоговорок (Mieder 1999). Это разграничение кажется совершенно оправданным, ибо учитывает функциональную специфику этих двух типов малого жанра антифольклора. Вместе с тем в набор антипословиц и антипоговорок исследо-

ватели и лексикографы включают и самые разные языковые единицы: шуточные афоризмы, шуточные сентенции, шуточные пословицы, крылатые выражения предикативного и непредикативного типа, шуточные дефиниции, шуточные парадоксы, шуточные газетные заголовки афористического типа и т.п. (Дамм 2002; Щурина 1999 и др.).

Легко увидеть некоторую условность и относительность такой детализированной классификации, «переходность» границ между её рубриками и в какой-то мере – «открытость ряда» такого разнобойного материала. Тем не менее, определённая зыбкость границ антипословиц, как кажется, не должна препятствовать ни их специализированному исследованию, ни их концентрированному лексикографическому описанию. Ведь зыбкость границ между разными типами паремий характерна и для традиционной паремиологии. Для антипословиц же такая «осцилляция» границ еще более свойственна уже потому, что они нередко и образуются смешением (per. контаминацией) «классических» пословиц и поговорок, афоризмов, сентенций, крылатых слов и выражений, цитат, лозунгов, рекламных роликов и т.п.

Собственно говоря, «эффект узнавания» любой трансформы пословицы – необходимое условие её популярности и функционирования. Как бы ни изменялись пословицы любителями острого словца, они должны быть узнаны, чтобы высечь искру иронии или юмора между полюсами традиционного и креативного, нового. «Как бы остроумно ни было изменение пословицы, как бы ни разоблачалась она индивидуально-творческими переосмыслениями в форме афоризмов или стихов, как бы серьёзны и глубокомысленны, абсурдно-гротескны или бессмысленны ни были её искажения – всё это тогда имеет истинный смысл, когда первоначальная пословица сопоставима с её инновативными манипуляциями», – пишет по этому поводу В. Мидер (Mieder 1998, V).

Считается, что пословица особенно часто становится иронической, когда к ней прибавляется какой-либо новый компонент (Mieder 1998, VI), что соответствует одной из наиболее активных тенденций развития фразеологической и паремиологической системы – тенденции к эксплицитности (Мокиенко 1989: 126-156). Одним из наиболее активных способов трансформации традиционных паремий является и сво-

образный языковой «макаронизм», контаминация двух совершенно разных по смыслу, а нередко – и структуре, пословиц. Этот процесс преобразования паремий также в какой-то мере соответствуют языковому духу нашего постмодерного времени – духу смешения стилей.

Смешанный характер современных субстандартных пословиц проявляется и в том, что традиционное постоянно перекрещивается с нетрадиционным. Отсюда – практическое неразличение паремий, имеющих авторство – т.е., так называемых крылатых слов и выражений, и паремий, его не имеющих, так сказать, народных. «Крылатика» при этом обыгрывается как обычные паремии, что косвенно свидетельствует о её активной адаптации в современных малых жанрах фольклора. Вот несколько паремий такого рода: *Пришёл. Увидел. Побелил; Пришёл. Увидел. И ушёл; Остаканись, мгновение! Счастливые трусов не надевают; Тяжело в лечении – легко в гробу; Спасение выпивающего – дело рук разливающего; Нам разум дал стальные руки-крюки! Бороться – и искать, найти – и перепрятать! Крепче за шофёрку держись, баран; Место клизмы изменить нельзя; Почём вы, девушки, красивых любите?* и др. Каждый носитель русского языка легко узнает за этими крылатыми паремиями фрагменты русского фольклора, русской и зарубежной классики, популярных песен и т.п. Уже даже сама их количественная представленность в живой речи свидетельствует об их активности и исключительной vitalности. Как бы вульгарными ни казались такие переделки, во множестве «запускаемые» теперь любителями острого словца в Интернет, несомненно, что они являются удачными или неудачными свидетельствами креативного духа языка. И нам, лингвистам, проходить мимо них с брезгливой миной, как кажется, всё-таки не стоит.

Не стоит и потому, что – как это ни парадоксально – такие анзтипословицы являются и своеобразными «консервантами» традиционной русской культуры, отражая средний уровень образованности, полученный носителями нашего языка в школе. Включаясь в мощное силовое поле живой современной речи и средств массовой информации, они заражаются и заряжаются экспрессивной энергией, которая исходит из этого поля. К сожалению, этот процесс имеет и отрицательные стороны, особенно – вульгаризацию современного русского языка. Но нам,

лингвистам, необходимо внимательно наблюдать за происходящими сейчас столь быстро и ускоряемыми возможностями компьютерной технологии языковыми изменениями, ставить диагноз болезненным явлениям и пытаться определить: что является симптомом настоящей болезни, а что – лишь здоровая реакция здорового человека, находящегося в состоянии аффекта. И по мере возможностей комментировать те антипословицы, которые возникли на основе классического наследия русской литературы.

Именно с таких позиций мы предлагаем анализ антипословиц, отразивших особо популярные крылатые выражения из русской классической литературы. Как увидим ниже, они представляют собой довольно адекватный набор «средней культурной компетенции», заученной в школах России. Представим его на основе материала двух наших словарей – «Антипословицы русского народа» (Вальтер, Мокиенко 2005) и «Большого словаря крылатых слов и выражений русского языка» (Берков, Мокиенко, Шулержкова 2008-2009).

Какие же писатели и их произведения получили креативное отражение в антипословицах?

Приведем соответствующие примеры в хронологическом порядке

### *Николай Михайлович Карамзин (1766–1826).*

Известный русский историк, поэт и литератор эпохи сентиментализма вошел в анналы современных антипословиц не своей знаменитой многотомной «Историей государства Российского» или сентиментальной повестью «Бедная Лиза», а фразой «**В России две беды: дураки и дороги**». Правда, его авторство здесь оспаривается и сентенцию приписывают и Н.В. Гоголю, П.А. Вяземскому, М.Е. Салтыкову-Щедрину и даже императору Николаю I, которые так или иначе отрицательно отзывались о качестве российских дорог. Ср. у А.С. Пушкина («Евгений Онегин», глава VII, строфа XXXIV):

У нас дороги нынче плохи,  
Мосты забытые гниют,

На станциях клопы да блохи  
Заснуть минуты не дают.

Так или иначе, но именно эта фраза породила немало антипословичных вариантов:

В России две беды – дураки и дороги, а в Америке две радости – умники и бездорожье. relax.ru,

В России две напасти: внизу – власть тьмы, а наверху – тьма власти. БМШ 2000, 96–97.

В России две радости – дураки и дороги. Без них мы стали бы заурядной европейской страной. Запись, О. Михайлова, март 2003.

В России нет дорог, а есть направления. Кузьміч 2000, 33.

Две беды в России – дорогие дураки и дешевые умные. relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

Судя по рекламе, в России три болезни: перхоть, кариес и менструация. Запись, СПб. 2002

### *Иван Андреевич Крылов (1769-1844)*

Русский баснописец, поэт, публицист и издатель сатирико-просветительских журналов вошел в «крылатое» наследие именно своими баснями, число которых (236!) впечатляет. При этом парадоксально, что если в «крылатую» сокровищницу русского языка вошло около 2000 слов и выражений, получивших описание в специальном словаре (Мокиенко, Сидоренко 2018), то в антипословичный фонд вошло очень немного. Таково обыгрывание финала хрестоматийной басни «Кот и повар»:

А Васька слушает да ест.

Споили, говорят, народ, а Васька слушает да пьет. Трушкин 2000, 159.

### *Александр Сергеевич Грибоедов (1795-1829)*

Парадоксальна и ситуация с «крылатым» наследием А.С. Грибоедова. Его комедия «Горе от ума» (1824) уже при жизни поэта разошлась на многочисленные крылатые фразы. Они не потеряли популярности и в

наши дни, о чем убедительно свидетельствует специальный «Большой словарь крылатых выражений А.С. Грибоедова», включивший около 2000 словарных статей и более 10 000 выписок из художественной, публицистической, научно-популярной литературы и современных средств информации (Мокиенко, Семенец, Сидоренко 2009). При этом, как и в случае с «крылатикой» И.А. Крылова, антипословичный «улов» творчества поэта минимален. В нашем словаре зафиксирована лишь одна антифраза, обыгрывающая известную цитату А.С. Грибоедова:

**Свежо предание, да верится с трудом.** Из книги А. Грибоедова «Горе от ума». БМШ 2000, 437.

**Свежо питание, да с...ся с трудом!** Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 139; Foma 2, 15.5.2002; kulich 12–01.

### *Александр Сергеевич Пушкин (1799–1837)*

Совершенно иная ситуация с «крылатым» наследием основателя реалистического направления и в поэзии и прозе, великого русского поэта А.С. Пушкина, который, по словам Ф.М. Достоевского, – «наше всё». Начиная с детского сада, дети заучивали и заучивают его стихотворения наизусть и поэтому по количеству крылатые слова и выражения-пушкинизмы по сравнению с «крылатикой» иных авторов имеют бесспорную пальму первенства. В словаре крылатых выражений А.С. Пушкина (Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999; 2005) зафиксировано и описано около 3000 таких языковых единиц, многие из которых постоянно воспроизводятся в литературе, средствах массовой информации и в живой русской речи. И, в отличие от «крылатики» И.А. Крылова, антипословичный фонд пушкинизмов и количественно, и качественно представлен чрезвычайно активно и многообразно. Приведем лишь часть из них, включенных нами в «Словарь антипословиц русского народа».

**Врагов имеет в мире всяк, но от друзей спаси нас, Боже.** А. С. Пушкин, «Евгений Онегин», 4, 18. Ср. **Избави мя, Боже, от друзей, а с врагами я и сам справлюсь.** Михельсон 1902, I, 126, 361–362; Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 123.

Только на ОРТ: полуфиналы Пушкин – Дантес, Лермонтов – Мартынов. Fomenko 04–02.

Дубровский и Маша – герои повести А. С. Пушкина «Дубровский». Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 183–184.

Спокойно, Маша, я Дубровский. Кожевников 2001, 349.

Не ссы, Маруся, я Дубровский. Кузьміч 2000, 135.

В душе настало пробуждение: и вот опять явилась ты... (Пушкин. К\*\*\*, 1825). Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 690–692.

В душе настало пробуждение, но тут опять явилась ты... Яцевич 06/2001.

Мой дядя самых честных правил... А. С. Пушкин. «Евгений Онегин». БМШ 2000, 278.

Мой дядя самых честных грабил... fantaz. 2.5.2002; Fomenko 04–02; myсли, 20.5.2002.

Мой дядя самых честных правил, иных же оставлял как есть. relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

Мой дядя, самых честных правил. Fomenko 05–01.

Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может [В душе моей угасла не совсем]. Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 678–679; БМШ 2000, 568. Начало стихотворения без назв. А. С. Пушкина (1829).

Я вас любил, а свет включил – чуть не убил. Fomenko 05–01; boom, 15.5.2002.

Я вас любил, деревья гнулись. Fomenko 04–02; boom, 15.5.2002; halyava, 15.5.2002.

Я вас любил, еще быть может. Fomenko 05–01.

Я вас любил, любовь моя, быть может... Запись, СПб., 2001.

Я вас любил! Еще? Быть может. narod, 17.5.2002.

Я вас любил... И все... И хватит. boom, 15.5.2002.



**Любви все возрасты покорны.** А. С. Пушкин. «Евгений Онегин»; БМШ 2000, 255.

**В любви все возрасты проворны.** Foma 2, 15.5.2002; kulich 12–01; myslі, 20.5.2002.

**Любви все возрасты по барабану.** Запись, А. Савченко, 2002.

**Любви все возрасты покорны, но только органы не все.** fantaz.ru, 2.5.2002.

**Любви все плоскости покорны.** boom, 15.5.2002; fantaz.ru, 2.5.2002; Fomenko 05–01; Fomenko 04–02; kulich 12–01; myslі, 20.5.2002; relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

**Любви все полости покорны.** Запись, СПб., 2001.

**Любви все пошлости покорны.** Запись, СПб., 2001.

**Мы все глядим в Наполеоны.** БМШ 2000, 283. Часть цитаты из романа А. С. Пушкина «Евгений Онегин», гл. 2, 14 (1833).

**Каждый метит в Наполеона, да не каждый попадает!** Foma 2, 15.5.2002.

**Тиха украинская ночь. Прозрачно небо. Звезды блещут.** А. С. Пушкин, «Полтава». Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 596.

**Тиха украинская ночь, но сало лучше (надо) перепрятать.** Кузьміч 2000, 203; gon, 15.5.2002; myslі, 20.5.2002; narod, 17.5.2002.

**Унылая пора! Очей очарованье!..** БМШ 2000, 514.

**Унылая, пора.** Fomenko 04–02.

**Что пройдет, то будет мило.** Выражение из стихотворения А. С. Пушкина «Если жизнь тебя обманет» (1825). БМШ 2000, 548.

**Что пройдет, то будет мимо.** Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 177.

**Темницы рухнут – и свобода...** Строка из стихотворения А. С. Пушкина «Во глубине сибирских руд...»

**Темницы рухнут на светлицы.** Foma 2, 15.5.2002.

**Мы все учились понемногу / чему-нибудь и как-нибудь.** БМШ 2000, 283. Цитата из романа «Евгений Онегин» А. С. Пушкина (гл. 1,5 -1833).  
**Мы все хотели понемногу кого-нибудь и как-нибудь.** boom, 15.5.2002.  
 Учиться никогда не поздно.

**Родила царица в ночь Не то сына, не то дочь; Не мышонка, не лягушку, А неведому зверюшку.** А. С. Пушкин. Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 518.  
**Родила царица в ночь Коле – сына, Толе – дочь.** Fomenko 05–01.  
**Родила царица в ночь нетто – сына, брутто – дочь.** «СимплиСити». СПб. вед. 2.8.2002.

**Я вас любил: любовь еще, быть может [В душе моей утасла не совсем].** Мокиенко, Сидоренко 1999, 678–679; БМШ, 568.  
**Я вас любил, деревья гнулись.** Fomenko 04–02; relax.ru, 30.4.2002. Контаминация начала стихотворения А. С. Пушкина и начальной строки известной народной песни.

Нередко креативная энергия антипословиц вовлекает крылатые выражения А.С. Пушкина в орбиту крылатики других авторов. Ярким примером такого словотворчества является *скрещение* знаменитого лозунга-призыва к советской молодежи В.И. Ленина с пушкинским крылатым выражением из маленькой трагедии «Моцарт и Сольери»: **Учиться, учиться и учиться – три вещи несовместные!** kulich 12–01. Контаминация крылатого выражения В. И. Ленина и афоризма А. С. Пушкина **Гений и злодейство – две вещи несовместные.**

Не менее оригинальна и инкрустация пушкинизма из той же трагедии в старую русскую поговорку:

**В ногах правды нет, она чуть-чуть повыше.** Alex, 15.5.2002; kulich 12–01; lipetsk, 20.5.2002; mysl, 20.5.2002. Контаминация поговорки **В ногах правды нет** и пушкинского крылатого выражения **Нет правды на земле, Но правды нет и выше.**

**В ногах правды нет. А может, нет и выше.** Вальтмо 2000, 23, 56. Контаминация поговорки **В ногах правды нет** и пушкинского крылатого выражения **Нет правды на земле, Но правды нет и выше.**

**В ногах правды нет. Но правды нет и выше.** boom, 15.5.2002; myslj, 20.5.2002. Контаминация пословицы В ногах правды нет и пушкинского крылатого выражения Нет правды на земле, Но правды нет и выше.

### *Михаил Юрьевич Лермонтов (1914-1941)*

При всей популярности произведений великого поэта, немногочисленным произведениям которого посвящена целая «Лермонтовская энциклопедия» (1981), где представлена базовая информация по всем аспектам лермонтоведения, его «крылатое» наследие уступает цитируемости выражений И.А. Крылова, А.С. Грибоедова и А.С. Пушкина. А в «копилку» антипословичного фольклора вошли лишь хрестоматийные строки из патриотического стихотворения «Бородино», которое каждый русский знает наизусть:

**Лихая им досталась доля: Когда б на то не Божья воля – не отдали б Москвы.** Цитата из стихотворения М. Ю. Лермонтова «Бородино» (1837).

**Такая нам досталась доля – нам не прожить без алкоголя!** relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

**Скажи-ка, дядя, ведь не даром?** Цитата из стихотворения М. Ю. Лермонтова «Бородино» (1837).

**– Скажи-ка, няня, ведь не даром? – Да, внучек мой, не по любви.** relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

**Скажи-ка, тетя, ты не даром?** boom, 15.5.2002; fantaz. 2.5.2002; Fomenko 04–02; halyava, 15.5.2002.

Ср. также уже вышеприводимую довольно искусственный «антирекламный ролик», намекающий на известные трагические дуэли, прервавшие жизнь двух русских поэтов:

**Только на ОРТ: полуфиналы Пушкин – Дантес, Лермонтов – Мартынов.** Fomenko 04–02.

### ***Фёдор Иванович Тютчев (1803-1873)***

Дипломат, поэт-мыслитель и лирик Ф.И. Тютчев оставил знаковый след в сокровищнице русских крылатых слов своим стихотворением «Умом Россию не понять» (Умом Россию не понять, / Аршином общим не измерить; / У ней особенная стать, / В Россию можно только верить» (1866, 1868)). Оно часто цитируется целиком, а его хрестоматийная известность генерирует и целый ряд антипословиц:

**Давно пора, ядрена мать, умом Россию понимать.** (Либерман).

**Россию не понять, но задницей почуять можно.** Запись, Ленинград, 1988.

**Умом «десятку» не понять. В «десятку» можно только верить.** КП,13.10.95; БМШ 2000,513.

**Умом Россию не понять, аршином общим не измерить. Зачем же в лодку пса сажать? На выживание проверить.** АиФ СПб., 8.11.2000.

**Умом Россию не понять. Разве что задним.** Фома, 15.5.2002.

**Умом Россию не понять. Так понимайте нас желудком.** Д. Бледнов, Пермская обл. АиФ 20.11.2002.

**Умом Россию не понять. Что вы хотите – Поле чудес.** Фома 2, 15.5.2002.

Популярен и романс на стихи Ф. И. Тютчева («К. Б.» – баронессе Крюденер, 1870), начальные слова которого стали «крылатыми»:

**Я встретил вас, и все былое...** БМШ 2000, 569.

Лишь испорченное воображение современных рекламодателей и испорченный языковой вкус способны были превратить эти романтические строки в «шершавый» рекламный заголовок:

**Я встретил VAX, и все былое...** (VAX – чистящая система). Нижегородская правда, 1.3.97. Кваша 2000, 6.

### ***Николай Алексеевич Некрасов (1821–1877)***

Стихи и поэмы классика русской литературы, муза которого была посвящена народу, входят в обязательную учебную программу и заучиваются наизусть. Не случайно поэтому они стали плодоносной основой многих крылатых слов и выражений. Часть из них обрели популяр-

ность у «креаторов» антипословиц. Приведем некоторые из них.

**Гляжу – поднимается медленно в гору...** Фраза из стихотворения Н. А. Некрасова «Крестьянские дети» (1861).

**Всю ночь поднимается медленно в гору, а утром проснешься – опять с ноготок.** kulich 12–01.

**Однажды в студеную зимнюю пору / Я из лесу вышел...** Начало стихотворения Н. А. Некрасова «Крестьянские дети» (1861).

**Однажды в студеную зимнюю пору смотрю – поднимается медленно.** boom, 15.5.2002; fantaz.ru, 2.5.2002; Fomenko 04–02.

**Поэтом можешь ты не быть, Но гражданином быть обязан.** Из стихотворения Н. Некрасова «Поэт и гражданин» (1856). БМШ 2000, 395.

**Врубаться можешь ты не быть, но загрузиться быть обязан!** gon, 15.5.2002; kulich 12–01; mysl, 20.5.2002.

**Нахалом можешь ты не быть, но депутатом Думы быть обязан.** Трушкин 2000, 111.

**Поэтом можешь ты не быть, но педагогом быть обязан.** Запись, В. С. Мокиенко, Одесса, 2002.

**Ученым можешь ты не быть, но кандидатом быть обязан.** Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 163.

**Кому на Руси жить хорошо.** Назв. поэмы Н. А. Некрасова.

**Кому на Руси жить хорошо, а кому еще лучше.** Д. Кантемиров, Дмитровград. АиФ, АиФоризмы. 13.9.2002.

### *Алексей Максимович Горький (1969–1936)*

Произведения советского писателя, «Буревестника революции», основателя социалистического реализма также были предметом обязательной школьной программы и потому глубоко врезались в память, запечатляясь в скрижалях русских крылатых слов и выражений. Часть из них нашла отражение и в антифразах.

Дети – цветы жизни. Восходит к рассказу М. Горького «Бывшие люди» (1897), где сказано буквально, что «дети – живые цветы земли». БМШ 2000, 141.

Дети – цветы жизни, [а] старики – кактусы смерти. kulich 12–01; Foma 2, 15.5.2002.

Дети – цветы жизни, но никто не хочет их нюхать. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни, пускай они растут на чужом подоконнике. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни, пусть они растут на помойке. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Дарите женщинам (девушкам) цветы. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48; Alex, 15.5.2002; boom, 15.5.2002; fantaz.ru, 2.5.2002; Fomenko 04–02; halyava, 15.5.2002; lipetsk, 20.5.2002; meet, 16.5.2002.

Дети – цветы жизни. На могиле родителей. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Надо вырвать их с корнем. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Не надо давать им распускаться. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Не надо делать из них букет. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Не надо сажать их в горшок вниз головой. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Плюнь – они завянут. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Так в воду их, в воду! Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы жизни. Так воткните их обратно в клумбу. Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 48.

Дети – цветы, алименты – ягоды. В. Галкин, Калязин, 2002.

Дети – это цветы, а цветам нужны горшочки. Запись, Ленинград, 1983.

Дети – это цветы, но пусть они растут на чужой клумбе. Кузьмич 2000, 52.

Любите книгу – источник знания. Цитата из рассказа М. Горького «Как я учился» (1918).

Любите газету, неиссякаемый источник кульков для семечек. Fomenko 04–02; halyava, 15.5.2002; meet, 16.5.2002; narod, 17.5.2002.

Любите жену – надежный источник знаний ваших недостатков. Трушкин 2000, 222.

### *Владимир Владимирович Маяковский(1893–1930)*

Цитаты из стихотворений поэта-футуриста, ставшего классиком советской литературы, уже при его жизни обретали «крылатость». Часть из них получила и антипословичное «гражданство» благодаря популярности первоисточника.

**Я волком бы выгрыз бюрократизм.** БМШ 2000, 569; Душенко 1997, 351.

**Я волком бы выгрыз лишь только за то, что им разговаривал Ленин.**

Вальтмо 2000, 21. Контаминация крылатой фразы В. В. Маяковского

Я волком бы выгрыз бюрократизм из «Стихов о советском паспорте»

(1929) и его же известной цитаты из стихотворения «Нашему юношеству»

(1927) Я русский бы выучил только за то, что им разговаривал

Ленин (Маяковский «В.И. Ленин»). БМШ 2000, 569, 575.

**Если сын у папы свин, значит сын – свиненок.** Цитата из стихотворения В. В. Маяковского «Что такое хорошо и что такое плохо» (1925).

**Если дядя с дядей нежен, СПИД у дяди неизбежен.** Кузьмич 2000, 61.

**И жизнь хороша, и жить хорошо.** Цитата из поэмы В. В. Маяковского «Хорошо» (1927). Душенко 1987, 253.

**«И жизнь хороша, и жить хорошо!»** – сказала бабушка, вылезая из мусорного ящика. Запись, СПб., 2002.

**Жить тяжело. А тяжело жить еще тяжелее.** gon, 15.5.2002.

**Жить хорошо. А хорошо жить еще лучше.** Белянин, Бутенко 1994, 59;

Кузьмич 2000, 68; Кожевников 2001, 122.

### *Николай Семёнович Тихонов (1896–1979)*

Известный советский поэт и писатель, общественный деятель, герой Социалистического труда и лауреат Ленинских и Сталинских премий

Пополнил кладовую крылатых слов благодаря стихотворению «Баллада о гвоздях» (1919–1922). Ее заключительные строки обрели крылатость:

**Гвозди бы делать из этих людей**

**Крепче бы не было в мире гвоздей.**

Метафора восходит к представлениям о крепости, негибаемости железа (ср. **железный характер**), которое осмысливается как материал для изготовления гвоздей. (БМШ 2000, 115).

В контексте антипословиц это крылатое выражение утрачивает патетичность и окрашивается в острую иронию:

**Гвозди бы делать из этих бомжей.** Заголовок. Нижегородская правда, 5.6.97. Кваша 2000, 6.

### *Евгений Александрович Евтушенко (1932-2017)*

В «крылатом» наследии известного советского поэта – 5 выражений: Дай Бог, чтобы твоя страна тебя не пнула сапожищем (Берков, Мокиенко, Шулежкова 2008, 1, 287), Мы этой памяти верны (Берков, Мокиенко, Шулежкова 2008, 1, 656), Поэт в России – больше, чем поэт (Берков, Мокиенко, Шулежкова 2008, 2, 237), Хотят ли русские войны? (Берков, Мокиенко, Шулежкова 2008, 2, 519), Пришли иные времена, Взошли иные имена (Берков, Мокиенко, Шулежкова 2008, 2, 254). «Конкурсную проверку» антипословиц выдержало лишь одно из них:

**Поэт в России больше, чем поэт.** БМШ 2000, 395. Начало поэмы Е. А. Евтушенко «Братская ГЭС» (1965).

**Поэт в России больше, чем поэт, но меньше, чем бомж.** Трушкин 2000, 103.

Разумеется, представленный нами антипословичный «отбор» относителен и не претендует на хрестоматийную «статистику» употребительности того или иного крылатого выражения. Тем не менее, доминантные имена русской литературы в ней получили достаточно объективное отражение, причиной чего является в первую очередь общая для всего Советского Союза школьная программа и престиж литературной образованности.



Список писателей, внесших свой, пусть и небольшой, вклад в антипословичную «копилку» мог бы быть и расширен – например, цитациями из популярной детской литературы. Ср. цитату А. Барто, из цикла детских стихотворений «Игрушки»:

**Идет бычок, качается...** и ее довольно искусственную переделку  
**Идет качок, бычается.** Fomenko 04–02; Fomenko 05–01.

*Может несколько удивить отсутствие антипословиц, восходящих к произведениям И.Э. Бабея, С.А. Есенина, А.А. Ахматовой, М. Цветаевой, А.А. Фадеева, Н.Л. Бродского, А.И. Солженицына.... При этом в «серьезной» русской «крылатике» они оставили более или менее заметный след. Впрочем, такая ситуация может быть объяснена и «естественным отбором»: ведь в сети антипословиц попадают, как правило, те крылатые выражения, которые дают повод для иронического обыгрывания и лучше всего подходят в качестве материала для словесной шутки.*

Не случайно поэтому «рекордсменом» за право завоевать «антипословичное поле» стали советские писатели-сатирики, уроженцы города Одесса, Илья Ильф (1897–1937) и Евгений Петров (1902–1942). Их знаменитые романы о похождениях «великого комбинатора» Остапа Бендера «Двенадцать стульев» (1928) и «Золотой теленок» (1931) до сих пор популярны, а породившие их крылатые выражения цитируются и в литературе, и в средствах массовой информации, и в живой речи. Недавно мы опубликовали словарь «крылатики» И. Ильфа и Е. Петрова (Мокиенко, Сидоренко 2021), насчитывающий около 1000 словарных статей. Не удивительно, что часть из них активно генерирует и злободневные антипословицы:

**Автомобиль не роскошь, а средство передвижения.** БМШ 2000, 21. Один из лозунгов, которым зеваки приветствовали машину «Антилопа гну» с Остапом Бендером и его компаньонами – жуликами, случайно оказавшимися на трассе автопробега «Москва–Харьков–Москва» (И. Ильф, Е. Петров. «Золотой теленок», гл. VI, 1931).

**Автомат не роскошь, а средство общения.** gon, 15.5.2002.

**Автомобиль – это средство передвижения, а бензин – роскошь.** АиФ, АиФоризмы, 13.9.2002; Запись, Д. Козлов, Москва; relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

Деньги не роскошь, а средство для пропивания. kulich 12–01.

Длинные ноги не роскошь, а средство выживания! Foma, 15.5.2002; Foma 2, 15.5.2002; meet, 16.5.2002.

Длинные ноги не роскошь, а средство передвижения. boom, 15.5.2002; Fomenko 04–02; halyava, 15.5.2002; myslj, 20.5.2002; succs, 13.5.2002.

Длинные ноги – это не роскошь, а средство продвижения по служебной лестнице! fantaz.ru, 2.5.2002.

Женщина не роскошь, но требует денег. Трушкин 2000, 219.

Красота и ум у женщины не роскошь, а средство передвижения по жизни. Трушкин 2000, 184.

Машина не роскошь, [а] роскошь – средства на ее передвижение. kulich 12–01; relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

Наглость не порок, а средство продвижения. Запись, СПб., март 2002; Fomenko 05–01. Контаминация пословиц Бедность не порок и крылатого выражения Автомобиль – не роскошь, а средство передвижения.

Народ не роскошь, а средство обогащения. Запись, А. Савченко, 2002.

Обжорство не роскошь, а работа желудка в момент отсутствия ума. Ю. Климов, Москва. АиФ, АиФоризмы. 13.9.2002.

Партия не роскошь, а средство попасть в Думу. А. Худолеев, Архангельская обл. АиФ, АиФоризмы. 13.9.2002.

Сердце не роскошь, а средство переживания. Запись, А. Савченко, 2002.

Склероз не роскошь, а средство передвижения крыши! gon, 15.5.2002.

Танки не роскошь, а средство для установления социалистической демократии. relax.ru, 30.4.2002.

Унитаз не роскошь, а средство для похудения. omen, 25.11.2002.

Ударим автопробегом по бездорожью [и разгильдяйству]! БМШ 2000, 508.

Ударим крепким сном по мукам совести. Fomenko 04–02.

Ударим платонической любовью по венерическим заболеваниям! АиФ, № 12,2001; Дамм 2000, 49; В. Семенов, Красноярский край. АиФ, АиФоризмы. 13.9.2002.

**Иногда и яйцам приходится учить зарвавшуюся курицу.** И. Ильф, Е. Петров. Двенадцать стульев; ШСП 2002, 285.

Завершая обзор антипословиц, созданных на основе произведений русской классической литературы, еще раз подчеркнем актуальность этого популярного ныне жанра малого фольклора. Будучи универсальным явлением для многих языков, они в каждом из них имеют свою специфику, как показала в специальных исследованиях наша Юбилярница (Litovkina 2005; Litovkina, Vargha 2005; Litovkina, Vargha 2005a). Благодаря ей и её уважаемый Наставник в области новейшей антипадемиологии и основатель этого научного направления проф. В. Мидер ощутил свежий вкус венгерских антипословиц на англоязычном фоне (Litovkina, Mieder 2005a). И нам, знающим лишь одно венгерское слово – antiközmondások (антипословица), хочется звучно пожелать Анне Литовкиной-Тоте:

**Kedves Anna,**

**Gratulálunk jeles évfordulójához, jó egészséget és további sikereket kívánunk az anti-közmondások elemzéséhez!**

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# Proverb variations and innovations





**MELITA ALEKSA VARGA**

**HOW LONG DOES A CROATIAN  
PROVERB “LIVE”?**

**Abstract:** Most Croatian proverbs have been documented in collections from the 19th and 20th centuries, more precisely from 1846 to 1987 (see Grzybek, Škara and Heyken 1993). Since there has not been a comprehensive contemporary dictionary or proverb collection published that would encompass the Croatian paremiological lore, there was an institutional project started in 2011 with the aim of determining the Croatian paremiological minimum and/or optimum and consequently to publish a Croatian online thesaurus (cf. Aleksa Varga, Feldvari 2022). In order to construct the Croatian online paremiological thesaurus, there has to be first a paremiological dictionary database established. For this purpose, since for the Croatian language there has not been a Dictionary of Croatian Proverbs published yet, there have to be different texts collected, namely proverbs together with their variants, anti-proverbs etc.

The aim of the present paper, therefore, is a state-of-the-art analysis, a comparison of the results from the previous Grzybek's analyses and research conducted in the 1990s to the field research from 2014 and 2018. The goal is to determine if and how many of the Croatian proverbs and proverb variants from the 19th and 20th centuries are still being used nowadays, and which proverbs have probably been used more in their altered form.

**Keywords:** Croatian proverbs, Croatian online thesaurus, versions of proverbs

### *1. Introduction*

Unlike some other languages where we can find different paremiological collections or dictionaries of proverbs either in print or online form (for example for English (Mieder, Kingsbury and Harder 1992, and Doyle, Mieder and Shapiro 2012), Bulgarian (Stojkova 2007), German (Wander 1867-1880), Hungarian (Litovkina 2005)) with their paremiological minimum and/or optimum already determined

in the course of different projects, most Croatian proverbs have been documented in collections from the 19th and 20th centuries, more precisely from 1846 to 1987 (see Grzybek, Škara and Heyken 1993). Since there has not been a comprehensive contemporary dictionary or proverb collection published that would encompass the Croatian paremiological lore, there was an institutional project started in 2011 with the aim of determining the Croatian paremiological minimum and consequently to publish a Croatian online thesaurus. The reason for publishing a Croatian paremiological thesaurus and not a dictionary is twofold. The first reason is that the research conducted in 2014 and 2018 showed that young people were unfamiliar with Croatian proverbs, and second, research also proved that young people were more used to entering free keywords when searching for items in post-coordinated systems like Google than looking up information in other media (cf. Furi and Petr 2016). Therefore, there was much greater need to develop a database that would be freely extendable with data from an online-questionnaire in which proverb variants would be collected (similar to the one developed by Matej Meterc (Meterc 2019 and 2021) for the Slovenian language), but which would have a didactic function as well. This means that the students would enter free keywords in the search bar of the thesaurus and the system would return proverbs with the same meaning and suggest even more proverbs with similar meaning, which would fulfill the didactic function of the thesaurus. An example for this has been shown in Aleksa Varga and Feldvari (2022: 11):

If the user searches for example for proverbs with the topic *krađa* (*theft*), the system will return all the proverbs where literally the term *krađa* (*theft*) appears as a lemma, together with its lexemes (e.g. *krade*, *kradeš*, *kradljivica*, *krao*, *krao*, *krasti* etc)

See proverbs with this keyword: *Tko laže taj i krade* [He who lies steals as well], *Od sve krade na Božić ni mesa* [Out of all the stealing there is no meet for Christmas].

In order to construct the Croatian online paremiological thesaurus, there would need to be a dictionary basis constructed containing

both proverbs, anti-proverbs, and related texts with all the usual data needed (cf. Aleksa Varga and Feldvari 2022). For this purpose, since for the Croatian language there has not been a Dictionary of Croatian Proverbs published yet, we will need to collect texts, i.e. proverbs from the two field questionnaires, as well as data from other collections including the results from Grzybek’s research.

The aim of the present paper is, therefore, a state-of-the-art analysis to compare the results from Grzybek’s analysis and research conducted in the 1990s to the field research from 2104 and 2018 in order to determine if and how many of the proverbs and proverb variants are still being used nowadays, and in which variants.

## *2. Research conducted in the 1990s and its results*

Peter Grzybek conducted three major studies on three Croatian proverb collections from the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the topic of proverb familiarity in the contemporary Croatian culture. As he stated in the introductory note (Grzybek 1997a), this question had not been studied before, but the importance of this topic went beyond the narrow framework of paremiology, bearing particular relevance for folklorists, linguistics, sociology, cultural semiotics, etc.

The first study was the study of Skarpa’s collection (1909). In this study (Grzybek 1996) tested 15027 proverbs from the collection and came to the conclusion that 627 proverbs were familiar to both men and women. The second study had been conducted to extract the obsolete proverbs from the collections by Mijat Stojanović (1866), as he stated that it has been commonplace in paremiology that proverbs are simply copied from previous compilers who do not even raise the question if these proverbs still exist (Grzybek 1997a: 202). The research was conducted on the experimental corpus of 1250 proverb texts, for which sixteen informants had to mark if they found the proverbs familiar or not. Grzybek at that time took into account the proverb variants as well. The analysis was done according to gender, but in the end he came up with a list of 134 proverb texts known by

either men or women in the year 1997 that were added to the future research conducted by Aleksa Varga and Matovac in 2014 (Aleksa Varga, Matovac 2016).

The third study was on the proverb collection by Gjuro Daničić (1871) (cf. Grzybek 1997b) in which he tested 5223 proverbs from the collections and concluded that 625 proverbs and their variants had been familiar to either the female or male informants. Upon asking them to supply the proverb variants, he came to the number of an average of 346 proverbs known by each informant in the study group. It is interesting to note that Grzybek (1997b) stated that there were ten proverb variants more familiar in this collection than those found in the Skarpa collection (*Kruška ne pada daleko od stabla* [A pear does not fall far from the tree]). Among these, there has been only one variant which has still been used in its unchanged form today, namely *Jabuka ne pada daleko od stabla*. [An apple does not fall far from the tree].

### 3. Field research in 2014 and 2018

The institutional project of determining the Croatian paremiological minimum and optimum started in 2014. Before that, there were only individual studies that encompassed different viewpoints of paremiology. The project to determine the Croatian paremiological minimum and optimum lasted until 2018, and was carried out in two phases, within the framework of two studies, using methods of field data collection and their statistical analysis. The first survey was conducted in 2014 (Aleksa Varga and Matovac 2016) using a printed questionnaire on a sample of 867 respondents, while the second survey was conducted in 2018 on a sample of 718 respondents using the same questionnaire. The research was conducted throughout the Republic of Croatia, and an attempt was made to obtain a representative sample of subjects aged 14 to 94 ( $\bar{x}$  = 30 years,  $s$  = 18.59). The questionnaire was compiled after thorough corpus analysis and piloting on a sample of 121 people. In the course of the Croatian research in 2014 and 2018 there was a separate questionnaire made which consisted of three sets of data, proverbs collected from the internet

sources, data from Grzybek’s research and the searching of the three main Croatian corpora - *Hrvatski nacionalni korpus*, *Hrvatska jezična riznica*, and the *hrWaC*-corpus. In the end there was the original list of 239 proverbs set that was thus narrowed down to the 207 most common texts that appear mostly in the three Croatian corpora. Due to the fact that at that time the Croatian paremiological minimum and optimum had not yet been established, we could not start from the point of view of selecting the most common proverbs that are present in oral communication, and which every speaker of the Croatian language should know, but had to rely on corpus analysis and statistical calculation of the frequency of appearance of proverbs in Croatian corpora and on Internet sites. As a further step, there was a list of proverbs subjected to a pilot study because it was not possible to ask the respondents to write the missing part for each of the 207 proverbs. Therefore, 21 linguists were selected in the pilot study (covering all parts of the Republic of Croatia), who indicated in an online questionnaire whether they knew the proverb or not, or whether they might know it (and in what) other form. Based on the obtained data, a questionnaire with the 105 most common Croatian proverbs ordered by the frequency of their occurrence was constructed, which was used in both surveys, in 2014 and 2018. The proverbs were ordered in such a way that the first 35 proverbs (from number 1 to 35) were the ones that were the most frequently occurring proverbs in the Croatian corpora, the second 35 (from number 36 to 70) were the ones that were less frequently occurring proverbs in the Croatian corpora, and the last 35 (from number 71 to 105) were proverbs that were the least represented in the Croatian corpora.

In the research from 2014, we used the method of final-text presentation, and in the research from 2018, we used the method of initial-text presentation. The results from all of the surveys were analyzed with the SPSS for Windows using the four-code system for analyzing proverbs developed by Chlostá and Grzybek (cf. Chlostá, Grzybek 2005 and 2015 and Grzybek 2012). In this system, the starting point is the so-called zero modification or zero variant of the prov-

erb, which is also the “expected” form (“zero variant” or 0V). After that, the next stage is the modification of the first degree, for example the omission of certain words that are not crucial for understanding, spelling or morphological alterations of proverbs, but also some lexical or syntactical alterations that are not a modification of the second degree. Modification of the second degree is the shortening or lengthening of the zero variant, that includes all lexical variations except synonymy. Modification of the third degree means major changes, in some cases it can even be a completely different proverb or a sentence that is not a proverb at all (Grzybek 2012: 149-150). In the course of the following chapters there will be the results of both surveys presented and compared to the previous research findings.

The results of the question on the familiarity of proverbs showed that the informants have been familiar with only 28 out of 105 proverbs in their zero variants, and thus in a ratio greater than 80% (cf. Aleksa Varga, Keglević 2020). Consequently, it could be concluded that only 28 proverbs in the Croatian language belong to the paremiological minimum of the Croatian language. If we compare these results to the experience of other linguists who calculated even higher percentages when determining the paremiological minimum, for example 90% for Hungarian and Czech (Tothne Litovkina 1992, Schindler 1993), 95% for German and English (Grzybek and Chlosta 2008:105 ) or 97% for the Russian language (Permjakov 1989: 143), we would arrive at an even lower result because in the case of the Croatian language, only 10 proverbs have been familiar on a level of knowledge higher than 90%, and these proverbs are also mainly the ones that are occurring most frequently in the Croatian corpora (Table 1).

Table 1. Proverbs with the highest rate of familiarity in 2014 and 2018

Frequency of occurrence in corpora	Zero Variant with their literal translation	% of familiarity	
		2014	2018
high frequency	Bolje išta nego ništa. [Better something than nothing]	96,19	99,1
middle frequency	Kakov otac, takav sin. [Like father, like son]	94,58	92,3
high frequency	Bolje ikad nego nikad. [Better sometimes than never]	94,35	98,5
high frequency	Bolje spriječiti nego liječiti. [Better prevent than heal]	93,66	96
middle frequency	Tko rano rani, dvije sreće grabi. [He who is early will grab two pieces of luck]	93,31	91,3
high frequency	Tko pjeva, zlo ne misli. [He who sings, thinks not ill]	92,85	95,7
high frequency	Tko visoko leti, nisko pada. [He who flies high, falls low]	92,62	93,9
high frequency	Ispeci pa reci. [First bake, than say]	91,81	96,9
high frequency	U laži su kratke noge. [Lies have short legs]	91,58	95,3
high frequency	Kud puklo, da puklo. [Where it might break, it should break]	91,12	98,1
high frequency	Sve se može kad se hoće. [Everything can be done if there is a will]	91	89,8
middle frequency	Tko se zadnji smije, najslađe se smije. [He who laughs last, laughs the sweetest]	90,77	90,3
high frequency	Bez muke nema nauke. [There is no knowledge without torment]	90,2	89,8
high frequency	Gdje ima dima ima i vatre. [Where there is smoke, there is fire]	89,85	92,9
high frequency	Krv nije voda. [Blood is not water]	89,62	97,8
low frequency	Svaki lonac ima svoj poklopac. [Each pot has its own lid.]	88,93	86,3
high frequency	Jabuka ne pada daleko od stabla. [An apple does not fall far from the tree]	88,81	95,6
middle frequency	Ne diraj lava dok spava. [Do not touch a sleeping lion]	88,81	91,6
middle frequency	Sve se vraća, sve se plaća. [Everything comes back, everything should be paid]	88,47	91,9

high frequency	Nije zlato sve što sjja.[It is not everything gold that shines]	87,66	94,4
middle frequency	Tko tebe kamenom, ti njega kruhom.[Who hits you with a stone, hit him with bread]	87,54	86
middle frequency	Sto ljudi, sto ćudi.[A hundred people, a hundred tempers]	86,27	86,9
high frequency	U zdravom tijelu zdrav duh.[In a healthy body healthy mind]	85,58	94,1
middle frequency	Neće grom u koprive.[ It won't be lightning in the nettles]	83,97	92,3
high frequency	Vuk dlaku mijenja, ali ćud nikada.[ A wolf changes its coat, but never its temper]	83,51	85,5
middle frequency	Tko nema u glavi, ima u nogama.[ He who doesn't have it in his head, has it in his legs]	83,51	78,6
high frequency	Pametniji popušta.[ The smarter one gives way]	83,16	86,4
high frequency	Ruka ruku miје.[Hand washed a hand]	81,43	86,6

Based on the analysis of the data from Table 1, we can conclude that actually 73% of the most common proverbs in the questionnaire have been supplemented by not their zero modification, but their variants, that is the modifications of the first, second or third degree. Further analysis showed that 1585 respondents wrote actually 6184 proverb variants. Most of them were modifications of the first degree (M1), which include, for example, the omission of certain words that do not disturb the meaning of the proverb, modifications at the orthographic, morphological, and even lexical or syntactic level (3819 texts). Modifications of the second degree (M2) imply shortening or lengthening of the zero variant, some other lexical variations (385 texts), while the modifications of the third degree (M3) imply modifications in the form of a completely different meaning of the proverb, some new sentence or even anti-proverbs (1980 texts).

One further analysis of proverbs with more than 100 variants (Table 2) showed that these are actually proverbs that are moderately or less frequently occurring in Croatian corpora. After analyzing these different variants, it can be observed that the high number of modifications does not always mean a large number of groups to which



the same modifications belong. For instance, the proverb *Kako došlo tako prošlo* [As come as go] has been recorded with 294 1<sup>st</sup> degree modification belonging to only three group categories. This can be interpreted in a way that lots of people wrote the same proverb modification, meaning that this variant had been widespread among the Croatian speaking community and it should be included into the dictionary database of the future thesaurus.

Table 2: Proverb variants with the number of modifications and group categories.

Proverb	Modification	Category	Variant	Number of variants within the category
Kako došlo, tako prošlo. [As come as go]	M1	1	Kako došlo, tako ošlo.	251
	M1	2	Kako došlo, tako otišlo.	35
	M1	3	Kako došlo, tako i otišlo	8
Nije zlato sve što sja. [It is not everything gold that shines]	M1	1	Nije zlato sve što sija	145
	M1	2	Nije zlato sve što blista.	1
	M1	3	Nije zlato sve što sjaji.	2
Slika govori više od riječi. [A picture speaks more than words]	M2	1	Slika govori više od hiljadu riječi.	2
	M2	2	Slika govori više od sto riječi.	3
	M2	3	Slika govori više od 1000 riječi.	113
	M3	1	Slika govori tisuću riječi.	346

#### 4. Comparison of the three studies

If we cross compare the results from the three studies, namely the proverbs and their variants found in Grzybek’s works to the results from the studies in 2014 and 2018, we can observe that there are 39 proverbs present in all three surveys in their either zero variant or the modification. 18 of these proverbs have survived their time and are still being used nowadays in the zero variant, the same variant

they had been marked as familiar in 1997. If we furthermore take a look at their familiarity rate in the 2014 and 2018 studies, we come to the results in Table 3.

Table 3: Familiarity rate of proverbs from 1997 in the 2014 and 2018 research:

<b>Proverb</b>	<b>Familiarity rate 2014 (%)</b>	<b>Familiarity rate 2018 (%)</b>
Bolje išta, nego ništa. [Better something than nothing]	99	96
Kud puklo da puklo. [Where it might break, it should break]	98	90
Ispeci, pa reci. [First bake, than say]	97	90
Jabuka ne pada daleko od stable. [An apple does not fall far from the tree]	96	76
S kim si, takav si. [With whom you are, so you are]	96	61
Tko pjeva, zlo ne misli. [He who sings, thinks not ill]	95	90
Tko visoko leti, nisko pada. [He who flies high, falls low]	94	90
U laži su kratke noge. [Lies have short legs]	94	88
Tko tebe kamenom, a ti njega kruhom. [Who throws the rock at you, you should throw bread at him]	85	87
Milo za drago.[Tit for tat]	82	84
Kako došlo, tako prošlo [As come as go]	82	61
Svakog gosta, tri dana dosta [Every guest, enough for three days]	76	76
Tko laže, taj i krade [Whoever lies, steals]	57	82
Koliko ljudi, toliko ćudi. [As many people, as many tempers]	50	69
Što se babi htilo, to se babi snilo.[ What Grandma wanted, Grandma dreamed]	49	22
Zrno do zrna pogača, kamen do kamena polača. [Grain to grain bread, stone to stone cake]	43	35
Dva loša ubiše Miloša. [Two bad guys killed Milosh]	28	33
Nova metla dobro mete.[ New broom sweeps well]	11	15

Table 3 shows that 14 of the proverbs actually have the familiarity rate of more than 50% in the surveys from 2014 and 2018, meaning they have still been used in the same zero variant as they had been recorded in the 19<sup>th</sup> century proverb collections examined by Peter Grzybek. The other 19 proverbs from the 19<sup>th</sup> century collections were familiar to the informants in the 2014 and 2018 studies are in the percentage of up to 50%. This means that they have been present in the oral tradition today but in their modified form, the modification of the first degree, which can be read in Table 4.

Table 4: Variants of proverbs from the 19<sup>th</sup> century collections

Brez vatre neima dima
Čovjek snuje, ali Bog boguje i odlučuje
Djelo čovjeka hvali
Gdje je dim, tu mora biti vatra
Izpeci, pak reci
Kakav lonac, onaki i poklopac
Kakvi otac, takav sin, kakva mati, takva kći
Koliko ljudi, toliko čuđih
Nema nauke bez muke
Obećanje ludu radovanje
Od glave riba smrdi
S kim si, onaki si
Složna braća kuću grade
Stara koka mastna čorba
Svagdje je dobro, ali kod kuće je najbolje
Tko rano rani, dvje sreće grabi.
To tebe kamenom, ti onog kruhom
Trla baba lan, da joj prođe dan
Odjeća ne čini čovjeka čovjekom
Žena kuću drži

## 5. Conclusion

The above examples and the limited dataset that had been available from the previous works of the late Peter Grzybek tend to refer to the fact that there have been proverbs in the Croatian oral tradition that have survived the “tooth of time” and are still being used nowadays in the same form as they had been found in the 19th century collections. Apart from these, naturally, there is a certain number of proverbs that have undergone minor lexical, orthographic or morphosyntactic changes, but bearing the same meaning and interpretation. Regarding these as modifications of the first degree, they have thus earned their rightful place in the future Croatian online paremiological thesaurus and proven the fact that proverbs, just like the language itself, tend to shift and change. Just like new words occur and remain in the language use, and some become obsolete, there is a certain number of Croatian proverbs that has proven its resiliency through the “lifespan” of more than two centuries. So how long can a proverb live? The answer to this question lies in the future research into the Croatian language changes affecting not only proverbs, but the modern proverbs and anti-proverbs as well.

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CHARLES CLAY DOYLE

## COUNTER-PROVERBS (AND ANTI-PROVERBS)

**Abstract:** *Counter-proverbs*, as that term is currently employed, are to be distinguished from *anti-proverbs* in that counter-proverbs, in the preponderance of cases, do not feature humor or satire; they are created simply to negate or contradict the proverbs on which they are based. It is likely that the number of anti-proverbs in existence greatly exceeds the number of counter-proverbs. Like anti-proverbs, counter-proverbs sometimes themselves evolve into actual proverbs (instances are shown in the **Appendix**). Occasionally, however, the historical record makes it difficult to ascertain which of a pair of expressions is a counter-proverb and which is the proverb to which the counter-proverb responds. Like anti-proverbs, counter-proverbs imply a degree of iconoclasm simply in their regarding proverbs as not inviolable or sacrosanct—or even, necessarily, wise.

**Keywords:** proverbs, counter-proverbs, anti-proverbs, historical paremiology, proverbs in English.

If a curious citizen of the general public or even a bright college student wishes to acquire some knowledge of proverbs, she will likely—rather than consulting scholarly works by Anna Litovkina or Wolfgang Mieder—betake herself to *Wikipedia*, the online encyclopedia known for the immensity of its scope and the not-infrequent speciousness of its information.

The *Wikipedia* article “Proverbs” is uncommonly substantial. Its author (anonymous, of course) shows conversancy with a wide range of scholarship on the subject, so it is perhaps unfair for me to quibble about just a single detail, one pair of sentences. But quibble I shall. The article states: “There are often proverbs that contradict each other, such as ‘Look before you leap’ and ‘He who hesitates is lost,’ or ‘Many hands make light work’ and ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth.’ These have been labeled ‘counter proverbs’. . . .” At which point the author cites *me*. And that is exactly what I did *not* say.

I coined the term *counter-proverb* in 1972, in a small note published in the old orange-bound Finnish journal *Proverbium*, edited by Matti Kuusi (Doyle 1972: 683-685). The eventual wide-spread adoption of the term (in my sense) among folklorists surprised me. In 1972 I was a baby professor with a new Ph.D. degree. My doctoral studies at the University of Texas had entailed a dual focus: folklore and English Renaissance literature. The article was titled “Smoke and Fire: Spenser’s Counter-Proverb.” My folklore mentor, Américo Paredes, had suggested that I send it to *Proverbium*. (Subsequently, I elaborated on thematic and other “literary” aspects of the episode in the context of *The Faerie Queene*; Doyle 1976: 33-41).

At the very beginning of Spenser’s epic (the longest poem in the English language—the first half published in 1590), a young, inexperienced and impetuous knight-errant, journeying with a lady named Una, whom he has been assigned to escort, comes upon a dark cave amid a dark forest. He dismounts and strides toward the cave, hoping to discover and vanquish some adversary (and maybe gain the approval of the lady)—a dragon, perhaps, or an enemy knight. But Una warns him:

Be well aware, quoth then that Ladie milde,  
 Least suddaine mischiefe ye too rash prouoke:  
 The danger hid, the place vnknowne and wilde,  
 Breedes dreadfull doubts: Oft fire is without smoke,  
 And perill without show. Therefore your stroke  
 Sir knight with-hold, till further triall made.

(Spenser 1912: 5)

“Oft fire is without smoke” is a *counter-proverb*. A counter-proverb is not just a proverb that happens to contravene the message of another proverb. Rather, it is a proverbial-sounding statement that has been specifically coined to rebut or contradict a recognized proverb. Una’s “Oft fire is without smoke” discounts the common Elizabethan proverbs “Where fire is, smoke will appear” and its equivalent,



“There is no fire without some smoke” (Whiting 1968: F194; Tilley 1959: F282). “Oft fire is without smoke” perhaps never itself quite attained the status of an actual proverb, although there exists a curious much later circumstance:

In 1992 appeared *The Dictionary of American Proverbs*, largely edited by Wolfgang Mieder. The volume, containing some 13,000 proverbs, is the culmination of an extensive project sponsored by the American Dialect Society under the auspices of Margaret M. Bryant. Between 1945 and 1985, a host of untrained (or barely trained) individuals had submitted 150,000 slips of paper on which were inscribed expressions that the submitters had encountered and identified as proverbs, with dates and locations. The dictionary actually includes an entry for “Oft fire is without smoke, and peril without show,” an entry based on two submissions, one from California, the other from Pennsylvania (Mieder et al. 1992: 210). The archaism *oft* and the inclusion of the second clause, Una’s “unpacking” of the allegory in her counter-proverb, suggest that the submitters were in fact quoting Spenser (or quoting someone quoting Spenser) rather than any normal American speakers!

Counter-proverbs and anti-proverbs are often mentioned in tandem, for example in the *Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (Doyle et al. 2012: xi-xii), in Mieder’s *Behold the Proverbs of the People* (2014: 95-96), and in Mieder’s *Dictionary of Authentic American Proverbs* (2021: 23). Wolfgang brought the term *anti-proverb* into English as a calque of German *antisprichwort* (apparently in 1982 in print, though he certainly must have used it earlier in his lectures and conversations), and, of course, Anna, Wolfgang, and their associates have mustered and discussed a multitude of “texts” of anti-proverbs in English and other languages (Mieder and Litovkina 1999; Litovkina and Mieder 2006, Litovkina et al. 2021). It should be noted that both terms, *anti-proverb* and *counter-proverb*, had been used earlier in other ways. An amusing attributive use of *anti-proverb* appeared in 1927, in reference to the elite prejudice against proverbs *per se* that has appeared at various times in history (Mieder 2004: 162-71): An anonymous “filler”

item in the American magazine *Better Crops with Plant Food* for 1927 pretended to report: “The Anti-Proverb League pridefully points out that [Charles] Lindbergh couldn’t possibly have had any success [as an aviator] had he paid attention to the familiar wisdom of keeping one’s feet on the ground” (*Better Crops* 1927, vol. 9, no. 40, p. 57). That witticism functions a little like many anti-proverbs in the modern sense: it facetiously posits a literal response to a common figurative proverb, in this case “Keep your feet on the ground.”

As folklorists (mostly) employ the terms, the affinities between the two categories consist largely of three points: (1) Both counter-proverbs and anti-proverbs specifically respond to existing proverbs. (2) Individual counter-proverbs and anti-proverbs, in their origins, partly depend for their effectiveness on a hearer or reader’s familiarity with the base or source proverbs. (3) Individual anti-proverbs and counter-proverbs sometimes themselves evolve into true proverbs, such as the counter-proverbs shown in the *Appendix*. Occasionally a counter-proverb or an anti-proverb will become better known than the proverb from which it derives.

Both anti-proverbs and counter-proverbs are iconoclastic by their very nature, in that they presume to alter “canonical” expressions, either their wording or their messages. However, the two manners of alteration differ. As noted, a counter-proverb simply offers an alternative aphoristic-sounding expression that directly rebuts or contradicts a given proverb, while usually echoing some key words of the proverb, enough to make recognizable what specific proverb is being “countered.”

An anti-proverb, on the other hand, plays with the wording or the formula of a proverb, the result being not necessarily a direct response to the substance or the message of the proverb at all but rather a comical alteration or elaboration of the proverb, often keeping its formula but replacing key words, with the main intent being to display the cleverness of the one who has propounded or proffered the anti-proverb, even if the result is a nonsense statement or image (“A woman without God is like a frog without a bicycle”). However, even

the facetious and outlandish suggestion for an alternative to a given proverb might itself amount to a kind of substantive response to what may be deemed the sanctimony or pedantry or archaism or even falseness of the proverb being echoed. Thus, among anti-proverbs that have “graduated” to the status of actual proverbs, we have, for example, the following, which imply substantive criticisms of their base proverbs: “Absence makes the heart go wander” (more *truthful*, in the real world, than the actual proverb, “Absence makes the heart grow fonder”). “No body is perfect” (a specific—and more physically healthful or comforting—application of the proverb “Nobody is perfect”). “Expedience is the best teacher” (cynical and thus perhaps more realistic than the proverb “Experience is the best teacher”). “The second mouse gets the cheese” (a consoling reminder that we do not always need to act like the competitive worm-seeking early bird in the proverb). “The best things in life are not things” (counseling against the materialism or acquisitiveness that may be implied in the proverb “The best *things* in life are free”). “A closed mouth gathers no feet” (advising against garrulousness, substituting a different metaphor for the proverb’s “A closed mouth gathers no flies”; it would probably be overly subtle to suggest that the image of feet in the mouth plays on the etymology of *impediment*). “Time wounds all heels” (anticipating a gratifying retribution, in preference to the more passive “Time heals all wounds”). In terms of both pathos and righteous anger, there exists no anti-proverbial proverb equal to one particular response to “Old soldiers never die,” said to be the English proverb most often altered to make anti-proverbs (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 15-17): “Old soldiers never die; *young ones do.*”

Given the greater range of possibility in the nature of their responses to their base proverbs—from the silly and trivial to the practical, wise, and ethically preferable; from the condensed and cryptic to the expansive—it is no surprise that a far greater number of anti-proverbs exist than counter-proverbs. To focus on just one data base, *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (Doyle et al. 2012), comprising English proverbs that seem to be no older than the twentieth cen-

tury: included are some 118 proverbs that probably originated as anti-proverbs, versus only eleven that originated as counter-proverbs.

Furthermore, a single counter-proverb (with variants, of course) seems most often to prevail and survive as a response to a given proverb. There is just one probable exception in the *Appendix*, where the same proverb has called forth two distinct counter-proverbs (nearly three centuries apart), whereas a considerable number of different anti-proverbs can be generated from a single base proverb. For example, “He who laughs last laughs best (longest)” has yielded “He who laughs last probably didn’t get the joke”; “He who laughs last has the last laugh”; “He who laughs last is generally an Englishman”; “He who laughs last is trying to think of a dirty meaning”; “He who laughs last is usually the dumbest”; “The man who laughs last is usually sitting behind a tall person in the theatre”; “When the boss tells a joke, he who laughs, lasts”; and twenty other texts in a standard collection of anti-proverbs (Litovkina and Mieder 2006: 163).

Some further notes on the contents of the *Appendix*: In that list, nearly all of what I have termed base proverbs appear in one or more of the standard proverb dictionaries. (A recent addition to what paremiologists think of the “standard proverb dictionaries” should be Fred R. Shapiro’s *New Yale Book of Quotations*, 2021). Two of the proverbs listed do not have entries in the standard dictionaries: “Everything is relative” and “The whole cannot be greater than the sum of its parts.”

“Everything is relative” might seem to have been influenced by modern physics. An acquaintance of mine even suggested that it must have originated with Albert Einstein himself, the “father” of *relativity*. However, for Einstein not *everything* was “relative”: the velocity of light in a vacuum (designated  $c$  in the famous equation  $E=mc^2$ ) is a constant, the *absolute* velocity that nothing can exceed. Then, of course, for any physicist or mathematician there is the invariant  $\pi$ . In any case, the proverb “Everything is relative” antedates Einstein’s birth by half a century. We might speculate, though, that the currency of the proverb and of the idea that it loosely encapsulated made

it possible for Einstein to apprehend relationships that had eluded Newton and Galileo and Aristotle.

The proposition that “the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts” addresses the concept that a collection or organization of individuals, acting in concert and having a common aim or belief, can sometimes overrule or overpower an inchoate mass of individuals who lack any common creed or purpose. An ancient mathematical axiom (sometimes attributed to Aristotle) has been repurposed and applied to social or political concerns.

As for the datings: A year is shown in the *Appendix* after each proverb and each counter-proverb that has become a proverb, the date of the earliest instance that I have been able to discover. In many cases, I have antedated what the proverb dictionaries give for their earliest examples. Especially when a proverb and its corresponding counter-proverb have datings that are close together, I cannot be certain that the proverb/counter-proverb sequence that is shown is correct. The most notable instance of that uncertainty is “Life is (just) a bowl of cherries” followed by “Life is not (just) a bowl of cherries.” The former saying occurred in 1931 in a popular song, just a few weeks prior to the latter, which appeared in a newspaper article about a football game (Doyle 2012, 40).

Some other notably close datings are these: “Statistics don’t lie” (1836) and “Statistics can prove anything” (1839). “Flattery will get you nowhere” (1901) and “Flattery will get you anywhere” (1906). “Good enough is good enough” (1897) and “Good enough is not good enough” (1899). “The master’s tools cannot destroy the master’s house” (1981) and “Use the master’s tools to destroy the master’s house” (1989). “The plural of *anecdote* is *data*” (1980) and “The plural of *anecdote* is not *data*” (1982). “God is in the details” (1955) and “The devil is in the details” (1963); here the dating (in English) is complicated by the fact that “God is in the details” had a background in German and French.

Most recently appear “When others go low, go high” (2016) and “When others go low, go lower” (2017). The “go high” saying was

popularized by Michelle Obama. But was she replying, with a counter-proverb, to an existing expression, or was she coining her own trade-mark proverb, which was then altered by some mean-spirited soul? Given that a proverb (or a counter-proverb) will nearly always have existed in oral tradition prior to its being “captured” in print or in electronic media, the earliest date shown (here or in proverb dictionaries) can seldom be regarded as the definitive date of origin. It is only a *terminus ante quem*.

“Chivalry is not dead” is heard far more commonly than the proverb to which it responds. The counter-proverb is typically uttered nowadays by a woman expressing light-hearted gratitude for a minor act of courtesy on the part of a man, like holding a door open for her.

The pair “Better dead than Red” and “Better Red than dead,” where *Red* means ‘living under a Communist regime,’ both seem archaic in the twenty-first century. During the 1960s, though, I myself saw both slogans carried on political signs at the same antiwar and anti-nuclear-armaments rallies. I assumed then that both expressions were recent coinages from that decade, one answering the other. However, “Better dead than Red” occurred as early as 1930—not in the oratory of a European fascist but rather in an article in *The Nation* magazine by an American tycoon.

Something of a curiosity is the pair “Let the buyer beware” (1523) and “Let the seller beware” (1619). Those proverbs have had a parallel existence in Latin, perhaps to lend a veneer of (apparent) legalism to the competing propositions: “*Caveat emptor*” and “*Caveat vendor*.” It should be noted that the latter is bad Latin: it ought to be “*Caveat venditor*” (Doyle 2015:122-123). “Let the buyer beware” is the only proverb for which the **Appendix** shows *two* distinct counter-proverbs: “Let the seller beware” but also, more recently, “The customer is always right” (1905), which still awaits a matching Latin version (“*Semper emptor rectus est*?”).

The counter-proverb-making process in the case of “Hindsight is better than foresight” (1832) is unusual, in that even though the

same words of the proverb are retained in the counter-proverb (in an altered sequence), the meaning of a key word has changed: in “Hindsight is better than foresight,” the adjective *better* means ‘more accurate,’ whereas in “Foresight is better than hindsight” (1879), *better* means ‘more prudent or practical.’

The proverb “The exception proves the rule” (1663) has proved unruly for most modern English speakers. What it intends to mean, historically, is that the validity of the general truth of a proposition is verified (the archaic sense of *prove*: ‘tested,’ like the *proof* of the pudding) by there being a specific exception to it. Or the exception validates a rule for most other cases, which are *not* exceptions. Or if there exists an exception, identified as such, then we know that there must be an actual rule. However, the proverb has been widely misunderstood to mean that the existence of an exception of itself somehow verifies a rule. So the counter-proverb “A single exception disproves a rule” may respond rather to a popular misunderstanding of “The exception proves the rule” than to the proverb itself.

In the cases of “More is more” (1975), a commonsensical response to the highbrow minimalist maxim “Less is more” (1969), and “A cluttered desk is a sign of a cluttered mind” (1974) in response to the self-justifying “A cluttered desk is a sign of genius” (1973): each of the counter-proverbs amounts to a sort of joking retort to its base proverb, or a parody. In their witty or satiric character, those counter-proverbs function somewhat like anti-proverbs. Likewise, in its bathos and bluntness, the counter-proverb “If you can’t beat them, run away” (2000), in response to “If you can’t beat them join them” (1901), sounds rather like an anti-proverb. Responding to the proverb “Advice is cheap” (1828), the counter-proverb “Advice is not cheap” (1894) commonly includes a playful satiric coda: “Advice is not cheap; if you think it is, try consulting a doctor or lawyer.” Therein, it too somewhat resembles an anti-proverb. Perhaps we should invent the term *anti-counter-proverb*.

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**Appendix:** SOME PROVERBS, WITH CORRESPONDING COUNTER-PROVERBS BASED ON THEM THAT HAVE THEMSELVES BECOME PROVERBS

**Actions speak louder than words.** 1628.

*Counter-proverb:* **Words sometimes (can) speak louder than actions (Actions do not always speak louder than words).** 1690.

**Advice is cheap.** 1828.

*Counter-proverb:* **Advice (Good advice) is not cheap.** 1894.

**Age is just a number.** 1955.

*Counter-proverb:* **Age is not (is more than) just a number.** 1985.

**One rotten (bad) apple spoils the whole barrel.** 1340.

*Counter-proverb:* **One rotten apple does not spoil the whole barrel.** 1955.

**If you can't beat them, join them.** 1901.

*Counter-proverb:* **If you can't beat them, run away.** 2000.

**A benefit is never lost (wasted, forgotten, thrown away) (Benefits bind).** 1616.

*Counter-proverb:* **Benefits are soon forgotten.** 1630.

**The best is the enemy of the good.** 1804.

*Counter-proverb:* **The good is the enemy of the best.** 1818.

**Better dead than Red.** 1930.

*Counter-proverb:* **Better Red than dead.** 1948.

**Big is beautiful.** 1869.

*Counter-proverb:* **Small is beautiful.** 1971.

**Bigger is better (The bigger the better).** 1556.

*Counter-proverb:* **Bigger is not always better (The bigger the worse).** 1682.

**Let the buyer beware.** 1523.

*Counter-proverb:* **Let the seller beware.** 1619.

- Counter-proverb:* **The customer is always right.** 1905.
- You cannot have your cake and eat it too.** 1611.
- Counter-proverb:* **You (Sometimes you) can have your cake and eat it too.** 1878.
- Cheaters never win (thrive, prosper).** 1805.
- Counter-proverb:* **You have to (Sometimes you have to) cheat to win.** 1927.
- Chivalry (The age of chivalry) is dead.** 1790.
- Counter-proverb:* **Chivalry is not dead.** 1822.
- Clothes make (are) (Apparel makes) the man.** c1500.
- Counter-proverb:* **Clothes do not make the man.** 1617.
- Every cloud has a silver lining.** 1855.
- Counter-proverb:* **Not every cloud has a silver lining.** 1892.
- The course of true love never did (can) run smooth.** 1595.
- Counter-proverb:* **True love (always) runs smoothly.** 1902.
- Crime doesn't pay.** 1832.
- Counter-proverb:* **Some (Many) crimes pay well.** 1974.
- No bad (ill, wicked) deed goes (remains) unpunished.** 1693.
- Counter-proverb:* **No good deed goes unpunished.** 1938.
- A cluttered (messy) desk is a sign of genius.** 1973.
- Counter-proverb:* **A cluttered (messy) desk is a sign of a cluttered (messy) person.** 1974.
- It's not easy being hard.** 1913.
- Counter-proverb:* **It's not easy being easy.** 1968.
- The end may not justify the means.** 1583.
- Counter-proverb:* **The end justifies the means.** 1629.
- Enough is enough.** c1563.
- Counter-proverb:* **Enough is never (not) enough.** 1797.
- A bad (poor) excuse is better than none (at all).** 1551.
- Counter-proverb:* **A bad excuse is worse than none.** 1852.
- The exception proves the rule.** 1663.
- Counter-proverb:* **A single exception disproves a rule.** 1867.
- Experience is a brutal (the cruelest) teacher.** 1617.
- Counter-proverb:* **Experience is the best teacher.** 1919.
- The feather makes not the bird.** 1572.

*Counter-proverb: Fine (Fair) feathers make fine (fair) fowls (birds).* 1596.

**Good fences make good neighbors.** 1794.

*Counter-proverb: No fences make good neighbors.* 1964.

**Fight fire with fire.** 1832.

*Counter-proverb: You cannot fight fire with fire.* 1904.

**Flattery will get you nowhere.** 1901.

*Counter-proverb: Flattery will get you anywhere (everywhere).* 1906.

**Forgive and forget.** 1377.

*Counter-proverb: Forgive but never (don't) forget.* 1654.

**You get what you pay for.** 1802

*Counter-proverb: You seldom (don't always, may not) get what you pay for.* 1905.

**God is in the details.** 1955.

*Counter-proverb: The devil is in the details.* 1963.

**Good enough is good enough.** 1897.

*Counter-proverb: Good enough is not (never) good enough.* 1899.

**You cannot buy happiness.** 1737.

*Counter-proverb: Wealth can buy happiness.* 1833.

**Hindsight is better than foresight (hindsight is twenty-twenty).** 1832.

*Counter-proverb: Foresight is better than hindsight.* 1879.

**Honesty is the best policy.** 1605.

*Counter-proverb: Honesty is not always the best policy.* 1690.

**There is honor (even) among thieves .** c1630.

*Counter-proverb: There is no honor among thieves.* 1786.

**First impressions are (the most) lasting.** 1700.

*Counter-proverb: First impressions are fleeting.* 1924.

**Less is more.** 1947.

*Counter-proverb: More is more.* 1975.

**Life is (just, but) a bowl of cherries.** 1931.

*Counter-proverb: Life is not a bowl of cherries.* 1931.

**Life is no (not a) bed of roses.** 1832.

*Counter-proverb: Life is just a bed of roses.* 1938.

**Don't (Never) hit (kick) a man when he's down.** 1816.

*Counter-proverb: When a man is down, hit him (Always hit a man*

**when he is down. When a man is down, that's when to hit him).** 1911.  
**The master's tools cannot destroy the master's house.** 1981.

*Counter-proverb: Use the master's tools to destroy the master's house.* 1989.

**Might makes right.** 1633.

*Counter-proverb: Right makes might.* 1842.

**You can't have too much of a good thing.** 1623.

*Counter-proverb: There can be too much of a good thing (Too much of a good thing is not good).* 1696.

**Bad (Ill) news travels fast.** 1567.

*Counter-proverb: Good news travels fast.* 1863.

**No news is good (the best) news.** 1616.

*Counter-proverb: No news is bad news.* 1863.

**Nothing ventured, nothing gained (Nothing venture, nothing have).** 1546.

*Counter-proverb: Nothing ventured, nothing lost (Nothing venture, nothing lose).* 1850.

**There are some (many) things money cannot buy.** 1780.

*Counter-proverb: There is nothing money cannot buy.* 1833.

**When others go low, go high.** 2016.

*Counter-proverb: When others go low, go lower.* 2017.

**Don't hate the player; hate the game.** 1992.

*Counter-proverb: Hate the player, not the game.* 2004.

**The plural of anecdote is data (evidence).** 1980.

*Counter-proverb: The plural of anecdote is not data (evidence).* 1982.

**Any (All, Even bad) publicity is good publicity.** 1886.

*Counter-proverb: Not all publicity is good publicity.* 1915.

**Everything is relative.** 1826.

*Counter-proverb: Not everything is relative.* 1925.

**Revenge (Vengeance) is sweet.** 1566.

*Counter-proverb: Revenge is never (not) sweet.* 1658.

**There is always room at the top.** a1852.

*Counter-proverb: There is no (seldom) room at the top.* 1903.

**Bad sex is better than no sex.** 1969.

*Counter-proverb: No sex is better than bad sex.* 1984.

**There are two sides to every question.** 1802.

*Counter-proverb:* **Not every question has two sides (Some questions have only one side).** 1937.

**Out of sight, out of mind.** 1250.

*Counter-proverb:* **Out of sight is not out of mind.** 1815.

**Silence means consent.** 1380.

*Counter-proverb:* **Silence means refusal.** 1842.

**Size doesn't matter** {in male sexual performance}, **(it's what you do with it, it's how you use it).** 1903.

*Counter-proverb:* **Size matters (Size does matter).** 1964.

**Statistics (Figures) don't lie.** 1836.

*Counter-proverb:* **Statistics can prove anything (You can prove anything with statistics).** 1839.

**All things come to him who waits.** c1530.

*Counter-proverb:* **Not all things come to him who waits.** 1925.

**The best things in life are free.** 1917.

*Counter-proverb:* **The best things in life are not free.** 1929.

**Second thoughts are best.** 1579.

*Counter-proverb:* **First thoughts are best.** 1732.

**Think before you act.** 1756.

*Counter-proverb:* **Act fist, think later (after).** 1829.

**There is truth in wine.** 1645.

*Counter-proverb:* **There is no truth in wine (Wine in, truth out).** 1755.

**Two can live as cheaply as (cheaper than) one.** 1840.

*Counter-proverb:* **Two cannot live as cheaply as one.** 1903.

**Virtue is its own reward.** 1596.

*Counter-proverb:* **Virtue is not (never, seldom) its own reward.** 1800.

**The whole cannot be greater than the sum of its parts.** a300 B.C.?

*Counter-proverb:* **The whole is (is sometimes; can be) greater than the sum of its parts.** 1845.

**Winning is not everything.** 1911.

*Counter-proverb:* **Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing.** 1950.

**The woman (always) pays.** 1916.

*Counter-proverb:* **It is not always the woman who pays.** 1925.

**Woman's place (A woman's place) is in the home.** 1832.

*Counter-proverb: A woman's place is not always in the home (A woman's place is anywhere she wants to be).* 1913.

**The world is a wide (big) place.** 1581.

*Counter-proverb: The world is a little place (It's a small world) (after all).* 1850.



HRISZTALINA HRISZTOVA-GOTTHARDT –  
KATALIN VARGHA – PÉTER BARTA

## DELIBERATE PROVERB INNOVATIONS: TERMS, DEFINITIONS, AND CONCEPTS

**Abstract:** The present paper aims to provide a brief general overview of terms, definitions and concepts developed to describe the various transformation processes undergone by traditional proverbs and to denote and define the proverbial utterances resulting from these processes. Based on this overview and discussion, a suggestion is then made regarding the name of the genre that can cover as accurately as possible the main characteristics of deliberate proverb innovations and that can be accepted and adopted by the majority of paremiologists.

**Keywords:** proverbs, anti-proverbs, deliberate proverb innovations, terms, definitions, paraproverbs

### *1. Introduction*

According to Röhrich and Mieder (1977: 114) “everything that is often cited becomes ‘worn’ and is, thus, increasingly disposed to parody”.<sup>1</sup> Röhrich and Mieder argue that this applies particularly to proverbs. Although proverbs are traditionally believed to be bits of wisdom about life and nature, they have never been considered sacrosanct. On the contrary, their ‘universal wisdom’ has been questioned for centuries, and consequently, proverbs have been transformed and/or parodied so extensively that their variations have sometimes been heard more often than their original forms (see T. Litovkina et al. 2021: 17).

A broad variety of terms has been introduced through time for the products of these transformations, e.g., ‘anti-proverbs’, ‘deliber-

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<sup>1</sup> All non-English citations were translated by the authors.  
German original: “Alles Vielzitierte wird abgenutzt und bekommt dadurch immer mehr eine innere Disposition zur Parodie” (Röhrich and Mieder 1977: 114).

ate proverb innovations', 'fake proverbs', 'fractured proverbs', 'hoax proverbs', 'humorous proverb modifications', 'humorous proverb transformations', 'mock proverbs', 'modified proverbs', 'occasional proverbs', 'paraproverbs', 'parodied proverbs', 'perverbs', 'perverted proverbs', 'portmanteau proverbs', 'proverb alterations', 'proverb innovations', 'proverb parodies', 'proverb variations', 'pseudo-proverbs', 'proverb transformations', 'transformed proverbs', 'twisted proverbs', 'wisecracks', etc. (see Grzybek 2012: 139, T. Litovkina et al. 2021: 17–18, and Cocco 2015: 43<sup>2</sup>). For some of these terms, no in-depth definition has been provided. For others, a theoretical concept has been developed that attempts to describe the phenomenon in detail.

Accordingly, the present paper aims to provide a brief general overview of terms, definitions and concepts developed by scholars to describe the various transformation processes undergone by traditional proverbs and to denote and define the proverbial utterances resulting from these processes. Furthermore, based on this overview and discussion, the authors of the present study propose a name for the genre that can cover as accurately as possible the main characteristics of deliberate proverb innovations and can be accepted and adopted by the majority of paremiologists.

## 2. *Anti-proverbs*

### 2.1. *Origin of the term 'anti-proverb' and its definition*

One of the most frequently used terms used in the field of paremiology to describe the phenomenon as such is 'anti-proverb'. The German term 'Antispruchwort' has been originally coined by Wolfgang Mieder. It was introduced for the first time in Röhrich and Mieder's joint book "*Spruchwort*" (1977: 114–115). According to Mieder (2007: 18), the prefix 'anti-' can be used as an analogy for such literary-folklor-

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<sup>2</sup> Cocco (2015: 43) also lists the terms used in five more languages in addition to English.



istic expressions as ‘Antiheld’ (anti-hero), ‘Antimärchen’ (anti-fairy tale) or ‘Antilegende’ (anti-legend) (see Jolles (1930/1965: 58; 242) “to describe in general all manipulations, parodies, alienations, perversions and variations of proverbs”. In his subsequent works dedicated to the subject, Mieder provides a more precise definition of the term, based on which an ‘anti-proverb’ is “an allusive distortion, parody, misapplication, or unexpected contextualization of a recognized proverb, usually for comic or satiric effect” (Mieder 2021: 41).

As Mieder (cf. Röhrich and Mieder 1977: 115–117) and other scholars following in his wake and working on topic-related studies together with him (e.g., T. Litovkina et al. 2021) have shown, there are different types of ‘anti-proverbs’. Some of these question the truth of the traditional proverbs by employing antonyms (*Cheer up! – there is always room at the bottom!* {There is always room at the top}) or by transforming the proverb into its opposite (*The friend that isn’t in need is a friend indeed* {A friend in need is a friend indeed}). Other anti-proverbs express the doubts regarding the content of the original text by simply posing an innocent question (*Still waters run deep – but how can they run if they are still?* {Still waters run deep}). At other times, the person who transforms the anti-proverb does not care about the original content of the proverb but uses the traditional text as the basis of a pun. Two typical examples for such puns are the blending of two or more proverbs (*Necessity is the mother of strange bedfellows* {Necessity is the mother of invention; Politics makes strange bedfellows}) or the so-called wellerisms<sup>3</sup> (“Variety is the spice of life,” as the shoemaker said when he was chewing wax, leather, and tobacco, all at once. {Variety is the spice of life}). Mieder states that in the case of ‘anti-proverbs’, the original proverb remains always recognisable (Mieder 1983: X).

<sup>3</sup> According to Mieder (2014: 793), a wellerism “is usually made up of three parts: (1) a statement (which often consists of a proverb or proverbial phrase), (2) a speaker who makes this remark, and (3) a phrase that places the utterance into an unexpected, contrived situation”.

## 2.2. *Acceptance and interpretations of the term ‘anti-proverb’*

Wolfgang Mieder’s term ‘Antispruchwort’ or ‘anti-proverb’ has been commonly accepted by numerous proverb scholars as “a general label for such innovative alterations of and reactions to traditional proverbs” (see T. Litovkina et al. 2021: 18). As can be seen in the next two sections, some paremiologists have fully adopted the term and use it in their studies. Others, however, have only partially agreed with it.

### 2.2.1. The term ‘anti-proverb’ as fully accepted by various scholars

The *International Research Group for Folklore and Linguistics* was established in 2006 in Budapest with the aim of exploring certain minor genres of folklore, especially proverbs, anti-proverbs and jokes, and of conducting comparative studies concentrating on utterances in different languages and within various social and cultural contexts. The members of the research group lead by Anna T. Litovkina have accepted Mieder’s term and have adopted it in their studies while analyzing the genesis, alteration modes, structure and use of anti-proverbs in different European languages (e.g., Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2018, T. Litovkina 2015, T. Litovkina et al. 2021). In one of their latest publications, however, T. Litovkina, Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Barta, Vargha and Mieder raised the question of “whether the term *anti-proverb* is indeed the most appropriate term for a genre” (T. Litovkina et al. 2021: 18–19). The authors pointed out that it is worth noting the opinion of scholars who have argued that not each anti-proverb is opposed to an original proverb, and have, thus, suggested the substitution of the prefix ‘anti-’ by other, more proper prefixes (see Section 3).

There are, still, many other scholars who have accepted the term coined by Wolfgang Mieder and have used it in their works. Unfortunately, due to space constraints only few of them can be mentioned here. Barbara Lenz (1998), for instance, demonstrated in one of her articles how productive some proverb structures can be by reviewing numerous ‘anti-proverbs’ based on the structural formula “*Lieber X als Y*” (“*Better X than Y*”). Tatiana Valdaeva (2003) conducted a

stylistic analysis of English ‘anti-proverbs’. Andrey Reznikov (2009) offered in his book a detailed language analysis and examination of Russian ‘anti-proverbs’ based on a corpus of 6,000 examples. Tilo Weber (2019) examined German ‘anti-proverbs’ based on the traditional text *Andere Länder, andere Sitten* (*Different strokes for different folks*) from the point of view of their schematicity.

### 2.2.2. The term ‘anti-proverb’ as partially accepted by various scholars

As mentioned above, certain scholars have argued that ‘anti-proverb’ does not appear to be the most apt term for all the different kinds of deliberate proverb innovations. A few important arguments provided by these scholars are briefly presented below.

Peter Grzybek, for instance, points out that the general term ‘anti-proverb’ may well cover two main groups of ‘proverb variations’:

[...] the first group – containing hoax proverbs, mock proverbs, fake proverbs, pseudo proverbs, etc. – is based upon and presupposes structural knowledge of the proverbial genre as a whole and thus implies the process of (ludistic) creation or generation, the second group is based upon and presupposes knowledge of (or familiarity with) concrete individual proverbs, and it is the intentional ludistic or humoristic modification of an individual proverb, which is at stake in this group (Grzybek 2012: 143).

He thus accepts the term ‘anti-proverb’ as a general category but draws attention to the fact that “in the history of paroemiology and paroemiography, a very different understanding of ‘anti-proverb’ has also been promoted. According to this alternative understanding an anti-proverb is a proverb which, usually within a given language and culture, expresses the opposite meaning of a given proverb” (Grzybek 2012: 142, cf. Voigt 2019: 918<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>4</sup> “By the early 1980s, the term ‘anti-Spruchwort’ (then ‘anti-proverb’) had become widespread, in Mieder’s multifaceted presentation [...] – these texts reverse the ‘truth’ or assertion of traditional proverbs” (Voigt 2019: 918). Hun-

Damien Villers (2010) proposes to use ‘anti-proverb’ only for one category of the examined utterances: “Contradiction: consists in saying the opposite of the target proverb, inverting its polarity”<sup>5</sup> e.g. *All that glitters is not gold* → *All that glitters is gold* (2010: 160).

Francesca Cocco (2015) reserves the term ‘antiproverbio’ exclusively for those anti-proverbs that constitute a real reversal of the original proverb (Cocco 2015: 48–49), ‘antiproverbio’ thus becoming a hyponym of ‘paraproverbio’.

Justyna Mandziuk (2016) finds it problematic that in the volumes published by Mieder (1993) and Mieder and Litovkina (1999), the authors treat the terms ‘anti-’, ‘quasi-’, and ‘twisted proverbs’ “as synonyms and thus use them interchangeably”, after which “these names were widely accepted by the linguistic community” (Mandziuk 2016: 22). She suggests a more hierarchical approach in which the terms ‘perverbs’ or ‘modified proverbs’ are used as an umbrella category that incorporates all the subcategories. In the suggested hierarchical structure, the category of anti-proverbs includes only modified proverbs that “express meanings that stand in opposition to the meanings of the original proverbs”. Her interpretation is based on the fact that “the prefix *anti-* stands for something ‘opposing, against’” (Mandziuk 2016: 23). She also notes the negative connotations of the term.

In a following article Mandziuk (2017: 10) points out that Mieder’s “general definition of the concept of anti-proverb<sup>6</sup> [...] seems only partly adequate”.

While it is true to say that anti-proverbs introduce a new semantic content (it happens so by means of the process called

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garian original: “Az 1980-as évek elejére terjedt el az ‘anti-Sprichwort’ (majd az ‘anti-proverb’) kifejezés, Mieder sokrétű bemutatásában [...] – ezek a szövegek a hagyományos proverbiumok ‘igazságát’ vagy állítását fordítják az ellenkezőjére.”

<sup>5</sup> French original: “La contradiction: consiste à dire le contraire du proverbe cible, à inverser sa polarité.”

<sup>6</sup> An anti-proverb is “an intentionally changed (twisted, parodied) proverb with a new meaning” (Mieder 2004: 281, cited by Mandziuk 2017: 10).

*relexicalisation*, which introduces new meanings through lexical and stylistic changes), the etymology of the prefix 'anti-' suggests something 'opposing, against', rather than parodied or twisted. Accordingly, anti-proverbs produce meanings that stand in contrast to the original ones. Moreover, they might add utterly new dimensions to the *bona fide* proverbs in such a way that the traditional meanings are seriously altered." (Mandziuk 2017: 10).

Mandziuk (2017: 11) argues that "the fact that they contradict or negate the original ones" is an "inherent property" of anti-proverbs, meaning that they can constitute only a subcategory of modified proverbs. She enumerates several ways in which this can be done, including reversal of word order; asking questions; "turning positive statements into negative ones and vice versa"; and "[the] addition of a dubious tag by means of conjunctions such as *but, if, yet, however, (al)though* etc." (Mandziuk 2017: 10–11).

Other researchers criticize the concept of anti-proverb and the use of the term from another perspective. In their critical comments, they point out that it is by no means self-evident what we consider a 'real' proverb and what an 'anti-proverb', and where we should draw the line between the two categories.

Alexander Kozintsev (2014) cites two definitions of the term 'anti-proverb', drawing attention to a significant difference between them. This difference is based on whether or not the anti-proverb is closely linked to an original proverb, i.e. whether or not the anti-proverb is the transformation of an original proverb. According to the first definition by Wolfgang Mieder, "anti-proverbs are 'any intentional proverb variations in the form of puns, alterations, deletions or additions', and they 'can only be effective communicative devices if the traditional proverbs upon which they are based are also known' (Mieder and T. Litovkina 1999: 3, 5; see also Mieder 2008: 88)." (Kozintsev 2014: 241). On the other hand, Kozintsev presents some examples drawn from Russian paremiography that are based on a considerably looser interpretation, in which playfulness and creativity are much more decisive than referencing a previously existing proverb:

“According to a broad definition adopted by Walter and Mokienko (2005), Mokienko and Walter (2006), and Reznikov (2009), any jocular proverbs, maxims, and sayings, not necessarily those parodying traditional prototypes, are regarded as anti-proverbs. Such a definition makes the databases awkwardly amorphous and infinitely expandable.” (Kozintsev 2014: 242).

Arvo Krikmann (2015) uses the term ‘anti-proverb’, but at the same time points out that while we “tend to believe that the difference between the ordinary ‘serious’ proverbs and funny ‘antis’ is clearly distinct, and the serious prototypes of ‘antis’ are clearly identifiable” (Krikmann 2015: 215), a large sample of text variants from the Internet shows that this is far from evident. In fact, Krikmann finds it questionable if there is “any possibility to distinguish here between the ‘serious’ utterances and ‘antis’” (Krikmann 2015: 215). He argues that this is only possible by closely examining the context of each occurrence:

In order to understand which of the thousands of actualizations of hypervariable Internet proverbs were intended to be seriously didactic, or undoubtedly funny, or were meant to fulfil some pragmatic functions of advertisements, etc., there is probably no other way than to get closely familiarized with thousands and thousands of their contexts. Fortunately – and differently from the innumerable older proverbs exposed in the cemeteries of printed sources or buried in the depths of archival manuscripts – these contexts do exist already “by definition” and can be very easily retrieved and studied. (Krikmann 2015: 227)

### *3. Alternative terms for deliberate proverb innovations*

In the last few decades, various scholars have examined critically the term ‘anti-proverb’, as well as the concept itself. Others have studied the phenomenon of deliberate proverb innovations entirely independently from the term ‘anti-proverb’. As a result, besides ‘anti-proverb’, numerous other terms have been coined. For a few

of these terms a corresponding definition has been provided. In the following, some of these concepts will be briefly presented.

### 3.1. Counter-proverbs

Charles Doyle coined the term ‘counter-proverb’ in 1972. According to Doyle (2012: 33), “[a] counter-proverb is simply an overt negation or sententious-sounding rebuttal of a proverb – an explicit denial of the proverb’s asserted truth. A counter-proverb does not typically aim for any ironic effect other than calling into doubt whatever wisdom it is that proverbs are supposed to encapsulate.” For instance, the statement *Oft fire is without smoke*, is a counter-proverb to the traditional texts *There is no fire without some smoke* or *Where fire is, smoke will appear* (Doyle 2012: 32).

Mieder and Doyle have given their respective terms very specific senses the essence of which can be found in Doyle (2012), Doyle et al. (2012), and Mieder (2015 and 2021). They both agree on the following:

- When creating a ‘counter-proverb’ an existing positive proverb is being changed into negative statement and vice versa. When creating an ‘anti-proverb’ a traditional proverb is being manipulated so that wording and meaning are being changed.
- While ‘counter-proverbs’ are not particularly plentiful, the creation of anti-proverbs has become a wide-spread phenomenon since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Mieder 2015: 40).

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the concept of ‘counter-proverbs’ as presented by Doyle is essentially in line with the narrow interpretation of the term ‘anti-proverb’ as described by Villers (2010) and Cocco (2015) (see Section 2.2.2.).

### 3.2. Postproverbials

In one of his first works dealing with the topic of deliberate proverbial innovations, the Nigerian paremiologist Aderemi Raji-Oyelade draws attention to the fact that, in the Yorùbá language, “it would not be unusual to hear a speaker using a ‘supplementary’ proverb in

place of an ‘original’ proverb for the same purpose but with a playful intention” (Raji-Oyelade 1999: 74). For this fascinating linguistic and cultural phenomenon, he has coined the term ‘postproverbial’. According to Raji-Oyelade, ‘postproverbials’ can be defined as “alternate creations derived from and which stand against traditional proverbs” (Raji-Oyelade 1999: 74). Besides, they do not simply ‘substitute’ the traditional proverbs but exist side by side in rather equal phonocentric status with them. As illustration, he quotes an original Yorùbá proverb in use (*E`ni t`òjìn sí kòtò, kq ará iyókù lqgbqn* [He who falls into a pit, is a lesson to others]) and its supplementary modern alternative (*E`ni t`òjìn sí kòtò, ojú è`lò fq* [He who falls into a pit is blind]) (Raji-Oyelade 1999: 76).

Raji-Oyelade points out that the so-called ‘postproverbials’ are “the linguistic evidence of the banal and blasphemous and as yet the witty imagination of young and literate Yorùbá speakers of the language” (Raji-Oyelade 2004: 302). They are particularly popular among the younger generation of Yorùbá speakers who have received a Western education, and have, therefore, a new perspective on traditional culture and values. Accordingly, the act of coining ‘postproverbials’ can be understood as the intentional creation of (often playful and blasphemous) modern proverbial utterances “of different values and vision” (Raji-Oyelade 2012: 41).

In this context, it can be concluded that there is barely any difference between ‘anti-proverbs’ and ‘postproverbials’. As Mieder states in his Foreword to Raji-Oyelade’s book “*Playful Blasphemies. Postproverbials as Archetypes of Modernity in Yorùbá Culture*” (2012: 18), “[t]he biggest difference might well be that the intentional play with proverbs has a longer tradition in Europe and America, while in more traditional societies the respect for the wisdom of the elders has prevented postproverbials from spreading as quickly”.

### 3.3. *Paraparemiás and paraproverbs*

The first use of the prefix ‘para-’ for the intentional play with proverbs goes back to several decades. As Raji-Oyelade has indicated:



[...] around the mid-1980s, a Catalan poet called Carles Hac Mor had created the conceptual terms “paraparèmia” (paraparèmies, plural) and “metaparaparèmia” to describe the anarchical and humorous character of proverbial transformations which eventuate the conditions of contradiction, the paradox and the parody of conventional sayings. In 2001, Hac Mor wrote a short article in issue 24 of *The Barcelona Review* under the title “Què és la paraparèmia?” (Raji-Oyelade 2012: 123–124).

Accordingly, Raji-Oyelade considers ‘paraparèmia’ a conceptual pretext of the ‘postproverbial’ (see Section 3.2.).

García Romero first uses the term ‘paraproverbio’ in 2015 (García Romero 2015), but it is only one year later that he publishes the only essay (as far as the authors know) dedicated solely to anti-proverbial terminology (García Romero 2016). In this latter work, he accepts the following anti-proverb definition: “An allusive distortion, parody, misapplication, or unexpected contextualization of a recognized proverb, usually for comic or satiric effect” (Doyle et al. 2012: xi). But he also goes further, suggesting the use of the term ‘paraproverb’ instead of ‘anti-proverb’:

We base our proposal on the fact that in the technical terminology of Linguistics and Philology the prefix *para-* is the most used to create terms that express the humorous twisting of a model. [...] we think that philologists can understand as humorous twisting of a model a neologism [...] composed with the prefix *para-*. (García Romero 2016: 143).

García Romero argues that this would result in terminology that reflects Mieder’s concept of anti-proverbs more clearly:

In my opinion, what Mieder calls ‘anti-proverb’ does not designate an utterance which, by its form and/or meaning, is ‘opposite’ or has ‘contrary properties or characteristics’ to a proverb, but, on the contrary, designates an utterance which retains characteristics of the original which it imitates (perfectly recognisable from a formal point of view), but in some way deviates from

or deforms that original. Consequently, the use of a compound with the prefix *anti-* would not, in our opinion, be appropriate<sup>7</sup> (García Romero 2016: 144).

He concludes that “it would be preferable to use terms such as ‘paraproverbs’, ‘paraparemiás’, ‘pararrefranés’, etc. (according to the terminology that each one prefers), instead of their corresponding compounds with *anti-*.”<sup>8</sup>

Francesca Cocco (2015) also suggests ‘paraproverbio’ in agreement with Fernando García Romero (Cocco 2015: 47–48).

### 3.4. *Perverbs / modified proverbs*

Mandziuk (2016) suggests a more hierarchical approach in which the terms ‘perverbs’ or ‘modified proverbs’ are used as an umbrella term that incorporates all the subcategories (‘anti-proverbs’, ‘quasi/pseudo-proverbs’, and ‘twisted proverbs’).

She considers the term ‘perverb’, created by the morphological blending of *perverted* ‘turned from the right way’ and *proverb*, “broad and general enough to cover the entire range of newly coined sayings” (Mandziuk 2016: 22), and uses it interchangeably with the more neutral term ‘modified proverb’. In her interpretation, ‘anti-proverb’ can be used only for a specific subcategory of modified proverbs which “express meanings that stand in opposition to the meanings of the original proverbs” (Mandziuk 2016: 23).

<sup>7</sup> Spanish original: “En mi opinión, lo que Mieder llama ‘anti-proverbio’ no designa un enunciado que, por su forma y/o por su significado, sea ‘opuesto’ o tenga ‘propiedades o características contrarias’ a un proverbio, sino que, por el contrario, designa un enunciado que conserva características propias del original al que imita (perfectamente reconocible desde el punto de vista formal), pero de alguna manera se desvía de ese original o lo deforma. En consecuencia, el empleo de un compuesto con el prefijo *anti-* no sería, en nuestra opinión, adecuado.”

<sup>8</sup> Spanish original: “sería preferible utilizar términos como ‘paraproverbios’, ‘paraparemiás’, ‘pararrefranés’, etc. (según la terminología que cada cual prefiera), en lugar de sus correspondientes compuestos con *anti-*.”

But this approach is questionable if we consider the origin of the term ‘perverb’ and its intended original meaning more closely. Grzybek (2012: 140–142) discusses the term ‘perverb’ and, along with ‘proverb parody’ and ‘anti-proverb’, sees it as a proverb modification which “obligatory presupposes concrete references to *individual* proverbs” (Grzybek 2012: 140). He describes the origin of the term ‘perverb’, and the specific type of wordplay connected to it:

As to the origin of this term, it seems that it is closely related to the French literary group OULIPO [...]. This group, founded in 1960, used (and probably invented) the term ‘perverb’ (French: ‘perverbe’) as a portmanteau word of “**p**erverse **p**roverb”, and defined it as the “combination of the 1st half of one proverb with the second half of another” [...] (Comp. p., 206).<sup>9</sup> (Grzybek 2012: 141).

In this interpretation perverbs “in any case consist of the fusion of two ordinary proverbs into one, thus ultimately containing the modification of two proverbs” (Grzybek 2012: 141). According to Grzybek, the only exception to this rule is a sub-category of perverbs, “the so-called ‘garden path proverbs’, which are based on syntactically and grammatically incompatible or incongruent fusions,<sup>10</sup> such as (15) *Don’t count your chickens will do it for you*” – in this case the beginning of a proverb is mixed “with some kind of advice” (Grzybek 2012: 141).

Then he cites (and criticizes) the following, more general definition of the perverb that covers “both subcategories (i.e., the spliced portmanteau proverbs as well as the garden path ones)”: “A perverb (portmanteau of ‘*perverse proverb*’), also known as an anti-proverb, is a humorous modification of a *known* proverb, usually by changing its ending in a way that surprises or confounds the listener.” (Grzybek 2012: 141–142).

He continues with explaining why this general definition and the equation of the two categories is problematic:

<sup>9</sup> French original: “réunir la 1ère moitié d’un proverbe avec la deuxième moitié d’un autre”.

<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is called ‘anacoluthon’ in stylistics.

This definition may seem to be plausible, at first sight; specifically, reference to some *known* proverb as a basis of a perverb may turn out to be helpful in the understanding of this genre, or sub-genre. A closer inspection of this definition shows, however, that it focuses on the modification of *one* proverb, only, and ignores the fact that spliced portmanteau proverbs actually contain the modification of two. And what may be even more problematic, is the identification of perverbs with anti-proverbs; although perverbs may be, without a doubt, regarded to be one particular kind of anti-proverbs, this definition does not work in the reverse direction: in fact, it would seem rather questionable to regard all kinds of anti-proverbs to be perverbs. (Grzybek 2012: 142).

For this reason, Mandziuk's suggestion of adopting 'perverb' as a broad category cannot be accepted without further ado. It has to be noted that Mandziuk herself dispenses with the term in more recent publications, and uses the more neutral term 'modified proverbs' as a broad category (Mandziuk 2018, Mandziuk-Nizińska 2020: 216–218).

### 3.5. *Twisted proverbs*

Mandziuk (2017: 11) sees 'twisted proverbs' as a subcategory of modified proverbs, which are characterised by "the fact that they undergo various lexical, conceptual and phonetic modifications". Her point of reference for this interpretation is the volume "*Twisted Wisdom. Modern Anti-Proverbs*" published by Mieder and Litovkina (1999), but in fact, the exact term 'twisted proverbs' is not used here by Mieder and Litovkina. As the following citations show, Mieder uses the term in other publications, but not as a specific term, rather just as a synonym for 'modified' or 'changed': "[...] proverbs are more often than not twisted into innovative formulations based on puns"; "[...] many advertisements contain traditional or twisted proverbs" (Mieder 2004: 244); "[...] *anti-proverb* an intentionally changed (twisted, parodied) proverb with a new meaning" (Mieder 2004: 281).

### 3.6. *Miscellaneous*

In the following, a few further terms for deliberate proverb innovations will be presented in brief as proposed and used by various scholars. However, these terms have not been elaborated nor been widely accepted and adopted in proverb scholarship.

Grésillon and Maingueneau (1984: 114) use the term ‘détournement’ and define it as follows: “[détournement] consists in producing an utterance that has the linguistic marks of proverbial utterance but does not belong to the stock of recognised proverbs”.<sup>11</sup>

Schapira (1999: 145) also uses the term ‘détournement’ (‘diversion’), which seems to have become common in French specialized literature, cf. e.g. Viellard (2005: 186–7). Besides, she speaks about ‘proverboides’ (Schapira 2000: 83) which coincide with Cocco’s pseudoproverbs.

Wozniak (2009: 186) too uses the French term ‘détournement’ (‘diversion’) and makes a difference between ‘modification’ and ‘détournement’. According to her, it is ‘modification’ “when the differences between the original proverb and the modified proverb are not due to a different intention to communicate, but to the constraints of the utterance”<sup>12</sup> while

the diversion does not have a formal origin of constraint. Thus the proverbial modification is based on a formal necessity but the same is not true for the diverted proverb. Indeed, the latter is not subject to any external constraint, no formal element justifies its alterations. It appears that the proverbial diversion is a motivation in itself. It is a desire to dismember, to reverse the fixity, which is useful in a given context. The simple fact of

<sup>11</sup> French original: “consiste à produire un énoncé possédant les marques linguistiques de l’énonciation proverbiale mais qui n’appartient pas au stock des proverbes reconnus”.

<sup>12</sup> French original: “lorsque les différences entre le proverbe initial et le proverbe modifié ne relèvent pas d’une volonté de communication différente mais de contraintes dues à l’énoncé”.

modifying the proverb without necessity is therefore a driving force. The creation of a ‘new’ proverb, which can be grasped by everyone as a diverted unit, is a goal. This stylistic exercise is in itself a motivation, a way of expressing one’s creative capacity and its main objective is humour, parody, derision.”<sup>13</sup> (Wozniak 2009: 195–196).

In an article of his, Villers (2010: 150) generally uses the term ‘détournement proverbial’ but also ‘métaproverbe’, ‘perverbe’ (following the Oulipo French literary movement) and ‘parodie de proverbes’ as synonyms. He also uses ‘écorchement’ (‘maiming’) not as a synonym of the former expressions but to denote an unintentional modification of the proverb. For Villers, ‘détournement’ (‘diversion’) is “altering the form (...) of a proverb”<sup>14</sup> in general (Villers 2010: 157).

In another writing of his, Villers (2014: 418–419) differentiates between ‘détournement’ or ‘parodie’ on the one hand and ‘métaproverbe’ on the other, the former being a larger group than the latter and comprising also wellerisms. He prefers the latter term also because “this term refers to Jakobson’s metalinguistic function but also to the metamorphosis that proverbs undergo”.<sup>15</sup>

Cocco (2015: 47) proposes the use of the term ‘proverbio derivato’ (‘derived proverb’) for the anti-proverb but eventually prefers not to

<sup>13</sup> French original: “le détournement n’a pas une origine formelle de contrainte. Ainsi, si la modification proverbiale a pour base une nécessité formelle, il n’en va pas de même pour le proverbe détourné. En effet, celui-ci ne subit aucune contrainte externe, aucun élément formel ne justifie ses altérations. Il apparaît que le détournement proverbial est une motivation en soi. Il s’agit d’une volonté de démembrement, de défigement, qui trouve son utilité dans un contexte donné. Le simple fait de modifier le proverbe sans nécessité est donc un moteur. La création d’un ‘nouveau’ proverbe, qui pourra être saisi par chacun en tant qu’ensemble détourné est un but. Cet exercice de style est en soi une motivation, une façon d’exprimer sa capacité créative et son objectif principal est l’humour, la parodie, la dérision.”

<sup>14</sup> French original: “altérer la forme (...) d’un proverbe”.

<sup>15</sup> French original: “ce terme fait référence à la fonction métalinguistique de Jakobson mais également à la métamorphose que subissent les proverbes”.

because anti-proverbs lack at least two prerequisites to be considered proverbs: anonymity and popularity. She then considers adding to the word ‘proverbio’ the suffix ‘-oide’ before rejecting this solution because of the pejorative connotation of the suffix.

Moreover, Cocco (2015: 49–50) considers ‘pseudoproverbio’ (‘pseudo-proverb’) a proverb-like expression behind which there is no concrete original proverb, just a proverb structure and in her view, ‘pseudoproverbio’ is not a hyponym of ‘paraproverbio’. The authors cannot agree with Cocco’s approach because her classification separates parodies using proverb structures from the rest of paremiological texts.

Mandziuk (2016, 2017) suggests more terms for subcategories of modified proverbs such as ‘quasi-proverbs’ and ‘pseudo-proverbs’, which both carry negative connotations. In her interpretation these terms, “used somewhat pejoratively, [...] may be seen not only [as] unsuccessful modifications but also ones that express false truth and pseudo-wisdom” (Mandziuk 2017: 11).

#### *4. Conclusion*

In summary, it can be said that there exists a broad variety of terms which have been used to refer to the phenomenon of deliberate proverb innovations in all its diversity. A few of these terms, e.g., ‘anti-proverb’ or ‘postproverbial’ have been distinctly defined and accompanied by an elaborate concept. However, no term and no related definition or concept have been accepted by the majority of paremiologists so far.

While searching for a solution to this terminological issue the following important characteristics of the genre should be considered:

- the deliberate proverb innovations retain features of the original proverb (or proverbial structure) from which they derive and which they imitate or deform (cf. García Romero 2016: 144);

- not every deliberate proverb innovation is opposed to an original proverb (cf. Villers 2010: 160, Cocco 2015: 48–49);
- the newly created utterances do not replace the original proverbs but exist contemporaneously with them and function as alternative (and often humorous) parallels to the traditional proverbs (cf. Raji-Oyelade 2004: 304, 2021: 41).

Based on the above, the authors of this study suggest the term ‘paraproverb’ as an umbrella term for all deliberate proverb innovations, and this for the following two reasons: firstly – as stated by García Romero (2016: 143) –, the prefix ‘para-’ is often used to create terms that express the humorous twisting of a model; secondly – according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*<sup>16</sup> –, the prefix has, among others, the following meanings: 1/ ‘beside’, ‘alongside of’, and 2/ ‘closely related to’, ‘closely resembling’.

In this context, the term ‘paraproverb’ (used in the sense of ‘deliberate proverb innovation’) would cover the main characteristics of the genre: paraproverbs are the result of the (humorous) twisting of a traditional proverb or of the use of proverb structure in a parody and exist – at least for some time after their creation – side-by-side with the proverbs from which they are derived.

The authors hope that with this paper they have initiated a new scientific discussion that might result in coining a new, widely accepted term for the phenomenon of deliberate proverb innovations.

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<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/para>



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ADEREMI RAJI-OYELADE

## OF ANTI-PROVERBS AND POSTPROVERBIALS: REFLECTIONS ON TERMS IN TRANSGRESSIVE PAREMIOLOGY

**Abstract:** In all academic and professional disciplines, from archaeology to zoology, terminologies have always been part of the process of defining and describing phenomena, perspectives and performances. This essay is focussed on two notable and current works in transgressive paremiology, that is the study of radical changes, inventive re-creations and transformations that accompany existing bodies of proverbs across cultures. The term “anti-proverb” is attributed to the scholarship of Wolfgang Mieder (1982) and Anna Litovkina (1999) while the term “postproverbial” is an invention of Raji-Oyelade (1999). Whereas the discourse of anti-proverb is copiously rooted in proverb scholarships across Europe, the term postproverbial has been the major referent in most contemporary discussions on proverb transformations in African Studies.

Perhaps, it is necessary to interrogate both the critical difference and similarity in the continental scholarship of terminologies. It is also important to address these choices and account for the peculiarity of each of the terms from available publications and references. Ultimately, the reception of a literary term goes a long way to defining its validity and acceptance within the critical space.

**Key words:** anti-proverb, postproverbial, proverb, literary terms, terminologies

### *1. Introduction: the taxonomist’s duty and the proverb medium*

In all academic and professional disciplines, from archaeology to zoology, terminologies have always been part of the process of defining and describing phenomena, perspectives and performances. Terminologies help not only in providing definitions of subjects or ideas within specific disciplines; they also contain other key terms which relate to the project of categorisation, typification and differentia-

tion. The creation or production of terminologies is the taxonomist act with the ultimate intention of classification of species, epistemologies, ideologies and branches of knowledge. Therefore, the taxonomy of terms in literary and cultural studies is but a standard and necessary practice which aids the methodical unpacking of subjects and ideas in definable, descriptive, nucleic, and specific ways.

The proverb medium is perhaps the most compact verbal sign of the cultural imagination of pre-literate and literate societies. Proverbs are a crucial ethnographic material for the interrogation of the lores and mores of a people. The given proverb text is a nucleic verbal creation which is found as resource mainly in such humanistic disciplines as anthropology, linguistics, literary, cultural and performance studies, among others.

As a branch of cultural studies, paremiology is without its own creation and deployment of bodies of terminologies in its critical reception across time, continents and disciplines.

## *2. Terms in transgressive paremiology: anti-proverbs and postproverbials*

The idea of the discourse of radical paremiology is more recent, noticeable or coming into focus within the last two decades of the twentieth century. Transgressive paremiology is the branch of contemporary proverb scholarship that focuses on the dynamism of the speech act with especial interest in the changes that occur to the typical and given proverb text. As a study of radical changes, the focus on inventive re-creations and transformations has been primarily in the structure and the re-formation of existing proverbs, although there are instances of wholly different productions of neoteric proverbs across cultures.

Lately, I have defined transgressive paremiology as “the study of innovations and transformations in contemporary proverb scholarship. Its crucial interest is to deal with significant structural violence

done to traditional or conventional proverbs”.<sup>1</sup> Transgressive paremiology involves the critique of modernist and postmodernist proverbs, and with it comes the emergence of particular terms which describe and delineate the radical cultural activity. In the drift of discussion that follows, my intention is to foreground two relatively recent terminologies of transgressive paremiology (“anti-proverb” and “postproverbial”) which have become significant references in the discourse of transgressive paremiology. These terms are attributed to the scholarly works of Wolfgang Mieder (1982ff) and Anna Litovkina (1999) on the one hand, and the scholarship of Raji-Oyelade (1999) on the other hand.

### 3. *Anti-proverb*

Between 1983 and 1989, Wolfgang Mieder first produced a 3-volume publication on the anti-proverb tradition in German, beginning with *Antispruchwörter*, Band 1. Wiesbaden: Verlag für deutsche Sprache.<sup>2</sup>

There have been other references to the anti-proverb discourse as available in other works in a number of European languages: Gossler, (2005) – *German*; (Litovkina & Vargha, 2005) – *Hungarian*; (Mignaval, 2004) – *French*; (Walter & Mokienko, 2001 and 2005; and Reznikov, 2009) – *Russian*; and (Mieder & Litovkina, 1999; and Litovkina & Mieder, 2006) – *English*.

In their major publication on the subject, titled *Twisted wisdom: modern anti-proverbs*, Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina define anti-proverb as “any intentional proverb variation in the form of puns, alterations, deletions or additions” (1999:3). The proverb scholars emphasise the importance of the activity as involving gaming, ex/

<sup>1</sup> See Raji-Oyelade, A. “COVID-19 (post)proverbials: twisting the word against the Virus”, *Proverbium* 39 (2022), p. 228.

<sup>2</sup> Mieder’s earliest works on anti-proverbs are contained in *Antispruchwörter*, Band 1. Wiesbaden: Verlag für deutsche Sprache, 1982; *Antispruchwörter*, Band 2. Wiesbaden: Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache, 1985; and *Antispruchwörter*, Band 3. Wiesbaden: Quelle & Meyer, 1989.

change, playful or wilful re-formations vested upon the structure of the conventional proverb. Seven years after *Twisted wisdom*, Mieder and Litovkina, defined anti-proverbs as “deliberate proverb innovations (alternations, parodies, transformations, variations, wise-cracks, fractured proverbs)” (*Old proverbs never die, they just diversify*, 2006, 5). In both publications, they provide examples of the radical variations, inventiveness and twistedness that are the hallmarks of the anti-proverb. The illustrations of the anti-proverb is available in German and other languages on the European Sprichwort-Plattform <<http://www.sprichwort-plattform.org/>>

#### 4. Postproverbial

The term “postproverbial” first came into the lexicon of African literary scholarship in 1999 (*Research in African Literatures*), with fuller explication in the book entitled *Postproverbials as archetypes of modernity in Yoruba culture* (Raji-Oyelade, 2012)<sup>3</sup>.

Postproverbials are defined as “supplementary proverbs... alternate creations derived from and which stand against traditional proverbs” (75). They are hybrid speech acts, re-creations of the traditional and conventional proverb medium; they are transgressive sayings both in sense and in structure when compared to traditional proverbs. The postproverbial impulse has become a major means of interpreting and unpacking alternate, transgressive and transformational acts in contemporary scholarship of the sub-field in humanistic discourses. Some notable works which have engaged with the term or its variation include publications by Olutoyin Jegede, Noah Balogun, Adeyemi Ademowo, Helen Yitah, Oladele Balogun, Shumirai Nyota, Ahmad Kipacha, Olayinka Oyeleye, Zaynab Ango, Nkechi Ezenwamadu, Chinyere Ojiakor, Uche Oboko, and Charles Akinsete

<sup>3</sup> The term “postproverbial” was first used at a seminar in the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria in 1995; the first full-length study of the phenomenon was Raji-Oyelade’s *Playful blasphemies: postproverbials as archetypes of modernity in Yoruba culture*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag 2012.



among others. The special issue of *Matatu*, volume 51.2 (2020) – “The postproverbial agency: texts, media and mediation in African cultures” - contains some of the best essays on the discourse of postproverbiality.<sup>4</sup> Till date, more scholarly works are engaging the proverb term and its interpretation in a number of African languages. These include essays in Ful’be, Igbo, Shona, Swahili, and Yoruba.<sup>5</sup>

In a 2004 essay, Raji-Oyelade provided the typologies of the postproverbial activity based on the structure of suture, clausal and phrasal excision, pun, phonemic inversion, extensions and additions. The examples so given were noted as reflecting the urban imagination of Africa, appearing in fictional and non-fictional genres including literature, music, film, social media and other cultural spaces.<sup>6</sup> Wolfgang Mieder has recently produced a bibliography of researches dedicated to the study of postproverbials.<sup>7</sup>

### 5. *Interrogating the terminologies as indices of radical transformation in proverb studies*

Anti-proverbs and postproverbials are potentially ubiquitous, existing in day-to-day communication, popular literature, media and entertainment. These nomenclatural choices (or peculiarity of naming) are decidedly continental and it is interesting that the transgressive paremiological activity is “differently” named in European and African scholarships of the subject. Whereas the use of the term “anti-proverb” is copiously referenced in proverb scholarships across

<sup>4</sup> The first international conference on postproverbials in African studies held at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria (June 19-22, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> See Introduction to the special edition of *Matatu* on postproverbials, published online on September 21, 2020: [https://brill.com/view/journals/mata/51/2/article-p229\\_1.xml?language=en#d59330001e320](https://brill.com/view/journals/mata/51/2/article-p229_1.xml?language=en#d59330001e320)

<sup>6</sup> See “Posting the African proverb: a grammar of Yoruba postproverbials, or logophagia, logorrhoea and the grammar of Yoruba postproverbials.” *Proverbium* 21 (2004): 299-314.

<sup>7</sup> Mieder, W. “International proverb scholarship: an updated bibliography”, *Proverbium* 38 (2021): 491-532.

Europe, the term “postproverbial” has been the major referent in most contemporary discussions on proverb transformations in African studies.

Perhaps, it is necessary to interrogate both the critical difference and similarity in the continental scholarship of terminologies. In his foreword to *Playful Blasphemies...* in which he engages with both terminologies, Mieder notes that there is a comparative sameness between anti-proverbs and postproverbials. He admits the fundamental point that like anti-proverbs, “postproverbials are above all ‘subversive creations’ that are formulated with the distinct desire to negate traditional wisdom and create new wisdom” (xiv).<sup>8</sup>

### ***6. Comparative or contrastive terminologies: anti-proverb and postproverbial***

Also in a jointly published paper by Aleksa Varga and Raji-Oyelade, the unanimous similarity between the two terms are implicitly established, with the activity of transformations and transgressions as procedures of the making of the anti-proverb and the postproverbial text.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the transformational activity that is inherent in them, both terms have the quality of being deviant in their operations. While anti-proverbs are noted to “frequently use elements of irony and satire, and are also based on a play on words, thus raising a humorous effect” (273), postproverbials are noted as containing “the dual quality of playfulness and blasphemy” (275).

Named either as anti-proverb or postproverbial, the proverb text is an alter-creation, the subversive or inventive response of the radicalized human imagination in engagement with conventional wise sayings. What becomes crucial is the justification of the similarity of

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in the second edition of Raji-Oyelade’s *Playful blasphemies: postproverbials as archetypes of modernity in Yoruba culture*, 2022.

<sup>9</sup> See “Proverbs across cultures: engaging with anti-proverbs and postproverbials in European and African proverb studies in the digital age”, 2021, pp. 268-282.

the different prefixations (“anti” and “post”) which subserve the theory of proverb. In elementary vocabulary, “anti” means “opposed to” or the opposite of, the antonymic reverse of convention, that which is different from and even deferred against the original utterance or text. In the context of the terminology in focus, the prefix “post” has both diachronic and synchronic potentials as an aberration, an aftermath and of convention; the postness of the proverb is a deconstructive referent as well as an evidence of the beyondness of the radical text. In general, the critical imagination of the typical anti-proverb and the postproverbial involves a post-structuralist activity. However, while I cannot be too emphatic on the rationale for the use of the appositive prefix “anti”, I can be exact on the theoretical logic of the post-structuralist and post-modernist temper of the term post-proverbial. While the devolution of both terminologies belong to the exercise of the literate imagination in relation to the dynamics of industrialisation, technology and mass communication, the term post-proverbial has apparent resonance with the idea of being a post-traditional and postcolonial exercise.

### *7. Hyphenated difference: postproverbial and the post-proverbial*

For the purpose of exactitude and theoretical intention, further difference should be noted in the graphic rendition of the term, either as “postproverbial” or “post-proverbial”. Oftentimes, there has always been a certain liberalism in writing such that one rendition is seen as a juxtaposition of the other, depending on the choice of the particular writer or critic. However, the seemingly innocuous hyphen that has been added to the other rendition of the term limits the original theoretical intention of the term. The hyphen in “post-proverbial” creates both a gap and a conflation with the essential concept of the transgressive thought which conceives the term “postproverbial”. Reflecting on the seeming inconsequentiality of that hyphenated difference, I try to mark the relation and the distinction as clearly put in chapter one of *Playful blasphemies*:

As conceived, the term postproverbial refers to the synchronic imagination of alternate creations which accompany (side by side, almost functioning as parallels to) the utterance and use of conventional sayings. The diachronic import of its postness has been noted, but to write about the phenomenon graphically as a “post-proverbial” act is merely to foreground its historical sense, which the prefix, “post”, tends to emphasise. I will therefore affirm that the hyphen is and should be decidedly absent and silenced in the writing of the postproverbial theory. (22-23)

## 8. Conclusion

Terminologies offer a vista of illuminations to concepts that may be slippery or volatile to immediate or deep understanding. They are descriptive as well as definitive of specific ideas or phenomena and they help to unpack the meanings of particular subjects. In the case of transgressive paremiology as exemplified in “anti-proverbs” and “postproverbials”, terminologies ease encounters and interpretations of the various production of neoteric proverbial sayings. They are the descriptive tools for the strategy of reading the structuration and the revisions invested into the convention of the proverb medium. They are also descriptive of the phenomena of alternate, modernist performance of proverbs which get radicalised by time, technology, industrialisation and urbanisation.

Furthermore, it must be said that the radical energy of these terms is that of a literate imagination whereby anti-proverb is decidedly Western and postproverbial is conceived as the effect of cross-continental and cross-linguistic encounters. These terms have become the most visible in available bibliographies of transgressive paremiology. In other interpretations, the receptions of anti-proverbs and postproverbials have the potential of birthing other terms that are crucial and particular to the field, indicative of further developments within the critical space. Indeed, terminologies are of crucial significance for the discourse of transgressive paremiology in literary and

cultural studies, anthropology and sociolinguistics, and media and communication studies, among other disciplines.

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# Proverbs in the language classroom





DRAHOTA-SZABÓ ERZSÉBET

## QUO VADIS, KÖZMONDÁS? GONDOLATOK A FRAZEODIDAKTIKAI ALAPELVEKRŐL A NÉMET MINT IDEGEN NYELV OKTATÁSÁBAN

**Absztrakt:** A frazeologizmusoknak a szövegértésben és a szövegalkotásban betöltött szerepét mutatja, hogy a szókincs didaktikájában a frazeodidaktika is helyet kapott. A frazeodidaktika alapvető feladata abban áll, hogy ajánlásokat fogalmazzon meg arra vonatkozóan, hogy a nyelvtudás szintjétől függően mely frazeologizmusok és milyen módszerekkel integrálandók az oktatásba. A frazeologizmusok közvetítését illetően alapelvek is rendelkezésünkre állnak. A tanulmány ezeknek a frazeodidaktikai alapelveknek a helytállóságát vizsgálja közmondásokon keresztül. Hangsúlyos szerepet kap az írásban a közmondások szerepe a kultúrtörténeti ismeretek átadásában, a grammatikai szabályszerűségek rögzítésében, a szókincsbővítésben. A kontrasztív szemlélet kapcsán a szerző példákon keresztül mutatja be, hogyan segít az interlingvális összevetés a pozitív transzfer megerősítésében, ill. az interferenciális hibák kiküszöbölésében. A kitekintésben a közmondásoknak a nyelvterápiában betöltött szerepéről esik szó.

**Kulcsszavak:** frazeodidaktikai alapelvek, közmondások, kultúrtörténet, grammatika, szókincsbővítés, kontrasztivitás, nyelvterápia

**Abstract:** The didactics of fixed expressions has become an integral part of the methodology of teaching vocabulary, which signals the role phraseological units play in text processing and text production. The fundamental role of the didactics of phraseological units is to state recommendations on which phraseological units could be integrated into language teaching, and on the methodology of teaching them at different levels of language competence. In addition, we have some basic principles at our disposal concerning the teaching of phraseological units. The present study examines the relevance of these principles through the teaching of proverbs. Emphasis is put on the role proverbs play in transferring knowledge related to cultural history, in the teaching and learning of grammar rules, and in vocabulary development. In line with the contrastive approach, the

author provides examples on how interlingual comparison contributes to positive transfer and to the correction of mistakes related to interference. The outlook section details the role of proverbs in language therapy.

**Keywords:** principles of the didactics of fixed expressions, proverbs, cultural history, grammar, vocabulary development, language contrasts, language therapy

## *1. Bevezetés*

Hosszú évtizedek óta foglalkoznak nyelvészek és néprajztudósok állandósult szókapcsolatokkal, így a frazeológia már nem tekinthető új tudományágnak. A frazeologizmusok relevanciáját az anyanyelv és az idegen nyelvek oktatásában is felismertük, hiszen abból indulunk ki, hogy szövegekben kommunikálunk, s a szövegek nemcsak egyes szavakból, hanem „előregyártott” nyelvi elemekből, frazeologizmusokból is állnak. Ezt a felismerést bizonyítja az is, hogy a nyelvtudományi és jellemzően elméleti kutatások mellett egyre több olyan publikációt olvashatunk, amelyek az oktatási gyakorlatra fókuszálnak. Az egy- és két- vagy többnyelvű frazeológiai lexikonok mellett tanulószótárak és gyakorlókönyvek jelentek meg (vö. pl. Bánffi-Benedek 2014; Földes és Kühnert 1990; Herzog et al. 1980, 2005; Hessky 1993; Hessky és Ettinger 1997; Wotjak és Richter 1988).

A Közös Európai Referenciakeretben is tükröződik az a tény, hogy a frazeologizmusok a lexikális kompetencia releváns elemei (vö. GER 2020: 154). Már A1 szinten szerepelnek állandósult szókapcsolatok (vö. GER 2020: 155), és C2 szinten a referenciakeret kiemeli, hogy a nyelvtanuló gazdag szókincsének a beszélt nyelvi és idiomatikus szó szerkezetek is részét képezik (vö. GER uo.).

A szókincs didaktikájában megkapta méltó helyét a frazeodidaktika, amely a frazeologizmusok szisztematikus, efficiens közvetítésével foglalkozik a nyelvoktatásban (vö. Winzer-Kiontke 2010: 250). A frazeodidaktika feladata segítséget nyújtani arra vonatkozóan, hogy a nyelvtudás szintjétől függően mely frazeologizmusokat és milyen módszerrel (feladatokkal, gyakorlatokkal, szövegekkel) ajánlott a

nyelvoktatásba integrálni. Modelleket fejlesztenek, a lehetséges feladatokat és gyakorlatokat típusokba rendezik (vö. pl. Babillon 2001; Kühn 1992, 1994; Lüger 1997, 2004).

A tanulmányban a frazeodidaktikai alapelvek állnak a középpontban. Megvizsgálom, hogy ezekkel mennyiben lehet egyetérteni, ill. kell-e őket módosítani, kiegészíteni. Az alapelvekből néhányat kiemelek és közmondásokon keresztül mutatom be őket, ill. érvelek mellettük. A célcsoportot németszakos tanárjelöltek alkotják. Az alapelvek szemügyre vételével a fő céloom választ adni a címben szereplő kérdésre, azaz: Quo vadis, közmondás?

## 2. Terminológia

Mielőtt rátérek a közmondásokra, helyezzük őket nagyobb összefüggésbe! A frazeologizmusoknak számtalan definíciója létezik. Jelen írásban frazeologizmusokon olyan legalább két szóból állandósult szókapcsolatokat értek, amelyeket lexikális és strukturális stabilitás jellemez, s ebből adódóan reprodukálhatóság. Az idiomatikusság a frazeologizmusoknak nem kötelező jegye (vö. Drahot-Szabó 2021a: 15). A frazeologizmusoknak a Burger-féle klasszifikáció szerint három nagy csoportjuk van: referenciális, strukturális és kommunikatív frazeologizmusok (Burger 2010: 36). A strukturális frazeologizmusok grammatikai viszonyokat fejeznek ki, így az elsajátításuk már az idegennyelv-tanulás kezdeti szakaszában kívánatos (pl. *weder ... noch; entweder ... oder*). Mivel a kommunikatív frazeologizmusok, azaz a rutinformulák, ill. más néven pragmatikai frazeologizmusok a kommunikációs aktus kezdetén, befejezésekor, ill. a kommunikáció lefolyása alatt elengedhetetlen nyelvi „panelek”, ezekkel kezdődik az idegen nyelvek tanulása (köszönési formák stb.). A frazeodidaktika feladatlírása is az előbbieket tükrözi, ugyanis azt hangsúlyozza, hogy ma már konszenzus van abban a tekintetben, hogy a frazeologizmusokat be kell építeni az idegennyelv-oktatás curriculumába, és a frazeológia „perifériájának” nagyobb jelentőséget kell tulajdonítani, azaz a rutinformuláknak, a funkciógés szerkezeteknek, a kollokációknak, hiszen ezek frekvenciált gyakorisággal használt

nyelvi elemek, így relevánsabbak az idegen nyelvet tanulók számára (Winzer-Kiontke 2010: 251).

Szintén a Burger-féle osztályozás szerint a referenciális frazeologizmusok egyik csoportjába tartoznak a nominatív frazeologizmusok, amelyeknek szemantikailag megnevező funkciójuk van, szintaktikailag pedig mondatrészi szerepük. Az itt tárgyalt közmondások a referenciális frazeologizmusok másik csoportjába, az ún. propozicionális frazeologizmusokhoz sorolandók, hiszen szemantikailag kijelentések, szintaktikailag pedig mondat-, ill. szövegértékűek. Így rokonságot mutatnak a szállóigékkel és a közhelyekkel. A közmondások fő szemantikai jellemzője, hogy életigazságot, bölcsességet, tanácsot fogalmaznak meg, formailag pedig mondatok.

A számtalan közmondás-definíció közül itt csak egyet emelek ki, amelyre a későbbiekben visszatérünk. O. Nagy (1976: 12) „klaszszikus” meghatározása szerint „a közmondás [...] „elv”, az általános érvényűség igényével használt „életbölcsesség”, tanács vagy ítélet, de mindenesetre olyan mondat, amelynek a tartalmával kapcsolatban fölvethető az „igaz vagy nem igaz” kérdése, és amely **mindig többé-kevésbé korhoz kötött és ezért társadalmilag is meghatározott világnézetet tükröz**”. (Kiemelés tőlem – D.-Sz. E.)

### *3. A közmondások pragmatikai értékéről*

A közmondások szociális funkciója korhoz és kultúrához kötött (lásd O. Nagy fenti definícióját is, ill. vö. Burger 2010: 110; Fleischer 1997: 77). Ma már nem használják a közmondásokat érvelésként bírósági eljárásokban, perekben, a gyermeknevelésnek sem ezek az alapjai (vö. Drahota-Szabó 2021a: 140k.). A mindennapi nyelvhasználatban azt látjuk, hogy a beszélők és a közmondások közötti pragmatikai viszony megváltozott, azaz a nyelvhasználók viszonyulása a közmondásokhoz, ill. azok visszahatása az emberekre, viselkedésükre, értékrendszerükre stb. Ezt mutatja az is, hogy a közmondások ma sokszor modifikált, elferdített alakban használatosak (vö. Drahota-Szabó 2021a: 135-159; Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al. 2018; Mieder és Tóthné Li-

tovkina 1999). Mindez azonban nem jelenti azt, hogy a kodifikált közmondások kivesznek a nyelvünkéből, hiszen továbbra is fontos argumentatív szerepük van nemcsak a szóbeli kommunikációban, hanem az írott szövegfajtákban is. A frazeologizmusok közül azonban – mint említettem – a kommunikatív formulák kapnak hangsúlyos szerepet az idegennyelv-oktatásban, mivel ezek az idegen nyelvű kommunikációnak kezdettől fogva az előfeltételei. Emellett egyre nagyobb figyelmet kapnak a kollokációk is, hiszen itt nagy az interferenciális hibalehetőség. A közmondásokra pedig továbbra is kisebb hangsúlyt fektetnek a tankönyvek. A kérdés tehát az, mi lehet ennek az oka, ill. sokkal inkább az, hogy mire is jók a közmondások az idegen nyelvi kompetencia kialakításában.

#### 4. Frazeodidaktikai alapelvek

A továbbiakban a frazeodidaktikai alapelveket vizsgálom, amelyeket (Lüger: 129–163) a következő tizenkét tézisben foglal össze (a fordítás németről magyarra tőlem való – D.-Sz. E.):

1. „A frazeológiai szókapcsolatok közvetítésében a szöveg a centrális egység.”  
 Altézis 1a: „Egyedül a kontextuson keresztül nyílik lehetősége a tanulónak a frazeológiai kifejezések szemantizációjára, esetleges más identifikációs segítségük mellett.”  
 Altézis 1b: „A kifejezési oldal jegyeit ugyancsak szöveg vonatkozásában kell közvetíteni.”
2. „A frazeologizmusok szemantikai-pragmatikai többletértékét a szituációs összefüggések figyelembe vételével lehet felismerni.”
3. „A frazeologizmusok egyik alcsoportja, azaz a rutinformulák számára a szituációs beágyazottság konstitutív, ezek közvetítése csak kommunikációs összefüggésekben lehetséges.”
4. „A rutinformulák nemcsak a mondatrész- és mondat szintet érintik, hanem szövegértékűek is lehetnek, így tehát fontos nyelvi kifejezőeszközök.”

5. „Az interlingvális összehasonlítások először is a nyelvről való reflexió szolgálatában állnak, ill. a frazeológiai egységek szemantikai sajátosságaira érzékenyítenek.”  
Altézis 5a: „Az összevetések segítenek az interlingvális aránylati különbségek felfedésében.”  
Altézis 5b: „Az összevetéseknek leginkább szövegtörzsetben kell történniük.”
6. „A frazeologizmusok csak korlátozottan alkalmasak a nyelvi kompetencia és az országismereti tudás integrált közvetítésére.”
7. „Az elsajátítandó tananyag mennyiségének a meghatározásánál szükséges a frazeológiai kifejezőeszközök célzott kiválasztása.”
8. „Egyes frazeologizmusokat elmélyülten és különböző szempontok szerint kell feldolgozni.”
9. „A frazeologizmusokat elsősorban passzívan kell birtokolni.”
10. „A frazeologizmusok használatát mint (túlzott) kulturális közeledést is lehet értelmezni.”
11. Autonóm tanulás: „Az individuális tanulási kompetencia kialakításának központi szerepe van.”
12. „Az új média segítheti az autonóm továbbtanulást.”

Az első három tézis egy pontban összegezhető, hiszen mindegyik a kontextusba ágyazottság fontosságát hangsúlyozza. Kontextuson pedig érthetjük nemcsak a nyelvi szövegösszefüggést, hanem a szituációs keretet is (vö. Drahota-Szabó 2022: 12). Ez a három tétel tehát valójában egy tétel, de kétségtelenül releváns. Annál a kérdésnél ugyanis, hogy mikor és hogyan integráljunk közmondásokat az idegennyelv-oktatásba (ha el kell választani a sor végén, akkor így: idegen-nyelv-oktatásba vagy ide-gennyelv-oktatásba), a mottó így hangozhat: „A közmondások oktatásba való beépítése nem öncél”. A közmondásokat az idegennyelv-oktatásban tematikus kontextusba ajánlott beágyazni, pl. a következő témakörökbe: család, hivatás, szabadidő, nyaralás, sport stb. A tanulás, ill. a hivatás, a munka témái-

nál például a következő közmondások illeszkednek a tananyagba:

*Erst die Arbeit, dann das Vergnügen.* [Munka után édes a pihenés.]

*Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde.* [Ki korán kel, aranyat lel.]

*Übung macht den Meister.* [Gyakorlat teszi a mestert.]

*Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmermehr.*

*Früh übt sich, was ein Meister werden will.*

*Ein voller Bauch studiert nicht gern.*

*Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben.*

*Wer rastet, (der) rostet.*

*Ohne Fleiß kein Preis.*

A felsorolt frazeodidaktikai tézisek többségével egyetértek. A 9. és a 10. tétellel azonban nem teljességgel: egyrészt azért nem, mert a passzív és az aktív tudás nem különíthető el élesen egymástól, másrészt pedig azért nem, mert a gyakorlatban, azaz a hétköznapi kommunikációban aligha reális az a veszély, miszerint a frazeologizmusok használatát az anyanyelvűek túlzott kulturális közeledésként értékelnék.

A 11. és a 12. tézis elhagyható, mert ezek nem (csupán) frazeodidaktikai alapelvek, hanem minden egyéb nyelvi és nem nyelvi kompetencia fejlesztésére érvényesek.

A közmondások idegennyelv-oktatásba való beépítésénél a fenti mottó így is megfogalmazható: „A közmondások nem a cél, hanem az eszköz”. Ez azt jelenti, hogy a közmondásokat nem (csak) önmagukért tanítjuk, pusztán azért, hogy a tanulók/hallgatók több közmondást ismerjenek, s ezeket a saját beszédprodukciónkban használni tudják. Azt is mérlegelni kell, hogy milyen nyelvi vagy egyéb, jellemzően országismereti, kultúrtörténeti ismeretek közvetíthetők vagy mélyíthetők el a segítségükkel. A továbbiakban erre térek ki. A kérdés tehát – ismételten az írás címével összhangban – továbbra is ez: Mire jók a közmondások?

## 5. Közmondások és országismeret, kultúrtörténet

A fenti kérdés megválaszolásakor reflektálok Lüger (2004: 150) már említett 6. tézisére, amely szerint: „A frazeologizmusok csak korlátozottan alkalmasak a nyelvi kompetencia és az országismereti tudás integrált közvetítésére”. Ezt a „korlátozottságot” lehet azonban feloldani a következő tézissel: „Egyes frazeologizmusokat elmélyülten és különböző szempontok szerint kell feldolgozni”. Különösen érvényes ez azokra a közmondásokra, amelyek kulturálisan és történetileg is pregnánsan kötöttek. Ha ezekkel a közmondásokkal elmélyültebben foglalkozunk, akkor nemcsak a nyelvi kompetenciát fejleszthetjük, hanem országismereti, kultúrtörténeti ismereteket is közvetíthetünk. Világítsuk ezt meg ezzel a közmondással:

*Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt, ist des Talers nicht wert.* (‘aki a kisebb pénzösszegekkel felelőtlenül bánik, nem lesz jómódú’)

A közmondás magyar ekvivalense: *Ki a fillért nem becsüli, a forintot nem érdemli.* (Vö. még: *Jobb a sűrű fillér, mint a ritka forint.* = ‘inkább sokszor jussunk kevesebb pénzhez, mint ritkán többhez.’)

Mind a német, mind a magyar közmondásban pénznemek szerepelnek, azaz reáliák, ezért ezek a közmondások reália-frazeologizmusoknak tekintendők. Reália-frazeologizmusokon olyan kötött szókapcsolatokat értek, amelyek egy adott kultúrával és/vagy nyelvvel, azaz egy kultúr-/nyelvközösség történelmével, szokásaival, hagyományaival, gondolkodásával szorosan összefüggnek, ill. nyelvspecifikus vonásokat mutatnak (Drahota-Szabó 2016: 308). Ilyenek a magyarban például a következő frazeologizmusok: *nincs egy (árva/huncut) fillérje sem vkinek* (‘nincs pénze, szegény’); *az utolsó fillérjét is odaadná vkinek vki* (‘nagyon jószívű’).

A közmondások társadalmi és történeti függősége nyilvánul meg abban, hogy a német közmondásnak elterjedt a mai, modernizált – a lexikonban is kodifikált – variánsa is (vö. Duden 2013: 565):

*Wer den Cent nicht ehrt, ist des Euros nicht wert.*



A többi frazeologizmusnak is van olyan változata, amelyben a *Pfennig* komponens helyett *Cent* szerepel:

*für jmdn./etw. keinen Pfennig geben* (beszélt nyelvi; 'vkit/vmit feladni; azt gondolni, hogy vkinek/vminek semmi esélye a sikerre') → *für jmdn./etw. keinen Cent geben*

*keinen Pfennig / keine zehn Pfennig wert sein* (beszélt nyelvi; 'értéktelen') → *keinen Cent / keine zehn Cent wert sein*

*auf den Pfennig sehen / mit dem Pfennig rechnen* ('nagyon takarékos') → *auf den Cent sehen / mit dem Cent rechnen*

*nicht für fünf Pfennig* (beszélt nyelvi; 'semmiképpen, semennyire sem') → *nicht für fünf Cent*.

A haladó nyelvtanulóknak, így a leendő némettanároknak is, igényük van arra, hogy megértsék, mit miért mondunk éppen úgy. A frazeologizmusokat, így a közmondásokat is „átlátható” egységeként szeretnék megérteni, megtanulni. Így például a *Taler* komponens a fenti közmondásban magyarázatra szorul (*Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt, ist des Talers nicht wert.*). A *Taler* egy ma már nem használatos pénzérme neve, ez a rövid forma az eredetileg *Joachimstaler* rövid formája, a 16. században keletkezett. A *Joachimstaler* nevű pénzérme pedig egy helységről kapta a nevét: St. Joachimsthal Csehországban található és a mai neve: Jáchymov. A 16. század első felétől az ottani bányából nyerték azt az ezüstöt, amiből a pénzt verték. (Vö. Duden 2001: 835.) A *Taler* szót a magyarba is átvettük, hiszen a *tallér* a 16. és a 19. század között nemcsak Erdélyben, hanem a régi Magyarországon is használt ezüstpénz volt (vö. Pusztai 2003: 1300).

A tantárgyakon átívelő oktatás jegyében a németórán magyar kultúrtörténeti ismeretek is közvetíthetők a felsorolt frazeologizmusok kapcsán. A fenti jelentésekben a magyar frazeologizmusokban a *garas* komponens fordul elő: *egy lyukas/árva garast sem ér vmi* ('semmit sem ér vmi'); *egy lyukas/árva garast sem adna vmiért vki* ('semmit sem adna vmiért vki'); *nincs egy árva/lyukas garasa sem vkinek* ('nincs pénze, nagyon szegény'); *leteszi a garast vmi/vki mellett vki* ('elkötelezi magát vmely álláspont vagy vmely személy mellett'); *az utolsó garasát is*

*odaadná vkinek vki* ('nagyon jószívű'); *élére rakja a garast vki* ('nagyon vagy túlzottan is takarékos'); *a fogához veri a garast vki* ('takarékos, ill. fősvény, zsugori, fukar').

Ezeket a magyar frazeologizmusokat ma is gyakran használjuk, de már csak kevés beszélő tudja, mi is volt a *garas* valójában. Ezeket az ismereteket átadhatjuk németórán is: a *garas* [ném. *Mariengroschen*] a középkorban egy ezüstpénz volt, a dénárhoz képest nagyobb és értékesebb. Ezután váltópénzként használták 5, 3, ill. 2 krajcár [ném. *Kreuzer*] értékben (vö. Pusztai 2003: 434). A *krajcár* volt a 19. században a legkisebb rézpénz (vö. Pusztai 2003: 768).

A frazeologizmusokat kétségtelenül akkor is tudjuk használni, ha nem ismerjük az etimológiájukat. Ugyanakkor, ha a közmondás a keletkezési történetének felfedésével motiválttá válik, akkor jobban rögzül az emlékezetben, azaz nagyobb eséllyel kerül át a receptív szókincsünkből a produktívba. Az etimológia emellett kultúrtörténeti ismeretekkel is gazdagítja a nyelvtanulót. Világítsuk meg az elmondottakat egy példával!

*Wer zuerst kommt, mahlt zuerst.* ('aki először érkezik, először kerül sorra; aki később érkezik, nem támaszthat igényeket'; vö. szinonim jelentésben: *Szemesnek áll a világ.*)

Ezt a közmondást a német szakos hallgatóim literalizálták, pontosabban remotiválták és így értelmezték: 'aki először érkezik (pl. egy partira), az először ehets, és a többieknek, az elkésőknek esetleg már semmi nem marad'. A *mahlen* igét tehát az 'enni' jelentéssel kötik össze, mint ahogy ez a *Mahlzeit!*-ban [*Jó étvágyat!*] is megjelenik. Ha azonban felfedjük a hallgatóknak a közmondás eredetét, akkor felismerik az ige itt aktuális másik jelentését is: 'valamilyen szemes termést, takarmányt a malomban megőrölni' (vö. DUW 2003: 1042). A közmondás ugyanis Eike von Repgow „*Sachsenspiegel*” című törvénygyűjteményére megy vissza, amely a következő alcímet viseli: „*Das sächsische Landrecht*” (vö. Duden 2013: 878). A közmondás eredetileg egy előírás volt, miszerint annak volt joga először megőrölni a gabonáját, aki elsőként érkezett a malomba (vö. DUW 2003 uo.).

## 6. Közmondások és grammatika

A fent említett 6. tézis szerint a frazeologizmusok nemcsak az országismereti tudás, hanem a nyelvi kompetencia integrált közvetítésére is csak korlátozottan alkalmasak. Erre a tézisre reflektálva először is ki kell emelni, hogy a grammatikát kizárólag a közmondásokon keresztül nyilvánvalóan nem lehet megtanítani és megtanulni, ez nem is jutna senkinek az eszébe. Az is bizonyos azonban, hogy a segítségükkel rögzíthetők a nyelvtani jelenségek és szabályok. Köztudott, hogy a szabályok rögzítésében az „emlékezeti mankóknak”, például a betűszavaknak fontos szerepe van. A német nyelvkönyvekben, ill. nyelvórákon is gyakran találkozhatunk emlékeztetőfejlesztő stratégiákkal (vö. Sárvári 2006). Ilyen ún. „Eselbrücke” vonatkozik a mellékmondati szórendre, amelyet így tudunk könnyen megjegyezni: KATI-szórend (K = kötőszó; A = alany; T = tárgy; I = ige). Mivel a közmondások formailag mondatok, alkalmasak arra, hogy a legkülönbözőbb nyelvtani szabályokat az emlékezetünkbe vessük a segítségükkel. Csak néhány példát említek:

(1) A szintaxis kurzuson a hallgatók megismerik a mondatok fajtáit komplexitásuk szerint. A főmondat és a mellékmondat sorrendje a következő közmondással is szemléltethető:

*Verschiebe nicht auf morgen, was du heute kannst besorgen!* (sorrend: főmondat – mellékmondat)

*Was du heute kannst besorgen, (das) verschiebe nicht auf morgen!* (sorrend: mellékmondat – főmondat) [*Amit ma megtehetsz, ne halaszd holnapra!*]

(2) Ugyancsak a szintaxis keretében foglalkozunk a tradicionális mondatelemzéssel, a szintagmákkal és a mondatrészekkel, azok megjelenési formáival. Az alany, ill. a tárgy szerepét jellemzően egy főnév vagy egy névmás látja el, ugyanakkor lehet vonatkozó mellékmondat is:

*Wer wagt, gewinnt.* [*Aki mer, az nyer.*]

*Wer sucht, der findet.* [*Aki keres, (az) talál.*]

*Wer nicht hören will, muss fühlen.*

*Wer die Wahl hat, hat die Qual.*

*Wer im Glashaus sitzt, soll nicht mit Steinen werfen.*

*Wer gut schmiert, der gut fährt.*

*Was sich liebt, das neckt sich.*

*Was lange währt, wird endlich gut.*

*Was ein Häkchen werden will, krümmt sich beizeiten.*

*Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmermehr.*

(3) A hallgatók megtanulják azt a szabályt, miszerint a német főneve-sült mellékneveket melléknévként ragozzuk. Ezt rögzítik a következő közmondások:

*Der Klügere gibt nach.* [Okos enged, számár szenved.]

*Jedem das Seine.* [Mindenkinek a magáét / ami jár / amit megérdemel.; Mindenki azt kapja, amit megérdemel.]

*Dem Glücklichen schlägt keine Stunde.*

(4) A közmondások a vonzatos igék elsajátításában is segítségünkre lehetnek:

*Eigener Herd ist Goldes wert.* [wert sein + Genitiv]

*Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht.* (schützen vor + Dativ)

(5) A melléknévragozási szabályok rögzülését segítik a következők:

*Einem geschenkten Gaul schaut man nicht ins Maul.* (a vegyes ragozásból a gyenge végződés) [Ajándék lónak ne nézd a fogát!]

*In/hinter einer rauhen Schale steckt oft ein guter Kern. / In einer harten Schale steckt oft ein weicher Kern.* (a vegyes ragozásból először gyenge, majd erős végződés)

*Wenn man dem Teufel den kleinen Finger gibt, so nimmt er die ganze Hand.* (gyenge ragozás) [funkcionális ekvivalens: A lejtőn nincs megállás.]

*Selbsterkenntnis ist der erste Schritt zur Besserung.* (gyenge ragozás)

*Die großen Fische fressen die kleinen.* (gyenge ragozás) [A nagy halak bekapják/megeszik/lenyelik/felfalják a kis halakat.]

*Hunger ist der beste Koch.* (gyenge ragozás) [Az éhség a legjobb szakács.]

(6) A tagadásra vonatkozó szabályokat rögzíthetik a következők (mikor *kein* és mikor *nicht* a tagadószó):

*Es ist noch kein Meister vom Himmel gefallen.*

*Eine Schwalbe macht noch keinen Sommer.* [Egy fecske nem csinál nyarat.]

*Hunde, die bellen, beißen nicht.* [Amelyik kutya ugat, az nem harap.]

## 7. Közmondások és kontrasztív szókincsbővítés

Közmondások segítségével nemcsak nyelvtani szabályokat rögzíthetünk, hanem a szókincs elsajátítását is támogathatjuk. A szókincsben köztudottan több ekvivalenciatípus létezik: egy-az-egyhez-megfelelés, egy-a-többhöz-megfelelés, több-az-egyhez-megfelelés, egy-a-részhez-megfelelés és egy-a-nullához-megfelelés. Ha azt is figyelembe vesszük, hogy a szavak gyakran egész paradigmaticai mezőket alkotnak, akkor a fentieket ki kell egészíteni ezzel: több-a-többhöz-megfelelés. Egy magyar szónak tehát ritkán felel meg a németben egyetlen egy szó. A magyar és a német szavak nem feltétlenül esnek egybe sem jelentésterjedelmükben, sem pedig stiláris értékükben.

Ezeknek a lexikális jelenségeknek a tudatosítása, az interferenciális hibák lehetőségének a tisztázása elsősorban a szemantika, ill. a beszédgyakorlat kurzusok feladata. Itt is segítségünkre lehetnek a közmondások. Az interferenciális hibák gyakoriságát egy 1998-as felmérésem is kimutatta, amelyben német szakos hallgatóim közmondás-kompetenciáját vizsgáltam (Drahota-Szabó 2021a: 176–186). A vizsgálatban 100 elsőéves és 100 végzős hallgató vett részt; az alapja a Grzybek (1991) által összeállított parömiológiai minimum volt. Grzybek vizsgálatához hasonlóan a hallgatóim a parömiológiai minimumot alkotó hetvenhét közmondás első felét kapták meg, s ezeket kellett kiegészíteniük. 2022 őszén végeztem egy kiscsoportos kontrollvizsgálatot az első évfolyamos (összesen 8 fő) hallgatóval. (Köz-

tudott, hogy a tanárszakos hallgatók száma évről-évre drasztikusan csökken, ill. az idegen nyelvek közül csak az angol tudja tartani a pozícióját.) Mivel mind az 1998-as, mind a 2022-es vizsgálatban a tanulmányaikat éppen elkezdő hallgatók vettek részt, eredményeik a középiskolában elsajátított tudásukat tükrözik.

A hallgatók a közmondások kiegészítésekor mindkét felmérésben sok olyan lexikális interferenciális hibát vétettek, amelyek az egy-a-többhöz-megfelelésből adódtak. A magyar többjelentésű *hallgatni* igének például a németben két ekvivalense van: *schweigen* és *hören*. A magyar közmondást ültették át a hallgatók szó szerint németre, és nem a szemantikailag megfelelő ekvivalenst választották: *\*Reden ist Silber, Hören ist Gold*. A német közmondás helyesen így hangzik: *Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold*.

A magyar *szem* szó ugyancsak többjelentésű és ezeket a jelentéseket a németben hangalakilag különböző szavak hordozzák: *Korn* ('gabona') és *Auge* ('látószerv'). A hiba ismét a magyar hatására keletkezett interferenciális jelenség: *\*Ein blindes Huhn findet auch ein Auge/findet Augen auch/kann auch ein Auge finden*. Helyesen: *Ein blindes Huhn findet auch (ein)mal ein Korn*. [*Vak tyúk is talál szemet.*]

A *hallgatni* és *schweigen/hören*, ill. a *szem* és *Korn/Auge* (esetleg még: *Ähre, Samen*) esetében azt is mondhatjuk, hogy részleges lexikális megfelelésekről van szó, ún. inklúzióról, bennfoglalásról, hiszen a magyar szavak a megfelelő mindkét német szó jelentését magukba foglalják, nem differenciálják a jelentéseket hangalakban, azaz külön szavakban.

A tükörfordításokként keletkezett hibás közmondás-kiegészítések oka tehát a magyar és a német szókincs aszimmetrikus volta, ami azt is jelenti, hogy a szavak gyakorta poliszémek, és a poliszém magyar és német szavak eltérnek egymástól a más szavakkal történő kombinálhatóságukban is. Ezt látjuk ebben a megoldásban is: *\*Es ist nicht alles Gold, was leuchtet*. A német közmondás helyesen így hangzik: *Es ist nicht alles Gold, was glänzt*. [vö. *Nem mind arany, ami fénylik.*] A *fénylik* igének tehát a németben két szó is megfelelhet: *leuchten* és *glänzen*.

A *glänzen* ige poliszém. Az első jelentésében ('fénysugarat visszaverni'; vö. DUW 2003: 656) a következő német igék a szinonimái: *blinken, blitzen, flimmern, funkeln, glitzern, leuchten, schimmern, sprühen, strahlen*, (választékos) *flirren*, (költői) *gleißen* (vö. Duden 2004: 443). A magyar ekvivalensek: *fénylik, ragyog, csillog* stb. A másik jelentésében ('csodálatot kelteni'; vö. DUW 2003 uo.) a rokon értelmű szavak és kifejezések: *sich abheben, auffallen, sich auszeichnen, beeindrucken, brillieren, Eindruck machen, herausragen, hervorragen, hervorstechen, sich hervortun, imponieren, prunken* stb. (vö. Duden 2004: 443). A magyarban ebben a jelentésben a következőket használhatjuk: *kitűnni, kiemelkedni*.

A *glänzen* igét az elsőként megadott jelentésében ezekkel a szavakkal köthetjük össze: *das Gold* (mint a közmondásban is), *Metalle* (pl. a napsugaraktól), *das Wasser* (pl. *der See glänzt im Mondschein*), *die Augen* (pl. *ihre Augen glänzen feucht, seine Augen waren glänzend schwarz*), *der Boden* (pl. *der Boden glänzt vor Sauberkeit*), *die Sterne*. Átvitt értelemben: *Freude glänzt in ihren Augen, er glänzt vor Freude* (vö. m. *ragyog az örömtől*). Ennek megfelelően a *glänzend* melléknév jelentése 'kiváló, kitűnő, remek, nagyszerű, pompás', azaz átvitt értelemben 'ragyogó' (pl. *ein glänzender Einfall* [m. *ragyogó ötlet*], *sie kommen glänzend miteinander aus* [m. *ragyogóan kijönnek egymással*], *es geht ihr glänzend* [m. *ragyogóan van*]) (vö. DUW 2003 uo.). Az utolsó példa szinonimájaként ezt is mondhatjuk: *es geht ihr blendend* (vö. DUW 2003: 298). A *blendend* konkrét jelentésében 'vakító, kápráztató' (pl. *blendende Sonne = vakító nap(fény)*), átvitt jelentése pedig az előbbi szöveggörnyezetben: 'káprázatos'.

## 8. Közmondások kontrasztívan

A frazeodidaktikai tézisek 5. pontja az interlingvális összehasonlításokra vonatkozik (Lüger 2004: 143-147). Azzal teljes mértékben egyet kell érteni, hogy a kontrasztív megközelítés sok haszonnal jár. A fenti tézis második alpontja szerint az összevetéseknek lehetőség szerint szöveggörnyezetben kell történniük (Lüger 2004: 147). Úgy vélem azonban, hogy ennek nem feltétlenül kell így történnie: haladó

nyelvtanulóknál, különösen leendő nyelvtanároknál – a kontrasztív nyelvészeti kurzuson – az összevetés az ekvivalenciátípusok vizsgálatával, szövegösszefüggések nélkül is elvégezhető (vö. Drahota-Szabó 2021a: 45-134). Első lépésben tisztázandó a tertium comparationis, azaz az összevetési alap: a hallgatókkal a frazeologizmusokat szemantikai, formai és stiláris szempontból hasonlítjuk össze.

A messzemenő ekvivalensek tudatosításával erősíthető a pozitív transzfer, pl.: *Aki másnak vermet ás, maga esik bele.* – *Wer andern eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein.* (A közös bibliai háttérnek köszönhetően vö. még az angolban: *If you dig a pit for someone else, you fall into it yourself.*; az oroszban: *He роў/копай другому яму, сам в неё попадёшь.*)

A részleges ekvivalensek közötti apró eltérések tudatosításával kiküszöbölhetők az interferenciális hibák. Az említett 1998-as felmérésben részt vett összesen 200 hallgató közül csak 57-en egészítették ki helyesen a következő közmondást: *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.* 117-en ezt írták, valamint a 2022-es felmérésben mindegyik hallgató: *\*Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Baum/von seinem Baum.* Ez egyértelműen a magyar közmondás tükörfordítása: *Az alma nem esik messze a fájától.* A részleges ekvivalensek esetében tehát azt tapasztaljuk, hogy a hallgatók tükörfordítással ültetik át németre a magyar közmondásokat.

A funkcionális ekvivalenseknek egyezik ugyan a frazeológiai jelentésük, de a képi háttér eltér, pl.:

*Jeder Topfindet seinen Deckel.* ('mindenki megtalálja a hozzá illő házastársát'); *Jeder Hans findet seine Grete.* ('minden férfi megtalálja a hozzá illő feleséget') – *Megtalálja/megleli zsák a foltját.*

*Alte Mäuse fressen auch gern frischen Speck.* – *A vén kecske is megnyalja a sót.*

*Die Katze / der Kater lässt das Mäusen nicht.* – *Kutyából nem lesz szalonna.*

A kontrasztív szemléletet kiterjeszthetjük más nyelvekre is, hiszen a hallgatóink többsége angolul is tanul. Az utolsóként megadott közmondás interlingvális szinonimái: *You cannot/can't make a silk pur-*



*se out of a sow's ear.; You cannot turn chalk into cheese.; Once a rustic always a rustic.*

## 9. Összegzés és kitekintés

Összegzésként megállapítható, hogy a közmondásoknak mind az idegen nyelvi kompetencia fejlesztésében (szókincs, grammatika), mind a kultúrtörténeti ismeretek közvetítésében fontos szerepe van. Ha azonban ezeken felül további választ akarunk kapni a címben feltett kérdésre (Quo vadis, közmondás?), akkor még egy területet meg kell említeni, amely ösztársadalmi relevanciával is bír. Társadalmainkban ugyanis egyre nő az idősek aránya, a demencia népbetegségnek számít. A demencia különböző fajtáival küzdő idős emberek általános problémája, hogy beszédük lelassul, gyakran nem találják a szavakat, ami az agyban és a beszélőszervekben bekövetkezett változások következménye. Olyan nyelvterápiára van tehát szükségük, amelyben az emlékezetükből reprodukálható, kész nyelvi miniszövegeket tudnak aktiválni. Ezek a miniszövegek a közmondások, amelyeket a demenciás időskorúak terápiájában is eredményesen használnak (vö. Drahotová-Szabó 2021b). Az anyanyelvi közmondásokat ugyanis gyermekkorban sajátítjuk el, így azokat mélyen elraktározzuk a mentális lexikonunkban, ugyanakkor – ismertségük folytán – könnyen előhívhatók. Így köthető össze a szövegértés, a recepció, valamint a nyelvi megnyilatkozások produkciója éppen azért, hogy a közmondások reprodukálható nyelvi egységek. A közmondásokon alapuló nyelvi játékok a demenciás időskorúaknak sikerélményt nyújtanak, tehát a nyelvi és a szintén rendkívül fontos mentális terápia sikeresen párosítható. A közmondásokkal való játék aktiválhatja a különböző hálóösszefüggéseket az agyban: a fonetikai hálót, ill. jellemzően a szemantikai hálót (ide tartoznak a szinonimák, az antonimák, a kohiponimák, a hiponimák, a hiperonimák) (vö. az általam összeállított, antiproverbiumokon alapuló játékos feladatokat is: <http://alzheimer-aktiv.de/sprichwoerter-raten>). Az interneten felkelhető, demenciás emberek nyelvterápiáját célzó feladatok, gyakorlatok között és az idegennyelv-oktatásban, valamint az anyanyelvok-

tatásban ismert feladattípusok között nagyon sok a hasonlóság, azaz – meggyőződésem és tapasztalatom szerint – a két terület egymástól sok hasznos impulzust kaphat.

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KEVIN J. MCKENNA

## REFLECTIONS ON INCORPORATING RUSSIAN PROVERBS INTO THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

**Abstract:** In my contribution to this Festschrift for Anna Litovkina, I propose to discuss the various ways over the years that I have incorporated Russian proverbs in the classroom and the benefits that my students have derived from this practice. I will begin my paper with a review of the most helpful proverb collections available for purchase by students and then transition to the various ways that I have engaged them pedagogically with these proverb texts. I will make a transition then to how proverbs can be used to introduce and practice a variety of grammar/syntax constructions for Beginning/Intermediate-level students which can be so important to developing a sound foundation for appreciation of this intricate language. To introduce American students to the rich and varied depths of Russian wit, wisdom, and humor, I will discuss those proverbs most appropriate for these purposes. Finally, I will describe the various ways in which I encourage students to pursue verbal mastery of the Russian language on the basis of weekly dialog presentations designed to enrich their cultural appreciation as well as linguistic skills.

**Keywords:** Russian proverbs, methodology

As co-editor Valery Mokienko observes in the Preface to his *Большой словарь русских пословиц* (Moscow, 2010), Russian proverbs enjoy widespread popularity and use for a wide range of purposes. As a Professor of Russian language/literature at the University of Vermont for nearly forty years, I have found them invaluable in a variety of ways in my Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced levels of Russian language and culture classes. In my contribution to this *Festschrift* for Anna Litovkina, I will discuss the various ways that I have incorporated Russian proverbs in the classroom over the years and the benefits that my students have derived from this practice. I will begin

my paper with a review of what I consider the most helpful proverb collections available for purchase by students and then transition to the various ways that I have engaged them pedagogically with these proverb texts. I will make a transition then to how proverbs can be used to introduce and practice a variety of grammar/syntax constructions for Beginning/Intermediate-level and Advanced-level students which can be so important to developing a sound foundation for appreciation of this intricate language. To introduce American students to the rich and varied depths of Russian wit, wisdom, and humor, I will discuss those proverbs most appropriate for these purposes. Finally, I will describe the various ways in which I encourage students to pursue verbal mastery of the Russian language on the basis of weekly dialog presentations designed to enrich their cultural appreciation as well as linguistic skills.

Now into my fourth year of retirement from the German/Russian Department at the University of Vermont, I am pleased to contribute this essay to Anna T. Litovkina's *festschrift* in honor of her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. After all, her textbook, *A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away*<sup>1</sup> has played a significant role in my own use of teaching Russian proverbs and proverbial expressions to American students for more than the last 30 years.

As co-editor Valery Mokienko observes in the Preface to his *Большой словарь русских пословиц*,<sup>2</sup> Russian proverbs enjoy widespread popularity and use for a wide range of purposes. I have found them invaluable in a variety of ways in my Introductory, Intermediate and Advanced levels of Russian language classes for nearly forty years. Prior to commenting on the various ways they have proved helpful in the Russian language curriculum, let me note the various proverb textbooks and collections that have been available to Russian language instructors and students.

For example, one of the most helpful proverb collections I have used for nearly the past thirty years in a broad range of Russian lan-

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<sup>1</sup> Pécs-Szkszárd: *IPF-Könyvek*, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Moskva: ОЛМА Медия Групп, 2010.

guage classrooms is M. Dubrovin's dual language *Английские и русские пословицы и поговорки/A Book of English and Russian Proverbs and Sayings*.<sup>3</sup> Numbering close to 300 English and Russian language proverbs, this cleverly illustrated collection is accompanied by humorous illustrations intended to clarify the literal and situational use of frequently used English-language proverbs and their Russian language equivalents. The book is designed for secondary and college-level students of the Russian language and holds great appeal for university students seeking to improve their comfort level with the Russian language and its people's culture. Similarly helpful for these purposes is S. Kuskovskaya's *English Proverbs and Sayings*.<sup>4</sup> This collection attempts to group various English proverbs or sayings according to their Russian-language equivalents. Organized around situational ideas and topics similar to both English-language and Russian everyday themes, this helpful book numbers more than 1000 proverbs and proverbial expressions. My experience in incorporating these cleverly designed books into our Russian curriculum has been that students benefit from the visual drawings and well-conceived situational content explanations of both familiar English-language equivalents as well as purely Russian proverbs that increase their insight into Russian everyday life and culture.

While not inclusive of the helpful cartoon drawings of the above-noted collections, S. S. Kuzmin's and N. L. Shadrin's *Русско-английский словарь пословиц и поговорок/Russian-English Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings* provides an equally useful range of other information for its readers.<sup>5</sup> For example, while certain proverbs of Russian oral speech are included, greater attention is paid to those proverbs and sayings that originated in 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian literature. The structure of each proverb entry contains a broad range

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<sup>3</sup> Moskva: *Prosveshchenie*, 1995. Unfortunately, while this and other proverb textbooks have been published in new, updated editions, I have been unable to identify more recent proverb publications.

<sup>4</sup> Minsk: *Vysheishaya Shkola Publishers*, 1987.

<sup>5</sup> Minsk: *Вышэйшая школа*, 1987.

of helpful information: for example, following reference to the English-language equivalent each proverb entry also includes Russian-English language quotations from fictional and publicistic literature to highlight situational use and meaning.

Clearly, Anna Litovkina's *A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away* is designed for Hungarian students of the English language but its clever organization and creative exercises have proved helpful and inspiring to me in familiarizing my American students with Russian proverbs and proverbial expressions. The book contains 47 units arranged into four chapters. The initial chapter largely introduces Latin-based proverbs as well as those originating from the Bible. Chapter Two is organized into fifteen topics by different internal and external features, structures, rhyme and alliteration, word repetition, etc. Chapter Three devotes attention to words most frequently used in the American proverbs. The final chapter treats a variety of topical proverbs such as money, love, knowledge and wisdom, children and parents, words and deeds, etc.

Having reference to these and other proverb collections has, of course, been immensely helpful in introducing my American students to Russian proverbs, but finding ways to explain their meaning, use, and understanding has proved a constant challenge. Inculcation of their direct or metaphoric meaning and use has proved far more challenging with college-age students. For example, merely knowing the translation-equivalents of Russian-to-English or English-to-Russian proverbs does not ensure understanding of their wide range of linguo-cultural meaning. Similarly taxing was the issue of when and how to introduce Russian proverbs into the classroom: at the introductory or intermediate or advanced levels of instruction?

#### Introductory level of Russian:

For understandable reasons I seldom introduced Russian proverbs or proverbial expressions in the first semester of a first-year language course when more attention was directed to issues such as the Russian alphabet, proper pronunciation, verb-conjugation, noun-adjec-



tive declension, etc. An occasional exception to this rule presented itself when the English and Russian language equivalents were virtual word-for-word translations like *Time is money/Время—деньги* or *All is well that ends well/Всё хорошо, что хорошо кончается*. Gradually, in the second semester, however, I found that students enjoyed increasingly frequent exposure to Russian proverb equivalents with familiar English-language proverbs, for example *An apple does not fall far from the tree/Яблоко (Яблочко) от яблони (яблоньки) недалеко падает*; *All that glitters is not gold/Не всё то золото, что блестит*. I found that students very much enjoyed the witty equivalents of English/ American proverb equivalents with which they were already familiar and were intrigued by the pronunciation and other familiar structural features that aided in their mastery of the Russian equivalent proverb. Not too surprisingly, these students often were not as familiar as one might expect with many popular American proverbs, but did enjoy giving thought and consideration to their metaphoric application in a wide variety of situational settings. For example, increasingly fewer American college age students today remain familiar with the adage *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread/Дуракам закон не писан* (literal trans.: *There is no written law for fools*), but discussion of its situational application and meaning proved insightful and enjoyable for them. Not at all surprisingly most students found themselves enjoying the meaning and apposite use of the American proverbs as they did of their Russian equivalents. For example, the familiar *First come, first served* in English gained new appreciation when compared with its Russian version, *Первому гостю первое место и красная ложка* (trans.: *The first visitor gets the first place and pretty spoon*). Similarly, the less familiar British proverb *Fine words butter no parsnips* initially strikes today's American students as dated and having little to no application, but its Russian equivalent *Соловья баснями не кормят* (trans.: *One does not feed a nightingale with fables*) strikes them as having a more charming and clever application. Similar examples with readily available cognate features include *Score twice before you cut once/Семь раз отмерь, один раз отрежь*; *Birds of a feather flock together/Рыбак рыбака видит издалека* (trans.: *One fisherman sees another from afar*); *Make hay while*

*the sun shines/Коси коса, пока роса (trans.: Mow [grass, corn, etc.] while there is still dew)..*

### Intermediate and Advanced levels of Russian:

For intermediate-level and more advanced third- and fourth-year language students, I found that introducing Russian proverbs in the context of lexicological word-roots facilitated both their appreciation for the colorful wisdom of proverbs as well as increased their overall vocabulary and mastery in the Russian language and culture. The Intermediate-level students seemed to perform best with familiar, often-used proverbs like *A friend in need is a friend indeed/Друзья по-ЗН-аются в БЕД-е (trans.: friends become known when there is trouble); All's well that ends well/Всё хорошо, что хорошо КОНЧ-ается; The best is often the enemy of the good/От ДОБР-а добра не ИЩ-ут (trans.: One does not look for good from good); Birds of a feather flock together/ РЫБ-ак рыбака ВИД-ит из-ДАЛ-ека*

Initially, I found it helpful to begin with familiar English language proverbs like: *All roads lead to Rome/Все дороги ВЕД-ут в Рим.* The familiar, underlying idea of this popular international proverb made it simple for students to comprehend the range of its popular application. Similarly, the Russian equivalent of *It never rains but it pours/При-Ш-ла БЕДа—от-ВОР-яй ВОР-ота (trans.: When misfortune has come, open the gates)* introduces yet another prefixed verb of motion, which yields so many apposite possibilities in the Russian language for Intermediate- and Advanced-level students of Russian. Another familiar proverb in the English language *More haste, less speed/Тутше ЕД-ешь, ДАЛЬ-ше будешь (trans.: The slower you ride, the farther you will go)* enjoys the same popularity and use for these students. In addition, the ВОД-ВЕД- word root proved equally instructive for purposes of introducing the complex system of motion verbs in the Russian language as well as for familiarizing students with the many layers of meaning for this comprehensive word-root in Russian. Other motion verb examples providing proverbial wisdom include: *The appetite comes with eating/Аппетит при-ХОД-ит во время еды; Don't*

carry coals to Newcastle/В Тулу со своим самоваром не ЕЗД-ят (trans.: One does not go to Tula with one's own samovar); Don't cross a bridge before you come to it/При-ИД-ёт время, прорастёт семя (trans.: There will come a time when the seed will sprout); A closed mouth catches no flies/В закрытый рот и муха не в-ЛЕТ-ит (trans.: A fly will not enter into a closed mouth); Do not wash your dirty linen in public/Не вы-НОС-и сор из избы (trans.: Do not carry rubbish out of your hut); When in Rome, do as the Romans do/В чужой монастырь со своим уставом не ХОД-ят (trans.: One does not enter another monastery with one's own set of rules); A word spoken is past recalling/ Слово не воробей, вы-ЛЕТ-ит— не поймашь (trans.: A word is not a sparrow—if it flies out of the mouth you will not catch it); Men may meet, but mountains never greet/Гора с горой не с-ХОД-ятся, а человек с человеком всегда со-ИД-ётся (trans.: A mountain never meets a mountain, but a man will meet a man); Four eyes see more than two/Ум хорошо, а два лучше (trans.: One wit is good, but two are better); Better late than never/ЛУЧШ-е ПОЗД-но, чем никогда; Two heads are better than one/Одна голова хорошо, а две лучше.

In addition to practice with verbs of motion, inculcation of Russian proverbs into the language classroom can prove advantageous for introducing language students to Russian noun-case governance. Often at issue here is overcoming students' anticipation that familiar English language proverbs will be rendered by familiar literal or structural equivalents in the target Russian language. For example, the Russian version of *If at first you do not succeed, try, try again* acquires an entirely different structure when rendered in the Russian language equivalent expressed in the Instrumental case form of, *Первый блин ком-ОМ* (trans.: *The first pancake always comes out as a ball*). Another Instrumental case equivalent in Russian presents itself in the aforementioned familiar English language version of *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*/В чужой монастырь со сво-ИМ устав-ОМ не ходят; or *If you run after two hares/rabbits, you'll catch none*/За двумя зайцами погонишься, не одного не поймашь. Helpful examples of Dative case proverb constructions include: *Don't look a gift horse in the mouth*/Дарён-ОМУ кон-Ю в зубы не смотрят or *No man can serve*

*two masters/Дв-УМ господ-АМ не служат.* Useful proverb examples formed around the Genitive case in Russian are easily found, for example: *Don't make a mountain out of a molehill/Не делай из мух-И слон-А* (trans.: *Do not make an elephant out of fly*) or *Those who live in glass houses should not throw stones/Коли хочешь себе добр-А, никому не делай зл-А* (trans.: *If you want good for yourself, do harm to no one*). For American students one of the most challenging grammatical cases relates to the aforementioned Genitive case, but fortunately countless numbers of Genitive-case proverb examples exist in the Russian language, for example: *Two dogs over one bone seldom agree/Два медвед-Я в одной берлоге не уживутся* (trans.: *Two bears will not get along in one den*) or *Too many cooks spoil the broth/У сем-И нянек дитя без глазу* (trans.: *When there are seven baby-sitters, the baby loses its eye*). Another telling example of Russian Genitive-case proverb examples relates to the intricate structure of numbers governance in the language, for example: *An apple a day keeps the doctor away* not only reflects the total dissimilarity from its Anglo-American structure but provides a good example of Genitive-case forms for numbers greater than four: *Лук семь недуг-ОВ лечит* (trans.: *An onion treats seven ailments*).

While American classrooms of late unfortunately devote less and less attention to some of the grammar challenges of the Russian language (for example, verbal aspect, verbal adjectives and verbal adverbs, short form adjectives, etc.), in many instances introduction to Russian proverbs can prove enlightening in simplifying these grammar issues. For example, the predicative function of short-form adjectives in the language can be helpful and instructive: *Forbidden fruit is sweetest/Запретный плод слад-ОК* or *It's a small world/Мир тесен* (trans.: *The world is crowded*) or *All cats are gray in the dark/Ночью все кошки сер-Ы.* When seeking to express the benefits of reciprocal kindness, one might turn to the Russian equivalent of *One good turn deserves another/Долг платежом крас-ЕИ* (trans.: *The beauty of a debt is in its payment*). As seen in this and many other examples, students benefit greatly in realizing that the new Russian proverbs

they are learning are not mere word-for-word translations from the Anglo-American versions with which they are familiar but reflect new and original ways of expressing views and ideas.

Proper location of stressed syllables in Russian often presents a challenge to non-native speakers of the language. Over the years I certainly found this to be the case with my American students. Once again, a helpful tool for this task was found in many briefly-worded Russian-language proverbs, for example, *A cock is bold on his own dunghill*/Всяк кулик на своём болоте велик (trans.: *Every sandpiper praises its own swamp*); *All in good time*/Всякое семя знает своё время (trans.: *Every seed knows its time*); *The best is often the enemy of the good*/От добра добра не ищут (trans.: *One does not look for good from good*).

Somewhat similar to the problematic task for students of properly placed stressed syllables in the Russian language is the issue of imperative, command forms. Here again instructors can incorporate Russian-language proverbs, which prove quite helpful for this task. For example, the familiar Anglo-American language proverb *Live and learn* makes the learning task of command forms in Russian that much more accessible for students in the equivalent *Век живи, век учись* (trans.: *Live a century, learn a century*). Similarly the universally popular proverb *Live and let others live* enjoys widespread enjoyment for American students in the Russian equivalent *Живи и жить давай другим*, or *Hold your breath to cool your porridge*/Ешь пирог с грибами, а язык держи за губами (trans.: *Eat a mushroom pie and hold your tongue behind your teeth*).

Similar to the above examples, exposure to Russian-language proverbs can prove helpful as well for introduction and practice with the comparative degree of Russian adjectives. For example, *A man can do only so much*/ВЫШЕ головы не прыгнешь (trans.: *A man cannot jump higher than his head*) or *East or west, home is best*/В гостях хорошо, а дома ЛУЧШЕ (trans.: *It is good to be visiting, but it is better at home*). Other popular examples of Russian proverbs with students built around the comparative degree of adjectives include: *Half a loaf is BETTER than no bread at all*/ЛУЧШЕ синица в руках, чем журавль в

*небе* [trans.: *Better a titmouse in the hands than a crane in the sky*], or BETTER *late than never/ЛУЧШЕ поздно, чем никогда.*

While the thematic categories of Russian proverbs were incorporated into various intermediate- and advanced-levels of language courses, a constant challenge became in what manner to practice their day-to-day use and mastery in the classroom. Whether for a second-year language class or a more advanced course on Russian lexicology or paremiology, I found that a weekly student-paired dialog format proved most beneficial for their attempting to master application for everyday activities and discussions. For example, in a dialog built around the topic of failing to pass a math exam one of the two students might conclude with the proverbial wisdom *As you sow, so shall you reap/Что посеешь, то и пожнёшь*. In discussing the advantages of arriving late to a class rather than missing it altogether, another pair of students built their dialog around the widely popular proverbial advice *Better late than never/Лучше поздно, чем никогда*. Dialogs focusing on the failed efforts of college sporting teams similarly concluded with the proverbial observation that *A chain is no stronger than its weakest link/Где тонко, там и рвётся*. In another dialog about fellow students who tend to brag excessively about their own limited and questionable accomplishments, agreement was confirmed by the proverb *A cock is bold on his own dunghill/Всяк кулик на своём болоте велик*. In agreeing not to discuss their mistakes or petty grievances in public, a dialog duo of students recalled the Russian proverb *Do not wash your dirty linen in public/Не выноси сор из избы*.

In conclusion, I cannot over-emphasize how pleased my students have been over the years with their classroom introduction to the wit and beauty of Russian proverbs. While over-emphasis on grammar or syntax in the Russian language can become tedious for students and instructors alike, the fresh inclusion of proverbial wit and wisdom provides them with new and pleasurable insights into the people's life and culture.



**Proverbs in  
interaction with  
other genres**





CARL LINDAHL

## DOES WISHING STILL HELP? PROVERBIAL TACTICS FOR BLURRING THE LINES BETWEEN TRUTH AND ILLUSION IN FAIRY TALES

**Abstract:** A major narrative strategy for talented *märchen* tellers is to assert the truth of impossible events by manipulating their tales' opening and closing formulas. Such alterations mirror the strategies for converting proverbs to anti-proverbs. In this process, skilled narrators often blur the boundaries between reality and fantasy, affecting the listeners' reception of the tale. This essay examines how narrators Joshua Alley (Euro-American, Maine), Alfred Anderson (Black American, Louisiana), Freeman Bennett (Canadian, Newfoundland), Zsuzsanna Palkó (Székely Hungarian), and Dorothea Viehmann (German, Hesse), among others, applied the "twisted wisdom" of anti-proverbs to surprise and engage their listeners and guide the moral and practical messages they wished their tales to convey.

**Keywords:** Anti-proverb, Anti-Märchen, Feghoot, Märchen/Fairy Tale, Narrative Strategies, Opening and Closing Folktale Formulas

Innumerable sayings approach traditional narrative by asserting the impossibility of "true" events, or the truth of events that cannot be verified. Presumably, no one believes in the truth of fairy tales, yet many proverbs assert that they "can come true". Tall tales assert the truths of various impossibilities and ultimately emerge as jokes on those who believe them. Aware that their stories often stretch past the boundaries of belief, narrators of fairy tales and related genres rely heavily on proverbial expressions that support, contest, or problematize the truth claims of their stories. Here I examine some of the ways that verbal artists deploy and alter proverbial expressions to marshal the power of a few unforgettable words to capture the folly, or the importance, of accepting the truth of the impossible.

We tend to use proverbs and proverbial expressions to make our world cohere: an adept proverb speaker masters the "social use of

metaphor” Seitel (1976): naming situations (Abrahams 1972: 121), converting the wisdom of many into the wit of one, rendering unique occurrences understandable by placing them in conformation with a community’s common knowledge. But the stabilizing, clarifying proverb possesses a playfully disruptive twin: the anti-proverb, which often employs “twisted wisdom” (Mieder and Litovkina 1999) to upend and parody proverbs and their messages.<sup>1</sup> Skillful narrators often introduce and conclude their tales by inflecting the proverbial nature of opening and closing formulas to create anti-proverbial parodies that fine tune or thwart listeners’ perceptions of what is false and what is true within the tale.

Seasoned storytellers understand tales as sites where reality and fantasy interpenetrate, creating a product that both reflects the everyday world and simultaneously embeds the imaginative power to transcend that world. One great narrator, Joshua Alley of coastal Maine, habitually told tales that tested his listeners’ sense of reality. Audience members repeatedly asked Alley if the events recounted in his tales had really taken place. His answer: “I don’t believe there ever was a story all true”. Yet a good story needed to possess—

... truth enough in it to make it hold together, see? ... If you are mixing up something, why, you can put stuff into that that you are mixing, something to make it stick together and hold together. It ain’t all the same kind of stuff. And that’s the way of my story. (Lindahl 2004: 222)

For Alley, the integrity of the story is the imperative. To make a “true” story he always had to introduce material that was not factually true. Alley recorded these reflections, along with numerous stories, at age 91, in 1934. His narratives ran a range from romantic, *märchenesque*

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<sup>1</sup> For more than two decades, in dozens of publications, Anna T Litovkina has compiled a rich, remarkable body of scholarship documenting anti-proverbs and exploring their uses. Professor Litovkina’s work has spurred me to consider the proverbial and anti-proverbial expressions that surround and inhabit traditional narrative.

fiction, to accounts of eighteenth-century settlers of his region, to legends and personal narratives of sightings of spectral ships. Across this wide generic range, his narrative style remained consistent. No matter what the topic, he spoke in a low-key tone of sincere persuasiveness, and his narratives, wonderfully coherent, did indeed “stick together”. His stories generally grew out of conversation with simple, casual framing statements that scarcely hinted at the transition from chat to story and back. He began his most elaborate fiction with the simple statement, “There was a widow woman and she had two daughters and a son”, a beginning as plain as his personal account of an eerie experience: “There was a cove on the island where we lived” (Lindahl 2004: 223, 248). In certain cases, he punctuates the ending with a personal statement – simultaneously drawing listeners out of the story and underlining aspects of its importance to him.

Other narrators either cannot or choose not to manage the transition from the everyday to the fantastic as easily and seamlessly as Joshua Alley did. They rely on the fairy tale’s formulaic frame as a verbal stage curtain—to mark the enclosed story as a fiction utterly divorced from daily reality: we are about to enter a fantasy world that exists far beyond the realm of the possible. Inside the frame unfolds a story in which goodness is rewarded, evil punished and justice fully served. In English-speaking tradition, “Once upon a time” has gained proverbial recognition worldwide as the phrase that opens the door to the magic world, and “happily ever after” is the almost equally famous phrase that shuts the magic door and delivers us back to our daily lives. These two expressions not only mark the beginning and ending of a story, but also the entry into, and return from, a faraway world.

Some performers, on some occasions, strive to manipulate the magic promise of “Once upon a time” into a joke on the audience: effectively, an anti-*märchen*. Narrators set on playfully undermining the perfect world that fairy tales promise often begin with “Once upon a time” to prepare their listeners for a rich and emotionally satisfying fantasy; and they stretch out the fantasy long enough to build their audience’s anticipation of a happy-ever-after, only to close

with an anti-proverb that converts *märchen* convention into a joke. The *feghoot* (which might be considered a cross between a tall tale and a shaggy dog story) ends with a punning expression that undermines both the plot of the story and the message of the proverb. As with a shaggy dog story, the longer the tale, the greater the narrator's triumph over the listeners, and the greater their disappointment upon discovering that they had been robbed of a satisfying story and subjected to a joke (Ritchie 2002: 120-121). The following example is abbreviated here to half its original length:

There once was a King of a tribe in Africa. He lived in a huge, round house made of grass.... By day he sat on the stump of a tree... covered with animal skins. Everyone else sat on the floor... No one sat on anything which raised them higher than the King.

One day, an English explorer chanced upon the village. The explorer was carried aloft by a group of bearers. He sat on a small bentwood chair, which sat upon a light platform which the bearers carried on poles on their shoulders.

[When the explorer realized that he was offending the king by sitting on a chair higher than the king's, he told the king that] he had merely been demonstrating a gift that he had brought for the King, namely the bentwood chair.

The King was excited, and graciously accepted the gift....

The explorer went on his way. When he arrived home he told of his gift to the African King. And so it was, that over the years, many explorers came to visit the King, and all bore a gift .... a chair of some description. Some brought elaborately carved ones. Some brought painted chairs, some brought chairs fit for a king, some would say they were like thrones! .... And the grass hut ... filled with thrones, ...side by side across the whole floor,... hung by hooks on the walls, and... up in the ceiling, and .... placed up on the rafters in the roof.

The King became an old man. One day he was sitting on his throne, contemplating all his other thrones which surrounded him – around him, above him, and under him. He looked too at the tired

old grass walls of his hut, and mused on how old his grass hut was, and how well it had stood up to the ravages of time, and wind, and fire and rain and termites. But, it hadn't. At that moment, under the weight of all the thrones in the ceiling and on the walls, the ... hut collapsed into a great big heap in the dust.

The moral of the story: People in grass houses shouldn't stow thrones. ("Ronnie" 2019)

The closing anti-proverb converts the original metaphor into an absurdly literal statement just after the narrator has brought the story to a crashing halt.

Traditional tales don't need to transform into feghoots to become anti-*märchen*. One of the easiest ways of draining magic from a fairy tale is to cut off the closing formula altogether and replace it with a punchline that calls attention to the impossibility of the underlying magical premise. In "The Toadfrog", an Ozark parody of the Grimms' "Frog King" tale, a lecherous amphibian gets the attention of a pretty girl by calling out, "Hi, Toots!" and telling her,

"I'm a handsome young man, by rights. But I'm turned into a toadfrog now, because an old witch put a spell on me".

The pretty girl studied a while, and then she says, "Ain't there anything you can do to break the spell?"

The toadfrog says there is only one way, and that is for a pretty girl to let him sleep on her pillow all night. The pretty girl thought that was the least she could do....

Next morning the pretty girl's father came to wake her up, and he saw a handsome young man in the bed with her. She told her father about the little old toadfrog, and the witch that put a spell on him, and how it all happened. But that old man didn't believe the story, any more than you do! (Randolph 1955: 91-92)

Here the storyteller turns the story over to the audience and their everyday experience to judge and ultimately to mock the unreality of its fairy tale logic.

Narrators who want to keep the *märchen* intact tend to begin by putting themselves, rather than their auditors, into the story. The manipulation of opening and closing formulas grows more subtle and complex when the narrator wants the story, no matter how unbelievable on the surface level, to convey a special kind of truth: a moral, a message, an admonition, a hope.

A skilled fairy tale teller generally draws on playful techniques that simultaneously stress both the impossibility *and* the personalized truth of the story. In many European and American traditions, the most common way of representing the tale as both impossible and true is to pretend to have been personally present when the fictional events unfolded. Tellers insert themselves into the beginning or (more often) the end of tale, or both. To further bewilder their listeners, narrators will apply two strategies often used in altering proverbs. In tall tale narration, the teller will draw out a proverbial expression to create an intensifying and comic effect: for example, “slow as molasses” will be transformed into “slow as molasses in January running uphill... backward” (Abrahams 1972: 124). Also, narrators can create comic effects by drawing upon what Mieder and Litovkina (1999: 1) characterize as “a long tradition of parodies of individual proverbs by adding contradictory comments to them”.

Note how master Newfoundland narrator Freeman Bennett opens “Jack and the Three Giants”, insisting that he was present centuries ago when the tale’s action unfolded; he employs both intensifying repetition and climactic contradiction to smudge the boundaries of truth and illusion:

Well once upon a time, in olden times ya know, ... perhaps five or six hundred year ago. ...I can only just mind [remember] that anyhow! I wasn’t very ol’, not five or six hundred year ago! But anyhow I can mind a little bit about it. ... there was a family living here.

(Widdowson 2002, 15; cf. Halpert and Widdowson 1996, 66)

Freeman Bennett confronts his audience with a bald impossibility. Yet throughout the long narration that follows, he tries mightily to make us *feel* the story as true. He might claim a certain truth in saying that he was there, because it is his wordplay that has created the imaginative world we inhabited as he spoke, and if we became engaged enough to half-feel that we have actually *been* there, if we half-believe that anyone has ever been there, he is the most likely suspect. In presenting himself as an emissary from his own creation, is he really lying?

Alfred Anderson, a Black narrator from south Louisiana, did not use such elaborate and poetic deceptions to introduce his fantasy narratives. He would typically drop the opening formula and set the story in a familiar world indistinguishable from that of the storytelling environment. His version of the international animal tale of “The Wolf and the Kids” (ATU 123) opens in a landscape that features the same bayous and swamps that surrounded his home near Bayou Lafourche outside of Donaldsonville.

So — they had a lady. She used to work. And she had three daughters. So ... she said, “I’m going to work.... I want you all to stay upstairs until I come back”. Because they had a big alligator—right outside the house, they had a big pond down there. Big alligator stayed there. So the mom and the daddy was working. And she told her three daughters, “I want you to go upstairs. And you stay up there till I *call* for you. And this is the way I’m going to call: *Ma-ma-li-to, dee-dunk, dee-dunk, dee-tum*”. (Lindahl et al. 1997: 124)

To this point in the narration, the events could easily have unfolded in the Andersons’ neighborhood, because there were indeed alligators inhabiting nearby ponds and marshes . Only at the point in the story where the alligator attempts to imitate the mother’s chant—“*Ma-ma-li-to, dee-dunk, dee-dunk, dee-tum*”—in an effort to gain access to the house and eat the children, do we find ourselves in fantasy world. After many unsuccessful attempts, the alligator manages to

imitate to the mother's voice well enough to fool the youngest daughter, who runs out the door and into its jaws despite the efforts of her two older sisters to hold her back. The mother arrives home to learn that the gator has eaten her baby. She is wailing in grief when the father returns, kills the alligator, cuts open its stomach and pulls his child out, safe and sound (Lindahl et al. 1997: 124).

This animal tale has now reached a satisfying end point; and it is time to add the closing formula, very common among Black narrators in the American South. Anderson adapts a rhymed nonsense formula that typically goes as follows:

I stepped on a wire [pin, tin] and the wire bent  
And that's the way the story went

Ordinarily, narrators will deliver this rhyme and bring down the curtain without asserting the reality of the tale (cf. Burrison 1991: 230; Dorson 1956: 39, 42, 53; Hurston 1978: 132). But every time Alfred Anderson said, "I stepped on a wire", he deliberately reinserted himself back into the tale and brought out a piece of the story for the audience to take with them (Lindahl et al. 1997: 126, 129, 132). In performing tales for his daughter, he never finished the rhyme but instead always made a reference to *why* the story was over and why he, the narrator, was leaving. He ended a 1982 performance of "The Girls and the Alligator" for his daughter Debra, with these words—

I stepped on a wire, and the wire bent—  
and I got out of there, girl, because that alligator was terrible.  
(Lindahl et al. 1997: 126)

—uttered in a whispery tone that was memorably frightening for Debra. Debra has told me that as a child, she was confused by her fathers' closing words. The story wasn't supposed to be true, but it felt true when her dad made himself a character in the fiction, so it had to be true in some important way.

By presenting himself as a witness to the alligator's near-fatal attack, Alfred effectively communicated a lesson in survival. The narra-



tor twisted himself and his moral through the frame to draw attention to a clear and present real-world danger. The threat of the alligator was the truest part of this fantasy story. In Alfred Anderson's world, people simply do not have fantasies about things that don't concern them. He made it his job to pull the most important part of the story right out of its formulaic frame. Her father's verbal tricks gave Debra the sense that the story wasn't over. She was a young woman when she shared with me her memories of her father's magic tales, tales that remained magical, mysterious, and meaningful to her well beyond her childhood years (Lindahl 1982, Lindahl et al. 1997: 122-24).

The great Hungarian Székely narrator Zsuzsanna Palkó grew up in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in circumstances of extraordinary isolation in the Bucovina, in a context so remote from the urban life of her time that on her first trip to Budapest at age 74 in 1954, she experienced and described the big, modern city as something equivalent to the magical castles and landscapes in her fairy tales (Dégh 1989: 87-89). Her notions of magic in some ways inverted what contemporary urbanites experienced: a telephone possessed miraculous powers while magical incantations were part of everyday healing practices.

Zsuzsanna Palkó filled her tales with proverbial, formulaic diction. She relied on some *märchen* formulas common in pan-Hungarian tradition, but also upon others that belonged especially and sometimes exclusively to her Székely culture, and some that were her own creations. One of her personal formulas was "steep as the Calvary" to describe the glass mountains and other obstacles that the hero had to scale. In Hungarian Catholic villages, the Calvary is typically the steepest, highest nearby hill, on which sacred shrines are erected for worshippers to visit in acts of faith. This phrase transported a familiar local feature into the magic tale; at least as importantly, the sacred name and its purpose of commemorating the passion and death of Christ, added to the gravity and danger facing the fictional hero striving to scale fairy tale mountains.

In opening and closing her most magical tales, Mrs. Palkó could show either gravity or playfulness, depending on the nature of the

audience and the messages she felt most important to convey. In all of her tales, she endowed her characters vivid and accessible, easily understood human traits and emotions, often exciting listeners to the point that they would break into the narration to applaud or insult a given character (e.g., Dégh 1995: 39-43, 183-93).

One of her most powerful tales, the “Serpent Prince” (Dégh 1995: 77-92), a version of the “Beauty and the Beast” tale (in this case, ATU 425A) in which the monster bridegroom is a snake, was one of her favorites. She emphasized the female protagonist’s devotion to her family and the enormous sacrifices she endured in her quest for reunification with her husband. Palkó’s 1950 performance for an adult village audience depicted the trials of the heroine in intensely emotional and provocative scenes.

Her opening formula is unusually elaborate for Palkó’s narratives – fashioned, I believe, to create the kind of imaginative wall she deemed necessary to cordon off such graphic scenes as the girl’s encounter with the “robustly sexual” snake on their wedding night (Dégh 1995: 77) and the extreme trials she endures trying to win him back. Palkó begins by stressing the remoteness of this magic world. Yet at the end of an escalating catalogue of impossibilities, she jumps back into the tale in a comic way to tease her audience with the admonition to pay close attention:

It happened long ago, beyond the beyond, even beyond the seven seas and beyond the glass mountain. There was a castle hill and below it an enormous willow tree. The willow tree had ninety-nine branches and on the ninety-nine branches sat ninety-nine crows, and if you don’t listen to this story, they will peck your eyes out! (Dégh 1995: 78)

Again, the escalation of one distancing impossibility after another, climaxing in a contradictory phrase “they will peck your eyes out!” that asserts that the fairy tale creatures can leap right out of the frame to punish those who do not listen well. The truth that Mrs. Palkó seeks most to convey in this tale is the scale and toll of the hard-

ships that a Székely woman faces in her adult and married life. So the opening formula, on the one hand, distances the audience from the hard truth, and on the other hand, insists that there is something important coming that the audience must reflect upon

As earlier mentioned, Mrs. Palkó told her tales in a community that recognized magic as an everyday occurrence. Palkó herself was a practitioner of many magico-religious healing treatments and her neighbors often requested that she perform ritual cures for such supernatural afflictions as the evil eye, which the community interpreted as an illness that neighbors inflict unintentionally upon each other (e.g., by admiring them too much). But the village also recognized certain kinds of afflictions brought upon by malicious, diabolical sorcery. Mrs. Palkó refused to try to treat such ailments because of their evil sources; if she dealt with such evil she could become contaminated by that evil; as she put it, “he who has spoiled it can also make up for it” – i.e., if one knows how to *destroy* a devil’s curse, one will also know how to *employ* a devil’s curse – and such knowledge brings one too close to the devil to maintain a healthy soul (Dégh 1989: 129). It is with this background that we must interpret the formulas used by Mrs. Palkó to narrate “The Glass Coffin” (Dégh 1995: 129), a tale that focuses on a lonely young woman who inadvertently invites the devil to be her suitor. Various Hungarian narrators have told this story either as a fairy tale (in which the devil is ultimately exorcised and the young woman lives happily ever after (see Dégh 1965: 46-57); or as a legend, in which the woman and her soul are destroyed by the devil. Mrs. Palkó’s total abhorrence of even the slightest hint of contact with the devil predisposed her toward the tragic ending. Her narration avoids the playful magical excess of “The Serpent Prince”. Rather, “The Glass Coffin” opens with a perfunctory formula and then proceeds immediately to the desperate situation of the unfortunate protagonist.

Once upon a time, in a land faraway, a woman had a daughter, who was very unhappy because no one loved her. She was getting on in years and no one yet courted her. She would go to the

spinning house with the others in the evening, and all the girls would have sweethearts there except her. Well, she was very sad about this and ashamed. (Dégh 1995: 51)

This is no magical world: the spinning house was the site of courtship in her village and the plight of any girl who does not have a suitor was a source of daily concern among Mrs. Palkó's neighbors. As the tale continues the girl's despair attracts the devil's attention and he comes in disguise to court her. She welcomes his advances but eventually, suspicious of his identity, secretly follows him into a cemetery where she sees him in his devil form "chewing on some dead bones" (Dégh 1995: 53). She then seeks help to drive the devil off; the only option is a magical death and rebirth. Finally, fairy tale elements appear: a king is able to resurrect and marry her; they happily raise two children. But the *märchenesque* interlude ends abruptly: the devil finds her and screams her to death in front of her family. Mrs. Palkó's final sentences are remarkable, and completely uncharacteristic of her standard *märchen* closing formulas.

So the king remained alone with his two children, unless he took another wife. And that is all there is to this story. Take it, or if you don't believe it, leave it! (Dégh 1995: 53)

In Mrs. Palkó's belief system, the girl was effectively dead, body and soul, from the first moment that she welcomed the devil's advances. The narrator's merciless closing words render a believer's verdict: there can be no happy ending for someone who has brought the devil into her heart. So Palkó dispenses with the closing formula altogether and replaces it with a warning that suggests that not even in fiction should her listeners let the devil enter their world.

It is hard for me to think of an opening formula more succinctly powerful than what is perhaps the best-known beginning in all of fairy tale literature, that of "The Frog King" in the seventh edition of the Grimm Brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*:

In den alten Zeiten, wo das Wünschen noch geholfen hat, lebte ein König, dessen Töchter waren alle schön (Grimm and Grimm 1857 1, 1)

[*In olden times, when wishing still helped, lived a king whose daughters were all beautiful....*]

This formula promises a timeless and perfect world of magic *within the tale* while also warning us that we will not be able to enter that world – because wishing still helped *back then*, but, by implication, not today. There is something achy about this opening that does seem to conform fully with the contents of the tale that follows. The youngest, most beautiful princess does indeed get everything she wants with minimal sacrifice. She loses her golden ball, but the frog immediately retrieves it in return for her promise to let him eat with her and sleep in her bed. She endures a short day of minimal pain as her king father insists that she keep her promise to the frog. Then, when in disgust she throws the frog against the wall, she receives far more than her actions would seem to merit. The frog transforms into a fabulously handsome and wealthy prince, and he marries her. She has lost a golden ball and withstood a few hours of embarrassment; in return, she has received far more than she bothered to wish for.

It was from the Wild family, a household of close neighbors (close enough that Dortchen, one of the narrating daughters, was to marry Wilhelm) that the Grimm brothers collected this tale. But the Wild version did not contain the phrase “when wishing still helped”. These words do not appear in the 1812 edition, and we cannot tell that they ever crossed the lips of any of the Wilds.

“When wishing still helped” first finds its way into their published collection in 1815, in a tale told by the Grimms’ archetypal Märchenfrau, Dorothea Viehmann, whose portrait, as rendered by the Grimms’ artist brother Ludwig Emil, literally became the one face that filled in for all the folk who furnished the Grimms with tales. In introducing the 1815 volume, the brothers describe her as a “peasant woman” (“Bäuerin”; Brüder Grimm 1815: iv) capable of retaining and

relating the old traditions virtually unchanged from telling to telling. And they praise her for her assured and accurate and flawlessly worded narration (Brüder Grimm 1815: iv-vi).

Frau Viehmann introduces “when wishing still helped” in “The Iron Stove” (which appears today as tale number 127 in the standard, seventh edition). From the beginning, this tale presents a fictional world altogether different from that of the “Frog King”—Viehmann’s story-world is one in which wishing *must* help to make anything good happen at all.

Zur Zeit, wo das **Wünschen** noch geholfen hat, ward ein Prinz von einer alten Hexe, **verwünscht**, dass er im Walde in einem grossen Eisen-Ofen sitzen sollte.

In the time when wishing still helped, a prince was cursed [*verwünscht* – a word embedding *Wunsch* and suggesting “wished away”, “victimized by ill wishes”, “bewitched”] by a witch, impelled to sit inside a huge iron stove in the forest.

This is another variant of the Beauty and the Beast tale (ATU 425A), and Frau Viehmann’s protagonist, unlike the girl in “The Frog King”, must suffer through lengthy and extreme trials to gain her husband: going without food for nine days in a forest, scaling a glass mountain, traveling over sharp swords and a vast lake, working as a maid in the prince’s castle, where she tells her tale and weeps for his attention while he lies unconscious (drugged by a rival who wants the prince to herself) until servants hear the true wife’s wailing and alert the prince that she has returned to him. This is a woman whose very survival, let alone happiness, depends on whether wishing still helps.

“When wishing still helped” may not sound so apt as the opening formula of “The Frog King”, but it appears that the Grimms found the phrase important enough to honor in the first sentence of the first tale in their collection. I believe that they moved the phrase to the front of the book because they saw it as representing something fundamentally important about why great narrators tell fairy tales.

In jokes the impossibilities of the fairy tale are mocked. On the lips of a narrator committed to *märchen*, impossibilities are achievable. Among those who best recognize the need for happy outcomes, wishing still helps.

It is likely to remain an open question whether wishing helps often enough, but Joshua Alley, Alfred Anderson, Freeman Bennett, Zsuzsanna Palkó, and Dorothea Viehmann knew that sometimes it could, and they knew how to twist the wisdom embedded in the fairy tale's proverbial frame to show us when and how it might.

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FIONNUALA CARSON WILLIAMS

## PROVERBS IN WELLERISMS IN IRELAND

**Abstract:** Reflecting Anna Litovkina's interest in and study of anti-proverbs I have delved further than previously into the proverbs used in wellerisms. My hypothesis was that such proverbs might have things in common. My analysis is based on wellerisms in Ireland in both Irish and English. The study draws on those which I have already published with an additional previously unpublished number from oral tradition which I have sourced. The analysis is followed by a catalogue of these previously unpublished ones thereby fulfilling another aim – to make accessible the store of wellerisms found in Ireland, those in Irish being accompanied by translations in English. The catalogue is fully annotated and each entry has as much context as could be gained from the source as well as references to other forms of folklore and a link to the original manuscripts.

**Keywords:** anti-proverbs, proverbs, structure, stylistic features, wellerisms, Irish, English, catalogue

This festschrift provides the ideal opportunity to round up and catalogue what I can of the wellerisms that I know of in Ireland and to look a little further into the proverbs used in wellerisms – those sayings oftentimes labelled “anti-proverbs”. In *Wellerisms in Ireland* I noted that further examples from oral tradition no doubt still lay in an archive in Ireland – The National Folklore Collection Schools' Collection conducted in the late 1930s (Carson Williams 2002: 6). The subsequent digitization of the National Folklore Collection, not to mention the associated transcription of much of it, meant that I was able to more easily access most of the remaining wellerisms that were still hidden there (<https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes>). I looked at all the entries titled “Proverbs,” “Seanfhocail,” “Local,” or “Old Sayings,” “Seanráite,” and the like, because this was where, in my earlier work, wellerisms tended to be; I also sampled a few untitled entries. In all, over 80 wellerisms, with about ten more in English than Irish,

were located, most of which were new types not found before. A few had a little comment or, more rarely, an origin story. As before, the quotations in them were a mixture of exclamations, such as “‘Good on myself!’ said Peggy Bán when she killed the seven bees with one blow” (National Folklore Collection Schools’ Collection, henceforth NFCS followed by volume and page numbers, NFCS 0613: 064) and so on but, as before, the biggest category of quotation was a proverb. Wellerisms with proverbs that emerged overwhelmingly have a triadic structure – quotation, speaker and circumstances like “‘*Is mór an nídh an neart, ’ arsan an dreoilín nuair chaith sí ciaróg leis an bhfaill*” (“‘Strength’s a great thing,’ as the wren said when she threw a beetle over the cliff” NFCS 0282: 048) but *all* those with proverbs which have just emerged are catalogued below and they, in conjunction with those that I previously catalogued and published, are discussed here (Carson Williams 2002 and 2010).

One wellerism with a proverb which is an exception to the three-part structure and which is new to the corpus is “‘Báis do leabh féin ar dtuis, ’ arsan sagart” (“‘Baptise your own child first,’ said the priest” IFCS 0282: 048). Another is the formula in which one wise woman advises another “‘Sé dubhairt Cailleach Gaillimh le Cailleamh Mhuigeo, ‘An t-é a bhionns go maith dhuit bí go maith dhó” (“‘The Hag of Galway said to the Hag of Mayo, ‘Be good to whoever is good to you” NFCS 0135: 204, County Galway). Is this a straightforward piece of advice or is there some irony in it? No versions of this turned up in English. The wellerisms attributed to the various wise women also differ from those with the usual triadic structure in that in them it is not unusual for the speaker to precede the quotation. Stylistically some have rhyme *Mhuigeo/ dhó* and repetition although these are not universal or exclusive features of wellerisms with proverbs.

There is one list titled “Sayings of Local Persons (most of them now dead) still in use” where two of the 19 have a proverb as the quotation “‘There’s currants for cakes and raisins for everything,’ says Thadeen the Clerk” and “‘One good turn coheres another,’ says Jacky O” (NFCS 0357: 118 “raisin”=local pronunciation of Standard English

“reason”; “coher” possibly connected with the term for reciprocal work “comhair”). The relevance of these local people is unfortunately no longer apparent so I have not included them.

The information about contributors or informants and collectors is, unfortunately, too patchy to be conclusive although some instructive details have shown up, such as that wellerisms with and without proverbs were known to all ages of men, women and children. Of those for which we do have details, many more were collected by and from men than women. With the exception of the questionnaire on wellerisms conducted in 1973 by the Department of Irish Folklore and part of the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, most wellerisms turned up in lists, many of which were titled “Proverbs,” or with similar titles mentioned above, and included more than one wellerism. As yet the questionnaire does not appear to have been digitized but all the wellerisms and associated information in it was included in *Wellerisms in Ireland* (Carson Williams 2002 where a copy of the questionnaire can also be seen: 283-284). The same informant often supplied both a wellerism with a proverb and one without. Many of the wellerisms were collected by schoolchildren as part of their homework. We know at least that some of the children collected wellerisms from their grandmothers (one grandmother was aged over 80) aunts and parents. Details were not often given of the informants’ ages or occupations but there were school children, teachers, students, academics, farmers, civil servants and various other professionals including clergymen. Teachers, both male and female seemed happy to include wellerisms in lists of proverbs despite the fact that they often appeared “anti-proverb” as we see here “‘Every little helps,’ as the monkey said when he spit in the sea” (“spit”= Standard English “spat”; NFC5 0836: 054 in a list titled “Local Sayings” which has a note at the end by the teacher).

Like those which I published previously almost all of the proverbs in these newly-catalogued wellerisms are well-known and, unlike the general run of proverbs, most of those in the wellerisms are not metaphorical thus we find proverbs like *The best of friends must part* and

*Is deas an rud an glaineacht* [Cleanliness is a nice thing] (Carson Williams 2002: 30-31 and the catalogue in it and below). The addition of a speaker and circumstances create an image that is usually humorous but occasionally ironic as in that other exceptional wellerism mentioned above about the priest baptising his own child first. An explanation given with it runs “and that means do your own work first and then help your neighbour if you have time” (NFCS 0282: 111).

As might be expected the proverb itself usually does not alter because the alteration – and therefore the humour or irony – is created due to the addition to it which is usually incongruous, for example “‘There’s nothing to beat thar art of man,’ said Peggy Scanlan when she stuck the candle to the wall” (NFCS 0575: 026). In contrast the humour in wellerisms without proverbs often simply hinges on literal meaning or pun such as in “‘Down!’ said the fowler when he shot the duck” (NFCS 0596:338). The addition to proverbs often shows some variety and in some cases the same proverb gives rise to different wellerisms because an entirely different ending is added, for instance, *Every man to his own taste* has given rise to more than one wellerism, in fact, in one case, two different endings were offered by the same informant “‘Every man to his own taste,’ as the ass said when he ate the thistle” or “as the man said when he kissed his cow” (NFCS 0506: 039 in a long list titled “Old Irish Sayings”). There was a large and successful tobacco company – Gallagher’s – in Belfast for many decades. In the early 1920s it produced cigarette cards illustrating fables, including *An ass eating thistles*. This may have been an influence on the creation of the wellerism in Ireland and or its spread there (discovered through [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An\\_ass\\_eating\\_thistles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_ass_eating_thistles)).

An additional wellerism based on a proverb with personification turned up in the new crop “‘Youth must have its fling,’ as the farmer said when the banbh jumped out of the crib” (NFCS 0318: 106 County Cork “banbh”=“piglet” or “young pig”; “crib”=“detachable rail round a cart”). The proverb had been recorded before with other endings (see, for instance, Carson Williams 2002: A 327, 328 and 329). This

particular proverb doesn't occur in Irish nor do many with personification, a certain factor, albeit small, in there being less overlap between wellerisms in Irish and those in the English of Ireland. In general the proverbs in Irish and English do overlap extensively so one might expect this to be the same with the wellerisms but this is not so (Carson Williams 2000: 429). The new trawl has, however, come up with a version in English of one previously only found in Irish: "Life is sweet,' said the tailor when he was running from the gander" (NFCS 0237: 139).

The only wellerism with a proverb that I have found in the whole assemblage that has a macaronic variant is one of the commonest wellerisms in Ireland: "When the wren flung a beetle against the wall, 'Is mór an nidhe an neart!" ("Strength's a great thing!" NFC 1917: 33 County Cork). Macaronic wellerisms in Ireland are really rare: I have only come across three others. In one of these the quotation is in English because the speaker is an Englishman but I cannot think why a wren should speak in Irish within an English frame.

The speakers in wellerisms in Ireland as elsewhere fall into distinct categories – humans, animals, inanimate objects and mythological beings. There is a noticeable difference between the speakers in wellerisms containing proverbs and those without. In those without, humans are the commonest speakers, especially men but animal speakers such as fox, monkey and various birds are frequent and outnumber women speakers. So, in those without proverbs there are only about a third as many women speakers as men and there are more animal speakers than women. In wellerisms with a proverb women speakers increase to about half of the human speakers while animal speakers decrease to fewer than half the number of women speakers. An even bigger difference in who or what is speaking in those containing proverbs and those without is the number of inanimate speakers. In those without there are nearly as many inanimate speakers, for example, clock, pebble and wall, as women whereas I only came across one inanimate speaker in a wellerism *with* a proverb "Idle hands tempt the devil,' what a skull said to the man that

kicked it in the graveyard” (Carson Williams 2002: Part A 111). The humour in many of the wellerisms with an inanimate speaker hinges on pun which is not the case with wellerisms containing proverbs. Both kinds of wellerism have very low and about the same number of mythological speakers.

In passing I would like to point out that the high proportion of inanimate speakers within Irish material is in marked contrast to the proportion of inanimate speakers in Dutch, Flemish, Frisian and the German wellerisms of Mecklenburg when compared with the magisterial works of Siegfried Neumann, Heinrich Cox and Jurjen van der Kooi (Neumann 1996: 414 ie they occupy one page out of well over 300 pages; Cox and van der Kooi 2007: nos. 4452-4466 ie they amount to only 15 out of a total of 4475 wellerisms).

Although the classic “I see, said the blind man” is by far the commonest wellerism in Ireland there are also wellerisms with proverbs in the top ten. The Department of Irish Folklore’s 1973 Questionnaire “Wellerisms” actually pointed out that “Sometimes wellerisms parody ordinary proverbs” providing an example which we shall see below turns out to be one of the commonest (Carson Williams 2002: 283).

*Strength is no load said the wren when...* with c.39 versions (21 in English and 18 in Irish) seems to be the second commonest. If we take it that this or similar is the original, it is often shortened to simply “Strength” in the English-language versions. Regarding the same wellerism in Irish, however, the proverb, with the exception of one variant, is maintained in full “Is breá/ iontach/ mór an nídh an neart,” [“Strength is a fine/ wonderful/ great thing”]. “Strength” on its own as the quotation with a *human* speaker has, however, given rise to two other wellerisms in Ireland and to wellerisms in Finnish and Scandinavian languages at least (Carson Williams 2002: Part A 275 and 276).

Next to it is *Everyone to their own taste said...when...* and the like, with at least 26 versions in English within which there is a wide range of speakers – male and female, named and unnamed. I have not dis-

covered any versions at all of the wellerism in Irish although it was one of the examples used on the 1973 Questionnaire: “Everyone to his taste,’ said the farmer when he kissed the cow.” The questionnaire was issued in both Irish and English with the exact same examples but even this does not seem to have elicited any Irish version (Carson Williams 2002: 283). On the other hand it has been located in a spread of languages including two other Celtic ones – Scottish Gaelic and, through Robin Gwyndaf, Welsh (Carson Williams 2002: 172; 2010: 41). The proverb itself in its own right has not been recorded in the main published collections in Irish.

The next commonest wellerisms are three without proverbs the first being “‘That’ll be a good fire when it burns,’ as the fox said when he shat [urinated] in the snow’ with at least 23 versions, all in English (the version cited was collected in 2012 from Peter Woods, d. 2019 aged 89, gardener, Co. Antrim who told me that he used it when he was out camping as a boy; Carson Williams 2002 Part A 83 (22)). “‘It won’t be long now,’ as the fox said when he left his tail in a trap” and “‘Is mór an gleo ná an t-olainn,’ mar dubhairt an bhean nuair a bhí sí ag bearradh an ghabhair” [“‘There’s more noise than wool,’ as the woman said when she was clipping the goat.”] with c. 18 and 16 versions respectively (former Murphy 1990: 63; latter NFCS 0624:146).

They are closely followed in number of versions by another wellerism with a proverb *Every little helps as ... said when...* (with 15 versions-8 in English and 7 in Irish). The last of the commonest is “‘Is iomdha gléas ceoil a bhíonn ann,’ ars’an fear a raibh an trumpa maide aige” [“‘There are many musical instruments,’ said the man who had the wooden Jew’s harp.”] of which there are predominantly Irish versions-11 as opposed to one English. Only this last wellerism does not appear to be represented internationally, perhaps indicating an Irish origin for it. The quotation does not appear as a proverb in its own right in any of the main collections; maybe it should not be considered as one.

The presence of a proverb in a wellerism or even the frequency of such a wellerism in any particular language does not appear to be

any stronger a factor in its internationality than wellerisms without proverbs. Cox and van der Kooi checked *Wellerisms in Ireland* against those in their assemblage of Dutch, Frisian and Flemish wellerisms (Cox and van der Kooi 2007). According to them of all the wellerisms in Ireland only three with a proverb had equivalentents – *Every little helps as ... said when ...*, “‘There’s nothing like a clane [clean] thing,’ as the man said when he turned his shirt after seven years” and *Everyone to his taste said ... when ...* (for details of the second type see glaineacht/fear in the catalogue which follows; Cox and van der Kooi 2007: Nos. 35, 580 & 2763). On the other hand they located eight *without* a proverb that had equivalentents (Cox and van der Kooi 2007: Nos. 2952, 4243, 4251, 4269, 4291, 4387, 4411 & 4414). They also added references to assemblages of English and German wellerisms so those are available to check from this point of view too (Mieder and Kingsbury 1994 and Neumann 1996 are the assemblages used).

I hear the odd wellerism now and again, however, much much less frequently than proverbs and I have never heard any wellerism containing a proverb. The most recent wellerism that I heard “‘I won’t detain you much longer,’ as Henry the Eighth said to his wife” was used by Tommy Sands, b. 1945 folk singer, song writer and political activist, from Co. Down, as his opening to his set of songs – he was the last performer at the evening “Celebration of Diversity and Difference” to mark United Nations International Day of Peace 21 September 2022 at the Farset Centre, Belfast. With this example it is clear that the *message* in the quotation “‘I won’t detain you long” is of prime importance rather than simply being the component of a joke. Likewise with the following used by a young male compere at the start of a concert after he had listed some performers “‘It’s only the tip of the iceberg,’ as the greengrocer said” (February 2012 An Droichead, Belfast). This is most likely the case particularly with wellerisms containing proverbs but we do need contexts to confirm this. Just as certain proverbs can fall into a riddle form some proverbs have fallen into a wellerism form probably without detracting from but in fact enhancing their valuable messages to increase their



impact. But, as suggested, the purpose or purposes of proverbs in wellerism form can only be fully assessed through contexts.

This piece has enabled me to throw a few more wellerisms in Ireland into the mix and even to draw attention to the fact that there are wellerisms in contemporary Persian being used right here too, an example of the latter being “The bride doesn’t know how to dance and says “The room is crooked.”” When I discussed wellerisms with a friend who now lives here and asked him if he knew this one he replied “Yes, I have heard this proverb a lot. We use it a lot in our conversation when it’s appropriate” (email from Mehrshad Esfandiari, 40s, sports coach, Co. Down 14 January 2023).

I would now like to thank Anna and her co-editors for eliciting an earlier foray from me into the proverbs in wellerisms and to congratulate her on her work in anti-proverbs and wish her well in her new work and on her milestone birthday (see Carson Williams 2007 for the earlier foray).

I would also like to record my thanks to Wolfgang Mieder for sending me a copy of Siegfried Neumann’s monumental tome, thereby putting me in touch with him, and to the late Heinrich Cox for sending me a copy of his and Jurjen van der Kooi’s equally monumental *Alle beetjes helpen*.

I am extremely grateful to the Director of the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, for permission to publish here for the first time material from it. It appears under NFCS, the “S” standing for its “Schools’ Collection” which was collected in the late 1930s.

### *The Catalogue*

Wellerisms in English are listed first, followed by those in Irish. Each wellerism is under a key word in the quotation followed by the speaker. Any details of context, informant “I.” and collector “C.” and their gender-female “f.” male “m.”-are then given and the reference

to any other version that appeared in Carson Williams 2002, henceforth *WI*, Part A numbers being those in English and Part B being those in Irish; the figures in brackets are the number of versions. “Co.”=County – a land division of which there are 32 in Ireland.

A few silent amendments to punctuation and spelling have been made. Those in Irish are maintained in their non-standard form.

### *English-language*

art/ Peggy Scanlan

“**There is nothing to beat the art of man,**’ said Peggy Scanlan when she stuck the candle to the wall.”

NFCS 0575: 026 Co. Tipperary in a short list titled “Proverbs” C: f. friends/ rat

“**The best of friends must part,**’ as the rat said when he lost his tail.”

NFCS 0836: 054 Co. Laois in a list titled “Local Sayings” with a note at the end by the teacher who wrote down the list stating “collected’ from a mix of 3 f and 2 m pupils”. The list includes two other wellerisms, another of which has a proverb (see little/ monkey below); the quotation is possibly from a song.

have/ blackbird

“**Have it yourself or be without it,**’ as the blackbird says.”

NFCS 0381: 110 Co. Cork in a list titled “Proverbs and Sayings” with 7 other wellerisms including two with proverbs (see man/ fellow and youth/ farmer below).

“Have it yourself or be without it,’ as the blackbird whistled at Malahide.” NFCS 0721: 068 Co. Westmeath in a list titled “Sayings and Proverbs” I: m. Malahide is a coastal port in Co. Dublin far from where the wellerisms was collected. *WI* Part B 165 (3); Carson Williams 2010: 6 (1 English version).

See also the Irish-language version *rud/ éinin* below.

life/ tailor

**“Life is sweet,’** said the tailor when he was running from the gander.”  
NFCS 0237: 139 Co. Roscommon in an extensive list titled “Old Sayings” I: a married woman aged 52. *WI* Part B 11 (6)

See also the Irish-language version under *anam/ táilliúr* below.

little/ wren, monkey

**“Every little helps,’** says the wren when she dropped something as she flew over the sea.”

NFCS 0648: 105 Co. Waterford in a list titled “Irish Proverbs and Sayings” I: m. farmer aged c. 60.

**“Every little helps,’** as the monkey said when he spit in the sea.”

NFCS 0836: 054 Co. Laois in a list titled “Local Sayings” with a note at the end by the teacher who wrote down the list stating “collected” from a mix of 3 f. and 2 m. pupils. The list includes two other wellerisms, one with a proverb (see *friends/ rat* above). *WI* Part A 180 (6) & Part B 22 (5)

See also the Irish-language versions under *beagáinín/ dreoilín* below.

longer/ Pegín

**“The longer you live the more you will see,’** said Pegín when she saw the aeroplane.”

NFCS 0613: 063 Co. Clare in a list titled “Sayings that people have”. The list is written by a f. pupil who writes: “...ones I have heard...”. Her list includes 9 other wellerisms, one other of which includes a proverb (see *strength/ wren* below).

taste/ ass

**“Every man to his own taste,’** as the ass said when he ate the thistle.”  
NFCS 0506: 039 Co. Limerick in a long list titled “Old Irish Sayings”:  
“Every man to his own taste,’ as the ass said when he ate the thistle” or “as the man said when he kissed his cow” ie two endings are given together for the same proverb-see also *taste/ man* below; *fable. WI*

Part A 288 (1).

taste/ fellow, man, old woman

“**Every man to his own taste,**’ as the fellow said when he kissed the cow.”

NFCS 0381: 106 Co. Cork in a list titled “Proverbs and Sayings” with 7 other wellerisms including two with proverbs (see have/ blackbird above and youth/ farmer below).

“Every man to his own taste,’ as the man said when he kissed his cow.”

NFCS 0506: 039 Co. Limerick in a long list titled “Old Irish Sayings” in which two endings are given for the same proverb-see man/ ass above for details.

“Every man to his fancy,’ as the old woman said when she kissed her cow.”

NFCS 0765: 129 Co. Longford in an extensive list titled “Proverbs and Local Sayings”; WI Part A 288 (23).

removes/ Poor Richard

“**Three removes are as bad as a fire,**’ as Poor Richard says.”

NFCS 0053: 066 Co. Galway in a list titled ‘Proverbs’ collected from a m. aged 64 by a f. relation.

strength/ wren, robin

“**Strength is no load,**’ says the wren when he pulled the worm out of the sod.”

NFCS 0371: 078 Co. Cork in a list titled “Proverbs” I: m.

“Strength!’ says the robin when he pulled the worm out of the ground.”

NFCS 0528: 052 Co. Limerick in a long list titled “Proverbs” containing two other wellerisms but neither with a proverb I: a m. farmer aged 54.

“‘Strength!’ said the robin when he pulled the worm from the ground.”  
 NFCS 0596: 338 Co. Clare in a list titled “Local Expressions” Boys’ School. There are 6 other wellerisms in the list but none with a proverb.

“‘Strength!’ said the robin when he pulled the worm out of the thatch.”  
 NFCS 0596: 473 Co. Clare in a list titled “Local Expressions” Girls’ School. There are 4 other wellerisms in the list but none with a proverb.

“‘Strength!’ says the wren when he picked up the worm.”  
 NFCS 0598: 190 Co. Clare in a long list titled “Sean-fhocail” and containing two other wellerisms but neither with a proverb.

“‘Strength!’ said the wren when he pulled the worm up from the ground.”

NFCS 0613: 063 Co. Clare in a list titled “Sayings that people have” “ones I have heard...” written by a f. pupil. Her list includes 9 other wellerisms one other of which includes a proverb (see longer/ Pegín above). *WI* Part A 277 (15) & Part B 165 (3); Carson Williams 2010: 9 (1 Irish version)

See also the Irish-language versions under *neart/ dreoilín* below.

youth/ *banbh*

“‘**Youth must have its fling,**’ as the farmer said when the *banbh*[h] jumped out of the crib.”

NFCS 0381: 106 Co. Cork in a list titled “Proverbs and Sayings” with 7 other wellerisms including two with proverbs (see *have/ blackbird* and *taste/ fellow* above). “*banbh*”=“piglet” or “young pig”; “*crib*”=“detachable rail round a cart”.

### *Irish-language*

*anam/ táilliúr*

**“Is luachmhar é an t-anam,’** mar adubhairt an táilliúr agus é ag rith ó’n ngandal.”

[“‘Life is precious,’ as the tailor said when he was running from the gander.”]

NFCS 0019: 054 Co. Galway in a long list titled “Sean-Fhoclaí” I: m. aged 73 C. his son. *WI* Part B 11 (6)

See also the English-language version under life/ tailor above.

beirt/ Gobán Saor

**“Giorraíonn beirt an bóthar,’** mar adubhairt an Gobán Saor lena mac.”

[“‘Two shorten the road,’ as the Gobán Saor said to his son.”]

NFCS 0619: 053 Co. Clare in a short untitled list of sayings where the quotation appears as “Giorraígh an bóthar” [sic] possibly in mistake for the above which is a well-known proverb in both Irish and English. In legend the Gobán Saor is a master tradesperson, usually a stone mason, whose work is in such demand that he is always travelling around Ireland. His son helps to make the journeying seem shorter by telling stories (Ó hÓgáin 1990). I would like to thank Gordon McCoy for discussing the Irish in this wellerism and also the one below.

confach/ fear deirce

**“Ná bí confach agus ní bheidh tú tinn,’** mar adubhairt an fear deirce leis an duine ... mí-fhoighdeach.”

[“‘Don’t be cross and you won’t be ill,’ as the beggar said to the impatient person.”] NFCS 1035: 105 Co. Donegal in a list titled “Sean Fhocla, Abairteacha agus Ranntaí” I: f. There is a short, untranslated word after “duine”.

congnamh/ dreoilín

**“Is congnamh gach beagáinín,’** arsan an dreoilín nuair do thuit bra-

on uisce san fharraige.”

[“Every little thing is a help,’ said the wren when a drop of water fell into the ocean.”]

NFCS 0282: 048 Co. Cork in a list titled “Sean fhocail a usáistear san gceanntar seo” [“Proverbs used in this district”]. The list contains 3 wellerisms all with a proverb (see leanbh/ sagart and neart/ dreoilín below)

“Is beag an rud nach cuideach é,’ mar dubhairt an dreolán nuair a rinne sé a mhúin san fhairrge.” [“It’s very little that doesn’t assist it,’ as the wren said when he urinated in the sea.”] NFCS 1064: 017 Co. Donegal in an extensive list titled “Sean Ráidhte (Sean fhocail)” containing one other wellerism; it also has a proverb (see glainéacht/ fear below). *WI* Part A 180 (6) & Part B 22 (5).

Dia/ fear

“**Tá Dia go maith acht níl an diabhal ró-olc,**’ mar adubhairt an fear agas é ag dul trasna na h-abhann.”

[“God is good but the devil isn’t bad either,’ as the man said when he was crossing the river.”] NFCS 0618: 182 Co. Clare in a list titled “Nathanna Cainte”.

glaineacht/fear

“**Is deas an rud an glaineacht,**’ mar dubhairt an fear a thionntuigh a léine i ndíadh i bheith ar cathadh seacht mbliadhna.”

[“Cleanliness is a nice thing,’ as the man said on turning his shirt after wearing it for seven years.”] NFCS 1064: 019 Co. Donegal in an extensive list titled “Sean Ráidhte (Sean fhocail)” containing one other wellerism; it also has a proverb (see congnamh/ dreoilín above). *WI* Part A 38 (2) & Part B 103 (2).

gléas ceoil, ceoil/ fear

“**Is iomdha gléas ceoil a bhíonn ann,**’ ars’an fear a raibh an trumpa maide aige. (tr. m.=wooden Jew’s...) [sic]

[“There are many musical instruments,’ said the man who had the wooden Jew’s harp.”] NFCS 0142: 020 Co. Mayo in a long list titled on this page “Sean-Fhocla agus Corra-Chainnte” which also contains another wellerism but one without a proverb C: m., the teacher. Note: in the digitized copy it is not possible to see the word “harp”.

**“Is iomdha gléas ceoil ann,’** mar dubhairt an fear a raibh an trumpa maide aige.”

[“There are many musical instruments,’ as the man with the wooden Jew’s harp said.”]

NFCS 1065: 137 Co. Donegal in extensive list titled “Sean Fhocal agus Seanráidhte”.

**“Is iomdha sórt ceoil ann,’** dubhairt an fear a raibh an trumpa maide aige.”

[“There are many kinds of music,’ said the man who had the wooden Jew’s harp.”] NFCS 0134: 027 (also similar on page 070, excluded as may have been copied) Co. Mayo in a list titled “Béaloideas. Sean Fhoclaí” I: m. C: f.; WI Part A 142 (1) & Part B 106 (7).

leanbh/ sagart

**“Bais dó leanbh féin ar dtuis,’** arsan sagart.”

[“Baptise your own child first,’ said the priest.”]

NFCS 0282: 048 Co. Cork in a list titled “Sean fhocail a usáistear san gceantar seo.” [“Proverbs used in this district.”]. The list contains 3 wellerisms each containing a proverb (see congnamh/ dreoilín above and neart/ dreoilín below). “Báisfidh mé mo leanbh féin ar dtuis,’ arsan sagart.” [“I’ll baptise my own child first,’ said the priest.”] There were three children born together and the priest took one of them and when he was baptising them he was in a hurry because they were weak and he said “I will christen my own child first” and that means do your own work first and then help your neighbour if you have time. It was in Bunán at the other side of Cnoc Buide this incident happened. The child adopted by the priest became St Fiacna of Teampaillín Fiacna. This sean-fhocal [proverb] is commonly used in this locality.” NFCS 0282: 111; legend.



maith/ Cailleach Gaillimhe, Cailleach Béara

“Sé dubhairt cailleach Gaillimh le cailleach Mhuigeo, **‘An t-é a bhionns go maith dhuit bí go maith dhó.’**”

[“The Hag of Galway said to the Hag of Mayo, ‘Be good to whoever is good to you.’”] NFCS 0135: 204 Co. Mayo in a list titled “Sean fhocla” C: f. teacher

“An té a bionn go maith dhuit bí go maith dhó,’ mar a dubhairt Cailleach Béara le Callaigh Muigheó.” [“‘Be good to whoever is good to you,’ as the Hag of Beara said to the Hag of Mayo.”] NFCS 0618: 194 Co. Clare in an untitled list of proverbs. I: grandmother of m. collector. The Hag of Beara was a mythological wise old woman who lived in the Beara peninsula, Co. Kerry (Ó hÓgáin 1990); *WI* Part B 129 (c.8).

neart/ dreoilín

**“Is mór an nídh an neart,’** arsan dreoilín nuair chaith sí ciaróg leis an bhfaill.”

[“Strength’s a great thing,’ said the wren when she threw a beetle over the cliff.”] NFCS 0282: 048 Co. Cork in a list titled “Sean fhocail a usáistear san gceanntar seo” [“Proverbs used in this district”]. The list contains 3 wellerisms all with a proverb (see *congnamh/ dreoilín* and *leanbh/ sagart* above)

**“Is mór an nídh an neart,’** arsan dreoilín teasbaigh nuair a chaith sé an chiaróg leis an bhfaill.” [sic] [“Strength’s a great thing,’ said the lively wren when he threw the beetle over the cliff.”] NFCS 0461: 082 Co. Kerry in a list titled “Sean-Fhocail” I: m. aged 60 C: f. aged 28, teacher

**“Is mór an nídh an neart,’** ars an dreoilín nuair do chaith sé an ciaróg leis an bhfaill.” [sic]. [“Strength’s a great thing,’ said the wren when he threw the beetle over the cliff.”] NFCS 0472: 062 Co. Kerry in a list titled “Sean-fhocail” with a note at the end “Local collection-pupils”.

**“Is deas í an neart,’** arsa an dreoilín nuair a chaith sé an chearóg leis an bh’faoil.” [sic]. [“Strength’s a fine thing,’ said the wren when he threw the beetle over the cliff.”] NFCS 0421: 061 Co. Kerry in a long list titled “Seanfhocail” which contains another wellerism but without a proverb I: the schoolchildren’s older relations. *WI* Part A 277

(15) & Part B 165 (3); Carson Williams 2010: 9 (1 Irish version)

See also the English-language versions under strength/ wren, robin above.

réidhteach/ fear

“**Is fearr an réidhteach,**’ mar adubhairt an fear fadó nuair a bhí sé i lár an achrainn.”

[“Concord is better,’ as the man in the middle of the quarrel said long ago.”] NFCS 0618: 167 Co. Clare in a list titled “Nathanna Cainnte” I: aunt of the f. collector.

rud/ éinin

“Dubhairt an t-éinin trioplach, **‘Bheadh rud agat féin nó bí i n-a éaghmuis.’**”

[“The neat/tidy little bird said, ‘Have a thing yourself or do without.’”] NFCS 0465: 014 Co. Kerry in a list titled “Seanfhocail” I. f. aged 80+ C: f., her granddaughter. *WI* Part B 165 (3); Carson Williams 2010: 6 (1 English version)

See also the English-language version have/ blackbird above.

rud/ bean na Gaíllimhe

“**An rud nach mbaineann dhuit ná bain dhó,**’ adeir bean na Gaíllimhe le bean Chonndae Mhuigheo.”

[“What doesn’t concern you, don’t concern yourself with it,’ said the Galway woman to the County Mayo woman.”] NFCS 0072: 105 Co. Galway in an extensive list titled “Sean-fhocla” C: f.

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**Theoretical and  
applied approaches  
to proverbs and  
other phraseological  
utterances**



RITA BRDAR-SZABÓ – AREZOO SHARIFRAD –  
HANI ABUMATHKOUR

## INTERCULTURAL COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC APPROACH TO PROVERBS

**Abstract:** In this article we offer a theoretical and methodological framework which intends to add further parameters to the intercultural cognitive linguistic study of proverbs. While pragmatic and discourse functions of proverbs have already been extensively studied across languages, there is a significant research gap regarding analyzing framing of and by proverbs from an intercultural cognitive linguistic perspective. The first step is to determine the illocutionary construction type instantiated by each proverb. The second step is to identify framing emerging from the integration of axiological framing within the proverb under scrutiny and from framing by imagery. Axiological framing gets realized by pinpointing gain-framing and loss-framing as distinguished by Prospect Theory, while adding a new type, namely avoidance-framing. Framing by imagery can be captured by sorting out different types of figurative language.

**Keywords:** intercultural cognitive linguistics, illocutionary constructions, framing of proverbs, axiological framing, figurative framing

### 1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to propose an intercultural cognitive linguistic framework which can be applied to the cross-linguistic study of proverbs. The cornerstone of any contrastive analysis is the notion of equivalence which presupposes some kind of *tertium comparationis*. The cross-linguistic investigation of proverbs is no exception in this respect. As shown by Krzeszowski (1984), translational equivalence cannot be considered a jolly joker that solves all problems of comparing languages. According to the argumentation of this author it is necessary to establish the optimal *tertium comparationis* in every case. In this article we intend to contribute to the fine-tuning of the

intercultural study of proverbs by introducing some new parameters for data analysis.

The following example illustrates the problem. There is a popular Arab proverb which is widely cited on diverse websites in English in the context of language learning but it has been even borrowed as the title for a language journal<sup>1</sup> which is announced by Amazon as follows: “128-page bullet journal with a one-of-a-kind cover of the inspirational quote, ‘learn a language and you’ll avoid a war.’ A positive reminder every day for language lovers and foreign language learners.”<sup>2</sup>

The borrowed proverb appears here as a quote but the source is not mentioned. There are, however, many other usage examples<sup>3</sup> where the same expression is identified as an Arab proverb and where the original saying is cited from Arabic as follows: أمن مكرهم من تعلم لغة قوم

Let us illustrate its usage in a text:

There’s an Arab proverb: “*Learn a language, and you’ll avoid a war.*” Each day when Staff Sgt. Alex Rababah wakes up at 4am, he reminds himself of the importance of his job as an instructor at the Defense Language Institute at the Presidio of Monterey. Rababah speaks English, four dialects of Arabic, three languages from his native Philippines, and is now learning Russian.<sup>4</sup>

If we take a contrastive perspective, we see that one cannot find an equivalent proverb in English or Persian. Careful examination reveals that the English translation does not completely represent

<sup>1</sup> Learn a language and you’ll avoid a war. Bullet journal published independently by Cierra J. Smith 2020, announced by Amazon.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Learn-Language-Youll-Bullet-Journal/dp/B087L4TH28>, 25.08.2021

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/languages/2015/02/04/News/4854>, 23.08.2021

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/languages/2015/02/04/News/4854>, 23.08.2021



the meaning and usage contexts of the original Arab proverb. First, we give the glossing and exact literal translation and glossing of this proverb:

(1)

من تعلم لغة قوم أمن مكرهم

man taʕlam-a luyat-a qawm-in ʔmin-a  
 who learn.3MSG-PST language-GEN people-NOM avoid-PST.3MSG  
 makra-hum  
 cunning-their.POSS

Lit. 'Who learned other people's language will avoid their cunning.'

The differences in lexical meaning and grammatical structure are obvious. The Arabic original mentions cunning, a characteristic attribute of potential enemies, contains a nominal relative clause, refers to an event in the past, has an indefinite subject, while the English translation hints at war (a possible negative consequence of not escaping cunning) and contains two coordinated clauses, a verb form in 2<sup>nd</sup> person imperative and another one with reference to the future. There are also remarkable differences regarding the pragmatic functions and possible usage contexts. Next, this proverb is available only in Standard Arabic and is not documented in colloquial varieties. However, it is usually used in daily life conversations in different parts of the Arab World, not only in Jordan. However, this saying appears in various Jordanian contexts (formal and informal). Obviously, this 'postcolonial' saying or proverb is heavily used to encourage people to learn foreign languages, particularly Hebrew and English. The rationale behind the use of this saying is mainly political in nature. To the best of our knowledge, we cannot provide an equivalent for this saying in English. Its translation is widely used in English texts, it differs, however, substantially from the original Arab proverb regarding grammatical structure, lexical meaning, pragmatic functions and usage contexts. Therefore it has to be stated that it is not without problems to use it in advertisements for language schools.

There is a Persian proverb, too, which is also often cited in similar language learning contexts in the following way: *A new language is a new life.*<sup>5</sup> The translation is correct in this case, but the original proverb in Persian is used as follows: یک زبان جدید یک زندگی جدید

In fact, there is a copula verb in the translation, but there is no verb in the original proverb as it consists of a verbless sentence. The original Persian expression can be transliterated and glossed as follows:

(2)

یک زبان جدید یک زندگی جدید

Yek Zaban-e jadid yek zendegi jadid

One language new one life new

Lit. A new language, a new life

'A new language is a new life'

This proverb is more used in advertisements for language institutes and schools to attract students in learning a new language. So, language teachers use this proverb to tell their students that learning a language can initiate a new life for students by travelling abroad and speaking with other people around the world. This proverb is also used by psychologists because a person can forget some bad memories while he/she is learning a new language, so s/he can start a new life while learning a new language. Learning and using a new language also increases self-confidence. This is why psychologists suggest learning a new language to some of their patients.

The examples cited above make us aware of the paradox of cross-linguistic equivalence in the realm of proverbs and demonstrate that the phenomenon of zero equivalence can force some speakers to use translation as strategy in order to fill the gap of the missing proverbs in the target language. The translation may, however, differ on various levels from the source proverb and the problem

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.clas.wayne.edu/languages/2015/02/04/News/4854>, 23.08.2021

of zero equivalence may remain unsolved. The examples discussed above also give us a hint that comparisons across languages have to account for the complex interplay of linguistic, cognitive, social and cultural aspects of proverbs.

This is the point at which our approach kicks in since our main aim is to put forward a framework that is able to capture potential cross-linguistic and intercultural differences regarding grammatical structure, semantics and pragmatics of proverbs. According to Petrova (2015: 243ff.) there can be observed four new types in the field of contrastive study of proverbs, traditionally called paremiology: the semantic approach, the linguocultural approach, the cognitive approach and the culturematic method. In this article, we are going to use some rich insights of the cognitive approach to proverbs as a starting point (cf. Gibbs 2001; Gibbs and Beitel 1995; Litovkina and Csábi 2002; Belkhir 2012, 2014 and 2021; Buljan and Gradečak-Erdeljić 2013; Molnar and Vidaković Erdeljić 2016) and try to take a new perspective on proverbs by introducing additional research parameters. We propose an integrated framework that can capture both cognitive and pragmatic aspects of the usage of proverbs in cross-linguistic and intercultural terms. The structure of this article is as follows. Section 2 provides the first part of the theoretical foundation of our study by sketching a cognitive pragmatic framework and applying the notion of illocutionary constructions to proverbs. Section 3 is dedicated to the introduction of axiological and figurative framing of proverbs and its correlation with prototypical illocutionary functions of proverbial constructions. Finally, we conclude in Section 4.

## *2. Perspectivization by proverbs as illocutionary constructions*

In this section first of all we introduce the basic ingredients of our cognitive pragmatic framework. Proverbs will be defined as specific illocutionary constructions with a prototypically fixed form and general reference and with inherent axiological and figurative framing capacities which can contribute to setting perspectives in discourse. The main idea of this approach boils down to the assumption that

the grammatical construction of proverbs expresses not only semantic contents but also speech act functions such as statement, advice or warning. As most proverbs are realized as sentences, they can be considered as argument structure constructions in the sense of Goldberg's Construction Grammar. Therefore the grammatical forms and sentence type of the proverbs will also be taken into account in the course of the analysis. Our starting point is the notion of grammatical constructions according to Goldberg (1995: 4), who provides the following definition: "a form-meaning pair  $\langle F_i, S_i \rangle$  such that some aspect of  $F_i$  or some aspect of  $S_i$  is not strictly predictable from  $C$ 's component parts or from other previously established constructions." Illocutionary constructions will be defined according to Pérez Hernández and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011: 101) as "linguistic configurations consisting of fixed and variable elements which are highly specialized to convey specific illocutionary values." This definition is widely accepted in the cognitive linguistic literature.

Proverbs can express direct and indirect advice, direct and indirect warnings or statements. Indirect speech acts have been dealt with frequently in pragmatic literature. According to Searle's classical account, indirect speech acts are "cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another" (cf. Searle 1975: 60). Apart from prototypical examples of indirect speech acts whereby the speaker appears to perform a speech act A (a primary speech act), while actually performing another speech act B (a secondary speech act) there are also cases mentioned by Searle (1975: 59) "in which the speaker utters a sentence, means what he says, but also means something more." It is stressed by Searle (1975: 59) that "[i]n such cases a sentence that contains the illocutionary force indicators for one kind of illocutionary act can be uttered to perform, IN ADDITION, another type of illocutionary act." Proverbs are used very often in this way as for example proverbial declarative sentences can be uttered not only to perform statements but, in addition, also other kinds of illocutionary acts, advice or warning. This approach to proverbs has a certain tradition in paremiology as it ap-

pears quite natural that different sentence types can express generally accepted wisdom, common social norms or approved folk observations captured as more or less indirect forms of advice, statements or warnings. The indirect nature of proverbs has been already noted also by scholars such as Norrick and Nahberger, who do not belong to the core of cognitive linguistics (cf. Norrick 1982; Nahberger 2000 and 2004). Proverbs are even considered by Norrick (1982) and (1985) as doubly indirect, on the one hand in the sense of being quoted and on the other hand in the sense of being uttered as indirect speech acts.

There have been many attempts so far in various frameworks to motivate indirect speech acts. Searle proposed a sequence of steps with the aim to reconstruct the nonliteral primary speech act. The main problem with this proposal is that, although the steps seem to be unconscious, it is hypothesized that the nonliteral primary act is derived from the literal secondary act. In the analytical framework we propose indirect speech acts will be handled within the metonymic scenario model (cf. Thornburg and Panther 1997; Panther and Thornburg 1998 and 1999), modified and enriched by the Cost-Benefit Model developed by Ruiz de Mendoza and his collaborators.<sup>6</sup> The speech act scenario model by Panther and Thornburg is based on the assumption that any element of an illocutionary scenario or a speech act scenario can stand metonymically for the whole of the associated illocutionary category. The central ingredient of the model is the idea that our knowledge about illocutionary categories is organized in the form of so-called illocutionary scenarios which are defined as information packages, stored in our long-term memory, and accessible to all members of a linguistic community, so that the merely hint at a particular component of the associated scenario is sufficient to activate the whole illocutionary category immediately. There are many proverbs which can be analyzed as indirect speech acts in which an element of a speech act scenario is used metonymically for the whole

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<sup>6</sup> Pérez and Ruiz de Mendoza (2002), Ruiz de Mendoza and Baicchi (2007), Baicchi and Ruiz de Mendoza (2011).

scenario. To be more precise, it is assumed that the interpretation of the indirect speech act is based on the metonymic activation of the whole model or one of its parts through a previous activation of another part of the model. However, the metonymic scenario model is not able to capture positive or negative values connected with the activation of knowledge about people's reactions in pleasant or undesired situations. Different types of socio-cultural parameters such as optionality, power, politeness or cost-benefit variables can also have a great impact on the interpretation of indirect speech acts (cf. Pérez and Ruiz de Mendoza 2002). Such additional aspects and values are captured by the Cost-Benefit Model that assumes "that speakers are culturally bound to help other people if it is within their range of abilities and is presented as lying at the root of linguistic expressions used to convey speech act meanings," as the model is summed up by Martínez del Campo (2012: 119). The Cost-Benefit Model can also account for the impact of negative or positive perspectivization of proverbs as illocutionary constructions.

### *3. Framing of proverbs*

This is the point where framing comes into play. Framing in and by proverbial illocutionary constructions is the main focus in this section. The notion of framing is frequently made use of also apart from linguistics in many other disciplines, especially in sociology, psychology and communication studies. There have been many different definitions proposed across various disciplines but also within the same ones. The term itself originates in anthropology with Gregory Bateson (1972) and in sociology with Erving Goffman who coined it in his 1974 book. He was primarily interested in studying ways of social construction of reality (Goffman 1974). However, in many other contexts it is re-construction of reality in a different way what is at stake. As Entman (1993: 52) puts it "... [t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment

recommendation, ...” Hertog and McLeod (2001: 147) stress furthermore that “[c]hoosing what frame ... phenomena are to be placed in may do more to determine their meaning than lengthy discussions of the facts of or arguments toward them. ... Once an unfamiliar idea, topic, action, or event has been framed its interpretation is driven by the frame.” Bullock and Shulman (2021: 320) define framing from the perspective of communication study as follows: “As a message design strategy, framing refers to the strategic presentation of information in such a way that draws attention *toward* certain aspects of information while simultaneously drawing attention *away* from other aspects.”

Another important source for the definition of framing is the cognitive linguistic approach to metaphor. According to the definition of Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 36), metaphor is “principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding”, but as stressed by Semino, it can also “express, reflect and reinforce different ways of making sense of particular aspects of our lives” (Semino et al. 2018: 625). In other words, this is to say that metaphors can be used for framing. As shown in Brdar and Brdar-Szabó (2020), metonymy can also contribute to framing while further research is needed to explore the possibility if other types of figurative language can play a role in framing. Nowadays the cognitive linguistic notion of framing is approaching very much the interpretation of frames and framing in the field of sociology and psychology as illustrated by the following definition of frames: “... portion of background knowledge that (i) concerns a particular aspect of the world, (ii) generates expectations and inferences in communication and action, and (iii) tends to be associated with particular lexical and grammatical choices in language.” (Semino et al. 2018: 627)

The current framework is based on the assumption that apart from contexts of wider scope with relevance for whole societies or special social groups, the phenomenon of framing can be observed in all kinds of situations and in all kinds of contexts. This is the rationale behind the decision to study framing of proverbs and by prov-

erbs. Tracy et al. (2003: 118) provide evidence based on psychological experiments that “positive and negative reframes are separate thought strategies embodied within proverbs that help people cope with life’s challenges.”

Two framing types appear to be relevant for proverbs, namely figurative framing and axiological or value-oriented framing. The first one is concerned with the study of different types of figurative language motivating proverbs. The main aim is to identify the presence of metaphor and – if possible – also other types of figurative language use and to establish their relative weight in framing proverbs. The second framing type relevant for proverbs is axiological or value-oriented framing. This side of framing has been the focus of Prospect Theory (cf. Kahneman and Tversky 1979). This approach to framing takes as its starting point the assumption that individuals or various groups of people can be influenced in making decisions concerning an issue due to different ways of formulating a message about that issue. Specifically, when a message is formulated in a positive way and when the benefits are perspectivized that could be obtained or the disadvantages that could be avoided by taking certain measures, it is said to be “gain-framed”. On the other hand, when a message is presented negatively and special emphasis is laid on the disadvantages that could result from taking certain actions or the losses that could be the consequence of not taking other actions, it is considered as “loss-framed”. As observed by Kahneman and Tversky, people tend to avoid risks when the consequences of a choice are projected as gains. On the other hand, they are more ready to take risks when results to be expected are expressed in terms of losses. Loss- vs. gain-framing can be considered as a general, strategic choice in approaching a topic.

What follows is the adaptation of the basic notions of Prospect Theory to the special concerns of proverbs. As for axiological framing, we propose the following 3 categories: 1. positive framing or gain-framing, 2. negative or loss-framing and 3. avoidance-framing. The original idea was to make a difference between negative framing



and loss-framing. In this framework negative framing would have referred to a negative state or a negative attribute in general, always the same. Loss-framing would have referred to the process or activity of losing something in the sense of arriving at some negative consequences. These two types can, however, be considered as two sides of the same coin.

Now we provide some examples for different framing types. We are going to demonstrate what is negative or loss-framing on the example of the proverb *A lie has no feet* (next to its variants *Lies don't travel far* and *Truth will out*), and its counterparts in other languages, e.g. *Lügen haben kurze Beine*, lit. 'Lies have short legs', in German. Having short or no feet/legs metonymically implies the inability to travel far and fast, which in turn implies that whoever is running will be caught in short time and close to the starting point. So, the proverb points out in the comment part an element that paints a negative outcome, and thus creates a negative or loss-frame. The pre-condition for this metonymy in both English and German is the personification metaphor—lie becomes a living creature (human-like) with body, including the relevant body parts, i.e. limbs. In the Croatian equivalent, *U laži su kratke noge*, lit. 'In lie, legs are short', lie is metaphorically presented as a location, but at the same time lie metonymically stands for the activity of lying (OBJECT OF AN ACTIVITY STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY). The Hungarian equivalent, *A hazug emebert hamarabb utolérlik mint a sánta kutyát*, lit. 'The liar is sooner caught up with than a limping dog', contains a simile, but it is based on a depersonification metaphor (HUMANS ARE ANIMALS). Limping metonymically hints at moving/escaping slowly. In a further metonymic step, slow movement implies less distance, just as in the English variant with *travel*. When we take into account the wide-spread metaphor TIME IS MOTION/JOURNEY, the entailment is that lies are discovered quickly, i.e. in short time. All this shows how complex the imagery may be, and how various mechanisms can interact in a variety of ways, often at more than one level.

A Jordanian Arabic proverb, translated as *The rope of lying is short*, also creates a negative or loss-frame because the metaphorically per-

sonified *lie's* rope is considered to be too short, which means it is useless. This metonymically hints at the negative consequences of a lie, a person who commits a lie will face negative consequences and will lose many abstract and concrete things, reputation, values.

Positive or gain-framing refers, on the other hand, to a state or situation where the proverb points out in the comment part an element that paints a positive outcome, and thus creates a positive or gain-frame. The Persian proverb that translates as *Throwing one arrow towards two targets* illustrates this point. Returning to the Persian proverb about new languages, we realize that it is also an example of gain-framing. At the same time, we observe how imagery, i.e. figurative operations help create the idea of gain. As mentioned above, this proverb consists of two elliptical, verbless structures. The first can be interpreted as a metonymy, specifically, OBJECT OF AN ACTIVITY STANDS FOR THE ACTIVITY (i.e. the language stands for the activity of learning/acquiring a new, additional language). Similarly, *new life* stands for new aspects or contents of life, or new possibilities in life. On top of this, we can also assume that novel linguistic capabilities are metaphorically connected with improvement in life, all based on the very simple metaphor MORE IS BETTER. This is what we find in the well-known Latin proverbs *Quot linguas calles tot homines vales* 'How many languages you speak, that many people you are worth' (attributed to Charles the Fifth of the Holy Roman Empire), which is mirrored in many languages, e.g., in Croatian as *Koliko jezika znaš, toliko ljudi vrediš*, or in Hungarian as *Ahány nyelvet beszélsz, annyi embert érsz*.

The third category is avoidance-framing. If a proverb is connected with this type of framing then it consists usually of an imperative construction under negation and an activity or a situation is mentioned which should be avoided. The Arabic proverb that translates as *Don't mention the old records* demonstrates avoidance-framing. A Persian example translates as *Don't play with lion's tail*. Here we can also consider the Jordanian Arabic proverb we mentioned at the beginning. The equivalent of *cunning* is again a metonymic device: here *cunning* stands for all the negative consequences that the ad-

versary's cunning may lead to, and this is clearly something that can be avoided, more specifically pre-empted by the knowledge that becomes accessible through the receptive use of that language.

What the two proverbs dealing with language, the Persian and the Jordanian Arabic one, have in common is that language is in a way conceptualized as a window to one's mind, culture, and also background plans and intentions.

Positive or negative framing or avoidance-framing is also a factor that makes it possible to activate the most appropriate speech act scenario as positive framing activates the speech act of advice and negative or avoidance-framing activates warning. Axiological framing however cannot be separated from framing by imagery as they get integrated in the illocutionary constructions of proverbs which are used holistically embedded in discourse. Proverbs in turn contribute towards framing and re-framing discourse (for example by using a proverb and/or anti-proverb, see Litovkina 2015; Litovkina et al. 2021; Litovkina and Belkhir 2023; Tóthné Litovkina and Mieder 2006).

To sum up: The cognitive pragmatic framework sketched in this section offers the possibility of a full-fledged modelling of proverbs both in decontextualized and context-based modes, and both from monolingual and cross-linguistic perspective. This approach provides access to the cross-linguistic analysis of proverbs along two different axes: to tokens of proverbs and their equivalents on system level and as usage events, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to subsystems and whole systems of proverbs across languages and cultures, whereby data collection can be based on mono- or bilingual dictionaries and on parallel or translation-equivalent corpora. The main advantage of this methodology is to make comparable the relative weight of particular framing types of proverbs across different subsystems and languages. Performing various types of comparisons can shed light on hidden correlations between some variables and it can also pave the way for the emergence of new hypotheses on different levels of abstraction. First of all, one gets insights into

the relative weight of particular features of proverbs in the selected languages against the background of cross-linguistic equivalence groups. Secondly, the proverb definition put forward in Section 2 can be tested on its applicability based on the analysis of networks and subsystems of varying sizes. Thirdly, this approach provides the prerequisites for testing hypotheses regarding universal and culture- or language-specific features of proverbs. Our approach is based on the assumption that the relative weight of illocutionary construction types and framing types - both regarding axiological and figurative framing - is at least partly of culture-specific nature.

## 5. Conclusion

In this article we set the aim for ourselves to put forward a cognitive pragmatic framework capable to provide a multi-faceted and dynamic approach to the analysis of proverbs both within a selected language and across languages and cultures. Our approach according to which proverbs are defined as specific illocutionary constructions with a prototypically fixed form and general reference and with inherent axiological and figurative framing capacities offers criteria for a complex analysis of proverbs. Furthermore, it provides multiple perspectives for the study of proverbs such as 1. monolingual vs. multilingual, 2. decontextualized vs. discourse-based and 3. token-oriented vs. network- or system-oriented approaches. Our framework therefore opens the way to cross-linguistic and intercultural analysis along two axes: Proverbs can be seen on the one hand as independent speech acts and utterances in their own right which have framing potential, proverbs can be, on the other hand, embedded into discourse both in their original and modified form as anti-proverbs and they can contribute both to the axiological and figurative framing of authentic discourse.

The application of this cognitive pragmatic framework to the analysis of authentic discourse, of great samples of proverbs and of a wide spectrum of languages can be seen as further promising research perspectives.

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**DOROTA BRZOWSKA – WŁADYSŁAW CHŁOPICKI**  
**WHEN VULGAR BECOMES HUMOROUS**  
**– THE CASE STUDY OF IDI...**

**Abstract:** The aim of the paper is to deal with the contextual and intertextual humor and its relations to bona-fide-mode of communication, and to analyse the process of a serious, vulgar message turning humorous and starting to function in humorous texts of different genres as a result of its creative transformation and recontextualisation. The Discourse Theory of Humor (Tsakona 2020) and its analytical foci, which are factors for humor quality and success: 1. Sociocultural assumptions, 2. Genre, 3. Text (Tsakona 2020: 129), are used in the article to analyse the political humor instances produced during the Russian-Ukrainian war on the example of the “*idi na hui*” phrase. The sentence containing the phrase, “*Русский военный корабль, иди на хуй*” (Russian warship, go fuck yourself), was originally used on 24 February 2022 during the Russian attack on Snake Island in Ukraine’s territorial waters by the border guard Roman Hrybov, who addressed the Russian missile cruiser Moskva in this way. The phrase became a winged word, and together with its derivatives gained popularity as a sign of protest during anti-war demonstrations all over the world. The phrase became a part of popular culture as it subsequently appeared in different humorous genres – memes, jokes, cartoons – as well as in non-humorous ones (e.g. songs). When the ship, cursed in this way, was eventually sunk by the Ukrainian missile, the situation was immediately used as an opportunity to create more humorous material. The paper presents the case study offering the detailed analysis of selected humorous instances that arose as a result of these media events.

**Keywords:** genres, humorous discourse, political humor, Russian-Ukrainian war, vulgarisms

### *1. Winged words*

The winged word, basically understood as a catch phrase, has a long tradition, as *epea pteroenta* (“winged words”) are among the most fre-

quent Homeric formulas. Some scholars opt for an interpretation of this frozen metaphor not in terms of birds' flight, but rather the practice of archery - *pteroeis*, where words were conceived as arrows (*gefiedert*, "feathered") and associated with birds (*geflügelt*, "winged"), and gave numerous examples of complementarity between a word and an arrow, and stating that "*epea pteroenta* are words that fly straight to the target, that are suited to the situation" (Létoublon 1999: 326). It is interesting to notice that also the opposite phrase *apteros muthos* or *apteros phatis* ("wingless word") has been discussed by the scholars, who claimed that "the word without *pteron* is a silent voice, one that does not pass into oral expression, in response to an action", and "its fundamental meaning is not in the domain of intellect, but rather in that of psychology" (Latacz in Létoublon 1999: 326).

But in contrast to a "wingless word"—which designates a speech that remains silent, a "word" that does not gain expression by "passing the barrier of the teeth" [...] one appreciates how direct discourse, orally expressed and understood as being reported by the bard just as it was spoken in "reality," could adopt as its most frequent signal the metaphor of the arrow that shoots off into the air, follows its trajectory without deviating from its route, and indeed produces an effect, for good or for ill, on the addressee (Létoublon 1999: 333).

Taking into account the above characteristics of winged words, one can conclude that the phrase "Russian warship, go fuck yourself" has gained the status of a winged word used as an arrow - straight onto the target, brief, fast - and became suitable to the situation. It has also been an expression of psychological power, and this is why it became so popular. The magical thinking leads people to believe in the performative power of words - and that is why the ship that sank sometime later was seen as cursed - struck by the arrow/missile launched by the words of desperate Ukrainian fury.

## 2. Cognitive imagery

With regard to the analysis of human thinking, an influential school among linguists over the last 30 years has been that of cognitive linguistics, shaped by such scholars as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (e.g. 1980 - *Metaphors we live by*) with their notions of image schemas, the precognitive schemas that affect our thinking. They include the basic notions such as container, verticality, path, front/back, figure/ground, merging, separation etc. This school is supplemented by the school of force dynamics led by Leonard Talmy (1988), who offers essentially a similar argument, dwelling on the folk ways of referring by linguistic means to forces that involve the struggle between an agent (agonist in his terms) and an antagonist, one of whom prevails and the other fails (or rather is blocked, i.e. prevented from achieving their goal). Both of these approaches involve and help analyze not only literal, but particularly metaphorical utterances, such as “He included us in his plans” (container schema) or “The telephone prevented him from leaving the house” (social, not physical blockage, thus a metaphorical use). These approaches are clearly compatible with Ronald Langacker’s (e.g. 2008) abstract notions of trajector and landmark that correspond to two major (first and second) entities in the utterance such as “I (trajector) love you (landmark)” and sometimes do not correspond so easily to grammatical subjects and objects (e.g. “That painting (trajector), I (landmark) really like it”). This highly abstract way of thinking is supplemented by Langacker’s interpreting of individual utterances as well as discourse in terms of schematicity/abstraction contrasted to specification of key elements of scenes; these two extremes develop and build upon the earlier notions of scripts or frames (e.g. Minsky 1975 or Fillmore 1984), scenes and scenarios (e.g. Mandler 1980).

The main idea behind these related concepts is that the human use of language is highly flexible, and given one actual, specific scenario or script, e.g. a customer visiting a restaurant, the speaker or hearer can easily move to a more schematic one (a person enters a container) and build upon various elements of the schema: trajector (person) or landmark (restaurant), agonists or antagonists, or parts

of a path image schema, e.g. source (She stood in front of the restaurant studying the menu), path (she opened the door of the restaurant and entered), or goal (she walked into the restaurant, sat at the table and ordered the menu). They can also easily ignore one part of the frame or script structure and develop another as the discourse or context requires (He stood in front of the restaurant, but, having looked at the menu, he decided the place was too posh and went home to heat up yesterday's soup). This flexibility, which can also be labeled creativity, is highly prominent in the case study we are examining in this article - the "arrow expression" hit the target and the aftermath reverberated in the audiences' minds pushing them into a creative effort. Furthermore, such a creative effort usually evokes a humorous reception of the stimulus, as clashes of different domains (frames, scripts; the phenomenon referred to as an incongruity or script opposition) are usually involved in such reshuffling or creative developments; in the case of memes the whole process is sometimes known as that of *memeosis*, e.g. Attardo 2020.

### 3. *Discourse Theory of Humor*

The above mentioned flexibility and creativity in the use of language is also visible in the Discourse Theory of Humor (DTH), which has grown out of the General Theory of Verbal Humor (GTVH; Attardo and Raskin 1991), which was in turn based on the Semantic Theory of Humor (Raskin 1985). The analysis of the text according to GTVH should include the following elements: language, narrative strategy, target, situation, logical mechanism, and script opposition. DTH elaborates on the GTVH in adding a detailed description of metapragmatic elements, and including Analytical Foci: 1. Sociocultural assumptions, 2. Genre, and 3. Text, which are the factors for humor success/failure, and high/low quality (Tsakona 2020: 129).

Sociocultural assumptions are strictly connected with the context of the occurring humor instances. As for genres, humour may be "typical" or "indispensable" for certain genres or "severely restricted" in others. Tsakona proposes an intermediate level in which "humour

is not obligatory but may occur whenever speakers think that its use serves their situated communicative goals“ (Tsakona 2020: 68), and can occur in genres where the presence of humour is not required, but frequent, or in genres where humour may occasionally occur, but it is not expected/frequent. Speakers are at liberty to make adjustments to the genres, to fulfill their discursive goals. Sufficiently large modifications may impact the genre itself and modify it. Tsakona calls this “renewal” or “recreation” of the genre (Attardo 2021: 269).

Text analysis focuses on a detailed description of what particular examples look like and what is the interplay between the visual and textual in the described instances of humor.

#### ***4. Vulgar words – the importance of vernacular language in showing strong emotions, and touching taboo sphere***

Another aspect of creativity or humorous incongruities that is often mentioned in the context of humour analysis is vulgarity or obscenity. When swear words are used, they may at first sight seem to be solely responsible for the humorous effect, but it is so only from a limited perspective. Chafe (2007) in his book, *The importance of not being earnest*, offers his reflection in this regard, arguing that the use of swear words may enhance the humorous effect, but they themselves do not constitute an incongruity, unless they evoke a register clash with the previous discourse, often by force of surprise. Any elements of the vernacular can strengthen the humorous effect because of the natural need of the hearer to become involved in humour (just as in any story, notably), to relate to it, to be moved by it, and thus if the joke teller uses the type of language that the hearer can relate to, the hearer can feel involved and engaged. Emotional involvement (which may entail other effects, such as giving outlet to the hearer’s/speaker’s frustration, and/or other negative emotions) may contribute further to the intensity of humour experience in both interlocutors, if we are dealing with conversational humour, but it also potentially enhances the perception of funniness of online humour, such as memes, where the sender is often anonymous and there is no specific target reader.

Further to the issue and closer to our case study, it should be emphasized that Slavic languages have a large repertoire of swear words of varying degree of offensiveness, many of which etymologically draw on the proto-Slavic language (this includes *hui* (prick), which is the focus of our study), and thus are deeply entrenched in the languages and considered native. Chłopicki (2019) discusses the diversity and flexibility of their usages, which bring to mind the now classical distinctions of restricted and elaborated codes, introduced by Bernstein (1962); in this regard, the vernacular language is often characterized by a limited number of swear words that are used highly flexibly and are context-sensitive, thus representing the restricted code. The recent dictionary of Polish swear words (published by JanKomunikant 2011 as well as Grochowski 2022), claims with multiple examples that the most popular Polish swear words (such as *kurwa*, which has a Latin origin, however) can have as many as 80 contextual meanings, although some of the distinctions seem doubtful and the differences in meaning can alternatively be attributed to contextual differences, and their schematic meaning might be claimed to be the same.

Swear words are sometimes used in intentionally offensive artistic actions, which can be considered practical jokes that draw on basic cognitive imagery (notably verticality, which is inextricably connected with phallicity): In 2010, the Russian street art group Voina painted a giant 65 m long and 27 meters wide phallus on the surface underneath the Liteyny drawbridge leading to the Bolshoy Dom, so when the bridge was up, the big “fuck you” sign appeared just in front of headquarters of the Federal Security Service in Saint Petersburg (cf. [http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/brown/voina4-29-11\\_detail.asp?picnum=1](http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/reviews/brown/voina4-29-11_detail.asp?picnum=1), retrieved on 16 March 2023).

### *5. Context of the Russian-Ukrainian war humor*

The connection between the phallic symbol and an invective against Putin and the Russian war has been present in the public sphere not only as the verbal gesture of the Ukrainian soldier pointed at the Russian ship, which we discuss in the present article.

Ukrainian road services undertook actions trying to mislead the Russian tanks on Ukrainian roads by removing signposts and putting „на хуй” signs (literally “to prick”, interpretable as “to hell”) on the signposts leading in all directions; to amplify the effect, the road services advertised it in social media too (<https://www.unian.ua/economics/transport/ukravtodor-demontuye-dorozhni-znaki-meta-zaplutatti-okupanta-necenzurnoyu-leksikoyu-novini-ukrajina-11719471.html>, retrieved on 26 February 2022).

„Русский военный корабль, иди нахуй” (Russkij wojennyj korabl, idi nachuj)“ (Eng. Russian warship, go fuck yourself) was the last message transmitted by the border guard Roman Hrybov to the Russian missile cruiser Moskva, on 24 February 2022, during the Russian naval attack on Snake Island in Ukraine’s territorial waters. The phrase and its derivatives became widely adopted during the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine in protests and demonstrations around the world. A few weeks later, the phrase was commemorated on a postage stamp specially emitted by Ukrposhta, the Ukrainian postal service. On 13 April 2022, one day after the first issue of the commemorative stamp, the Moskva was critically damaged by an explosion caused by Ukrainian anti-ship missiles and sank the following day” ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_warship,\\_go\\_fuck\\_yourself](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_warship,_go_fuck_yourself), retrieved on 16 March 2023).

## 6. *Battle of Snake Island – humorous material*

Soon after the first use of the phrase, internet users displayed their creativity and the phrase appeared multiple times in various forms and genres that started to spread across the internet. The different genres included among others: comments (one liners), antiproverbs, memes, cartoons, stamps, posters, banners, billboards, signposts, songs<sup>1</sup>. The phrase itself was altered on different levels and the mod-

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<sup>1</sup> Songs are worth mentioning as their lyrics contain the analysed antiwar and anti-Putin phrase, but as their content is mostly non-humorous, and the use of humor in protest songs is “rather restricted” (as per Tsakona’s (2020)

ifications included: the verbal form, the language (it was translated into other languages), target, situation, and characters. Also a change of focus was observable - the figure/ ground shifts resulted in a focus on particular elements of the phrase: хуй, иди нахуй, or корабль.

### 6.1. *Playing with figure and ground*

After a short time of the popularity of the whole original phrase, the implicit versions emerged too. Sometimes only the first letter of the swear word was provided, as in Fig 1, the remaining letters being marked by hashtags, and sometimes various other metonymic mechanisms were used, including non-verbal ones like in Figure 2, where the obscene American-style gesture is used to replace the verbal message. The Ukrainian flag was often used as a background, as in Fig 1, where the whole scene is re-sketches to make it more iconic, and the verbal message is translated into English.



Fig. 1. An iconic meme. <https://www.managingip.com/article/2bbhl-4lo97dlbejn0x4ao/exclusive-appeal-launched-over-russian-warship-trade-mark-rejection>, retrieved on 23 February 2023.

terminology that includes genres with “severely restricted” use of humor), this calls for a separate study. Some Polish songs examples performed successfully by recognized authors during concerts or as youtube editions include e.g. Dezerter, Idi, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KnqKKxG3uk>, Janusz Kurowski, Russkij korabl, idi na chuj, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axZ-kNXDHdWo>, Szymon Podwin, Idi nachuj, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-nEAU-GRTVyo>, all retrieved on 16 March 2023.





Fig. 2. A Ukrainian stamp. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian\\_warship,\\_go\\_fuck\\_yourself#/media/File:Stamp\\_of\\_Ukraine\\_s1985.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_warship,_go_fuck_yourself#/media/File:Stamp_of_Ukraine_s1985.jpg), retrieved on 29 December 2022.

There were multiple translations of the phrase into various languages, and they were often accompanied by a change of context, like in Fig. 3, where the phrase is translated into Polish and placed in the Polish context as a banner at a Ukrainian refugee reception centre.



Fig. 3. Reception centre for Ukrainian refugees in Poland. <https://wyborcza.pl/51,75410,28232401.html#S.galeria-K.C-B.1-L.1.duzy>, retrieved on 16 March 2023.

Some of the images, like Fig. 1, have the ship as the central figure, while other ones focus on the human figures (like Fig. 2). So does Fig.

4, which brings to the fore the barely sketched out faces: an angry and shouting person (standing for Russia, which is made clear by the flag background) challenges a wise and calm one that resembles an ancient Greek sculpture, probably of the philosopher Socrates (standing for Ukraine, which again is made clear by the presence of the flag).

**'Russian warship, go f\*\*\* yourselves':  
Final words of Ukrainian border guards  
protecting Snake Island – just 40 miles  
from Romanian border in the Black Sea  
– before Kremlin navy opened fire  
killing all 13 of them when they refused  
to surrender**

- Contingent of soldiers, allegedly 13 in number, were posted on Snake Island
- It sits in off the coast of Ukraine and Romania and was controlled by Ukraine
- Recording relayed the ultimatum sent by Russian sailors on nearby warship
- They warned the guards to surrender 'otherwise you will be shelled'
- The men defiantly refused and all were subsequently killed



Fig. 4. Schematic Russian and Ukrainian characters.

<https://i.kym-cdn.com/photos/images/original/002/317/755/8b2>, retrieved on 29 December 2022.

## 6.2. *Playing with targets and scenarios*

Such a prominent and provocative message is bound to encourage recontextualisations (cf. Tsakona 2020), which includes a change of target within the same scenario or the change of the scenario itself into a related or even unrelated one. Thus, on the posters used in protests against the war, the caricature of Putin is accompanied by the message from Snake Island, thus the target of the message predictably expands from the Moskva ship to Putin, as the warmonger and instigator, thus becoming personalised (see Figure 5).



Fig. 5. Protest against the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Częstochowa. (Phot. Grzegorz Skowronek / Agencja Wyborcza.pl), <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75410,28232401,idi-nachuj-to-zawolanie-naszycz-czasow-niech-zostanie-z-nami.html>, retrieved on 8 March 2022.

More interesting shifts, however, include changes of scenarios (also known as scripts). The memes in Figure 6 present two different although related scenarios that shift the “Idi” story towards the Battleship Game scenario and Computer Keyboard operation scenario, respectively. The elements linking the war event and the game are the ships, while in case of computer operations this is the Z symbol, standing for the Russian troops. In Figure 7 in turn the scenario is that of a promotion (fictional in this case as ship promotion does not exist), as well as ship identification procedure (false identification in that case).



Fig. 6. Memes that emerged after the Moskva cruiser was destroyed. Left: Zelensky: “So I fire at B5”, Putin: “Sunk”; <https://joemonster.org/art/63726>, retrieved on 14 April 2022.

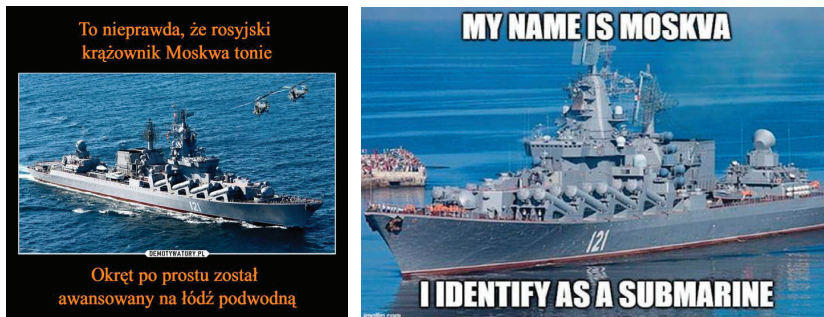


Fig. 7. Meme on the left: It is not true that the Russian Moskva ship is sinking. The ship has simply been promoted to a submarine. [https://demotywatory.pl/5131263/Russkij-wojennyj-korabl-idi-na-c\\*uj-MEMY-po-zniszczeniu](https://demotywatory.pl/5131263/Russkij-wojennyj-korabl-idi-na-c*uj-MEMY-po-zniszczeniu), retrieved on 14 April 2022.

Sometimes the examples shift to other unrelated scenarios, with the same target (Putin). In comments offered by Polish commentators under a newspaper article concerning the war (all comments from <https://wyborcza.pl/0,128956.html?tag=idi+nachuj#S.tag-K.C-B.1-L.1.redlink>), some antiproverbs, thoroughly researched by Litovkina (e.g. in *A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away*, 2000), can be found as well: “Kto mieczem wojuje, ten czasem ginie od chuja”, Eng. “live by the sword, die by the dick”, which is the altered version of “live by the sword, die by the sword”. Thus the death at war scenario clashes here with sexual scenario, as antiproverbs aim at evoking incongruity.

Among the comments, there are also references to “Idi na chuj” as a middle name or an identification phrase functioning as a name, which evoke the immortality scenario since they are to be carved on Putin’s grave:

-Vladimir Vladimirovich “Idinachuj” Putin. To już mu zostanie nawet po śmierci. Piękna i dumna spuścizna. [This will stay with him even after death. A beautiful and proud heritage].

-No to, Wołodia, doczekales się frazy, która cię unieśmiertelni! Wyrjemy ci te słowa na nagrobku! [So, Volodia, you have earned the phrase that will make you immortal! We will carve it on your tombstone.]

In other cases the change of the target occurs, and Polish politics and politicians are criticized by the same saying:

1/ Pisiory idi na h...!!!!!! [PIS [Law and Justice party] idi na h..]

2/ Kaczor idi nachuj (Kaczor - male duck - reference to Kaczyński’s last name)

3/ Kaczorze ty mój... [“Kaczor mine”, *Idi na huj* is only alluded to here via the rhyming words *mój-hui*)

Adherents of the ruling political party in Poland - PIS (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Law and Justice) are known among their political opponents as “Pisiory” - a disrespectful nickname, also by allusive

reference to another slang meaning of the word - dick (Pl. *pisior*), hence 1/. The sayings 2/ and 3/ bring in the reference to Kaczor (Pl. male duck, but also a popular derogatory nickname of Jarosław Kaczyński, PIS leader), 3 evoking the reference to the saying in question only indirectly, via the phrase that rhymes in Polish (this works since the comment itself is among the responses in the thread that concerns the saying in question).

Other scenarios are also evoked in the following cartoons. In Figure 8, the sexual scenario is evoked via the image of a bathing young woman, who uses the saying in order to scare away the ship, which, absurdly, has its periscope directed at her back side. Naturally, the word *hui* itself (spelled *chuj* in the Polish way) does evoke sexual references here, especially to stereotypically rough Russian hobos.



Fig. 8. <https://www.blasty.pl/tag/idi-na-chuj>, retrieved on 2 March 2022.

Figure 9. displays the scenario of killed Russian soldiers reporting at the Pearly Gate who approach St Peter and apparently ask him to let them in, which he refuses to do, whereupon they complain that they have been promised (probably by leaders of Russian Orthodox Church, like Metropolitan Kiril) the life in paradise, and St Peter amusingly sends them away with the “Idi” saying, thus both the target and the scenario are different here.



Fig. 9. Soldiers: “But we have been promised paradise.” St Peter: “Russian soldiers ‘Idite (pl. from *idi*) na hui’” <https://realist.online/news/osnovano-na-realnykh-sobytijakh-podborka-memov-pro-voynu-putina-i-eho-orkov>, retrieved on 8 March 2022.

Finally, Figure 10 displays a tongue-in-cheek quote from a fictional character, known as Baba Nadya, who came into being in 2022 as a fictional author of incongruously vulgar street messages addressed to Russian occupying soldiers, telling them to go away. Later on, she became a popular online 2-D Instagram character (with as many as 100 thousand followers) that produced memes praising Ukraine and putting down Russia. Here she argues that the author of the saying must become the next protagonist on the Ukrainian dating TV show called the Bachelor, where the title character is to choose a female partner among many candidates. The message, like other messages of Baba Nadya, is incongruous as it presents the Ukrainian soldier, the author of the saying, as a much desired, well-kept masculine man. Thus there are two unrelated scenarios with two unrelated targets, the vulgar saying being their only linking element.



Fig. 10. The author of the “Idi” phrase must be the next “Холостяк” Bachelor (very popular show on Ukrainian TV), <https://realist.online/news/russkij-korabl-idi-na-khj-i-banderovskoe-smuzi-voennye-memy-dlja-podnjati-ja-dukha->, retrieved on 28 February 2022.

## 7. Conclusions

A theme closely reported by various media across the globe once again proved to be very productive in creating humor in different genres. Although the Russian war with Ukraine could also be looked on from the sick disaster jokes perspective (see Davies 1998), we have chosen to focus more on the change of context, targets and scenarios as they illustrated the dynamics and possibilities given by imagination, creative use of language and the resulting humor, seen from various angles. The material analyzed shows the occurrence of the following types of changes observed in the collected corpus: change of the context, change of the target, playing with targets and scenarios, reversing figure and ground perspectives. When we look at the case in accordance with the Discourse Theory of Humor we see that:

1. Sociocultural assumptions draw attention to the severe criticism of the Russian invasion. The specific examples of the courage and prowess of the military forces of a smaller country fighting against those of a bigger one make the target audience of the humor-



ous text cheer the successes and admire the power of resistance of the Ukrainian soldiers. The leaders are pictured as opposite characters - Zelensky as the hero and Putin as the villain. Civilians - mainly women are also engaged in conveying the message that Russians should go home.

2. There are multiple humorous genres us used to repeat the same phrase: banners, posters, stamps, with memes and cartoons being the prevailing examples. As for genres represented in the study, we took into consideration those when humor was “typical” or “indispensable” - memes and cartoons. Most of the cases occurring in different genres could be classified as representing Tsakona’s intermediate level. Creators of banners and posters made necessary adjustments to fulfill the discursive goals of making people laugh and support the antiwar case.

3. Texts are the factors for humor success/failure, and high/low quality. The analyzed phrase proved to be successful and of high discursive quality as it was able to resonate wildly in instances of different humorous examples and spread quickly both in the public sphere and in the internet spaces of at least three different languages - Ukrainian, Polish and English.

The research has shown the occurrence of multigenre instances that were used by humor creators to comment on the war topic in relation to one prominent wing-word phrase that somehow summarized the Ukrainian attitudes towards their enemy. Because of its sharp, short and vulgar form it became the slogan used by those who wanted to show their support of fighting Ukrainians. Let us hope that one more time history will prove that “The pen (word in this case) is mightier than the sword”.

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FORGÁCS TAMÁS

## A KONNOTATÍV JELENTÉS VÁLTOZÁSAI FRAZEOLÓGIAI EGYSÉGEKBEN

**Absztrakt:** Keveset kutatták eddig a frazeológia történeti aspektusait, pedig az idők során megváltozhat a frazémák alakja és a jelentése is. A denotatív jelentés mellett megváltozhat az egységek **konnotatív jelentése** is. Ennek megítélése ugyan nem könnyű, ugyanis erősen függ a lexikográfus szubjektív megítélésétől, márpedig régi gyűjteményekben szinte csak erre hagyatkozhatunk. Bizonyos tendenciák azonban így is kirajzolódnak.

Az egyik változás, hogy a magasabb műveltséget, olvasottságot feltételező fordulatok, amelyek forrásvidéke például az antik irodalom, a mindennapi közlés szintjére kerülve többnyire **veszítenek választékosságukból**. Ez gyakran együtt jár a demotiválódásukkal is, vagyis a nyelvhasználók többnyire nem ismerik már a mögöttük lévő mitológiai tartalmakat (pl. *páni félelem, sziszifuszi munka*).

Egy másik tendencia, hogy a kezdetben pusztán szűkebb körben, például a szlengben használt kifejezések a köznyelvben is elterjedve **veszítenek argotikus konnotációjukból** (pl. *palira vesz, kihúzza a gyufát*).

Egy harmadik tendencia, hogy a **nyelvhasználatban visszaszoruló, ritkábbá váló kifejezések idővel választékosnak hatnak** (pl. *délihábot kerget, iga alatt nyög*).

**Kulcsszók:** történeti frazeológia, konnotatív jelentés, jelentésváltozás.

**Abstract:** The historical aspects of phraseology have barely been researched even though the form and the meaning of phrasemes can change during time. Not only the denotative meaning, but also the **connotative meaning** of the phraseological units can change. It is not easy to evaluate it because it strongly depends on the subjective opinion of the lexicographer, on which we can almost only rely in old collections. In spite of this, certain tendencies are still emerging.

As one of the changes, when those idioms which require higher literacy to be understood, and whose source is, for example, Classical Literature, are

becoming part of everyday communication, they **are mostly losing their selectivity and elaboration**. It is often connected to their demotivation, too, i.e. in most cases language users are not familiar with the mythological contents behind these idioms (for example, *páni félelem* 'panic reaction', *sziszifuszi munka* 'Sisyphian task').

As another tendency, while those phrases which at the beginning were merely used in a narrow circle, such as slang, are spreading in common language, they **are losing their slang/argotic connotation** (for example, *palira vesz* 'make a dupe of sy', *kihúzza a gyufát* 'to get it in the neck').

It is a third tendency that **with time, those phrases that were regressing in language use and becoming less and less common have turned into appearing selective and elaborate** (for example, *délibábot kerget* 'to chase a mirage', *a zsarnokság igája alatt nyög* 'to groan under the yoke of tyranny').

**Keywords:** historical phraseology, connotative meaning, change of meaning

1. A frazeológiai egységek használatának egyik fő funkciója a kifejezés expresszivitásának növelése: emiatt nagyon sokuknak – elsősorban az idiomatikus kapcsolatoknak – lényegesen erősebbek a konnotatív jelentésaspektusai, mint az egyszerű lexémáknak. A **konnotatív jelentés** indirekt információként a beszélőnek a beszéd tárgyához való érzelmi beállítottságát vagy a szóban forgó jelnek a nyelvi eszközök használatával kapcsolatos normarendszerbe való besorolását fejezi ki. Ez a szempont a szótárakban az ún. **stílusminősítésekben** fejeződik ki, melyekben részben a tényleges stílusrétegekbe való besorolás (hivatalos, választékos, durva stb.), részben a kifejezés csoportnyelvi besorolását illető információk (szleng, argó, szaknyelvi stb.), esetleg annak dialektális jellegére vagy elavult voltára való utalások tartoznak (vö. Fleischer 1997: 198).

A frazeológiai egységeket a konnotatív jelentés szemszögéből gyakran meglehetősen egyoldalúan ítélik meg, és sokukat – általánosítva – a pongyola vagy a bizalmas nyelvhasználat körébe tartozónak

állítják be.<sup>1</sup> Ez a megközelítés azonban túlzottan egyoldalú, ugyanis egyes konnotatív jelentések a szövegben különböző felhasználást nyerhetnek. Helyesen mutat rá például Fleischer arra (1997: 199), hogy a *régies* stílusminősítésű egységek használhatók archaizálásra, de akár irónia kifejezésére is. De más stílusminősítésekkel kapcsolatban is találkozhatunk ilyen esetekkel. Bárdosi például *választékos*-ként tünteti fel szólásmagyarázó lexikonában a *néma levente* szókapcsolatot (2015: 337), s ez annyiban el is fogadható, hogy egy kevésbé ismert irodalmi mű a forrása: Heltai Jenő 1936-ban megjelent, azonos című színműve. Ugyanakkor azonban ezt is gyakran használják ironikusan, sőt gúnyosan, l. az alábbi példákat:

- (1) ...vége a közmegegyezésnek. A pártok közötti fogadalomnak, hogy mint megannyi **néma levente**, úgy burkolóznak hallgatásba egymás pénztárosairól, káeftéiről, ügyvédi irodáiról. (Magyar Hírlap 1996. október 30., 7)
- (2) A „parlament **néma leventéje**”, Czoma Kálmán, aki egyetlenegyszer sem szólalt fel az Országgyűlésben, Torgyán József sugallatára váratlanul kezdeményezte a kizárásomat, de a többség nem szavazta meg ezt. (MNSzt.; Népszabadság 2001. március 20.; Cím: Patthelyzet a kiszáradt frakcióban)

A szótári **stílusminősítésekkel** egyébként is nagyon óvatosnak **kell lenni**, azok ugyanis gyakran elég szubjektívek, s meglehetősen függenek a gyűjteményt készítő lexikográfus értékítéletétől. O. Nagy például az *érti a dörgést* [*dürgést*] szólást a *táj* rövidítéssel nyelvjárási-asnak tünteti fel, de rögtön utána az *ismeri* [*tudja*] a *dürgést* [*dörgést*] változatot már a *biz* rövidítéssel a familiáris stílusrétegbe tartozóként adatozza (1976: 150). Valójában azonban itt egyazon szólás variánsairól van szó, s ha megvizsgáljuk az MNSzt. adatait, akkor is láthatjuk, hogy az *érti a dörgést/dürgést* alak is előfordul több 20. századi írónk-

<sup>1</sup> Ezt tükrözi néhány régi magyar fordulat is, amelyek arra céloznak, hogy inkább a tanulatlan emberek élnek szólásokkal vagy közmondásokkal: *Ostoba ember kedveli a közmondásokat; A naplopó szájában mindig kész a közmondás* (vö. Szemerkenyi 1994: 52).

nál és a sajtónyelvben is, azaz egyértelműen megkérdőjelezhető a dialektális besorolása.<sup>2</sup>

A '(megalkuvó módon) a sajtójától eltérő többségi véleményt hangoztatja' jelentésű *együtt üvölt a farkasokkal* fordulatot viszont *választékosnak* nyilvánítja O. Nagy, miközben az ezzel szorosan összefüggő közmondásszerű formát (*Aki farkassal lakik, farkasnak kell annak lenni*) *tájnnyelv*ként szerepelteti (1976: 197). Magam az utóbbi formát inkább *régiesnek*, elavultnak jelölném<sup>3</sup>, a szólásváltozatot viszont inkább *köznyelv*inek s enyhén *pejoratív*nak mondanám, mintsem *választékosnak*. Egyébként a kifejezés német megfelelője (*mit den Wölfen heulen*) sem számít *választékosnak* a Duden 11 szerint (812), ebben szerintem szerepe lehet a *heulen* ige pejoratív konnotációjának, s talán ugyanez érvényesül a magyarban is.<sup>4</sup> Hasonlóképpen nem érzem *választékosnak* a kifejezéssel szinonim, annak szerkezeti variánsának tekinthető *együtt bőg a nyájjal* szólást sem. Ebben szerepet játszik a *bőg* negatív stílushatása mellett a *nyáj* lexéma negatívan konnotált másodlagos jelentése is ('vkit, vmit ostobán, vakon követő embercsoport'):

- (3) A Minden Korok „szere”, a „korszerű” elleni lázadás legalább olyan extatikus örömet okozhat, mint **együtt bőgni** a mindenkori **nyájjal**. '68 szelleme azt üzeni máig: – ÁLLJUNK ELLEN minden hülyeségnek, legyen akár többségi, akár kisebbségi. (Magyar Hírlap 1998. július 28., 13)

2. Már maguknak a **stílusminősítéseknek a típusai is vitára adhatnak néha okot**, ezt jól szemléltetik O. Nagy gyűjteményének a *vál* és az *irod* rövidítésekkel feltüntetett besorolásai is. Az első rövidítés feloldása: „a választékos stílusrétegbe tartozó”, a másodiké: „az iro-

<sup>2</sup> Ezt tükrözi egyébként az is, hogy Bárdosi (2009: 130–131) is pusztán a *bizalmas* besorolással közli ezt a fordulatot, nem tüntet fel *tájnnyelvi* besorolást, de Szemerkenyi (2009: 281) is *köznyelv*ként adatozza.

<sup>3</sup> Megjegyzem, hogy a kicsivel később feltüntetett *Ki farkassal tart, annak vonítani kell* változatot O. Nagy is *régiesnek* jelzi (1976: 198).

<sup>4</sup> Vö. még fr. *Il faut hurler avec les loups* és ang. *Who keeps company with wolves, will learn to howl*, ill. *One must howl with the wolves* (vö. Bárdosi 2015: 269)



dalmi nyelvben használatos” (1976: 29). Ha abból indulunk ki, hogy O. Nagy szótárának megjelenése idején az irodalmi nyelv nagyjából egyet jelentett a leginkább kiművelt nyelvváltozattal, akkor lehet olyan érzésünk, hogy ez a két stílusréteg meglehetősen közel áll egymáshoz, elkülönítésük tehát nem egészen szerencsés. Ez a véleményünk csak tovább erősödhet az olyan példánk láttán, mint amiket a **szárny** címszóban találunk (1976: 616–617):

(4) sz290: *Megszegik a szárnya [szárnya szegik] vkinek* = ereje javát elveszti, tehetetlenné válik (*rég, irod*)

sz291: *Szárnyára ereszt [bocsát] vkit* = kibocsátja az életbe (*vál*)  
Vö: sz292

sz292: *Szárnyra kel vki* = elhagyja a szülői házat, és önálló életet kezd (*irod*) Vö: sz291

sz293: *Kiterjeszti a szárnyait vki fölött [fölé]* = oltalmába, védelmébe veszi (*irod*)

Különösen az sz291 és sz292 jelzésű szólások esetében tett kölcsönös hivatkozások szemléltetik véleményem szerint, hogy nem igazán indokolt ennek a két stílusminősítésnek a szétválasztása.

Az *Aki másnak vermet ás, maga esik bele* fordulatot O. Nagy köznyelviként kezeli – helyesen, hiszen az egyik legismertebb közmondásunkról van szó. Az előtte feltüntetett szólásszerű változatot (*vermet ás vkinek*) viszont *irodalmi nyelvi* stílusminősítéssel közli, ám ha megnézzük az MNSzt. adatait, akkor azt látjuk, hogy ez utóbbira is jócskán találunk példákat a *személyes* vagy a *sajtónyelvi* használatban is.

A stílusminősítések esetlegességét jól tükrözi a következő példa is:

(5) *bekapja a legyet* a) (*biz*) 'elhiszi a hazugságot; lépre megy'; b) (*argó*) '<nő> elveszti a szüzességét, ill. teherbe esik' (O. Nagy 1976: 428)

A kifejezésnek mindkét jelentése nagyjából a *bizalmas* stílusrétegbe tartozik, a b) jelentés azonban valóban inkább csoportnyelvi, bár ma már legfőljebb a *szleng*, s nem az *argó* körébe utalnám. Ennek

a különbségnek az okát azonban inkább abban keresném, hogy a terhesség a tabu fogalomkörébe esik (Ullmann felosztásában (1973: 260) az *illem tabui* közé), így a humorosan eufemisztikus megnevezését talán kissé alacsonyabb stílusrétegbe tartozónak érezzük.

Az (úgy) *kivan, mint a liba* hasonlat esetében O. Nagy a kifejezés két jelentését szintén eltérő stílusminősítéssel közli: a) (*biz, tréf*) 'nagyon kimerült'; b) (*argó*) 'egy krajcárja sincs' (i. m. 435), de szerintem a második meglehetősen ritka: inkább kissé alkalmi, okkasionális használatnak érzem, az MNSzt.-ben sem találtam ilyen adatot.

O. Nagy *tájnnyelv*ként tünteti gyűjteményében az *ott áll [van], ahol a part szakad* szólást is, de ebben az esetben is helyesebbnek tartom Bárdosi véleményét, aki stílusminősítés nélkül közli a fordulatot, azaz *köznyelv*ként sorolja be (2009: 544). Ez persze jelezheti azt is, hogy a két gyűjtemény megjelenése közti időben (ebben az esetben: 1976 és 2009) megváltozhat a nyelvhasználatban egyes kifejezések megítélése a beszélők részéről, de a különbség fakadhat a lexikográfusok eltérő nyelvi ízléséből is.

Sőt: egy-egy stílusminősítés akár függhet a társadalmi közfelfogástól is. A *Pénz olvasva/számolva, (asszony verve) jó* közmondás alapjelentését ('a kifizetett pénzt mindkét félnek gondosan meg kell számolnia') O. Nagy (1976: 555) és Bárdosi (2009: 548) egyformán adják meg, de a zárójelbe tett, tréfás folytatás jelentését O. Nagy – feltehetően a kor szocialista közvélekedésének szigorúbb normái miatt – nem a *bizalmas* stílusrétegbe tartozóként tünteti fel, hanem *régies*-nek mondja, s szögletes zárójelben azt is hozzáteszi, hogy jelentése <fejletlen társadalmi közösségekben>: 'a férj olykor veréssel is neveli a feleségét'. Bárdosinál ez a kitétel – helyesen – elmarad, hiszen nyilvánvaló, hogy a nők elleni erőszak – sajnos – nem a társadalmi fejlettség függvénye.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Ez az értékítélet maguknak a gyűjteményben szereplő fordulatoknak a kiválasztásában is szerepet játszhat. Nyilvánvalóan a fenti példából is látható társadalmi álszemérem lehetett az oka, hogy O. Nagy gyűjteményéből hiányoznak más, a családon belüli erőszakra utaló közmondások is, mint pl. *A malmon*

3. A konnotatív jelentésaspektusok leírása tehát nem könnyű, meglehetősen függ a lexikográfus megítélésétől és ízlésétől is. Történeti szövegekben még nagyobb bajban vagyunk, hiszen igazi kompetencia híján gyakran csak sejtéseink lehetnek ezekről az aspektusokról.<sup>6</sup> De azért itt is lehetnek bizonyos fogódzóink. Korhonen például egyik cikkében (1990: 264) a 17. sz. elejéről való német újságszövegek frazeológiai egységeit vizsgálva arra a megállapításra jut, hogy a *Relation* című újság gyászhireiben megfigyelhető egy olyan tendencia, hogy ha egy előkelő, illetve magas állású személyiség haláláról írnak, akkor a *Todes verscheiden* vagy a *mit Tod abgehen* frazémákat használják, egyéb esetekben viszont a puszta *sterben* 'meghal' igét, vö. pl.

(6a) Am erschienen (!) Donnerstag ist der Cardinal Monreale *tods verschieden* ... der Principe de Puzuola vom Hauß (!) Conzaga ist auch *mit Todt abgangen*

(6b) ... aus Engelland schreibt man das zu Londen (!) wochentlich 200. (!) Personen *sterben*

A kontextusok alapján tehát nagyon valószínű, hogy a két frazeológiai kifejezés abban a korban is a választékos stílusrétegbe tartozhatott. Előfordul ugyanakkor, hogy bizonyos kifejezések csak egyszer-kétszer fordulnak elő a vizsgált szövegekben: ilyenkor nagyon nehéz állást foglalni a konnotatív jelentések tekintetében. Némi segítséget adhat viszont egy szintaktikai kritérium: ha két kifejezés össze van kapcsolva, s közülük az egyiknek ismerjük a konnotációját. Valószínűsíthető ugyanis, hogy két és-sel kapcsolt fordulat egy tárgyilagos tudósításban ugyanahhoz a stílusréteghez tartozhat, vö. pl.

(7) ... Trautmannsdorff aber hat jhn ermahnt / *gemach zuthun vnnnd hinter sich zu denken...* (Korhonen 1990: 264)

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*és ifju asszonyon gyakor az igazítás vagy Ha a hörcsökös asszonyt meg akarod szelidíteni, járd meg vele a táncot a mogyorósban 'verd meg mogyorópálcával'* (vö. Margalits 1896: 23).

<sup>6</sup> Bizonyára ezzel magyarázható az is, hogy a frazeológiai jelentés változásával foglalkozó tanulmányok alig térnek ki ezekre az aspektusokra: Burger és Linke is mindössze két mondatot szánnak a problémákörre (1998: 751).

A *Gemach tun* és a *hinter sich denken* kifejezések ebben az esetben egyaránt arra vonatkoznak, hogy 'higgadjon le, gondolja át nyugodtabb körülmények között a dolgot', s feltételezhetően egyaránt a semleges stílushoz tartoznak.

Előfordulhat azonban az is, hogy egy idiómát egy bizonyos kontextusban inadekvátnak érzünk, ugyanakkor további adatok híján nem tudunk a kérdésben biztosan állást foglalni. Korhonen (i. m. 265) bemutat például egy 1609-ből származó szövegrészletet, amelyben egy világos, kissé száraz stílusú információközlésben bukkan fel egy expresszív idióma:

(8) Der Böhm. Hoff Secretarius Johan Manteli hat vmb erlassung seines Diensts angehalten / vnd *sich aus dem Staub gemacht*.

Ebben az *Aviso* című lapból idézett részletben a képi megfogalmazást egy hivatalos nyelvi fordulat (*um Erlassung seines Dienstes anhalten* 'felmentését kéri a szolgálatvégzés alól') előzi meg, ennél fogva meglehetősen stílustörésnek tűnik az 'elkotródik, odébbáll' jelentésű *sich aus dem Staub machen* [szó szerint kb.: 'eltünteti magát a porfelhőből'] kifejezés használata. Emiatt felmerül, hogy vajon ez utóbbi ebben az időben ugyanúgy a *familiáris*, sőt némileg *argotikus* stílusrétegbe tartozhatott-e, mint ma.<sup>7</sup> Korhonen is megjegyzi, hogy ennek a megítéléséhez további korpuszintern és -extern vizsgálatokra volna szükség. Számolni kell ugyanakkor azzal, hogy az első német újságok megjelenésének idején a stilisztikai tudás még nem lehetett igazán

<sup>7</sup> Segítheti a konnotatív jelentés felfedezését, ha a szerző idézőjelbe teszi a szóban forgó fordulatot. A következő két példában is ez a megoldás utal a szólások bizalmas, a második példában kissé szleng stílusára:

A nemzetgyűlés „*beleüti az orrát*” az állami szerződésbe is, és nagyobb nyilvánosságot követel, különösen a katonai megrendelések területén. (Heti Világgazdaság 1996.október19., 31-32)

Nemegyszer a temetkezési vállalkozó hamarabb szerez tudomást a halál beálltáról, mint a hozzátartozó. Még él a beteg, de a boncmester már „*drótot kap*” a kórteremből, s amikor a fájdalomtól letaglózott hozzátartozó megérkezik, a vállalkozó már kész okmányokkal fogadja a prospektúra ajtajában. (Népszabadság 1997. február 8., o. n.)

fejlett, illetve ha az volt, akkor különböző okoknál fogva valószínűleg nem figyeltek rá eléggé.

Mindezek alapján azt mondhatjuk, hogy az állandósult szókapcsolatok konnotatív jelentésének vagy jelentéseinek történeti változását egzakt módon leírni nehéz, szinte reménytelen vállalkozás. Bizonyos tendenciák ennek ellenére kirajzolódnak. Vegyük röviden szemügyre ezeket!

4. Vannak olyan kifejezések, amelyek stílusminősítése viszonylag egyértelmű. Ilyenek például azok a magasabb műveltséget, olvasottságot feltételező fordulatok, amelyek forrásvidéke például a görög-római irodalom, közülük is főként azok a szókapcsolatok, amelyek egy mitológiai alakra utaló tulajdonnévi elemet is tartalmaznak. Ilyenek például a következők:

(9) (a) *Léthé vize* 'a feledés, felejtés'

(a) *Danaidák hordója* 'a soha véget nem érő, hiábavaló, eredménytelen tevékenység (szimbóluma)'

*elíziumi mezők* 'a túlvilág'

*Morpheus karjai*(*ba dől*) 'álom(*ba szenderül*)'

*a Nessus inge vkinek (vmi)* 'a romlást hozó ajándék; b) mérhetetlen testi v. lelki kínokat okozó dolog'

*Pandora szelencéje* 'a baj, a szerencsétlenség szimbóluma'; *kinyitja Pandora szelencéjét* 'bajt, szerencsétlenséget idéz elő'

*Polükratész gyűrüje* 'a szerencse mulandóságának, a balsors kikerülhetetlenségének szimbóluma'

*Prokrusztész ágy / vminek a Prokrusztész ágya (vmi)* 'rendszabály, megoldási forma, amelybe a valóságos esetek csak erőszakkal kényszeríthetők' stb.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> A konnotatív jelentés nyelvenként eltérő is lehet: a *matuzsálemi kor*(*ban van*) 'rendkívül magas életkor(*ban van*)' fordulat a magyarban a *választékos* stílusrétegbe tartozik (vö. ÉKsz.<sup>2</sup> 870), a németben azonban az ennek első ránézésre megfelelő *alt wie Methusalem* hasonlat *umgangsprachlich* (Duden 11: 34), ill. *salopp* (Fleischer 1997: 199) minősítést kap, azaz inkább a *familiáris, bizalmas*

Ezek esetében is azt látjuk azonban, hogy a mindennapi közlés szintjére kerülő, **gyakrabban használt formák veszítenek választékosságukból**, igaz, ez többnyire együtt jár a demotiválódással, azaz a nyelvhasználók nem minden esetben ismerik már a mögöttük lévő mitológiai vagy művelődéstörténeti tartalmakat. Alábbi példánk ilyen eseteket mutatnak be, több közülük egyben azt is szemlélteti, hogy a demotiválódás gyakran együtt jár a kifejezésekben szereplő tulajdonnevek köznevesülésével is:

(10) *páni félelem* 'rendkívüli félelem'

*sziszifuszi munka* 'aprólékos, időigényes, gyakran hiábavaló munka, erőfeszítés'

*árgus szemekkel figyel* 'alaposan szemmel tart; éberen, gyanakodva <figyel, les>'

(*vkinek/vminek*) *az égisze alatt* 'vkinek v. vminek a védelme, védőernyője alatt'

*drákói szigor* 'igen nagyfokú szigorúság'

*lucullusi lakoma* 'fényűző, bőséges lakoma'

*megoldja a gordiuszi csomót* 'egy bonyolult, nehéz ügyet vmilyen egyszerű, frappáns megoldással intéz el'

*gigantikus/gigászi küzdelem* 'mindegyik fél képességeinek és erejének maximális kihasználásával való harc, erőpróba'

*ifjú titán* 'tehetséges, feltörekvő fiatal <néha némi rosszalló mellékízzel: képességeit túlbecsülő ifjú>'stb.

Utolsó adatunk nemcsak arra példa, hogy kevésbé választékosnak minősül idővel a kifejezés, hanem a konnotatív tartalom további módosulására is, hiszen a kifejezés ma már gyakran *pejoratív* érzelmi töltettel (is) használatos.

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nyelvhasználat körébe tartozik. Hasonlóan a *szegény Lázár* 'beteg, szenvedő, sajnálatra méltó ember' kifejezés a magyarban *régiesnek* és *választékosnak* számít, ezzel szemben a német *armer Lazarus* köznyelvi, sőt kissé szleng ízű kifejezés (vö. Földes 1990: 43). Emiatt mindkét idézett példánk kontrasztív megfelelése sem valódi ekvivalencia, hanem az ún. stilisztikai szinonímia körébe tartozik.

4.1. Hasonló példákat a bibliai eredetű fordulatok között is találni, ezek egy része is máig választékosnak minősül, lásd pl. O. Nagy 1976 következő adatait (zárójelben a kiadás oldalszámjai):

(11) *kősziklára épít [épül]* 'biztos, szilárd alapokra épít (, ill. épül)' (vál) (391)

*elköltözött Ábrahám kebelébe* 'meghalt' (vál) (32)

*(Múlják el tőlem e) keserű pohár* '(bárcsak elkerülhető volna a rám váró) szenvedés, gyötrelem' (vál) (561)

*pusztába kiáltó [rég: mondott] szó [rég: Kiáltó szó a pusztában]* 'komoly figyelmeztetés, amelyre azonban senki sem hallgat, amelyet senki sem szívlel meg' (vál) (569)

A bibliai szövegek zöme azonban jóval ismertebb a klasszikus irodalomnál, ezért az innen származó fordulatok közül nagyon sok mára ugyancsak elveszítette választékos jellegét, s teljesen köznapi frazémának számít, pl.

(12) *bábeli zűrzavar* 'nagy összevisszaság, felfordulás, rendetlenség'

*fekete bárány* 'vmilyen csoportból, közösségből kilógó, a normákat be nem tartó ember'

*a damaszkuszi út(on jár vki)* 'megváltoztatja (politikai) véleményét, beállítottságát'

*egyiptomi sötétség* 'nagyon nagy sötétség'

*az ígéret földje* 'a) a bibliai Kánaán; b) a gazdagság, a jólét országa'

*mennyei manna* 'nagyon finom eledel'

*nagy behemót ember* 'nagy testű, lomha mozgású személy'

*hétpecsétes titok* 'nagyon nagy titok'

*hitetlen Tamás* 'kétkedő, tamáskodó ember'

5. Egy másik tendencia, hogy a kezdetben valamely szűkebb csoportnyelvi rétegben, például az ifjúsági vagy a bűnözői **szlengben** használt kifejezések a köznyelvben is elterjednek. Ezzel párhuz-

mosan a korábbi bizalmas, sőt **argotikus konnotációjuk a semleges stílus felé mozdul el**. Ez a trend rajzolódik ki Korhonen vizsgálatából is (1994: 401–402), aki rámutat, hogy stílusminősítéseket inkább csak a 20. század harmincas éveitől tartalmaznak szisztematikusan a német frazeológiai szótárak, de az egyes egységekhez tartozó minősítések többnyire meglehetősen nagy változatosságot mutatnak. Több olyan kifejezést is bemutat, amelyek korábban *szleng* (*umgangssprachlich*) minősítésű egységei ma inkább *semleges* (*neutral*) besorolást kapnának (pl. *unter den Hammer kommen* 'kalapács alá kerül' vagy *vom Leder ziehen* 'eredetileg: 'kardot ránt' → ma már: 'kirohan vki ellen'.<sup>9</sup>

O. Nagy gyűjteményében (1976) is sikerült ilyen példákat találnom. Feltűnő – és alighanem a nyelvi ízlés megváltozásával is összefügg – hogy O. Nagy az alacsonyabb stílusrétegekbe sorolt kifejezéseket, amelyeket ma leginkább *szleng* minősítéssel szótáraznánk, még *argotikus* stílusminősítéssel közli. Ez annyiban érthető is, hogy a *szleng* fogalma és a *szlenggel* foglalkozó kutatások már az ő gyűjteményének megjelenése után kerültek a nyelvészeti köztudatba. Ezzel együtt számos olyan kifejezés található gyűjteményében, amelyeket ő *argotikus*ként tüntet fel, de ma még *szleng* stílusminősítést sem kapnának, hanem inkább stílusmegjelölés nélkül, azaz a mindennapi kommunikációban teljesen semleges, szokványos fordulatokként szerepeltetnénk őket, legfeljebb a *bizalmas* stílusrétegbe tartozóként.<sup>10</sup> Ilyen kifejezések például a következők (az O. Nagynál található jelentésdefiníciókkal és stílusmegjelöléssel közlöm őket, a gyűjtemény oldalszámának feltüntetésével):

(13) *(el)húzza a csíkot* '(el)fut, (el)szalad; hirtelen távozik, meglép, meglóg vhonnan' (*argó*) (125)

*csőbe húz [behúz a csőbe] vkit* 'alaposan rászedi, irgalmatlanul becsapja' (*argó*) (133)

<sup>9</sup> A *Leder* a kifejezésben eredendően a bőrből készült kardhüvelyre vonatkozott.

<sup>10</sup> Saját szótáraimban (Forgács 2003, 2013) így is jártam el.



*drótot kap* '(titkos) értesítést kap' (*argó*) (150)

*Mit eszik rajta?* '<nem értem,> miért szereti <a szóban forgó nőt v. férfit>, mi tetszik neki rajta?' (*argó*) (184)

*kihúzza a gyufát* 'pórul jár, megjárja' (*argó*) (254)

*kiveri a huppot* 'nagy veszekedést, patáliát csap' (292)

*olajra lép* 'megszökik, meglóg' (*argó*) (316)

*palira vesz vkit* 'becsap, rászed, kihasznál vkit' (*argó*) (539)

*tropára megy* 'tönkremegy, teljesen elromlik, használhatatlanná válik' (*argó*) (684)

A következő két kifejezést sem sorolnám ma már az *argó* körébe, legfeljebb a *humoros* vagy *tréfás* stílusminősítést tenném hozzájuk:

(14) *Én se most jöttem Ceglédről a hat húszassal [a hat huszonötösse]*  
'van nekem is magamhoz való eszem, nem lehet engem se egykönnyen becsapni' (*argó*) (112)

*olcsó és nem ráz* 'noha nem kerül sokba, mégis eléggé jónak mondható' (*argó*) (316)

A 'nagyon unja a dolgot' jelentésű *unja a banánt* szólást O. Nagy (1976: 69) nemcsak az *argó*hoz tartozónak ítéli, hanem azt is hozzáteszi: *elavulóban* van. Ezzel sem lehet egyetérteni, a fordulat ugyanis meglehetően közkeletű: ezt bizonyítja az is, hogy az MNSzt. példái közül nem is egy az Index című internetes lapnak a beszélt nyelvet meglehetősen jól visszatükröző olvasói fórumából (Index Fórum) való.

Eddigi példáink főleg azt szemléltették, hogy a korábban inkább szűkebb csoportnyelvi használatú, emiatt *választékos* vagy éppen *bizalmas*, *familiáris* stílusrétegbe tartozó frazeológiai egységek között elég sok olyat találunk, amelyeket idővel a nyelvhasználók szélesebb csoportjai használnak, ez pedig csökkenti *választékos* vagy *argotikus/szleng* konnotációjukat, s a *semleges* irányba tolja el őket.

6. Megfigyelhető továbbá még egy harmadik, az előzővel fordított tendencia is: a **nyelvhasználatban visszaszoruló, ritkábbá váló ki-**

**fejezések idővel választékosnak hatnak.** Lássunk erre is példákat O. Nagy gyűjteményéből!

(15) *délibábot kerget* 'hiú ábrándok után fut' (vál) (139)

*iga alatt nyög* 'elnyomatás a sorsa' (vál) (298)

*letépi láncait* 'kivívja szabadságát' (vál) (421)

*ólomlábon [ólomlábakon] jár* a) 'nagyon lassan, (bosszantóan) nehézkesen jár vki'; b) 'kínos lassúsággal telik <az idő>' (vál) (517)

*minden poklon [poklokon] keresztül* 'minden veszéllyel, borzalommal megküzdve' (vál) (563)

*porig aláz vkit* 'mélyen megalázza' (564)

*szárnyára ereszt [bocsát] vkit* 'kibocsátja az életbe' (vál)

Burger és Linke a németből is bemutatnak egy hasonló példát (1998: 751). Az 'ajtot mutat vkinek, kiutasít vkit' jelentésű német *jmdm. die Tür weisen* szóolás szerintük eredetileg *semleges* stílushatású volt, így találjuk Röhrich szerint (1991: 1651) Hans Sachsnál is (Der kram der narren kappen):

(16) Wen einer hat nimer gelt herfür,

So weisen wir im die haustür.

1580-ból Johann Fischart *Bienenkorb* című munkájában *jmdm. die Tür zeigen* formában is megtalálható a kifejezés: Schreiben die Vätter undienliche Sachen für sie [die römische Kirche], so zeigt sie inen die Thür und leßt sie lauffen [Ha az atyák nem kedvező dolgokat írnak az egyházzól, akkor az ajtot mutat nekik, s hagyja, hogy elmenjenek] (vö. Röhrich uo.). Mára azonban ez utóbbi forma nem használatos, a *weisen* igei komponenssel alakult változatot viszont a Duden 11 már elavulóban levőnek és *választékosnak* minősíti (740).

7. Bierich a konnotatív jelentés megváltozása kapcsán megemlíti még egy további szempontot is (2012: 95). Szerinte **a konnotatív jelentéselemek változása főként a pejorációhoz kapcsolódik**, a melioráció sokkal ritkább. А *бобы разводитъ* [szó szerint: szétválasztja a

babokat] kifejezés például a mai oroszban ’összevissza fecseg/locsog’ jelentésben használatos. Bierich azonban 18. századi példákkal bizonyítja, hogy a fordulat jelentése korábban ’jósol, jövendőt mond’ volt, melyben a babok szétválogatása is szerepet játszott, hasonlóan például a csontokkal való jósláshoz. Hogy a régebbi pozitív konnotáció miért változott negatívra, abban Bierich szerint szerepet játszhatott a jövendőmondásba vetett hit meggyengülése is.

8. Ezek volnának a legfőbb tendenciák, amelyeket a frazeológiai egységek konnotatív jelentésének változásai kapcsán röviden fel lehet vázolni. Befejezésül az ünnepeltet köszönteném néhány közmondás igazságával, hiszen elsősorban ezek kutatására koncentrálok a munkássága.

Aki ennyit foglalkozik a nyelvtudománnyal, bizony néha elfáradhat a munkában. Nem véletlenül találjuk meg már régi gyűjteményeinkben a *Fáradsággal adják a tudományt* közmondást (Erdélyi 1851: 396). De megtaláljuk azt az igazságot is, hogy *Kinek mi kedvére, nincsen az terhére* (Sirisaka 1890: 109), illetve hogy *Hasznos munkában soha nem nagy a’ fáradság* (Dugonics 1820: I: 284). Kívánom, hogy ünnepeltünk még sokáig érezhesse azt a kellemes fáradságot, ami az embert eltölti, mikor valamilyen nagyobb munkának sikeresen a végére ér, de mindig úgy érezhesse: nem is akkora ez a fáradság, mert hasznos volt a befektetett munka. Ehhez adjon neki a Teremtő még sokáig egészséget és töretlen munkakedvet!

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OUTI LAUHAKANGAS

## AUTHENTIC BUT MARGINAL. RE-EVALUATION OF HUMOROUS SAYINGS IN THE FINNISH FOLKLORE ARCHIVES

**Abstract:** During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the folklore archives of the Finnish Literature Society asked people to write down and send their local oral tradition to be stored and analyzed by researchers. Among others, proverbs and sayings were copied to index cards and sorted according to definitions of the so-called small genre. Ranking the values of different records of oral tradition was a more or less conscious paradigm of folkloristics. It served as a basis for sorting the records. Authenticity of oral tradition in relation to literary sources was an important criterion. Humorous sayings that are considered casual have been surplus material compared to serious proverbs.

The author of this article wants to take a new point of view regarding the old archival material. She finds a simple method to compare humorous proverbial material to modern stand-up comics. She also compares it to current ways of discussion in social media.

**Keywords:** proverbs and sayings, humor, 1st person singular, stand-up comics

### *1. Introduction*

Finland cannot boast about any ancient literary culture or eloquent Poets Laureate, but the idea of Finnish nationality still found its peculiarity in language, traditional folk poetry, myths and proverbs. We had “the thousand-year code for oral high culture, crystallized, formularized knowledge, skill and belief”, as the folklorist Matti Kuusi (according to Heikki Laitinen 1985) has pointed out. The 19<sup>th</sup> century was an active period of collecting Finnish and Karelian oral poetry and rune singing. The reading and writing skills were in a high level in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the folklore archives of the Finnish Lit-

erature Society established a network of enthusiasts of tradition to collect, write down and send their local oral tradition to be stored and analyzed by researchers. The next step was to arrange the transcription of different genres of folklore from manuscripts to index cards. Among others, proverbs and sayings were copied and sorted according to definitions of the so-called small genre.

From the beginning of the nation building, it was essential to be able to compare the collected material to those of the so-called civilized nations. Ranking the values of different records of oral tradition was a more or less conscious paradigm of folkloristics in Finland. It served as a basis for sorting the records. Authenticity of oral tradition in relation to literary sources was an important criterion.

Historically oriented research on proverbs opened a way to become part of European history and evolution of languages. We were careful not to be paralleled to “primitive tribes” as sources of exotic proverbial speech and research objects of anthropologists.

The jump from the goals based on the national interest to new research questions about the use and function of proverbs and sayings has been long. Still, exhaustive work to collect and file oral tradition in the archives in Finland has been irreplaceable documentation of Finnish and Karelian oral culture. Nowadays, digitization of mass media material and studying chats in social media of the Internet have opened possibilities to search for constancy and change of verbal communication. Especially fixed forms of proverbs are easier than in previous decades to be found in their textual or social contexts. A folklorist’s ideal is not anymore to arrange the chaos of all the collected material (especially the ancient runes of the Finnish people) “into an orderly literary-historical cosmos”, as Kuusi (1994 [1963]: 36) may have envisioned in his early life.

## *2. Marginal material in the folklore archives*

The collectors of oral tradition i.e. respondents of archival inquiry were not choosy concerning the material they sent to the Finnish Lit-



erature Society. They wrote down any recurrent saying or refrain they could recall. Vulgar or trivial sayings were not censored from the notes by any archival clerks. The manuscripts were copied to archival cards and later sorted according to types of tradition. The only thing, which was almost always missing from the sent material, was the social contexts of the sayings. It was believed that sayings well-known enough carried the message of their use. A large part of this material ended up as unclassified marginals of folklore. Especially the understanding of situational humor was mostly lost. Thus, we can only speculate about jest and joking in Finnish or Karelian former daily life.

Professor Matti Kuusi used to encourage his students to collect and study any authentic and potential folklore: “Nothing that is human is alien to a folklorist or a chemist” (Cf. *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto. Terence 170 BCE*). For scholarly purposes nothing is dirt or vulgar.

Kuusi’s message was clear. He encouraged students to be open to new recurring sayings and stories. They took notes of writings on the walls of toilets, in student houses and pubs. (Jokinen 1989: 199) Kuusi followed the trends of the 1970s’ folkloristic studies about graffiti like Alan Dundes (1966) and Dan Ben-Amos (1971) and happened to anticipate later social media studies. Still, he continued the collecting practice of his predecessors. The main focus was in the texts, in the items of folklore and the currency of their occurrence. Folkloristics still imitated methods of traditional botany.

Kuusi, surely knew other approaches to oral folklore. In the 50s, he even arranged a radio program by which he studied proverbs as tools of conversation. (Kuusi 1994) Voice actors created social situations, which were broken off suddenly at a dramatic moment to stimulate a proverb use. Radio listeners were asked after three different auditory images: What would you have said in this situation? The atmosphere of the first situation was prepared so that most of the listeners gave the same proverbs as the reaction to it. Like in the empirical psychology of those times, Kuusi spoke about stimulus and reaction and found the proverb use as a reaction to the last given

stimulus. He still wanted to break this belief and showed with other examples that there are many more things influencing the situation.

It is not by chance that he chose the just referred to lecture dealing with the aptness of proverbs to be included in the collection of his translated articles. It was his only experiment about social contexts of proverbs. He also wrote an epilogue to this text after 30 years. (Kuusi 1994: 111–113) He had stepped on the ground of social scientists and saw how different standards of empirical studies hindered him to continue – or at least, he had good reasons to go back to basics, namely texts and forms.

On Kuusi's bookshelf was Mathilde Hain's postdoctoral thesis, which was done during World War II in a German village. Hain's field work was a sociologically oriented folklore study far before the times of participant observation methods. She was accurate in writing down proverbs and expressions she heard in daily situations around the village. She wrote about the differences of atmosphere or tone of those proverbs, which were in frequent use. Young people knew many proverbs used by elderly villagers, but if they were used, they were kind of repeated as speech of elders.

The few [proverbs], however, are still fully involved in the life of the village community, so that one can clearly recognize their function. More than the usual proverbs, they call for a relaxed atmosphere, which leaves time for a funny game with words that were originally intended to be serious. (Hain 1951: 61)

Hain paid attention to dual use of some proverbs depending on the situation either as a serious or a parodic proverb. This observation is a rough division, but it gives a good reason to head towards the question of parodic or light use of proverbs.

### *3. The origins of parody and proverbial sayings*

Humor in proverb texts is not obvious. Cultural and social differences are the first obstacles to recognize humor. In this case it is easier

to study proverbs and proverbial utterances in their social contexts. An obvious category in which proverbs are used humorously is 'turning the situation into a joke'. The liberating effect of humor, when somebody is using a proverb in a proper situation, is often an outlet for an individual's own inner emotional tension. More precisely, recognizing humor and laughing depends not only on personal but also on common emotions. Certain witticisms or parodical sayings have become perhaps a person's favorite expressions, because he or she knows how to use them. (Lauhakangas 2004; 2015)

This is a mode, where we can see strands to present ways of entertaining. Stand-up comics have a lot in common not only with narrative but with proverbial tradition. Stand-up comedy was a turn from comic actors to comic rhetors. The rise of it meant that instead of mere delivery popular rhetoric turned to invention. Stand-up comedy was not only entertaining but also persuasive. (Meier & Schmitt 2017: xxii)

The quality of hidden persuasion of stand-up comics is comparable with the use of humor in proverbial sayings. The impact of punchlines parallels that of apt proverbial sayings in social situations. If the line does not openly target anyone else than the speakers themselves, its humor is accepted. If we consider a stand-up comedian's main repertoire, it consists of incidents of their own life and comically detailed introspection. The introspective punchlines are carefully planned to sound unintentional and occasional. Stand-up is made to look like a monologue of a wondering self, but it is made for communication and surprise. Antti Lindfors (2019: 31) characterizes the 'I' of the stand-up comic, the 'you' of the audience, the 'here' of their surroundings, the 'now' of the present moment to be contextually mediated. If the stand-up comic utters 'I', we are not sure if s(h)e refers to the authentic self-presence of the performer or not. We can often experience and interpret proverbial utterances as ambiguous personal opinions or as a comic's line. Only the situation and our relations to the speaker define the degree of jesting.

There are also proverbs and sayings especially in different Finnish dialects that are more like lines from some disappeared conver-

sation or proposition. It would be interesting to study their function in comparison to present ways to make people laugh and get popularity in social media.

#### 4. *The strength of the first person singular*

A proverbial saying caught in the Eastern part of Finland, Savo, tells a lot of the function of humor targeted at oneself.

(1) *Jos et ossoo itelles naoroo, millekkä meinasit naoroo, ku vanahaks tuut?* [If you cannot laugh at yourself, at what are you going to laugh, when you'll grow old?]

In the case of Finnish proverbial utterances we cannot prove that items collected from Savo region had in general a more humorous attitude towards life than anywhere else. We can ask, if the humor of Savo people originally differs from others. There are plenty of studies concerning comparisons of mentality connected to locality (e.g. Hakamies 2008), but that question will be outside of this article. Anyway, the proverbial proportion about one's ability to laugh at oneself may serve as a story line of the following attempt to catch the quality of humor in proverbial sayings using the first person singular.

We can appropriately ask, if the kernel of accepted proverbial humor or at least the most successful part of it lies behind self-knowledge and ability to laugh at oneself. What does it mean to speak about oneself, to position oneself as the subject in a proverb or a proverbial saying? Does a subjective approach automatically abandon the speaker's possibility to appeal to the anonymous, approved and undeniable wisdom of her culture? Is generality lost in specificity?

Kuusi as other scholars giving the definition of the genre of proverbs has emphasized that proverbs get "additional weight when we do not speak merely with our own mouths – when our interlocutor realizes that we are not using an individual expression of state of mind, but a general opinion" (Kuusi 1994: 105). As a young contract worker in the Finnish folklore archives I had a task to go through card

piles of unsorted proverbial material. I had to sieve out the marginal material in order to find proverbial material, which was possible to categorize to well-known categories. One important criterium that Kuusi gave to me for that identification task was to notice where the first person singular was used. Indexical pronouns did not belong to general propositions. I learned to think that those lines were suspiciously personal and casual material. Now it is time to come back to reassess those lines.

### *5. Proverbs with the first person singular in Finnish archival material*

In order to study the first person singular in proverb material of the Finnish tradition archives, there is a shortcut to a representative corpus of the same material. Kari Laukkanen and Pekka Hakamies (1984) have compiled a collection, which covers the whole card index of proverbs. The author of this article has later digitized the collection for further use. Thus, it was possible to analyze the main connections which 'I' has in Finnish and Karelian proverb texts.

PERSONIFICATIONS are a special type of proverbs and subspecies of them consist of speaking animals or things like February talking to January or pitchy wood boasting to birch bark.

Another way to tell some general wisdom using the first person singular in proverbs is to JUXTAPOSE 'YOU' AND 'I'. A proverb from Lavansaari, a former Finnish island in the Gulf of Finland, emphasizes importance of cooperation in spite of differences:

(2) *Sie sitä, mie tätä, a molemmat ollaa tarpeen.* [You are that, I am this, but both of us are useful.] A humorous way to express how unnecessary it often is to stick to social hierarchies is the next proverb from middle-Finland.

(3) *Sinä herra, minä herra, kuka meistä pussin kantaa.* [You – a Mister, I – a Mister; who will carry the bag?] Pirkkala. Same kind of funny role-taking is played in the proverb collected from the Turku region:

*Se kun on sinun, se on minun, ja se kun on minun, ei sinun tule siihen mittään.* [What is yours is mine, and what is mine, you'll have nothing to say]. Pretending consensus is also humor from Luvia, South-Western coast of Finland.

(4) *Olla me yksist puole, ko joku lyö sinu, ni mää lyön kans.* [Let's go along; when someone hits you, I will hit you, too].

The first person singular fits well to AN ADAPTABLE PERSON portrayed in Finnish proverbs. That character breeds Finnish sense of humor. It tells about social means of survival.

(5) *Sitä minä mitä muutki, nauran samaa kun taloon väkiki.* [I will agree with others, I will laugh at the same things as the members of the household] Isojoki (West Finland).

AS THOUGH SELF PITY is a clever way to turn the laugh towards others instead of oneself.

A proverb from Northern Finland, Haapavesi, is as an answer to somebody calling you names.

(6) *Hulluksi minua kaikki muutki hullut sanoo.* [Call me a fool like all the other fools call me, too.] Another proverb from North, Kiihtelysvaara sounds like an overstatement.

(7) *Pitäisin minnäi piian ja ottaisin orjan, kun syömätä eläis, vuatteita tarkenis.* [I would keep a servant girl and take a slave, if I could live without eating and stand the cold without clothes]. The third example of a pretension of self-pity comes from Sysmä.

(8) *Voarin nai muorin, isän nai äeten, mut minun piteä ottoa ihan ventovieras.* [My grandpa married my grandma, my father married my mother, but I am supposed to take a complete stranger.] You cannot tell about the actual contexts of use of these proverbs. They may have been tools of mockery or humor using yourself as a target. They may have originated from individuals with low intelligence or naive talk, which was openly ridiculed in those 'good old days'.

A commonly accepted target of mocking has been to RIDICULE LAZY PEOPLE. There are proverbs as those lines of a lazy weaver.

(9) *Kutosi minnäi laetetu kankaa ja kerihtisi piättömä lampaa.* [I would certainly weave a prepared fabric and I would shear a sheep without a head] Kangasniemi. From Karelia comes a proverb.

(10) *Ken alottas, ken lopettas, mie keskkohan kelkuttaisin.* [Who would begin, who would end, I would weave the middle] Impilahti.

SELF RESPECT seems to be the message of a part of proverbs with the first person singular. The Western coast of Finland is known of a self-confident style of speech, which the next two proverbs embody.

(11) *Silloon on joukko jäykkää, ku min oon huanoin.* [The crew is sure unworthy, if I am the worst.] Kauhava.

(12) *Joka on pitempi kun minä, se on roikka; joka on lyhempi, se on pätkä.* [He who is longer than me, is a lanky fellow; he who is smaller, is a stump.] Ruovesi.

When the first person singular in a proverb reflects A PERSONAL ATTITUDE, it reminds us most of modern stand-up comedy.

(13) *En minä työtä pelkeä, uskallan käyvvä vaekka työn viereen moate.* [I am not afraid of work, I even dare to lie down beside it] Mäntyharju.

(14) *En minä pelkää perhoistakkaa vaikka sen lentävän näkisin.* [I am not afraid even of a butterfly, although I would see it fly.] Juva.

(15) *Sen minä sanon silakalleni vasten silmijä, että voi on parempata.* [I dare to say to my Baltic herring straight to his face that butter is better.] Tampere.

(16) *Kyllä minä tiijän, miten käy kesällä mäenlaskun, mättääseen se töksähtää.* [I am fully aware how it goes with sliding downhill in summer, it will bump on a tussock.] Haapavesi.

(17) *Mitäs mie eukol tien, poikamies, ku ei uo muutakoa perettä.* [What will I do with a wife, a bachelor, without any other family.] Kurkijoki.

(18) *Köyhyys ei ole ilo, vaikka mua naurattaa.* [Poverty is not a delight, although I am laughing.] Haukipudas

In order to supplement the material found in the Finnish proverb collection examples using the first person singular were picked up from the archival card index labeled as witticisms.

(19) *Minen oo vastahan muuta kun maharotonta ja sitä ei oookkaa.* [I am not against anything else than impossible and there is nothing like that.] Ilmajoki.

(20) *Minun valheestani on harvoin totta löydetty.* [From my lies you have seldom found any truth.] Tervo.

## 6. Comparison with current ways of discussion in social media

In the previous section we analyzed the first person singular proverbs of the traditional Finnish material, which are quite exceptional and in a way contrary to the most familiar sentence form of proverbs. The humor of these is possible to compare with same kind of sayings coming into being on the Internet. There are familiar beginnings compared to previous proverbs and their mode is typically anti-proverbial with additions to familiar proverbs. (Mieder 2004, 28)

(21) *En ole laiska, mä vaan optimoin asioita* [I am not lazy, I only optimize things.] You could find plenty of different additions to the same beginning “I am not lazy”. E.g. ”I just rest before I get tired” or like in German *Ich habe nur Geduld* (patience), or in English *I’m just on energy saving mode*. The same is known in Finnish just like the next endings: *I am just very relaxed / I just really enjoy doing nothing*. The original sources of these anti-proverbs are certainly international. There have also been serious campaigns before or after these anti-proverbs. E.g. “I am not lazy or stupid. I have cerebral palsy”.

Another example with the first person singular seems to be quite originally Finnish. There were 381 Finnish hits in Google search (visited 10.3.2023).

(22) *En minäkään ole täyrellinen, multa puuttuu viat.* [Even though I am not perfect, I just lack faults] In Kuusi’s (1988) collection of contemporary proverbial sayings there was only the beginning without



the first person singular. *Kukaan ei ole täydellinen*. [Nobody is perfect] collected in Vantaa city. Neither an English Google search nor a question to our international group of paremiologists could produce any equivalent anti-proverb in other cultures.

## 7. Conclusion

The author of this article wanted to draw attention to easily neglected materials in Finnish tradition archives. Searching for Finnish nationally oral tradition has directed the earlier intelligentsia to classify such material into marginals, which was not comparable to the most valuable folklore of the assumed civilized cultures.

Instead of ignoring suspiciously casual and personal utterances it is worth studying the first person singular proverbs, anti-proverbs and sayings. Their function in social interaction is based mostly on self-confident humor. The most productive type of the first person singular proverbial utterances turned out to be lines in which a personal attitude is expressed. The humor in these proverbial expressions resembles that of stand-up comic in current scenes. The lack of knowledge of social contexts in archival sources hinders us to reconstruct the situations where and when those naiveties or witticisms were used.

In the chats of the Finnish Internet platforms it was possible to find anti-proverbs with the same kind of humor, where the first person singular was an essential stylistic device.

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ANNA T. LITOVKINA  
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