

Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Melita Aleksa Varga (eds.)  
**Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies**



Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt,  
Melita Aleksa Varga (eds.)

# **Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies**

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Managing Editor: Anna Borowska

Associate Editor: Darko Matovac

Language Editor: Aderemi Raji-Oyelade

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To Professor Wolfgang Mieder, with eternal gratitude  
for support, advice, inspiration and encouragement.

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The Editors

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## Introduction

Proverbs summarize everyday experiences and common observations in a concise and figurative way. They have been created and used for thousands of years and passed as expressions of wisdom and truth from generation to generation. It is thus not surprising that scholars became interested in this language phenomenon and started to examine it from various points of view. For instance, paremiographers are devoted to collecting and classifying the proverbs, and paremiologists address questions concerning the definition, form, structure, style, content, function, meaning and value of proverbs (see Mieder, 2004: xii). However, the main results of the paremiographic activities and the paremiological research are listed in the annual bibliographies in *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, edited by Wolfgang Mieder. Yet, even though proverbs have been collected and studied for centuries, there is a major question that arises every now and then, namely do proverbs play a significant role in the modern age, or are proverbs on their way to extinction in highly developed cultures? Current paremiological research results show, however, that proverbs are still alive and illustrate the complex communicative functions the sayings possess: electronically stored and processed large, structured sets of contemporary texts (corpora) testify to the relatively high frequency of occurrence of proverbs, and we are witnessing the fixedness and productivity of proverbs in modern languages (Steyer, 2012: 7). It is based on these findings that we believe that proverbs still deserve much attention, some of which is being transferred through the present volume.

Similarly to the four main works in this area (Trench's *On the Lessons in Proverbs* (1853), Taylor's *The Proverb* (1931), Röhrich & Mieder's *Sprichwort* (1977) and Mieder's *Proverbs. A Handbook* (2004), the present volume discusses the nature and the study of proverbs in detail. It provides a comprehensive overview of the main areas of paremiological research, not only summarizing the current research stand, but also highlighting suggestions for further study. The basic notions among others include defining proverbs, main proverb features, origin, collecting and categorization of proverbs. Special emphasis is placed on the relation between theory and practice and on important application areas which currently need more elaboration: the role of proverbs in foreign language teaching and computer and corpus linguistic aspects of paremiology.

Unlike the previous works mentioned above, each single chapter of this book is composed by a different author – a leading scholar-specialist for this particular area of proverbial study. Since all the fifteen chapters intend to give basic knowledge, an insight into the main issues of paremiology, some overlapping of the information presented in them turned to be unavoidable. Nevertheless, the different chapters do not build upon each other and can be read separately, not necessarily in the order given.

The paremiological glossary in the end of the volume and the multilingual approach are important key features that make this handbook unique and important. The exemplification is done by using proverb examples from various languages. All examples are translated into English, which is given in square brackets after the original entry. For the convenience of our readers, if a proverb has an English equivalent, it is noted with the abbreviation *ee* in the square brackets. The word-for-word translations of proverbs into English have been marked with *ww*. The original proverb from which an anti-proverb has been derived is preceded by a < sign. An index of key terms from the book will hopefully prove to be helpful while searching for valuable information.

The first chapter of the volume entitled “Subject Area, Terminology, Proverb Definitions, Proverb Features”, outlines the subject area of the proverb study, taking into account the folkloristic and linguistic aspects. The author of the chapter, Neal R. Norrick points out that proverbs have been studied from a range of perspectives for various reasons, and the diverse research traditions have produced a range of differing terminologies, which require description and comparison. For this reason, the author introduces and compares the standard terms used by linguists and folklorists while trying to define the proverb. Furthermore, Norrick gives a short overview of the various attempts to describe the essence and the character of this linguistic phenomenon. He considers the possibility of a feature-based definition and investigates the main proverb features in their own right.

In his chapter entitled “Origin of Proverbs”, Wolfgang Mieder discusses the multifaceted aspects of emergence of proverb. He agrees with Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting that proverbs are not created by the folk but rather by an individual. Quoting the anthropologist Raymond Firth, the author describes the process of creation of a proverbial text, its way from “the concrete formulation of an individual in response to particular set of circumstances” to “the acceptance by the people at large as being appropriate to a more general situation”. Mieder introduces the four major sources for common European proverbs, namely the Greek and the Roman Antiquity, the Bible, the Medieval Latin and the loan translations. In addition, he refers to the fact that some modern sayings are created by the mass media; lines of popular songs and films, advertising slogans etc. can very quickly turn into proverbs. The author closes his paper summarizing several new theories on the creation of proverbs.

Outi Lauhakangas’ “Categorization of Proverbs” shows different ways of classifying the unilingual and multilingual proverb material. The author explains the history, background, aims and motives of these efforts, presents and compares two serious attempts to systemize the international proverb lore – *G. L. Permyakov’s Logico-semiotic Classification of Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* and *The Matti Kuusi International Type System of Proverbs*. Furthermore, she offers a critical point of view to a number of popular and systematic proverb collections, cultural comparisons and multilingual databanks. Ultimately, Lauhakangas provides a summary of the different needs in constructing categorizations of proverb corpora and also reviews the possible bias in applying conventional classification methods to proverbs.



In the chapter “Semiotic and Semantic Aspects of the Proverb”, Peter Grzybek addresses the issue of the meaning(s) of proverbs. He shortly presents different approaches towards the semiotic study of proverbs, as for instance classifying the traditional sayings according to their speech act character, to their status as a complex super-signs or categorizing them based on the assumption that proverbs are signs and models of typical situations. The author argues that it seems reasonable to take the three semiotic dimensions – the pragmatic, the syntactic and the semantic dimension – as a starting point for an analysis of the semiotics of the proverb. He also concludes that studying proverbs from the perspective of cultural semiotics can give deep insights into various cultural mechanisms.

Marcas Mac Coinnigh points out that proverbs are found in all world languages and although they may vary in terms of their subject matter and function, it is generally accepted that the majority of sayings adhere to certain grammatical formations regardless of language, and certain syntactic structures are the favoured architecture for the creation of new proverbs. In his paper entitled “Structural Aspects of Proverbs” Mac Coinnigh describes and analyzes the most common proverbial formulae (e.g. *X is Y; No X, no Y* etc.) and syntactic markers (e.g. syntactic parallelism, emphatic word order, parataxis etc.) using examples from a range of European and non-European languages. His main aim is to provide a linguistic overview of the notion of proverbial style and structure in world languages.

Vida Jesenšek’s essay “Pragmatic and Stylistic Aspects of Proverbs” discusses the topic from two different perspectives. The first one is the perspective of the so-called traditional and the second one of the contemporary stylistics. Traditional stylistics regards proverbs as stylistic devices, to which it assigns individual characteristic stylistic attributes outside of textual use (e.g. their belonging to a particular stylistic register), whereas modern stylistic theories understand style as a functional-pragmatic factor and focus on observing proverbs in complex textual-situational contexts. By using examples from German language, namely proverbs in context, Jesenšek illustrates the argumentative potential of proverbs, their contribution to performing various speech acts and the role in organizing and structuring the text.

Based on the assumption that proverbs are linguistically and culturally coined frames, Anna Lewandowska and Gerd Antos refer to the traditional sayings as verbal stereotypes of knowledge which allow their users to comment on, standardize and evaluate new situations with the help of known social clichés. In the chapter “Cognitive Aspects of Proverbs”, the authors pose the following questions: What makes proverbs stereotyped? Which influence does the linguistic form of proverbs have on our ability to memorize and duplicate them? Which role do proverbs play in social language transfer? Lewandowska and Antos discuss the above questions from a cognitive point of view and concentrate on Lakoff and Johnson’s *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* as a frame to create a cognitivist understanding of proverbs.

The scope of the chapter “Empirical Research and Paremiological Minimum”, written by Peter Ďurčo, falls on the concept of the so-called paremiological or

proverbial minima in languages. He gives a short overview of the various attempts to establish a set of proverbs that all members of a particular speech community know or a set of proverbs an average adult is expected to know. Despite the sceptical opinion of some scholars, Ďurčo argues for the need and importance of paremiological minima for various languages. In addition, he discusses in detail the potential empirical approaches, naming not only the advantages, but the disadvantages as well. In the closing session of his paper the author presents the findings of his own research in this area.

The chapter “Proverbs from a Corpus Linguistic Point of View” features some aspects which are particularly relevant for the empirical study of proverbs in written language. The main focus lies on two corpus linguistic approaches to the study of current proverb use: the corpus based and the corpus driven approach. Kathrin Steyer outlines the general principles on which the two methods work. All the examples are based on the German Reference Corpus *DeReKo*, which is located at the Institute for the German Language in Mannheim. The questions, search strategies and examples presented in the paper, according to the author, should be transferable to other corpora and other languages.

The first section of the chapter “Paremiography: Proverb Collections” deals with theoretical issues such as the lack of a general and unambiguous definition of proverbs and proverb collections. Tamás Kispál argues that the main questions concerning proverb collections relate mostly to their usage. For this reason, he focuses in his essay mainly on presenting the structure and the features of printed and electronic proverb compilations. To illustrate his theoretical framework, the author uses numerous examples from diverse printed volumes and electronic collections. He puts special emphasis on the importance of integrating exercises on proverbs, especially into proverb dictionaries written for non-native speakers.

The next chapter, “Contrastive Study of Proverbs” intends to outline a comprehensive picture of the major approaches that have been suggested, developed and applied by proverb scholars who pursue the relatively new field of comparative (crosscultural) and contrastive paremiology. In the scope of her chapter, Roumyana Petrova explores briefly the essence of the approaches both in general linguistics and in paremiology and paremiography. The author argues that contrastive paremiology is actually the theoretical extension of contrastive paremiography. Petrova offers a short overview of the current contrastive paremiology research and presents in greater detail four sets of specific approaches in contrastive proverb studies: the semantic, the linguocultural, the cognitive and the culturematic method.

The main thesis of Charles C. Doyle’s chapter, “Proverbs in Literature”, is that proverbs can be thought of as (minimal) folk poems. For this reason, they have long been employed not only in oral discourse, but also as an element within formal literature – to point morals, develop characters, enliven a dialogue, or they can function in a variety of other ways. The author illustrates the manifold range of uses of the traditional sayings with numerous examples for proverbs in poetry, prose fiction,

plays and other kinds of literature, e.g. in philosophical writings, political speeches, etc. Doyle closes his chapter by pointing to the various remaining opportunities for research and close study of how and why authors have employed specific proverbs.

Anna Konstantinova's chapter "Proverbs in Mass Media" discusses different aspects of proverb application in mass media texts. Opening her paper with some general remarks on proverbs in the media discourse, the author explores the cases of standard and creative use of proverbs. Apart from that, Konstantinova looks at the way proverbs help structure different media texts. In addition, she dwells on the role of proverbs on the semantic level of the texts. The author shows how in modern mass media the proverb proves to be a tool of choice for conveying different attitudes and views. The primary resource data used by Konstantinova include newspapers and magazines from UK and USA, American TV series and popular English language songs.

In her own essay, "Proverbs and Foreign Language Teaching", Sabine Fiedler sets out to provide answers to the following questions: Why should proverbs play a part in foreign language teaching? Which proverbs should be taught and learnt? How can the teaching of proverbs be best accomplished? At the same time, the chapter offers a detailed overview of current issues in phraseodidactic research. Furthermore, it draws on the results of a survey on the knowledge of proverbs among advanced learners of English. Even though Fiedler focuses specifically on English and German examples, the ideas presented in the chapter can easily be adapted to the teaching of other languages.

"Anti-proverbs" is the title of the last chapter of the volume. In this essay, Anna T. Litovkina describes the nature of the deliberate and innovative proverb alterations, known among paremiologist as anti-proverbs. The chapter gives a definition of the anti-proverb, discusses its occurrence, treats proverbs most popular for variation and proverbs with international distribution, addresses the different mechanisms of proverb variation and topics. The vast majority of the texts quoted in this chapter are in English; but in some additional cases, anti-proverbs from other languages are quoted as well. In the end, Litovkina reviews the background of anti-proverb research providing valuable grounds to further investigation of the phenomenon.

With the choice of the topics and scholars, we hope that the present volume will be appealing to both experienced and budding scholars, both undergraduate, graduate and doctoral students of Linguistics, Folkloristic and Culture Studies, as well as to all other professionals interested in the study of proverbs. It is our sincere hope that the book will offer an extensive and intriguing overview of the multifaceted study of proverbs.

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Neal R. Norrick

# 1 Subject Area, Terminology, Proverb Definitions, Proverb Features

## 1.1 The Subject Area of Paremiology

The linguistic units called proverbs in a culture constitute a diverse, organically developed and developing collection of certain recurrent sayings from the discourses of a language community. Lexica and anthologies can mislead us into thinking there are some fixed, homogenous groups of items called proverbs – as opposed to an adhoc grouping of recurrent sayings. There is no a priori reason to expect the proverbs of a community to constitute a coherent syntactic type or to express a consistent set of propositions. We should not expect to discover a single characteristic *proverbiality* or a single inclusive definition of the proverb, and we should not be surprised when isolated proverbs contradict each other. Hence Taylor's (1962) famous remark that the definition of the proverb is too difficult to reward the effort.

What we generally call proverbs are traditional, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognizable units. Proverbs are characteristically used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or to perform a speech act in a speech event. This differentiates them from non-sentential items like proverbial phrases, idioms, binomials etc. Proverbs make apodictic (expressed as undeniable truth) statements like *Money talks* or they evoke a scenario applicable to a range of analogous situations, as in *Little strokes fell great oaks*. In supplying ready-made responses to recurrent types of situations, proverbs seem to suggest particular evaluations or courses of action.

Proverbs can be collected and anthologized as little texts complete in themselves; they can be described in their relations to other proverbs, in their discourse contexts and within their cultural matrix. For folklorists, proverbs exist as items of folklore alongside riddles, proverbial phrases and jokes. They provide highly recognizable, (relatively) fixed textual building blocks with unique rhetorical potential. Proverbs are valued as folk wisdom and bearers of traditional lore. Their cultural salience renders proverbs interesting in cross-cultural comparison as well, including questions of intercultural transmission and translation. For linguists, proverbs unite features of the lexeme, sentence, set phrase, collocation, text and quote. They illustrate interesting patterns of prosody, parallelism, syntax, lexis and imagery. Because of their imagery, proverbs provide evidence of stereotypes and standard cultural metaphors. These properties further make proverbs valuable in psycholinguistic testing. Proverb variation by text and by speech community raises interesting issues as well. Recent advances in corpus linguistics have established patterns of proverb use as statistical facts rather than educated guesses. Corpus investigations show that proverbs

are rare and often manipulated in contexts where they appear, but they nevertheless remain recognizable due to their cultural salience. For lexicographers, proverbs are items to be collected, categorized and catalogued with information on their origins and distribution along with appropriate links to other proverbs, proverbial phrases, idioms and so on within and across linguistic communities. Thus, proverbs have been studied from a range of perspectives for various reasons, and the diverse research traditions have produced a breadth of differing terminologies, which require description and comparison.

## 1.2 Terminology

Proverbs have repeatedly been characterized as self-contained, traditional units with didactic content and fixed, poetic form, whereby all these characterizations have been cast in varying terminologies with various nuances and connotations. Folklorists have been concerned with setting proverbs proper off from the proverbial phrases, proverbial comparisons, superstitions, wellerisms, clichés and idioms. At the same time, linguists have sought to define the proverb with terms such as sentence, clause, idiom, and conversational turn among others. In the following, the standard terms will be investigated and compared before turning to the matter of definition as such.

### 1.2.1 The Proverb and Its Kin

The *proverb* is a traditional figurative saying which can form a complete utterance on its own. Its ability to constitute a complete utterance distinguishes the proverb proper from another traditional, characteristically figurative form, the *proverbial phrase*, which cannot stand on its own, for example *to kick over the traces*, which lacks a subject. The linguistic term *idiom* is often applied to proverbial phrases with figurative meanings. A special sort of proverbial phrase is the *proverbial comparison* (or *proverbial simile*) with *as*, *like* or *than*, for example *as brown as a berry*, *like a house afire* and *older than the hills*. The *maxim* and the *cliché* are like the proverb in forming a complete utterance, but they lack its traditionality and imagery: Whereas the maxim states a rule for conduct as in *Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today*, the cliché expresses a trite observation as in *When you're hot, you're hot*. The slogan is a non-traditional form created to promote a product or idea as in Nike's advertising slogan *Just do it* or Obama's campaign slogan *Yes, we can*. Non-traditional sayings in general usage but perhaps associated with particular sources such as Greek mythology for *Pandora's box* or historical persons as for Martin Luther King's *I have a dream* are called *winged words*. There are also *aphorisms*, literary forms like the proverb in its straightforward memorable formulation as in *Art is long, life short*.

Winged words and aphorisms merge into the stock of allusions to well-known texts and writers such as *All the world's a stage* from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Apart from that a *binominal* is a linguistic term for formulaic phrases consisting of two parallel words connected by *and* or occasionally *or*, including proverbs such as *Live and learn* and *Sink or swim*. The *wellerism*, which derives its name from the character Sam Weller in Charles Dickens' novel *The Pickwick Papers*, is another traditional item which extends a proverb or a cliché, playfully assigning it to a speaker as in *It won't be long now, as the monkey said when he backed his tail into a fan*. Superstitions are traditional beliefs without any fixed expression, e.g. that breaking a mirror brings seven years of bad luck. Although, these definitions and distinctions seem rough-and-ready, they provide an initial working basis, the more precise parameters of which such as self-containedness and traditionality will be examined in the paragraphs to come.

### 1.2.2 Self-containedness

According to Seiler (1922), proverbs must be self-contained sayings (in *sich geschlossene Sprüche*), by which he means that none of their essential syntactic units may be replaced. Seiler introduces this criterion to distinguish proverbs from proverbial phrases: it excludes proverbial phrases like *to face the music* and *smooth as silk*, because they lack syntactic units essential to render them complete clauses, and these can be linked to them at will, as in *you have to face the music* and *hair smooth as silk*.

Milner (1969a) and Barley (1972) come quite close to Seiler's self-containedness when they identify proverbs with statements. Abrahams (1972) is perhaps more precise in requiring that a proverb be a *full* statement, and Dundes (1975) proposes the even more precise *propositional* statement. Now, Abraham and Dundes seem to mean that the proverb must be co-extensive with a logical proposition, i.e. one unit consisting of a subject and predicate. An initial objection to this criterion is that it fails to correspond to natural conversational conventions, which have little to do with formal logical conventions (Abercrombie, 1965; Crystal & Davy, 1969). Second, all five writers cited apparently intend their criteria to apply to some deeper, semantic level underlying the surface structure of proverbs, since proverb surface structures routinely consist of pure predicates without arguments, as in *Forewarned, forearmed* or *Live and let live*. But without a complete semantic analysis and a theory of proverb deep structures, such features provide no firm basis for definition.

Moreover, even presupposing deep structure semantic analyses for the proverbs in question, the logical proposition or statement can only serve as a lower boundary on proverb structure, since proverbs commonly contain more than a single proposition-like unit, as in e.g. *Marry in haste and repent at leisure*. As characteristically conversational units, proverbs are more appropriately described in terms of the structure of conversation, say that of a complete conversational turn syntactically independent of surrounding discourse (Norrick, 1985).

Paremiologists have also had recourse to the syntactic notion of the sentence. Taylor (1934) determines that proverbs must be complete (if elliptical) sentences, and goes on to insist (Taylor et al., 1939) that they be *grammatical* sentences. Such scholars as Abrahams (1968a), Holbek (1970) and Röhrich and Mieder (1977) also accept (complete) sentence status as a basic property of the proverb; see also Mieder's (2004) summary definition as a "short sentence of wisdom." Unfortunately the syntactic notion of the sentence suffers from some of the same problems as the statement or the proposition as a definitional criterion for the proverb: it ignores the fundamentally conversational nature of the proverb; it is untestable due to its appeal to some unoperationalized notion of deep structure; it is not coextensive with the proverb, but provides only a lower boundary on its form at best. And the notion of the sentence brings in problems of its own.

For one thing, many proverbs exhibit special recurrent proverbial structures (formulas in the terminology of Neumann, 1966), which diverge from the standard Subject-Predicate pattern, for instance *Like father, like son*, and *Better late than never* among many others. Second, there are proverbs like *Them as has gits* in violation of standard rules for sentences and even foreign proverbs like *Che sarà, sarà* completely outside English sentence structure. Again characterization in terms of a possible conversational contribution makes better sense. The notion of the sentence was brought in to reflect the criterion of self-containedness necessary to distinguish proverbs from proverbial phrases (Seiler, 1922; Taylor, 1962; Röhrich, 1973), and these latter cannot alone constitute an independent contribution to conversation, which would suffice to distinguish the two, again appealing to conversational categories. Sayings whose referring expressions are interpreted generally rather than particularly in context as in *A rolling stone gathers no moss* can then classify as proverbs, as can imperatives like *Strike while the iron is hot*, interpreted with reference to the hearer in the conversational context.

### 1.2.3 Traditionality

Proverb scholars have repeatedly stressed the traditional nature of proverbs as items of folklore, including their common use in recurring verbal performances (see, e.g., Seiler, 1922; Firth, 1926; Taylor, 1950; Mieder, 1996; among many others). Certainly, we must insist on currency in some linguistic community. The traditional nature of proverbs coordinates closely with their status as items of folklore. The relation between traditionality and folklore comes out nicely in Abrahams' (1969: 106) definition of folklore as "traditional items of knowledge which arise in recurring performances." Since folklore is traditional and recurring, it is seen as authorless, sourceless and also as non-literary, non-learned. Inasmuch as proverbs are linguistic units, the recurring units must initially be oral/verbal, even if they are later recorded in writing and canonized in lexica.



Firth (1926) cites the rustic nature of proverbs as items of folklore in his definition, but he also stresses their common use in recurring verbal performances. Seiler's (1922) term *Volkläufigkeit* (folkloricity) encompasses both the folkloristic nature of proverbs and their common use as well. More recent definitions have preferred the term *traditional*, perhaps including the notion *items of folklore* (e.g. Taylor, 1950; Röhrich, 1967; Holbek, 1970; Abrahams, 1968a; Milner, 1969a; Dundes, 1975). In sociolinguistic terms, proverbs must be associated with some language community. To the extent that they contain dialectal, sociolectal features, proverbs can further be associated with particular social groups or "communities of practice" (Eckert, 1989; Eckert, 2000; Wenger, 1998). Then terms like *Volkläufigkeit* and *traditionality* can be understood as implying long-term common usage in certain communities of practice.

However, *folklore* and *traditionality* can also refer to the content of proverbs, specifically their rustic imagery relating to pre-industrial society. *Time is money* goes back at least as far as the ancient Greek Theophrastus (c. 372-287 BC) and is attested for English as early as 1659 (Taylor, 1950), so that it clearly counts as traditional in the sense of being in common use over time, but it hides its age well. By contrast, proverbs like *Strike while the iron is hot* and *Don't put the cart before the horse* trade on rustic images which give them a traditional ring, whether they have been in common use over time or not. Clearly, we must distinguish these two senses of *folklore* and *traditionality* in any consideration of proverbs.

#### 1.2.4 Didactic Content

Didactic content has also been consistently predicated of proverbs (e.g. by Seiler, 1922; Firth, 1926; Abrahams, 1968). The didactic tendency may take the direct form of a prescriptive rule, as in *Look before you leap*, or the indirect form of a general observation, as in *Soon gotten, soon spent*. Jolles (1930) objects to calling proverbs didactic in the first direct sense, allowing only the empirical interpretation of proverb content as general observations, but he fails to distinguish, first, the neutral ideational meaning of a proverb, second, the reason for its use in some context, and, third, the effect of a proverb in context. Thus, we can say some proverbs explicitly express a social injunction, others are often used with didactic force, and others may suggest a course of action to a listener in context. Mieder's (1996: 4) definition of proverbs as containing "wisdom, truths, morals, and traditional views" seems to cover all these aspects. Still, whether speakers perceive *The early bird catches the worm* as a summation of past experience or not, they can deploy it as a warning and they listener can interpret it as advice and follow it in any case. Requiring didactic tendency would eliminate some items often included in the category of proverbs, in particular those bound to specific situations like *Long time no see* as a greeting formula or *A little bird told me* as a way to avoid divulging the source of information. Sayings like these lacking any didactic

potential are perhaps better separated from proverbs proper and labeled clichés or conversational gambits

Certainly many proverbs exhibit either direct didactic tendency as items of advice, as in *Put your best foot forward*, or indirect didactic tendency as potential advice summarizing past experience, as in *First come, first served*. Others can be used with didactic intentions under appropriate conditions, for instance *Little pitchers have big ears* as advice about the danger of exposing children to adult talk generally rather than as a specific warning that children are listening.

### 1.2.5 Fixed Form

Taylor (1950) explicitly mentions *fixed traditional form* as characteristic for the proverb, and in Taylor (1962) he calls “rigidity of form ... an essential characteristic of proverbs.” Barley (1972) also invokes the notion of fixed form, though he includes “limited restructuring and variation.” Dundes (1964) distinguishes fixed-phrase genres of folklore such as proverbs and songs from free-phrase genres like jokes and riddles. Fixedness in the form of proverbs follows from the necessity that they remain recognizable in context. Speakers cite proverbs as units, assuming their listeners will recognize them as such and interpret them appropriately. Nevertheless, recognizability does not require complete immutability of proverb form. Listeners continue to identify proverbs in spite of lexical and grammatical variation because proverbs are “strongly coded” (Meleuc, 1972) and “overcoded” in Eco’s (1972; 1976) terms: their structures are marked and they bear greater social and psychological significance than do other set phrases. Seiler (1922) stresses that fixedness cannot preclude variability through time and from one community to the next. This variability naturally leads to multiple forms for a proverb in some cases, e.g. *Where/when one door shuts/is shut another opens/is opened* and *All that glitters/glisters is not gold/All is not gold that glitters/glisters*. In conversational contexts it may be impossible to say whether a particular speaker has uttered a pre-existent variant or a nonce restructuring of a given proverb.

Further, because proverbs are strongly coded and highly recognizable, mention of one crucial phrase can serve to call forth the whole proverb. Thus, the first noun phrase from *A rolling stone gathers no moss* yields the name of the rock group *The Rolling Stones* and the music magazine *The Rolling Stone*, as well as the title for Bob Dylan’s song *Like a rolling stone* and so on. In conversation simply saying *Remember the early bird* alone would serve to warn a listener about arriving late.

Finally, proverbs are often introduced with *frames* like *you should*, *one should* and *always*, as in **You should** strike while the iron is hot or **Always** look before you leap (Taylor (1930) calls these proverb *formulas*, but Kuusi’s (1966) term *frame* seems to be more popular). Proverbs are also often introduced or followed by *proverbial affixes* (Norrick, 1981) like *as the saying goes*, *as they say* and *it is said*. Certain adjectives like

*proverbial* and *everlovin'* can appear before any stressed noun in a proverb without affecting its recognizability, as witness: *The proverbial pen is mightier than the sword* or *Make hay while the everlovin' sun shines*. In fact, these *proverbial infixes* (Norrick, 1981) help listeners identify proverbs as such. Taken together, these items hold out the possibility of varying and extending practically any proverb; at the same time, their frequent occurrence with proverbs tends to foreground proverbial utterances.

As Moon (1998) has shown on the basis of empirical corpus investigations, proverbs are both comparatively rare and variable in everyday discourse, but they remain recognizable to members of the language community due to their high salience. Fixedness in proverbs is relative, and proverbs are never completely frozen.

### 1.2.6 Poetic Features

Metaphoricity (or imagery) is also often included among the required features of a proverb. Thus, Barley (1972) distinguishes literal traditional sayings from necessarily metaphorical proverbs, terming the former *maxims*; Greimas (1970) draws a parallel distinction between the figurative *proverb* and the literal *dicton*. At the same time, other writers like Taylor (1950) and Hain (1963) consider imagery a common attribute of proverbs rather than a defining property as such. Moreover, as Seiler (1922) and others have noted, metaphoricity is a matter of degree rather than an absolute dichotomy, so that the distinction between proverbs and literal sayings would have to be a gradual one as well. Furthermore, many proverbs may vary by use between literal and metaphoric interpretation. *It never rains but it pours* can occur in the literal context of a real rain storm or with metaphorical reference to a streak of bad luck. Strictly speaking, metaphoricity is a matter of proverb use rather than an internal semantic property of proverbs themselves.

Like metaphoricity, prosody is often counted among the typical, but not necessary, features of proverbs, e.g., by Seiler (1922), Hain (1963) and Abrahams (1968). Besides rhyme as in *Birds of a feather flock together*, alliteration as in *Live and let live*, and assonance as in *Strike while the iron is hot*, Taylor (1962) identifies various metrical patterns and parallelism characteristic of proverbs. Related to prosody is the tendency for proverbs to display certain word-order patterns, e.g., shorter elements first, longer elements toward the end (Panini's Law), as in *Here today, gone tomorrow*; see Cooper and Ross (1975) and Norrick (1985). Prosody and regular patterning make proverbs both more memorable and more recognizable in context.

Both imagery and prosody help render a construction more memorable and thereby increase its chances of becoming a standard formula. This explains why so many proverbs do display ostentatious prosody and remarkable imagery, but it does not entail that all proverbs exhibit such poetic structures. Indeed, plenty of everyday prosaic phrases have somehow managed to achieve proverbial status, e.g. *Time is money* and *Children should be seen and not heard* among many others.

### 1.3 Proverb Definitions

What we generally call proverbs are recurrent, pithy, often formulaic and/or figurative, fairly stable and generally recognizable units used to form a complete utterance, make a complete conversational contribution and/or to perform a speech act in a speech event. This definition differentiates them from non-sentential items like proverbial phrases, idioms, binomials etc. Proverbs make apodictic statements like *Money talks* or they evoke a scenario applicable to a range of analogous situations, as in *Little strokes fell great oaks*. In supplying ready-made responses to recurrent types of situations, proverbs seem to suggest particular evaluations or courses of action, resulting in their often noted didactic tendency. They are associated with various discourses and recognized texts, speakers and writers, including famous authors, all of which accrues to the significance they bear in society. Still, there is no single *proverbiality* and no single inclusive definition of the proverb. Alternate definitions will be examined and contrasted, leading to a consideration of the features characteristic for proverbs – or really for groups of proverbs. Despite Taylor's (1962) warning about the futility of defining the proverb, paremiologists have proposed various sorts of definitions through the years.

With culturally determined items like proverbs, as with other areas of language use, it is necessary to recognize the fuzziness of the category and the scalar application of features. Wittgenstein (1953) showed that cultural institutions like *game* could only be defined as families of related activities, rather than in a feature-by-feature manner, and this holds for institutionalized sayings like proverbs as well. Probably no single proverb unites all the characteristics we imagine to be prototypical. Among those proverbs we might consider prototypical, there are, first, proverbs which sketch a scenario generalizable to comment on a range of analogous situations like: *The early bird catches the worm*; *A rolling stone gathers no moss*; *A stitch in time saves nine*. Second, there are formulaic examples, which tend to make a literal statement such as: *Like father, like son*; *The more haste, the less speed*; *Easy come, easy go*; *Better late than never*. A few common formulaic proverbs may evoke a scenario as well, e.g., *Once bitten, twice shy*; *When it rains, it pours*; *Fair weather after foul*. Third, there are those proverbs which make a specific statement about a particular matter, usually in less strikingly figurative language like: *Money talks*; *Time flies*; *Beauty's only skin deep*.

The attempt to discover a definition of proverbiality based on specific properties is probably just as fruitless as a definition of the proverb itself in such terms. The notion of proverbiality is itself even more clearly a matter of prototypicality (compare Arora, 1984). Honeck and Welge (1997) develop a scale of proverbiality based on “characteristics shown by the prototypical best proverbs.” Their definition contains characteristics like *nonliteral in relation to a topic*, *use of poetic features*, and *nonhackneyed*, but these features themselves cry out for definition. Moreover, according to such criteria, there can be no clear line between proverbs, clichés, literary allusions

and popular sayings like: *When you're hot you're hot*; *All the world's a stage*; *Fools rush in where wise men fear to go*; *It's just like déjà vu all over again*. What counts for all such sayings is currency in community discourse in relatively stable form. This fact presents a problem for any effort to define the proverb in purely structural terms. Two noteworthy attempts in this direction are Milner (1969a; 1969b) and Dundes (1975).

Milner (1969a) argues that the most characteristic form of the traditional saying “consists of a statement in four parts,” whereby each part can be assigned a positive or negative value and the four parts naturally group into two halves. Then, for each half, two plus or two minus signs yield a plus, and the combination of a plus and a minus yields a minus. Milner develops analyses like the following for proverbs.

+	+	+
new	brooms	
-----		
+	+	+
sweep	clean	
+	+	+
a fair	exchange	
-----		
-	-	+
is no	robbery	

Unfortunately, even clearly quadripartite (four-part) proverbs resist any obvious assignment of positive and negative values: for instance in *Monkey see, monkey do* how would one decide to score monkeys or doing as + or -? Moreover, many attested proverbs simply do not fall into four discernible elements, most clearly short examples like *Time flies* and *Money talks*; moreover, Milner's appeal to some “hidden structure which must be perceived by the unconscious level of our minds” (Milner, 1969b) is clearly unconvincing. Dundes (1975) argues that Milner's assignment of values and configurations ends up as a system of classification rather than a definition as such.

Dundes himself further develops the basic idea of a structural definition of the proverb. He says, first, that only underlying formulas provide the basis for definition, and, second, that the basic unit of classification is a *descriptive element* consisting of a *topic* and a *comment*—an analysis parallel to that Georges and Dundes (1963) had proposed for riddles. A proverb may consist of a single descriptive element, e.g., *Love is blind*, though examples with multiple descriptive elements are statistically more common. On this basis, Dundes distinguishes equational proverbs like *Time is money* from oppositional proverbs, which in turn may involve simple negation as in *All that glitters is not gold* or more complex oppositions as in *Better buy than borrow* and *You can't have your cake and eat it*. Ultimately Dundes analysis ends up as a classification system for proverbs as well. Simply saying proverbs are analyzable into two halves and four quarters or into descriptive elements consisting of topic-comment

pairs provides little basis for defining proverbs without showing the various ways proverbs instantiate these structures, so that any definition must include a system of classification.

Moreover, the topic-comment definition Dundes proposes is functional rather than structural at base. It ultimately derives from the theme-rheme distinction within the Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP) analysis of the Prague School of linguistics. And it is precisely the functional—as opposed to structural—basis of this approach which allows for parallel analyses of such structurally distinct proverbs as:

*Opposites attract* (Noun Verb);  
*Easy come, easy go* (Adverb Verb);  
*Out of sight, out of mind* (Preposition Noun);  
*No pain, no gain* (Determiner Noun).

Each of these proverbs contains paired descriptive elements as shown, each structurally distinct yet functionally identifiable as theme-rheme descriptive elements. This is the genius of FSP analysis; and this functional approach underlies any comprehensive proverb analysis. We require a functional definition of the proverb in any case, since we must continue to recognize, e.g., *Live and learn* as a binomial in structural terms (*Verb Conjunction Verb*), even though it functions as a proverb.

Barley (1974) argues that in defining items of folklore we should “forget the genres and concentrate on the features,” and he develops a feature-matrix definition for the proverb and related items. In abbreviated form:

	statement	fixed	metaphorical
proverb	+	+	+
riddle	-	-	+/-
maxim	+	+	-
proverbial phrase	-	+	+

Norrick (1985) makes a further attempt in this direction, arguing for prioritization of certain features and using different sets of features for ethnographic and supercultural proverb definition; see also Harnish (1993). Consideration of a feature-based definition of proverbs naturally leads into the following investigation of proverb features in their own right.

## 1.4 Proverb Features

Semantic features of individual proverbs are interesting in themselves and they may suggest an approach to proverbiality. Furthermore, standard semantic features of proverbs can serve as a model of basic types of meaning relations which should be familiar to all members of a culture. The assumption that standard proverb meanings will be accessible to normal adult members of the language community provides the foundation for the use of proverbs in tests of understanding by psycholinguists and psychologists.

### 1.4.1 Polysemy

The polysemy of the proverb *A rolling stone gathers no moss* with its two standard interpretations *a person on the move remains young* and *a person on the move remains poor* has often been noted. Historically the separate interpretations may have originated as dialect variants. Although tests have shown that both readings for this proverb co-exist, hearers interpret it interactionally to mean either that they should or should not *roll*, depending on their beliefs (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1973).

### 1.4.2 Pun

Proverbs occasionally contain puns. This makes them potentially polysemic as well, in as much as either meaning may predominate in any particular discourse context. For instance, we interpret *No news is good news* to mean either *news is never positive* or *the absence of new information leaves hope that nothing bad has happened*; similarly, we interpret the phrase *get up with the fleas* in the proverb *Lie down with the dogs and get up with the fleas* to mean either *arise when the fleas do* or *arise infested with*.

### 1.4.3 Hyperbole

Any proverb containing absolute modifiers and adverbs like *no*, *never*, *all* and *always* is likely to involve overstatement, as in *A watched pot never boils* and *The grass is always greener on the other side (of the fence)*. We understand the first to mean that a watched pot seems to take longer to boil and the second to mean that distant grass tends to seem greener. See Norrick (2004a; 2004b) on overstatement and Extreme Case Formulation in proverbs.

#### 1.4.4 Irony

A few proverbs are ironic, e.g., *All geese are swans*, though irony is much commoner in proverbial phrases such as *A fine kettle of fish* and *As clear as mud*.

#### 1.4.5 Tautology

Tautologous proverbs are considerably more common. The most obvious examples are proverbs where the same noun phrase appears on both sides of a copula verb, as in *Enough is enough*; *Boys will be boys*; *What will be, will be* and *It isn't over till it's over*. Of course, such proverbs are not meaningless expressions of equivalence. They exhibit regular patterns of interpretation, and various attempts have been undertaken to explain how listeners produce appropriate interpretations, e.g., Wierzbicka (1987), Fraser (1988) etc.

#### 1.4.6 Paradox

One might not expect to find paradoxical proverbs at all, in as much as proverbs record salient observations and rules of conduct. Yet proverbs expressing preposterous claims like *The pen is mightier than the sword* are fairly common in English, and level-mixing, vicious circle proverbs like *Never say never* and *Expect the unexpected* are not particularly rare. If proverbs employ paradox, it must somehow reinforce their generalizing, didactic tendencies. Golopentia-Eretescu (1970; 1971) recognizes several different patterns of interpretation, whereby non-contradictory meanings are derived for some paradoxical proverbs, but others like *Nothing is permanent but change* exhibit genuine logical contradiction, mixing logical levels and leading to vicious circles. For such proverbs no resolution works: The paradox asserts itself, scintillates and intensifies: permanence passes, change abides, as Norrick (1989) shows.

#### 1.4.7 Connotation

Connotations contribute to the overall discourse meaning of proverbs as well. They intensify the rhetorical force and the traditional significance of proverbs. Folksy, rural, pre-industrial connotations are typical of proverbs, e.g., *Make hay while the sun shines* and *Don't put the cart before the horse*. Many proverbs also exhibit Biblical and/or religious connotations as well, e.g., *The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak* and *The blind lead the blind*.



Proverbs employ humour fairly frequently and jocular connotations are evident in many proverbs (see section on *set phrases and humor*), e.g., *Monkey see, monkey do* and *If you can't be good, be careful* used as a leave-taking formula.

#### 1.4.8 Imagery

Proverbs and proverbial phrases often have striking images. This helps keep them noticeable and memorable despite relative infrequency and variation, as Norrick (2007) argues.

Cognitive linguists argue that the metaphors in set phrases organize our perceptions, but the picture is far from clear (compare Burger, 1996; Burger, 1998). Proverbs contain specialized images from pre-industrial life, rather than basic-level metaphors or images familiar to speakers today. Proverbs thrive on foregrounding, high visibility and cultural salience, and consequently their images must be striking and memorable, not quotidian. Proverb images often fail miserably as models for organizing our perceptions of recurrent situations. In fact, they are frequently specialized, archaic and/or far-fetched, e.g., *Don't buy a pig in a poke* and *The pot calls the kettle black*. *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree* is certainly confusing and ambiguous by comparison with *Like father, like son*. *The hasty bitch brings forth blind whelps* introduces a whole range of irrelevant questions about dogs by contrast with the clear, concise, assonant and rhyming *Haste makes waste*. Proverbs frequently mix metaphors, combining images from separate source domains into complex, sometimes incompatible collages. Thus, *Every cloud has a silver lining* first draws on the metaphoric domain of weather phenomena standing for human experience and emotion, then switches to a scalar domain where silver represents something precious and desirable. The lining is mysterious, fitting, as it does, neither with clouds nor with silver. We try to imagine the cloud as a garment with a precious lining, but then the bad weather aspect of the cloud disappears. The result is a jumble of incongruous metaphors from unrelated domains, which cannot really resolve itself at all. As another example, *Hitch your wagon to a star* mixes the metaphoric domain of horses and wagons with astronomical imagery. It is difficult to imagine just how one might hitch a wagon to a star and what would result from the match. Again the image can hardly serve as a model organizing our perceptions.

Different sorts of imagery may be distinguished in proverbs. Seiler (1922) identifies both metaphor and personification in proverbs. Thus, some proverbs call forth a scenario generalizable to a range of analogous situations like *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, while others make a specific statement about a particular matter, often employing personification, as in *Money talks*. Proverbs may also be only partially metaphoric, as in *Every dog has its day*, where only the noun *dog* need be understood in a general figurative way as standing for any animate entity or human being.

Seitel (1969) shows how fully metaphoric proverbs express a scenario applicable to a range of parallel social contexts. He posits a relation between the leopard and his spots in the proverb *The leopard cannot change his spots* and the situation in which a speaker wishes to argue that a thief can never reform. The proverb in effect provides a model by which we comment on an analogous social situation: the leopard is to his spots as the thief is to his criminal tendency, abbreviated by Seitel in the formula  $A:B::C:D$ .

Maranda (1971) sets up a model for the riddle which looks much like Seitel's model for proverbs. His standard formula  $A/B = C/D$  is simply a notational variant of Seitel's abbreviated formula. Maranda recognizes a metonymic relation between each of the paired terms  $A/B$  and  $C/D$ , and a metaphoric (analogical) relation between the two pairs. For the Finnish riddle *One pig, two snouts*,  $A$  stands for the pig,  $B$  for his snout,  $D$  stands for the two snouts, and  $C$  for the thing to be guessed, namely the traditional Finnish fork plow. Georges and Dundes (1963) show that the two sets of terms in Maranda's riddle formula are related just as the terms of the proverb are to its concrete situation. The metonymic relation between the pig and his snout parallels that between the leopard and his spots, while the relation between the plow and its two snouts parallels that between the thief and his criminal tendency.

Barley (1972) adapts and expands Maranda's model for the proverb. Since the relationship between the terms of a proverb, unlike those of a riddle, can be understood even outside context, Barley distinguishes the internal, logical relations between the terms of the proverb itself from the external relations which the proverb contracts to its situation of use. The analogy between the proverb image and the situation of use is then not drawn directly, but by way of the generalized relation expressed by the proverb. Barley calls this the *maxim level*, because metaphorical proverbs can be paraphrased by literal maxims, in the case of *The leopard cannot change his spots* we find the maxim *Once a thief always a thief*. Barley simply generalizes each term of a proverb, essentially just disregarding the particular semantic features of words, to generate its maxim level *structural description*. If *leopard* is characterized as *animate*, *animal*, *feline* etc., one simply erases features up to the level of *animate*. If the spots in the proverb are characterized as *natural*, *marking*, *blotch*, *contrastive color*, then all the features are erased up to the level of *natural*. This process yields a generalized structural description like *animate beings cannot change their natural characteristics*. See Grzybek (1994; 2000) for a good critical treatment of this research on proverb interpretation and context from a semiotic perspective.

Norrick (1985) reworks Barley's traditional feature semantic approach in terms of frame theory. Schema representations for words like *bird* and *worm* will include the information that (some) birds hunt for worms, because worms serve as food for them, thereby ensuring that generalization of the concrete image in *The early bird catches the worm* will lead to *early agents reach goals* rather than simply *early animate beings get animate beings*. Norrick goes on to identify all kinds of imagery in proverbs. He first distinguishes the scenic species-genus synecdoche of proverbs like *The leopard*

*cannot change his spots* and *The early bird catches the worm* from nominal (part-whole) synecdoche in which a single noun in a proverb must be interpreted in *pars-pro-toto* fashion, e.g., *A false tongue will hardly speak the truth*, where *tongue* stands for the whole speaking person. Then he analyzes various sorts of predicate extension metaphor, in which a selectional feature or presupposition of the verb forces an anthropomorphic, animate or concrete interpretation, e.g., *Pride feels no pain*, where *pride* is personified, *Familiarity breeds contempt*, where *familiarity* is interpreted as a living organism, and *Fair words break no bones*, where words are treated as physical objects, respectively. Norrick further recognizes, first, object-attribute metaphor in proverbs like *Necessity is the mother of invention*, where *mother* stands for its attribute of nurturing, and, second, metonymy of the instrument-function variety, e.g. in *Fear gives wings*, where *wings* stand for the ability to fly.

#### 1.4.9 Syntactic Features

Proverbs often represent structures which would be ungrammatical by normal standards. Like other idiomatic structures, proverbs represent an anomaly in any generative linguistic paradigm (Chafe, 1968). Proverbs often contain archaic and dialect words and structures, e.g. *Them as has gits*. They may even come from other languages entirely, as in *Che sarà sarà* and *C'est la vie*. Proverbs are also often constructed around formulas which fail to conform to normal sentence grammar, e.g., *Like father, like son*; *The bigger they come, the harder they fall*; *Once bitten, twice shy*.

Since proverbs are typically conversational, it makes more sense to think of them as potentially complete contributions to conversation in order to sidestep the issue of grammaticality. Nevertheless, the syntactic structures of proverbs are interesting in themselves, e.g. those without verbs like: *No rose without a thorn*; *Soon ripe, soon rotten*; *Many men, many minds*. As Nordahl (1999) argues, when proverbs lack verbs, and when they are otherwise elliptical, hearers must mobilize rhetorical principles to work out discourse inferences. This holds as well for proverbs without nouns like: *The more, the merrier*; *Easy come, easy go*; *Slow and steady wins the race*.

Along with truly formulaic structures, proverbs exhibit various patterns of repetition. As demonstrated in Norrick (1989), repetition in proverbs tends to focus attention on key terms and to emphasize contrasts between the repeated elements. Sometimes the syntactic frame of a proverb contains repetition as in *Where there's smoke there's fire*. Repetition across a copula results in tautological proverbs like *Enough is enough* and *Boys will be boys*. We find proverbs like *An eye for an eye*, where each token of *eye* stands for a different referent, but separate tokens may also seemingly refer to the same thing as in *You gotta do what you gotta do*, resulting in apparent paradox. Playful variation with repetition results in such memorable proverbs as *One is none* and *When the going gets tough, the tough get going*. We return to the interpretation of tautological and paradoxical proverbs below.

At the same time, as Bhuvanewar (2003) has shown, proverbs represent all the major types of syntactic structures (in English and Telugu). Many of the best-known proverbs instantiate standard types of sentences, e.g. Subject-Verb-Direct Object, as in *A rolling stone gathers no moss*; or Subject-Verb-Indirect Object-Direct Object, as in *You can't teach an old dog new tricks*; Subject-Copula-Predicate Nominal, as in *Time is money* and so on. To correctly access the role of formulaicity in our perception of prototypicality of proverbs or in the notion of proverbiality, however, we need statistical data. We must consider not only the frequency of formulaic versus non-formulaic proverbs in various corpora, but also the frequency of specific formulas and the number of formulaic examples among the most frequently used proverbs.

Research on the length of proverbs in words has so far been suggestive, but inconclusive (see Grzybek, 2000). Czermák (1998) determines an average length of 4.7 words for proverbs in the Czech National Corpus. More statistical data of various kinds will be necessary to reach any firm conclusions.

The matter of so-called transformational defects, as described by Fraser (1970), Newmeyer (1972), Dobrovolskij (1997; 1999) and others is not particularly important for proverbs, insofar as they often occur in variant related forms and remain highly recognizable even when truncated and manipulated. Currency and familiarity allow recognition of proverbs even in varied and abbreviated form: hence the use of recognizable chunks like *early bird* in contexts like *the early bird satellite* and *early bird air fares* (numerous examples in the internet) Proverbs provide convenient structures for manipulation to create original statements, as in this example from CNN market analysis: *The early investor catches the bargain stocks*. Note in particular the tendency to literalization of the proverb image here. See Mieder (2007), Mieder (1982) and Mieder/Litovkina (1999) on the modification of proverbs into *anti-proverbs* in discourse.

Finally, as Moon (1998) argues, transformability has now become a statistical corpus fact rather than an intuitive game. Corpus investigations show that some set phrases, including proverbs, tend to appear in certain variant forms while others do not. This discussion of recognizability despite manipulation leads naturally into the following section on proverbs in discourse.

#### 1.4.10 Discourse Features

Moon (1998) presents statistics from computer counts showing that proverbs are both comparatively rare and variable, but they are still recognizable to members of the language community. Moon stresses the correlations between frequency, form, type of idiomaticity and discourse function. Very frequent items like *at least* and *of course* tend to be functional and not fully lexical, frozen collocations rather than metaphorical, while colourful, stylistically marked and metaphorical expressions like proverbs are rare and often manipulated in contexts where they appear; see also Moon (2007).

Proverbs are statistically infrequent in corpora counts, because of the kinds of corpora available and the way computer programs search, but also due to the nature of proverb use itself, as Norrick (2007) argues. First, proverbs are often bound to contexts poorly represented in corpora, e.g. oral storytelling, everyday face-to-face talk. Second, proverbs occur in variants, as noted above, and these go unrecognized in computer searches (numerous examples in the internet, e.g. *early bird airfares* and *like a rolling stone*). Third, proverbs really are infrequent compared to gambits, prefabs, binomials, collocations like: *(do you) know what?*, *by and large*, *ins and outs* and *in short*.

Nevertheless, proverbs remain recognizable to native speakers, due, first, to their cultural salience and value as folk wisdom and bearers of traditional lore. Second, proverbs occur in prominent discourse positions like speech summaries and story closings with evaluation functions. In argumentation, as Wirrer (1998) shows, proverbs create a canonical specialization of topoi like the *busy bee*. Third, proverbial utterances are often foregrounded with special voice shifts and intonation speech and marked with framing devices like *we always say* and *as the saying goes*. As little recurrent texts in themselves, proverbs represent highly marked, “strongly coded” (Meleuc, 1972) structures, e.g. prosody (rhyme, alliteration, rhythm), rhetorical strategies (hyperbole, paradox, personification, metaphor), proverb formulas: *like N like N* and *the A-er the A-er*, special syntax and lexis: *Them as has gits* and *Look what the cat drug in*.

Finally, because they are highly codified and easily recognizable, proverbs often serve as templates for creative manipulation, and hence they appear in forms unrecognizable to a computer search. For instance, in a conversation reported in Norrick (1993), a participant comments on a recipe for tofu potato casserole by saying, *that’s like the bland leading the bland*. The original form of the proverb allusion appears in Matthew 15,14: *If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch*, but perhaps more frequent is the form *Like the blind leading the blind*. Either way, the full proverb provides a serviceable structure for creation of a new utterance. Consider also *I’d rather have some ten million in the hand than one million in the bush* in the passage from the London Lund Corpus (Svartvik & Quirk, 1980) below, where *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* presumably served as template.

- B: fine.  
I mean it’s not that I want to,  
A: no, no no no, no, oh no.  
but it seems absolutely fixed now.  
B: and I’d rather have,  
some ten million in the hand,  
than than the one million in the bush.  
um but,  
A yes, yes of course.  
B I think this is highly unlikely.

and uh I I'm I'm personally assuming,  
that uh a million in the bush,  
is more likely to happen.

A yes, yes, literally.

B yeah.

A in the bush.

B {laughs} yes. I think I know.

The proverb provides not only the initial allusion in lines 6-7, but the phrase *a million in the bush* in speaker B's next turn (line 12) and the phrase *in the bush* for speaker A (line 16). Note also the proverbial framing device *literally* in line 14 here produced by speaker A in response to the proverbial allusion. Neither this nor the previous allusion would, of course, be picked up in a computer search, yet allusions and variations like these are probably the most common occurrences of proverbs in discourse.

As noted in section 2.5 on fixed form, proverbs often appear along with other set phrases, e.g., *you know*, *they say*, *an apple a day*. There are standard frames like *one should*, *you should* and *always* which often fill out imperative structures in proverbs, rendering, say, *Keep your nose to the grindstone* as *You should keep your nose to the grindstone* or *Always keep your nose to the grindstone*. Proverbs in discourse are also frequently bracketed by various proverbial affixes like *they say*; *I always say*; *as the saying goes* and so on. In addition, framing devices like *literally* frequently occur in proverbial discourse contexts, and speakers generally set proverbs off from the surrounding discourse in various ways, as Hain (1951), Czermák (1998) and Moon (1998) demonstrate. Clearly more research is needed in this area, not just to determine how proverbs are varied with formulas like *you should* and *always*, but also to see how framing devices like *as the saying goes* and *literally* function in context.

Most of the foregoing discussion holds for proverbial phrases as well, defined as figurative but incomplete clauses (versus collocations, idioms, clichés) or, again, via prototypes like *as smooth as silk* for proverbial similes and *to live high on the hog* for verbal phrases. Proverbial phrases, too, occur rarely and in variant forms, specially marked and set off from their discourse contexts in various ways. Just as the *proverbial worm turns*, we also find people *living high on the proverbial hog*.

The patterns of frequency, salience and recognizability all hang together. Proverbs and proverbial phrases are not frequent, but highly noticeable, because they are salient in context, frequently foregrounded, easily remembered, and so they can be varied and serve as templates but still remain recognizable. By contrast, frequent phrases like *of course* and *at all* go unnoticed despite their frequency and because of their nondescript form.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Proverbs have been studied from folkloristic, linguistic and lexicographic perspectives with varying methods and goals, resulting in diverse terminologies, sometimes overlapping, sometimes complementary. Various attempts to define the proverb and proverbiality have met with differing degrees of success, but there is fairly general agreement about the basic groups of proverbs and their salient features.

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## 2 Origin of Proverbs

### 2.1 Introduction

In 1931 Archer Taylor, the twentieth-century doyen of international paremiology, stated at the beginning of his seminal book *The Proverb* that “the origins of the proverb have been little studied” (3). In the same year his friend Bartlett Jere Whiting published his invaluable article on *The Origin of the Proverb*, also arguing that much more scholarly work is needed to understand the multifaceted aspects of proverb origins. Both paremiologists present much information on this intriguing subject matter, and they certainly agree that proverbs are not created by the folk but rather by an individual. Someone at some time and somewhere couches a general observation, behavior, or experience into a short complete sentence that subsequently is picked up by others who might well change the wording slightly resulting in a number of variants until a standard formulation results. As early as 1823 the British statesman Lord John Russell said it best, when he defined a proverb as *One man’s wit, and all men’s wisdom* that in itself has become proverbial as *The wit of one and the wisdom of many* (Taylor, 1975: 68). In other words, every proverb begins with an individual whose keen insight is accepted and carried forth as a piece of proverbial wisdom by people of all walks of life. Of course, for most proverbs the individual coiner is no longer known, and the numerous cultural, ethnographic, folkloristic, historical, linguistic, and literary studies of the origin, dissemination, function, and meaning of individual proverbs only rarely succeed in identifying that very person who uttered the proverbial wisdom for the first time (see Quitard, 1860; Röhrich, 1991-1992; Mieder, 1977 and 1984).

Thus a comprehensive study of the ancient proverb *Big fish eat little fish* was able to trace the proverb back to an allusion in the didactic poem *Works and Days* by the Greek writer Hesiod of the eighth century B.C from which it developed by way of variants and translations until it became established in more or less identical wording in most European languages and beyond (Mieder, 1987). But the first reference in Greek does not really identify the originator of this rather obvious insight based on a common observation in nature. Most likely the proverb was already in oral communication and it will never be known who uttered this concise piece of wisdom for the first time. And yet, for some proverbs it is precisely known who started it and at what time, to wit William Shakespeare’s *Brevity is the soul of wit* (1601), Alexander Pope’s *Hope springs eternal in the human breast* (1733) that is now usually cited in its truncated form of *Hope springs eternal*, Theodore Roosevelt’s *Speak softly and carry a big stick* (1900), and Erich Segal’s *Love means never having to say you’re sorry* (1970). Some proverbs clearly started as sententious remarks with famous literary authors such as Cicero, Geoffrey Chaucer, William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra,



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Friedrich Schiller, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bertolt Brecht, etc. It is known that their statements became literary quotations, that they were repeated again and again, and that they eventually circulate as proverbs, with their original author slowly but surely being forgotten. This phenomenon is definitely going on today. Well-known individuals like Winston S. Churchill, John F. Kennedy, Mikhail Gorbachev, Willy Brandt, Martin Luther King, and others have formulated concise and memorable statements that have become proverbial (Mieder, 2009). At times these proverbs are cited by also naming their author (Taylor, 1931: 34-43), but as is the usual case with proverbs, they circulate in oral and written communication as anonymous folk wisdom. Today, with the power of the mass media, some of these utterances can become proverbs in a very short time sequence.

But it should also be noted that certain proverbs get attached to names of famous people to add special authority to their wisdom, without anybody having been able to find these texts in their written works. Thus, it has falsely been claimed that Martin Luther coined *Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weib und Gesang, der bleibt ein Narr sein Leben lang* [Who does not love wine, women and song will remain a fool his whole life long] (first reference in 1775) which starting in 1857 also gained currency in the Anglo-American world as *Who does not love wine, women, and song, remains a fool his whole life long* while stubbornly keeping Luther's name attached to it (Mieder, 2004b). And speaking of America, it should be noted that while such anonymous proverbs as *The cat in gloves catches no mice*, *There are no gains without pains*, and *Creditors have better memories than debtors* were in fact used by Benjamin Franklin in his almanacs and his famed essay *The Way to Wealth* (1758), he most certainly did not coin them. But to give this proponent of Puritan ethics his due, the proverbs *There will be sleeping enough in the grave* (1741), *Time is money* (1748), and *Three removes is as bad as a fire* (1758) are his very own inventions (Gallacher, 1949: 250-251).

## 2.2 The Creation of Proverbs

The older scholarship on proverbs followed the romantic notion that the origin of proverbs lies somehow in the soul of the folk. Their *birth is veiled in mystery and obscurity* (Trench, 1853: 42), and *their parentage is enveloped in mystery* (Hulme, 1902: 18). In fact, it was "loosely imagined that proverbs are a kind of mystic accretion of wisdom; that they have crystallized out of the experience of the past ages without the precise effort of individuals, almost without the intervention of human agency" (Firth, 1927: 262). As can be imagined, it remains an especially vexing problem to ascertain the origin and age of proverbs from oral societies, but proverbs from literary traditions might in fact also have been in anonymous oral use prior to their first historically recorded reference (Schneider, 1981: 33-41). Confronted with the collection of proverbs in oral use only among the Maori of New Zealand, anthropologist Raymond

Firth came to the same conclusion regarding the origin of proverbs as scholars have reached dealing with the proverbs of literate societies:

It seems fairly clear that at one time or another some one person must have expressed the feeling of the community on that particular point in words which appealed to other members of the group, and which were passed around and adopted as a convenient mode of expression. [...] There are three processes which usually go to the making of a proverb among primitive folk:

- (1) Concrete formulation by one individual in response to some set of circumstances.
- (2) Acceptance by the people at large as being appropriate to a more general situation, and seeming by its peculiar form and twist of phrase to give fit expression to their thoughts and feelings.
- (3) Possible modification of phraseology or meaning with the passing of time by an unconscious process, with the effect of keeping it consonant with public sentiment. (Firth, 1927: 262-263)

The renowned American medieval literature scholar and paremiologist Bartlett Jere Whiting agreed with Raymond Firth's observation in his seminal article on *The Origin of the Proverb* (1931), arguing that the creation and acceptance of proverbs is very much the same as far as orality and literacy are concerned:

Just as it is incomprehensible that a group should join in the manufacture of an ordinary word, so it is incomprehensible that a group, working from whatever impulse and under whatever circumstances, should join in the composition of a proverb. Thus, at the outset, we are forced to admit that every proverb was the work of an individual; and, at the same time, we must ask ourselves just what kind of an individual it is which we mean. If we are to assume conscious literary creation of a proverb, we assume that it was the work of an author who might under his own name have issued it alone, or in a collection of proverbs, or incorporated in some more extended literary work; or of an individual who contrived to incorporate his name into the proverb itself. (Whiting, 1931: 49-50).

More or less at the same time that Whiting wrote his essay, his friend Archer Taylor reached the same conclusion in his magisterial section on *The Origins of the Proverb* in his invaluable classic study *The Proverb* (1931): "It is not proper to make any distinction in the treatment [of the invention] of 'learned' [literary] and 'popular' [oral] proverbs. The same problems exist for all proverbs with the obvious limitation that, in certain cases, historical studies are greatly restricted by the accidents of preservation. We can ordinarily trace the 'learned' proverb down to a long line of literary tradition, for the classics or the Bible through the Middle Ages to the present, while we may not be so fortunate with every 'popular' proverb. [...] Obviously the distinction between 'learned' and 'popular' is meaningless and is concerned merely with the accidents of history [and the (im)possibility of having recorded the origin of the proverbs]" (Taylor, 1931: 4-5; see also Urbas, 1876: 511; Seiler, 1922: 19-20; Röhrich & Mieder, 1977: 26-27; Mieder, 1996: 236-237).

Following these masters on whose shoulders modern paremiologists stand, one might well state the following, keeping in mind that “you can only call a communicative form a proverb when it is known and common – and this means that you unfortunately missed its genesis [in most cases]” (Ayaß, 2001, 239) and that there is a “processus de proverbialisation” (Schapira, 2000: 85-86) involved for a proverb-like statement to become an actual proverb:

Proverbs, like riddles, jokes, or fairy tales, do not fall out of the sky and neither are they products of a mythical soul of the folk. Instead they are always coined by an individual whether intentionally or unintentionally. If the statement contains an element of truth or wisdom, and if it exhibits one or more proverbial markers [parallelism, rhyme, alliteration, ellipsis, metaphor, etc.], it might ‘catch on’ and be used first in a small family circle, and subsequently in a village, a city, a region, a country, a continent, and eventually the world. The global spread of proverbs is not a pipe dream, since certain ancient proverbs have in fact spread to many parts of the world. Today, with the incredible power of mass media, a newly formulated proverb-like statement might become a bona fide proverb relatively quickly by way of the radio, television, and print media. As with verbal folklore in general, the original statement might well be varied a bit as it gets picked up and becomes ever more an anonymous proverb whose wording, structure, style, and metaphor are such that it is memorable. (Mieder, 2004a: 9; Mieder, 2007a: 396-397)

Keeping the matter of variants in mind as the original statement develops into its standard proverbial form and that the proverb itself can then be employed in various forms as a mere allusion, a partial remnant, a question, an anti-proverb, etc., it is of theoretical use to realize that “an individual proverb is something of an abstraction, a form that exists as the basis for a range of possible variation” (Doyle, 2001: 73; see also Taylor, 1931: 22-27). Put another way, the conclusion that can be reached from all of this is that “the texts of all proverbs are self-sufficient, in general dissociated from their sources and origins, and continually being added to the canon” (Olinick, 1987: 464). Indeed, new proverbs are constantly being added to the repertoire, but it must not be forgotten that traditional proverbs can also disappear when they no longer fit the mores of the modern world, to wit such anti-feministic proverbs like *A woman’s tongue is like a lamb’s tail* or *A woman is the weaker vessel*. Little wonder that the woman’s liberation movement led to the creation of the new proverb *A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle* and its variant *A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle* in the early 1970’s not by the American feminist Gloria Steinem but rather by the Australian educator Irina Dunn (Doyle, Mieder, Shapiro, 2012: 279-280).

It must not be forgotten that proverbs continue to be created and that there is obviously a future for proverbs in modernity (Combet, 1996), as Wolfgang Mieder’s book *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season. Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age* (1993) has clearly shown. But before turning to the peculiarities of modern proverb creations, it is necessary to take a look at the four major periods of the creation of proverbs that belong to the common stock of European proverbs (Mieder, 1999; Mieder, 2000b: 303-307; Mieder, 2006: 86-92). Restricting the comments to just these nations, cultures, and languages does not mean that similar developments did not occur in Africa, Asia,

the Middle East, etc. (see Goitein, 1952; Yankah, 1989; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 1990; Paczolay, 1993).

## 2.3 Four Major Sources for Common European Proverbs

Even though for most proverbs their creators will never be known, it is quite feasible to estimate the time of their origin. Detailed diachronic and comparative work can succeed in tracing a proverb back to a time when it most likely was created. The realia expressed in such proverbs will certainly provide clues for an approximate date of origin (Dundes, 2000b). Thus, the Danish paremiologist Bendt Alster has provided herculean labor in deciphering the cuneiform tablets of ancient Sumer, showing that parallel proverbs to those of the ancient wisdom literature and those of classical antiquity having become common European proverbs must have been in oral communication before 2500 B.C. (Alster, 2005). These cuneiform tablets even include remnants of very early fables and folk narratives that have subsequently been reduced to proverbs, but again without revealing who might have been the individual person who first shortened such texts to mere proverbs and at what precise time. Some of the highly metaphorical proverbs go back to Aesop's animal fables as well as fairy tales and folk tales. In fact, some of these ancient and later medieval narratives have been forgotten and live on only as proverbs or proverbial expressions, to wit *Sour grapes*, *To be a dog in the manger*, *Don't kill the goose that lays the golden egg*, *Much cry and little wool*, *The sun will bring it to light*, etc. (Taylor, 1931: 27-32; Röhrich, 1960; Huxley, 1981; Carnes, 1988; Mieder, 2007b: 1108-1109).

Of course, it has long been noticed that some of the proverbs known in identical wording in most European languages can at least be traced back to Greek and Roman sources, always with the caveat that they might in fact be considerably older than their earliest written record found thus far. The still valuable comparative study *The Antiquity of Proverbs* (1922) by the British scholar Dwight Edwards Marvin includes fifty small essays on such "international" European proverbs, stating at the outset that "it is a mistake to assume that the earliest known record of a saying indicates its origin. Many with which we are familiar were, so far as we know, first used by the Romans, but the Latin language was the medium of innumerable Greek phrases that predate their Roman use and they may have been the utterances of unknown philosophers, the fragments of lost historic records, the attributed responses to ancient oracles or the accepted lessons of forgotten myths and fables" (Marvin, 1922: 3; see Taylor, 1931: 61-65). It should be noted, however, that Bishop Richard Chenevix Trench in his early paremiological survey *On the Lessons in Proverbs* (1853) had already seven decades earlier stated that "nations are continually borrowing proverbs from one another" (Trench, 1853: 32). More significantly, the German paremiologist Friedrich Seiler, to this day known for his comprehensive *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde* (1922) that was of

much use to Archer Taylor for his celebrated overview *The Proverb* that appeared a few years later in the United States, referred to such borrowed proverbs as *Lehnsprichwörter* (loan proverbs) and presented the scholarly community with his four-volume compilation and analysis *Das deutsche Lehnsprichwort* (1921-1924), showing that there are many proverbs current in the German language that were loaned or borrowed from classical, Biblical, and medieval Latin proverbs. Proverbs from such languages as primarily French, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Czech, Polish, etc. were also borrowed later, as the German speaking people came in touch with their neighbors. This type of borrowing was a common European phenomenon (see Taylor, 1931: 43-52; Barta, 1989; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, 2009), and it has been documented in two monumental comparative proverb collections, namely Emanuel Strauss' three-volume *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (1994) and Gyula Paczolay's *European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese* (1997). Of course, it must not be forgotten that Erasmus of Rotterdam played a major role in disseminating the proverbs from classical antiquity by way of his unsurpassed *Adagia* (1500ff.) with its thousands of references from Greek and Roman sources. As is well established, his compilation was used by the humanists of the sixteenth century, the proverbs were employed for instructional purposes, and they found their way into the literary works and vernacular collections by way of translation. In fact, Gyula Paczolay considers this annotated collection as a "secondary source" for classical proverb dissemination (Paczolay, 1998: 606). All of this borrowing was so widespread that what might appear to be a proverb of definite Russian, Spanish, or Hungarian origin upon closer scrutiny proves itself to be much older and having found its way into those languages through loan translation. Bishop Trench has described these surprises in a charming fashion over one hundred fifty years ago:

There is indeed nothing in the study of proverbs, in the attribution of them to their right owners, in the arrangement and citation of them, which creates a greater perplexity than the circumstances of finding the same proverb in so many different quarters, current among so many different nations. In quoting it as one, it often seems as if we were doing wrong to many, while yet it is almost, or oftener still altogether, impossible to determine to what nation it first belonged, so that others drew it at second hand from that one; – even granting that any form in which we now possess it is really its oldest of all. More than once this fact has occasioned a serious disappointment to the zealous collector of the proverbs of his native country. Proud of the rich treasures which in this kind it possessed, he has very reluctantly discovered on a fuller investigation of the whole subject, how many of these which he counted native, the peculiar heirloom and glory of his own land, must at once and without hesitation be resigned to others, who can be shown beyond all doubt to have been in earlier possession of them. (Trench, 1853: 31)

Every paremiographer putting together a national or regional proverb collection is faced with this troubling phenomenon. For example, the *Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder, Kingsbury, & Harder, 1992) includes many proverbs that originated in North America, but it also lists British proverbs and many other proverbs that have been loan translated during the past centuries. The title of this large compendium

should more appropriately have been *A Dictionary of Proverbs Current or Found in America*, and the little book of *Vermont Proverbs* (Mieder, 1986) should have been called more precisely *Proverbs Used and Registered in Vermont*. That is not to say that an attempt was not made to record as many indigenous proverbs from the United States or from the small state of Vermont as possible. But as the proverb says, *Don't judge a book by its cover [or title]*, and it must simply be realized that the important matter is whether a proverb, no matter what its origin or date, is in fact known and used in a particular language. Naturally this also indicates the danger of trying to determine something like a national character or worldview by a set of proverbs, especially if that set includes proverbs that are of general European or even global prominence.

And there is yet one more matter that needs to be mentioned here. All these loan processes assume a single origin of every proverb, i.e., monogenesis. And yet, separate origins of such minimalistic texts as proverbs can occur, after all, as Alan Dundes has pointed out: "If one is engaged in citing cognates of a particular proverb, one should be careful to distinguish actual cognates, that is, versions and variants of the proverb in question, assumed to be historically/genetically related to that proverb, from mere structural parallels which may well have arisen independently, that is, through polygenesis" (Dundes, 2000a: 298). The issue of monogenesis versus polygenesis has been discussed in folklore circles since the Brothers Grimm, and it remains a perplexing scholarly problem to this day (Chesnutt, 2002). After all, why should such short proverbs as *Love is blind* or *Walls have ears* not have been coined more than once in disparate areas of the world? They express common ideas or phenomena, often in a metaphorical way, that might well have resulted in more than one origin. Such proverbs, few as they might be, could be called *universal proverbs* in opposition to proverbs of but one origin appearing in many parts of the world due to normal loan processes that are enhanced by modern aspects of globalization (Paczolay, 2005: 74). Nevertheless, polygenesis is hard to prove, but it has, for example, been shown by painstaking historical analysis based on many contextualized references that the late medieval French proverb *Laissez faire à Georges* (1498) referring to the cardinal and statesman Georges d'Amboise and the modern American proverb *Let George do it* (1902, but probably somewhat older) with its reference to African-American railroad porters have no genetic connection (Mieder, 2014).

But to return to the classical muttons, here are a few proverbs of Greek or Latin origin, keeping in mind that each one of them deserves a detailed analysis as to its earliest recorded reference in Greek or Latin: *Where there is smoke, there is fire*, *Barking dogs do not bite*, *One swallow does not make a summer*, *Don't look a gift horse in the mouth*, *So many heads, so many minds*, *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, *A small spark makes a great fire*, *A true friend is known in need*, *Like father, like son*, *Blood is thicker than water*, *Make haste slowly*, *In wine there is truth*, etc. Yes, these proverbs go back to classical antiquity, but that is only one side of the coin, for it can certainly be argued that loan translated proverbs have what perhaps can be called several *secondary*



origins in the various target languages. In other words, take the classical proverb *One hand washes the other* with its earliest reference in ancient Greek. When it appears in Latin as *Manus manum lavat* it has a secondary origin and the history of this Latin proverb could be studied from its earliest reference on. When it is loan translated into German as *Eine Hand wäscht die andere* it has its secondary origin in that language that deserves to be studied in all its citations and meanings. The same is true for the Russian loan translation *Pyka pyky moem*, the French *Une main lave l'autre*, etc. The paremiological scholarship has not yet used the term *secondary origin*, but it is a term that fits the situation of a translated proverb taking on its own life in a target language well. After all, such proverbs do become part of the national corpora, and this continues to take place today. For example, the originally German proverb *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* [The apple does not fall far from the tree] with its earliest reference from 1554 appears in English translation for the first time in the *Notebooks* covering the years between 1824 and 1836 of the American transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson as *The apple does not fall far from the stem* and it has long become an *American* proverb among the population of the United States (Mieder, 2000a).

The second major source for common European proverbs is the ancient wisdom literature that found its way into the Bible and other religious texts (Westermann, 1995). As one of the most widely translated books the Bible had an incredible influence on spreading proverbs, some of them older than the Bible, to many cultures and languages (Pfeffer, 1975). These proverbs have become so well integrated into various European languages that native speakers often are not at all aware of the fact any longer that they are citing Biblical wisdom when using them. But be that as it may, the following proverbs from the Bible have entered many languages (not just European) as word-for-word loan translations: *As you sow, so will you reap* (Galatians 6:7-8), *He who digs a pit for another, will fall into it himself* (Proverbs 26:27), *You see the mote in another's eye but fail to see the beam in your own* (Matthew 7:3), *He that will not work, shall not eat* (2 Thessalonians 3:10), *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you* (Matthew 7:12), *A prophet is not without honor save in his own country* (Matthew 13:57), *An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth* (2 Moses 21:24), *He who sows the wind shall reap the whirlwind* (Hosea 8:7), *Man does not live by bread alone* (Deuteronomy 8:3, Matthew 4:4), etc. Of course, it depended at least to a certain degree on the Bible translator whether Biblical proverbs were able to establish themselves in the target language. A revealing example is the Bible proverb *Ex abundantia cordis os loquitur* (Matthew 12:34) that was awkwardly rendered into English as *Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh* in the King James Bible of 1616 and that consequently never really caught on as a proverb in that language. On the other hand, in Germany Martin Luther translated it quite *folksy* as *Wes das Herz voll ist, des geht der Mund über* in 1522, and the proverb remains current to this day. But there is also a counter-example: Luther rendered Mark 3:24 not at all well as *Und wenn ein Haus mit sich selbst uneins wird, kann es nicht bestehen* [If a house is at variance with itself it cannot endure]. It never caught on as a proverb in the German language, whereas the English

rendition of *A house divided against itself cannot stand* is very current in general speech especially in the United States, where Abraham Lincoln's use of it prior to the Civil War helped to popularize it. But as luck would have it, the then mayor of Berlin Willy Brandt used the proverb in English when he delivered a major address commemorating Lincoln's sesquicentennial birthday in 1959 at Springfield, Illinois. He then started using his own and much better translation *Ein in sich gespaltenes Haus hat keinen Bestand* from time to time in Germany, usually referring to Lincoln's use of it but not to its Biblical origin. When the wall came down in Germany in 1989, Brandt became very engaged in the process of unification and relied heavily on this translation to argue for a smooth transition to unity. With his popularity and the media coverage the proverb has now caught on in Germany as well, clearly a late development but a modern sign of the fact that the spread of loan translated proverbs continues, even if an old Bible proverb has to find its way into the German culture and language by way of America (Mieder, 2005: 112-117).

The rich treasure trove of medieval Latin proverbs makes up the third major source for some of the most popular proverbs known throughout Europe. They have been edited in Hans Walther's and Paul Gerhard Schmidt's massive nine-volume *Proverbia sententiaeque latinitatis medii aevi. Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters* (1963-1986). Add to this Samuel Singer's und Ricarda Liver's thirteen-volume *Thesaurus proverbiorum medii aevi. Lexikon der Sprichwörter des romanisch-germanischen Mitealters* (1995-2002) that registers thousands of Latin and vernacular proverbs from literary sources of the entire Middle Ages, and one gets an idea of how prevalent proverbs were at that time. As would be expected, not all of these Latin as well as Romance and Germanic language proverbs became known throughout Europe, but there are plenty who did reach such an international status, as for example such popular favorites as *Never put off till tomorrow what can be done today*, *New brooms sweep clean*, *Strike while the iron is hot*, *When the cat is away, the mice will play*, *All that glitters is not gold*, *Empty vessels make much sound*, *A horse has four legs and still it stumbles*, *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*, *The pitcher goes so long to the well until at last it breaks*, *All cats are gray in the dark*, *Clothes do not make the man*, *The devil is not so black as he is painted*, etc. It might be surprising to find the proverb *All roads lead to Rome* in this group of Latin proverbs from the Middle Ages. However, it is placed here correctly, since *Rome* in this case is not the imperial city but rather the city of the church. In other words, for believers and clergy alike everything leads to the center of the papacy in Rome.

Lest it be forgotten, it should be pointed out before turning to the fourth and more modern source of wide-spread proverbs that there are naturally also the thousands of home-grown proverbs dating from medieval to modern times that are part of any national or regional repertoire. For most of them the individual coiner is not known, but they were phrased by someone as pieces of wisdom with certain proverbial markers (metaphor, structure, rhyme, alliteration, ellipsis, parallelism, etc.) that made it possible for them to be accepted and repeated by others so that in due time

they took on a proverbial nature. By way of detailed historical and contextualized analysis their approximate dates of origin can be ascertained, as for example for such indigenous English proverbs as *Early to be and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise*, *A stitch in time saves nine*, *Birds of a feather flock together*, *Nothing ventured, nothing gained*, *Practice makes perfect*, etc. Everyone of these folk proverbs deserves a detailed study regarding its origin, dissemination, meaning, and continued use, but the originator and precise date will never be known.

This certainly is also true for the fascinating more recent fourth group of proverbs that belongs to the stock of common European proverbs. As is well known, Latin as the *lingua franca* of Europe has long been pushed aside, but it has now been replaced by the *Englishes* of the world, notably the Anglo-American variety. British and American proverbs have been loan translated for quite some time, but this trend has increased at an impressive rate since the end of the Second World War that brought the United States as a major political, economic, and cultural player in closer contact with Europe and the world at large. The American way of life with its future oriented worldview and emphasis on pragmatism, business, consumerism, mobility, and popular culture (music, television, film, mass media, etc.) has infiltrated societies throughout the globe, and the English language has become the communicative tool that ties the world together. Individual English words have long been taken over by other languages, either directly or as loan translations. This is also true for proverbs that are accepted either in their original wording or as loan translations. Benjamin Franklin's *Time is money* has entered numerous languages in the form of loan translations, but with the power of English as the international *lingua franca*, the German version of *Zeit ist Geld* is today also cited in its original English as *Time is money* in Germany. In fact, the following Anglo-American proverbs have all been loan translated into German (and also other languages), but especially the shorter ones are also cited in English at times and not surprisingly so considering the general knowledge of English in Europe and elsewhere:

(1) English: *Don't swap horses in mid-stream.*

German: *Mitten im Strom soll man die Pferde nicht wechseln.*

(2) English: *It takes two to tango.*

German: *Zum Tango gehören zwei.*

(3) English: *Don't put all of your eggs into one basket.*

German: *Man soll nicht alle Eier in einen Korb legen.*

(4) English: *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.*

German: *Ein Apfel pro Tag hält den Arzt fern.*

(5) English: *A picture is worth a thousand words.*

German: *Ein Bild sagt mehr als tausend Worte.*

(6) English: *The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.*

German: *Das Gras ist immer grüner auf der anderen Seite des Zaunes.*

(7) English: *A dog is man's best friend.*

German: *Der Hund ist des Menschen bester Freund.*

(8) English: *No news is good news.*

German: *Keine Nachrichten sind gute Nachrichten.,* and

(9) English: *Good fences make good neighbors.*

German: *Gute Zäune machen gute Nachbarn* (Mieder, 2010a; Mieder, 2010b: 297-340).

Of special interest is what has happened with the early seventeenth-century English proverb *The early bird catches the worm* that has always been considered as the equivalent of the extremely popular German proverb *Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde* [The morning hour has gold in its mouth] from the previous century. Once the English proverb was loan translated into German as *Der frühe Vogel fängt den Wurm* in the 1970s by way of American mass media, it caught on very quickly, in fact so much so that it is now giving the old German proverb a run for its money! (Mieder, 1997; Mieder, 2010b: 285-296). There is no doubt that the international domination of the English language will continue this process, spreading old and new proverbs in English or as loan translations throughout the world. This is not to say that proverbs from other languages are not translated as well, but these incidents are relatively rare and usually limited to but neighboring cultures and languages. An example would be Mikhail Gorbachev's consequential proverbial statement in October of 1989 at Berlin that was translated into German as *Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben* [Who arrives late is punished by life itself] that became a new proverb in Germany almost over night by way of the ever-present mass media (Mieder, 2010b: 363-382).

## 2.4 Origin of Some Modern Proverbs

But speaking of the mass media, lines of popular songs and films, book titles, advertising slogans, bumper stickers, T-shirt inscriptions, headlines, etc. can very quickly turn into proverbs.<sup>1</sup> For quite a few the creators and the first date of occurrence can

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<sup>1</sup> For precise references for the examples used in this sections see Doyle, Mieder & Shapiro 2012

be found, if one bothers to research them. But often such individuals are not in the public eye, and for most people it is irrelevant who might have coined them. There is no doubt that especially in modernity people delight in creating proverb-like statements that could be called pseudo-proverbs. Yet, over time, they might well reach a general currency and become *bona fide* proverbs (Mieder, 2012). Thus the advertising slogan *What happens in Las Vegas stays in Las Vegas* (2002) to attract tourists has turned proverb, and so have the slogans *Say it with flowers* (1917) from the Society of American Florists, *Number two tries harder* (1962) from the Avis car-rental company, and *You've come a long way, baby* (1968) from the Philip Morris cigarette company. Lines from songs by famous lyricists and musicians have also become proverbs, to wit *There's no business like show business* (1946) by Irving Berlin, *Life is just a cabaret* (1966) by Fred Ebb from the musical *Cabaret*, and *All you need is love* (1967) by John Lennon of Beatles fame. Then there are those lines turned proverbs from popular films, like *If you build it, they will come* (1989) from *Field of Dreams* that actually is based on W.P. Kinsella's story *Shoeless Joe Jackson Comes to Iowa* (1979) that was not popular enough to create a proverb, *Keep your friends close and your enemies closer* (1974) from the *Godfather*, and the often heard *Life is like a box of chocolates* (1994) from *Forrest Gump*.

Modern proverbs are also created consciously by individuals as so-called *laws* of the trials and tribulations of life in a stressful world. Quite often the bits of wisdom intended for the greater public have the name of the originator attached to them, and by now entire little books have been published with such personal maxims or mottoes, as these texts might better be called at first. However, many of them have been accepted by others and they can be found in oral and written communication, either with a name attached to them or as anonymous laws that have indeed become proverbs. Of special interest is the law *If anything can go wrong, it will* which together with the variants *Anything that can go wrong, will go wrong* and *Anything that can possibly go wrong usually does* has definitely developed into a well-known proverb. Its first reference appears in Nevil Maskelyne's article *The Art in Magic* (1908): "It is an experience common to all men to find that, on any special occasion, such as the production of a magical effect for the first time in public, everything that can go wrong will go wrong. Whether we must attribute this to the malignity of matter or to the total depravity of inanimate things, whether the exciting cause is hurry, worry, or what not, the fact remains". Nothing is mentioned here about a possible author of this basic truth, and it took until 1951 for this law to appear in print with the designation *Murphy's Law*. According to *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (2012), here is the story of how the name Murphy was attached to it: "In popular legend, Murphy's Law originated in 1949 at Edwards Air Force Base in California, coined by project manager George E. Nichols after hearing Edward A. Murphy, Jr., complain about a wrongly-wired rocket-sled experiment. However, there is no documentation of that connection until 1955" (Doyle, Mieder, & Shapiro, 2012: 101-102). So it really isn't known precisely who coined this law turned proverb, but the name of Edward Murphy has

been attached to it and to other such laws as well, just as Benjamin Franklin's name became associated with numerous proverbs two hundred years earlier. Among other well known *proverb laws* that have entered folk speech are Healey's Law *When you are in a hole, stop digging* (1911), Parkinson's Law *Work expands to fill the available (allotted) time* (1955), and Hardin's Law *You can never do merely (just, only) one thing* (1963). And there are also those modern proverbs that have been attributed to famous individuals, as for example *It's not over (the game is) not over till it's over* (1921) to the baseball star Yogi Berra, *A week is a long time in politics* (1961) to former British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, *Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee* (1964) to the boxing champion Mohammed Ali (Cassius Clay), *Trust but verify* (1966) to former President Ronald Reagan, and *Old age is not for sissies* (1969) to the American actress Betty Davis.

Other proverbs are created, again for the most part anonymously, by way of intentionally creating so-called counter-proverbs (changing an existing positive proverb into a negative statement and vice versa) or anti-proverbs (the intentional manipulation of a proverb that changes the wording and meaning). At times the originators of such *playful* reactions to proverbs are known, as for example aphoristic writers, journalists, and other wordsmiths. The important matter is that new proverbs get created on the basis of traditional proverbs. Among examples of counter-proverbs are *Flattery will get you everywhere* (1926) versus the older *Flattery will get you nowhere*, *Bigger is not always better* (1928)) versus *The bigger the better*, and *Size does matter* (1964) versus *Size doesn't matter*. While counter-proverbs are not particularly plentiful, the deliberate creation of anti-proverbs, while nothing new in the proverb tradition, has become a wide-spread phenomenon since the beginning of the twentieth century (Litovkina & Lindahl, 2007). Of literally hundreds of them the following three might serve as telling examples: *No body is perfect* (1958) versus the older *Nobody is perfect*, *Beauty is only skin* (1963) versus *Beauty is only skin deep*, and *Expedience is the best teacher* (1966) versus *Experience is the best teacher*. While most anti-proverbs are one-day wonders that have not entered general folk speech, there are those that express new wisdom and have been accepted as innovatively expressed wisdom based on traditional proverbial structures – a process that is nothing new in the long history of creating new proverbs. Since much of this humorous, ironical or satirical manipulation of common proverbs is taking place in the vast arena of the mass media (newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film, and the Internet), anti-proverbs with a claim of some truth or wisdom can reach thousands or even millions of people who in turn might use them to such a degree that they may well become new proverbs (Valdaeva, 2003; Mieder, 2008).

This leads to the fascinating question whether proverbs can be consciously invented? Bartlett Jere Whiting in his otherwise valuable article on *The Origin of the Proverb* answered with a definite *no*, stating that "There have been many who have issued sententious sayings of their own labelled as proverbs, but in no case have such imitations deceived for a moment even the most superficial student of the

true proverb. [Especially literary authors] have failed in their attempts to imitate the proverb” (Whiting, 1931: 20). He might be right regarding especially authors of aphorisms whose texts, frequently actually based on traditional proverbs, have failed to become accepted proverbs (primarily because those that might in fact be proverb-like had no chance of becoming true proverbs because of the small number of readers in most cases). However, it might be pointed out that the novelist but also philologist J. R. R. Tolkien certainly *invented* proverbs for his *Hobbit* (1937) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1956-1957) that serve as sapiential *leitmotifs* and might well be current among the special *folk group* of Tolkien enthusiasts (Trokhimenko, 2003). Field research among that reader group would probably establish that the invented proverbs *Every worm has its weak spot* and *Never laugh at live dragons* from the widely read *Hobbit* have become proverbial among them! Be that as it may, Whiting is wrong with his negative view regarding the invention of proverbs. They all have been or continue to be invented by someone sometime, even if at first they are at best proverb-like or pseudo-proverbs, as for example a sententious remark in a novel, a verse from a song, or an advertising slogan. The issue is that such well-turned phrases might become proverbs if they are accepted and repeated beyond the individual who came up with it all. Surely Whiting would have to agree that there must be a beginning, no matter whether it is a by-chance start or a conscious creation.

## 2.5 New Theories on the Creation of Proverbs

In any case, the revered Whiting might be quite surprised to find what especially Stephen Winick and Richard Honeck together with Jeffrey Welge have to say about the conscious creation and invention of proverbs. In his pioneering article on *Intertextuality and Innovation in a Definition of the Proverb Genre* (2003), Winick argues that, “given the right conditions, new items created on proverbial models [structures] do indeed come to be widely quoted [as new proverbs]” (Winick, 2003: 572), to wit the older proverb *Different salves for different sores* with its well-established proverbial structure *Different Xs for different Ys* and the African-American proverb *Different strokes for different folks* (Mieder, 1989: 317-332). But he then goes one step further, claiming that such aspects as currency and traditionality should no longer be included in what is to be considered as *proverbiality*. In other words, an invented sentence that has some of the markers (alliteration, rhyme, parallelism, etc.) is a proverb from the very outset of its creation. Such “utterances, which are already proverbs, make their meanings in a proverbial way, at the moment of their creation” (Winick, 2003: 573). For Winick the proverbiality of an utterance is in the text itself, and that very text is a proverb without any need of such cultural or folkloristic aspects as dissemination, currency, traditionality, etc.:

It is neither necessary nor desirable to consider canonicity the essential component of proverbiality. All of the features that “sometimes” occur in proverbs – phonetic, syntactic and semantic poetic features, ascription to an ancestor, etc. – are techniques of intertextual reference, drawing our minds to previous proverbial utterances. Thus, on a more general level, all of these “occasional” qualities of proverbs add up to one quality that is always there: rhetorical force imparted through intertextual reference. This approach allows for dynamic creativity within the proverb tradition. (Winick, 2003: 577).

It is true, of course, that such a proverb-like statement or even pseudo-proverb might be interpreted by an individual listener or a reader as an actual proverb, or as Winick states, “It is a matter of interpretation. Once an item is interpreted as a proverb, it becomes one, at least in that situation” (Winick, 2003: 588). He looks at these possibilities as a new dynamic approach to proverb creation, concluding that his “intertextual model allows for the existence of new utterances that ring with the echoes of previous gnomic sayings, without stigmatizing these by suggesting they are ‘not-quite proverbial’” (Winick, 2003: 592). All of this makes plenty of sense from a purely linguistic or intertextual point of view. However, even if someone were to create such a proverb-like sentence and claim that it is a proverb – as Steve Winick suggests – it would still have to prove itself to be worthy of that designation by going beyond its mere creation by an individual to a state of group acceptance. Changing the proverb *The proof of the pudding is in the eating* for a moment, one might well respond to Winick’s laudable attempt to give possible new proverbs a chance with *The proof of the proverb is in the repeating*. But to stress once again, there is nothing wrong with intertextually looking for possible new proverbs – how else are they to be found? But for such a text to be called a proverb in the normal sense of that word, certainly more than one contextual reference has to be found, and what is wrong with saying *the more the merrier* as far as proverbiality is concerned?

Richard Honeck and his co-author Jeffrey Welge gave their equally intriguing article the provocative title *Creation of Proverbial Wisdom in the Laboratory* (1997), and as Winick, they argue against the cultural or folkloristic view of proverb creation by paremiologists as Taylor, Whiting, and many others. They frame their approach from a cognitive point of view, arguing “that proverbs are best treated as abstract theoretical mental entities, rather than as familiar, culturally embedded forms” (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 207). In a certain way, though independently conceived, this cognitive approach looks at proverbs somewhat like Winick’s linguistic stance, for “according to the cognitive view, proverbs can be familiar or unfamiliar, personal or communal, used in social or nonsocial contexts, for social or nonsocial purposes, and either conform or not conform to various proverb formulae. The key question in the cognitive view is whether a statement is functioning, or is likely to be capable of functioning, as proverbs function. In this regard, the most basic functions of proverbs are psychological, namely, they categorize events and motivate thoughts and behavior” (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 208). But adding that proverbs obviously also have such pragmatic functions as exhorting or warning, Honeck and Welge see themselves



forced to state a caveat nevertheless: “To be clear, we do not question the emphasis on traditionality and currency in the cultural [and folkloristic] view of proverbs, but we do believe that it tends to omit due consideration of the initial, more cognitive psychological processes in their initial creation” (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 208). It is true, paremiologists for the most part have not properly answered the psychological question why people produce many proverbs in the first place and why, for example the Native Americans (Mieder, 1989: 99-110; Mieder, 2004a: 108-111), have created hardly any. But here then is the major point of their argument:

If the cognitive view of proverbs is adopted, the laboratory creation of proverbiality becomes feasible. This is because this view does not make any of the implicational complex of the cultural view – traditionality, social usage, etc. – necessary factors in proverbial function. What is necessary is that a statement serve the basic categorization and motivational functions that proverbs do. Indeed, speculatively, there may be more personal than cultural-level proverbs, and if the cultural definition is accepted, all of the former would be excluded from consideration. If the cognitive view’s premise is accepted, however, all that stands in the way of initial proverb creation is the set of experimental manipulations that could foster it. (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 208-209)

Having thus made the case for purely *personal proverbs* but failing to stress that the cultural and folkloristic view of proverbs does include the fact that every proverb starts as a piece of wisdom of an individual person, the authors become almost poetic in their concluding assessment: “It is important to acknowledge the early stage of proverb creation, when proverbs-to-be are performing basic figurative categorization, and perhaps largely personal functions. These proverbial statements are *baby proverbs* that may not be recognized as such but that have the potential to become full-fledged communal proverbs. There may therefore be a large pool of proverbs-in-waiting whose fate is determined in the crucible of larger sociohistorical forces. Both the cultural and cognitive views, as well as others, are needed to fully understand the overall process” (Honeck & Welge, 1997: 225). But notice the terms being used here for the initial and personal creation of proverbs, i.e., *proverbs-to be*, *baby proverbs*, [*not yet*] *full-fledged proverbs*, and *proverbs-in-waiting*. What does all of this mean other than that the creation of a proverb is a personal matter, but in order for such a proverb-like statement to become a *bona fide* proverb, one that is to be added to the annals of proverb collections, it does need to go beyond the original creator. This has always been the case, and in the mind of the folk with its view of proverbiality and that of most paremiologists a proverb remains an expression of a general truth that has been accepted and repeated by a folk group no matter what its size or background. Certainly no paremiographer could possibly wish to register all those “personal proverbs” that should perhaps better be called maxims or mottoes to distinguish them from what is commonly understood a proverb to be in the popular view (Mieder, 1993: 18-40).

## 2.6 Conclusion

Finally then, yes, proverbs are created by individuals. Anybody can create a sentence that includes a basic truth, that sounds like a proverb, that has all the stylistic and linguistic features of a proverb, and that appears to be full of wisdom. But there is a basic problem with such an invention, and this problem exists with every proverb that has ever been coined! Be the text ever so close to what we understand a proverb to be, it still needs elements that will turn it into a proverb. A proverb requires some currency among the folk. In other words, it has to be accepted into general oral and written communication and appear with at least some frequency and distribution.

If one looks back at the creation of proverbs over the centuries, it must be remembered that it might have taken years, dozens of years, or even centuries for a given proverb to get accepted and reach a certain currency and traditionality. Today, in the modern age of the computer and the internet, someone might make a spontaneous proverb-like statement that will literally travel across a country or even the globe in seconds. Truly modern proverbs cover such ground with solid speed. But, of course, it remains to be seen whether they will stay in circulation for some extended period of time. How long? That is a tough question to answer. After all, proverbs have always come, stayed, and gone. A day, a week, a month, a year surely are too short, but how about a decade? In any case, judging from the proverbs included in *The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs* (2012), some of these modern proverbs have been around for several decades and have proven that they have staying power.

One thing is for certain, the age of proverb creation is not over! People will always feel the need to encapsulate their observations and experiences into easily remembered and repeated generalizations, and those that are of general interest and well formulated will, with a bit of luck, be accepted by other people. The proverb *Proverbs are never out of season* is as true today as ever before, and the study of the origin of modern proverbs is indeed as intriguing as trying to reconstruct the possible start of an ancient proverb. And why is there still much to be studied regarding the origin of individual proverbs? The answer is quite simple. The minute the question is raised about the origin of a proverb, a multilayered and intricate scholarly project is started that often results in lengthy monographs with a multitude of linguistic, folkloristic, literary, cultural, and historical references. The modern proverb *Nothing is as simple as it looks* (1905) certainly fits the question about the origin of proverbs, but that should not prevent paremiologists from searching for answers in their quest to uncover the process of proverb creation and dissemination.

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## 3 Categorization of Proverbs

### 3.1 Introduction

In this paper, we shall go through different ways of classifying proverb material, both unilingual and multilingual. The history, background, aims and motives of these efforts will broaden the perspective to two serious attempts to systemize international proverb lore and open the way for new attempts to categorize this special genre of folklore. Secondly, a critical point of view to a huge number of popular and systematic proverb collections, cultural comparisons and multilingual data banks will be offered. The idea is to develop the *proverb literacy* of readers so that they are able to analyze, evaluate and create questions concerning their own research material. Ultimately, we shall provide a summary of the different needs in constructing categorizations of proverb corpora and also review the possible bias in applying conventional classification methods to proverbs. On the base of these conclusions we shall try to make an outline of the best possible universal database of proverbs that should take into account culture-specific challenges and discuss the practical conditions for it.

These three aims tell about the difficulty of scientific proverb research but perhaps particularly these challenges and open questions have been one reason for the constant enthusiasm for collecting and interpreting proverbs through the centuries. Proverbs have become separate items like esteemed quotations that seem to bear probed wisdom and useful knowledge within them. This industrious, prolonged, large-scale and often purposeful collecting has resulted in a huge number of collections of proverbs. Most of them are either unilingual or contrastive between two languages but there have also long been multilingual collections. Paremiologists like to construct order in their material that seems to tell more about universal human experience than any other source.

### 3.2 The Specificity of Proverbs

After reading the introductory article of this book you certainly have a good view of the specificity of proverbs and even proverbial expressions compared to other statements and utterances. The long history of this genre of speech, anonymity, traditional flavor, memorable form, figurative meanings in contexts, and often universality define proverbs. Those items, which I shall call proverb-like expressions, develop this tradition and make use of memorable forms of familiar proverbs. Daniel Andersson (2013: 28) shows from his cognitive linguistic point of view that actually every proverb should be interpreted in its whole meaning potential. If a proverb is in real use, the

*base meaning* of it is continuously in a blending process. It is used in context-bound meaning creation. The impressive and interactive features of proverbs tell about their fitness to get over language borders. Thus, any categorization of proverbs should be done keeping in mind their importing and exporting history, their potential flexibility to immigrate or emigrate as folklore.

In order to identify proverbs of different languages and culture areas, agreement about their features does not stay as evident as when recognizing physical objects. An innovation like the ax was transported from one area to another. We have evidence of its age from archeological findings. In Finland we know that *kirves*, our word for an ax, has been adopted from Baltic languages. But the history of adopting a proverb from a language to another may have different stages and motivations. We do not even know if we can call it a proverb from the very beginning. The age of a single proverb can sometimes be assessed but the reconstruction of the process of some expression becoming a proverb in a certain language community is always dependent of many repetitive and coincidental influences.

### 3.3 Whose Tradition Are Proverbs?

Is there a common view of the origin of proverbs around the world? Do we think that our familiar proverbs are our endogenous and private cultural heritage, some general wisdom owned by the *folk*? Or do we believe in God's truth behind the noblest proverbs used by our wise men? Some researchers see proverbs as a part of the common man's contesting speech (Lombardi-Satriani, 1974: 103–104). This kind of speech reflects people's countereaction when being disadvantaged. Statements of proverbs can function in a reversed way, if they are used in situations where balance of power is unequal. A proverb is an indirect way to question generalizations. Didactic use of proverbs and their ironic use cannot both realize the same function. Along with the question of different functions comes a question of traditionality of proverbs. In which level of tradition do we refer when we define proverbs as traditional expressions?

We cannot claim that proverbs belong only to oral tradition. The impression one gets reading for instance Finnish proverb collections is that they deal with agrarian living conditions of the 19th century. Historically, part of their use has been like invoking authoritative literal texts, although the users have been illiterate. This holds true for most of the European proverb lore. British proverbs may remind us of Shakespearean era. Chinese proverbs tell about Confucian tradition and most of the Sub-Saharan proverbs reflect a tribal way of life. All these conceptions live side by side in the world of proverb users.

Most of European proverb collectors were clergymen and public servants. The great Dutch humanist Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536) was a Catholic priest, although he was a reformist striving for more harmonious change in the church than



Luther (1483-1546). The last version of Erasmus' *Adagia* included over 4000 Greek and Latin proverbial expressions, many accompanied by richly annotated commentaries. It has been the core of the written Western proverb lore in addition to the Bible and German proverbs in Luther's texts.

Proverbs known before Erasmus' times, like *One swallow doesn't make a summer* or *Don't look a gift horse in the mouth*, have become known all over the world or have turned out to be common earlier than we thought. It is difficult to say whose proverbs people of different cultures use today, since proverbs or recognizable fragments of them have become popular elements of popular and global communication, lately in social media.

### 3.4 Practical and Ideological Needs to Categorize Proverb Material

Organizing linguistic matter has been a practical question for centuries. Lexicography has developed to a branch of science (see e.g. F. Čermák's (2011) work on the Czech National Corpus and R. Almind's, H. Bergenholtz' and V. Vrang's work on the *Danish Idiom Dictionary*), and encyclopedists have organized human knowledge according to themes of life and hierarchies of general values. For lexicons as well as proverb collections there has been one universal system to organize the chosen entries: alphabetical order seems a neutral way to present things.

The aim to collect proverbs and to construct a national heritage of them and other genres of folklore of a language community brings with it a supposition of consistency between the proverbs of one's own community. The belief that proverbs as such, form a coherent narration of their local users seems natural. Interesting examples of national collections are those which have the aim to present proverbs of one culture but which are compiled by an immigrant. For example William Scarborough (1875) was an American Presbyterian missionary in China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He compiled "a careful and enthusiastic study" of *Chinese proverbs* in which he also presented English translations. He certainly had good intentions doing this but we are not able to evaluate his choices and interpretations without experts of the Chinese culture. Scarborough writes in his preface:

In making this selection of proverbs, it was not thought fair to exclude altogether the vulgar and immoral. A few of these are admitted – veiled under free translations—as the representatives of a class, which, so far as my experience goes, is not a very large one (Scarborough, 1875: ii-iii).

This collection of Chinese proverbs was made before the political revolution of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but it has its bias arising from narrow Christian attitudes. The author is glad but at the same time quite confused to find many proverbs closely resembling the sayings of the Holy Bible. "Many of the Proverbs of Solomon have their counterparts

in the proverbs of China”, he writes (Scarborough, 1875:xiv). As a missionary Scarborough had to reason that these pagans are “not as good as their proverbs”, their virtue was not in deeds. We notice that biblical Proverbs were his yardstick.

The need to preserve an endangered language or dialect is a strong reason to elevate the value of proverbs in this language. Consequently, constructors of national romantic identity and high moral have been selective. Some proverbs have been excluded being too vulgar and some sounding too literal. Thus, we cannot avoid intentional and unintentional choices already made by our predecessors, if we are going to use as our sources any ready collected proverb material.

Thematic collections have different classifications according to the author’s interests or ways to interpret the material to be published. A good example of thematically arranged collections that have a clear national aim is Vladimir Dalj’s (2003, original 1862) Russian collection, which is still or again very popular. New editions are published at regular intervals. In Dalj’s collection there is one headline *punishment, kapa* that is repeated seven times in different compositions. In any scientific categorization the ideal should be that you do not create overlapping categories. Yet, proverb material is not so one-dimensional that you could easily determine the one and only category for every expression. Dalj was a profoundly well-read humanist who knew the Russian tradition. Thus, he was inclined to transfer his overall conception to the collection. He presents the theme of *penalty* in connection with *obedience* and *disobedience*, *compassion*, *recognition*, *submission*, *attack* and *threats*. *Judiciary* is repeated three times in Dalj’s subheadings. It is connected to *order*, *truth* and *extortion*. The theme of law and order seems central and closely connected to questions of social position. There are not just titles like king, wealth and poverty, or master and servant, but these are dealt in connection with order. The central question is again willingness or refusal to serve, control and humble oneself.

There is another theme that is underlined among Dalj’s classification. He presents detailed forms of spirituality. In his book Dalj has headlines like *Mystery*, *Mystery and curiosity*, and *Faith and mystery*. He combines *destiny*, *patience* and *hope* and differentiates even a title called *Fanaticism and hypocrisy*. The collection begins with *God and faith* that are connected with *sin* and *faith*.

Thinking about the proverb genre we can find plenty of omens and “superstitions and signs” (as Dalj himself calls them) brought to these groups. Dalj’s classic is a good example of a national collection that constructs a national character by categorizing proverbs. His way to categorize demonstrates how significant cultural variety can be when we are interpreting proverbs. Data banks of proverb texts are never neutral.

### 3.5 Differences in the Accuracy of Proverb Material

If we compare proverb texts of two different cultures the most general versions of synonymous proverbs apply to points of reference. For intralingual and especially for comparisons between two cognate languages we need more accurate knowledge about similarity between proverb notes. Although the structure and the wording is the same in both proverb texts, the common use and interpretation may differ.

If you see one proverb text representing a certain attitude in one language area, it is difficult to estimate how representative for this area it really is. Behind a single proverb text there may be many varying texts. E.g. in the inclusive collection of Estonian proverbs (Krikmann & Sarv, 1980) a proverb *Ega kuer siis kiljata, kui kondiga visata* [The dog will not yelp if you throw him with a bone] (nb 4020.) has 17 slightly different variants. E.g. *Vai koer siis valu tunneb, kui teda kondiga visatakse* [The dog will hardly feel pain when it is thrown with a bone.] In the same entry you are encouraged to compare this proverb to two synonymous proverbs about an ox and a cat. Those are synonymous proverbs that might have same idea in other languages, too. But they are not variants of this dog-proverb type.

What are the preconditions for starting to systemize a proverb material? Actually, we should not start organizing *purely* from the basis of proverb texts. Although we imagine we are making neutral choices, our hypotheses are based primarily on the knowledge of our own culture and society. We know the history, social circumstances, culture and hierarchies of our own society from where we presume the familiar proverbs in our own language have arisen. We have inevitably preconceptions of the phenomena we plan to organize. This would not be a very disturbing problem, if the material were unilingual and from a single cultural area.

Thus, it is a somewhat different aim to construct a collection of proverbs of two or more languages. The knowledge determined by our own cultural categories influences our interpretation of the phenomena and certainly the subsequent proverb material we are going to add to our classification. The basis for the work might still be quite similar as in the previous unilingual case. Now you just search for cohesive construction made of differences and similarities. Selectivity may be even stronger in this project of contrastive languages than in constructing an image of one language community. Still, even alphabetically arranged comparisons of proverbs are always choices. It is difficult to notice any missing item while reading an alphabetical list of titles. Let us take e.g. the collection *Turkish proverbs and their equivalents in fifteen languages* (Yurtbaşı, 1996). If you start from *Endurance*, next titles are *Enemy*, *Envy* and *Equality*. A quick look at an English dictionary raises terms like *enjoy* or *entertainment*, which are missing. Perhaps there were no such proverbs in Turkish that would have dealt with those subjects.

As soon as we begin contrastive work with two or more languages this problem arises. For example, if we choose *Master and servant* to be a group title, this covers most of the cultures we know but a more detailed classification, subgroups for

proverbs dealing with these issues, will be determined by the most familiar material we have. A practical question arises: How do we succeed to form common subtitles for proverbs coming from completely different cultures? Do we know we are dealing with the same phenomenon without exactly knowing the variety of proverbs in another culture? This kind of uncertainty follows us in any project of comparing proverbs used in distant cultures.

Even if the connections between proverb texts from two cultures can be clarified, the degree of popularity and divergent use in those cultures will often obscure the comparison. A proverb has been translated from a language to another, but is it the same proverb, if its use and common interpretation are totally different in two cultures? The receiving culture is always stratified and often polarized, and perhaps in a community there has already pre-existed a synonymous proverb.

With the term *synonymy* we refer to proverbs, which have the same idea but not the same form. If proverbs have both the same idea and they vary only by some words or grammatical structures, they are proverb variants to each other. This is the case if we compare proverb texts inside a language or between cognate languages.

An example of changes in proverb loans is a proverb emphasizing the value of other people's help, *A friend in the way is better than a penny in the purse* (Tilley, 1950: 242, nb F687). This proverb has been carried from Holland or England to Finland. In Finland this proverb has somehow been translated and transformed to *Parempi reppu reessä kuin ystävä kylässä* [Better to have a sack in your sleigh than a friend in the village]. The text or its variants alone do not prove anything about Finnish mentality compared to the European style. The misuse of hospitality has perhaps been worse in Finland than in the south. (Kuusi, 1954: 74.) This is just an example that even a reverse variant of a proverb can develop and find a sounding board in new circumstances, if the topic is functional enough.

The above mentioned strictly analyzed Estonian national proverb corpus has already been compared with proverb corpora of cognate languages- Finnish, Karelian, Votic, Vepsian and Livonian. (Kuusi & Krikmann & al, 1985). Searching for proverb equivalents between cognate languages has quite clear rules. If you find an equivalent, you can be almost sure that those expressions have the same roots. Comparing proverbs of cognate languages means primarily surveying distribution and different variations of the same proverb type. In case we had information of conventions of proverb use in different countries, the interpretations might prove to be different. We could not be so sure anymore that we deal with the same proverb, although it is outwardly the same. Basically the same problem might arise between proverb variants of different dialects within one language. For example an Estonian proverb *Käsi aitab kätt, jalg jalga* [One hand helps the other, a foot helps a foot] is slightly different in its few Finnish variants: *Käsi käden noutaa* [One hand satisfies the other hand]. This proverb type is not known in the southern and western parts of Finland. As a plain texts it can easily be mistaken for *One hand washes the other* (Ibid. nb 6.), which is a

universal type and well-known in Finland, too. Only close study of contextual meanings or different actual uses of texts define them to two different categories.

In their pilot study concerning a corpus of German proverbs Peter Grzybek and Christoph Chlosta, both native speakers of German, noticed that they could not always reach the meanings of proverbs from different parts of the country (Chlosta & Grzybek, 2000). After this experiment Grzybek sees the challenge to set side by side proverb materials that differ much in their degree of semiotic analysis (analysis of meanings). If we make very detailed analyses of contexts and use of proverbs in one language, a successful comparison requires the same level in the other language. Focusing on one language is different from having items from many languages. In order to proceed to systematic categorization and not only symptomatic (based on coincidences) work you are *forced* to go deeper into details than you would like<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.6 From Intuitive Orderliness to Systematic Categorization

Scarborough, the collector of Chinese proverbs mentioned above, describes a condition which seems to be internalized in the proverb enthusiasts of the Western cultural area. In order to feel that he understood the inherent orderliness of proverbs he had to become familiar with a great number of proverb texts.

It may seem, at first, as though there were no rules shaping them after any models whatever. But, just as to the eye of a skilful botanist, the promiscuous growths on the sides of a shady stream fall into ranks and classes, so to one who examines these proverbs with a little care, they will be seen to class themselves together, until, out of what seemed a perfect chaos, several orders arise (Scarborough 1875, ix).

In this way Scarborough finds for example parallelism in Chinese proverbs. The stylistic features are not the only thing he becomes interested in. Scarborough discusses a more important quality which seems apparent in Chinese proverb texts: virtue or morality. This has been a natural and logical order for scholars systemizing their vast material. It is proportioned to your own, most familiar ways to perceive human action and motives. Subjectivity can never be totally excluded, but researchers have tried to diminish it by making classifications that would comprehend all possible cases.

We shall introduce and discuss about two concrete attempts to construct a systematic categorization of international proverbs. The first suggestion for proverb classification is a part of Grigory L. Permyakov's *General theory of cliché* that he describes "folkloristic in its main material and linguistic in its method" (Permyakov, 1979). The

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<sup>2</sup> A private discussion between Outi Lauhakangas and Peter Grzybek in November 2012.

other classification system is the *Matti Kuusi international type system of proverbs* (Lauhakangas, 2001).

### 3.7 G. L. Permyakov's Logico-semiotic Classification of Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases

After the English publication of his work Grigory Permyakov (1919–1983) became well-known among paremiologists but actually his work is not very deeply understood. Maybe for that reason, his scientific approach to categorization of international proverbs is not much applied or developed. His experiment of proverb classification is part of his notes on the *General Theory of Cliché*. Permyakov's logico-semiotic theory of invariants in language functions especially in folklore. The part concerning proverbial expressions is based on an "investigation of several tens of thousands of proverbs and proverbial phrases belonging to 72 peoples of the East, and the equal number of Russian folk sayings" (Permyakov, 1979: 163).

Along his theoretic pursuit Permyakov also had a practical reason to develop a classification as he prepared a collection of *Selected Oriental Proverbs* (Permyakov, 1968). He used both translated collections of proverbs and proverbial phrases and dictionaries of Russian-Eastern languages. Permyakov's theoretical considerations are based on structural paremiology and semiotics.

Permyakov seemed to be fond of proverbs and proverbial phrases. He wrote about folklore items, "artistic miniatures reflecting facts of everyday life in a vividly expressive form". From proverbial expressions he got an idea to study clichés in general. He considered them to represent a special type of logical (logico-semiotic) constructions (Permyakov, 1979: 163). Permyakov's commentator Y. V. Rozhdestvensky (1979: 259) clarifies that linguistics clichés are conventionally defined as ready-made and reproducible language units. Linguists' interest in clichés was focused merely on vocabulary and inventory of units that can be used. These language items were only described.

Instead, Permyakov's hypothesis was that there are rules of producing reproducible units. He approached them from the standpoint of grammar, poetics and rhetoric. He was not very interested in collecting and describing clichés (like lexicologists or other paremiologists) but rather in the way they are created. He saw the mutable character and social aspects in the development of folklore as well. (Rozhdestvensky, 1979: 261, 267.) From the current point of view he was ahead of his time in his ethno-psychological and structural approaches to folklore phenomena.

Permyakov applied Vladimir Y. Propp's (1958 [1928]) functional analysis of fairy-tale texts. Rozhdestvensky (1979: 265) specifies qualities of Permyakov's analysis. Firstly, it is empirical and inductive analysis of language texts (from cultural text

sphere). His analysis is a description of the rules of building clichéized texts and it considers clichés originating as oral speech.

In his article *On paremiological homonymy and synonymy* Permyakov (1979, 248) goes deeper to the questions of semiotic categorization. He gives an example of a homonymic proverb of the Nyang tribe (in Cameroun) *If a nut above (on a tree) hasn't grown (ripen yet), it will fall down (on the ground)*. The first meaning is that not every evil is apparent at once, but sooner or later it will come out. The other meaning for the same proverb is how a good deed takes time to be accomplished. Permyakov emphasizes that the two different meanings are revealed in contexts where this proverb is used. Thus, the homonymy will be removed in social situations. For the categorization of proverbs these examples are still important.

The most characteristic feature in Permyakov's analysis is his concept of *situation*. He specifies the situations, *real life contexts* in which folklore texts are created and used. A word resolves a situation but it does not itself depend on the situation. The figurative meaning of the clichéized text makes it possible to use folklore texts as rules for identifying new and previously unknown situations. (Permyakov, 1979: 272)

Permyakov (1979, 180–195) demonstrates his categorization by giving text specimens classifications according to four *logico-semiotic arch-invariants* each falling into three categories. All twelve categories are divided into subcategories according to combinations of features. Permyakov concentrates on proverbs of over twenty Eastern minority cultures, peoples living under the Soviet regime from Abkhazian to Uzbek. He has also taken proverb texts from other Oriental and Arabic cultures and samples even from Sub Saharan tribes.

Permyakov (Permyakov, 1979: 30, 157) sees that features of proverbs centre around a limited number of invariant opposition pairs of the type *one's own – another's*, *near – faraway*, *good–evil* etc. Different images in proverbs are just indicators of these general properties. He notes that sometimes only one member of the pair is present in a paremia (proverb or proverbial saying). However the other member is implied. The problem in his approach is his attempt to make differences between proverb types according to their negative, positive and mixed forms. This seems to result from Permyakov's way to interpret proverbs as answers to potential questions in social situations. He sees that proverbs and proverbial phrases are signs of situations or of a certain type of relationships between objects (Permyakov, 1979: 20).

**Table 3.1:** G. L. Permyakov's (1979: 180–195) logico-semiotic arch-invariants represented by logico-thematic groups and subgroups A–C. (The subclasses and oriental proverb variants are not presented in this table.)

Logico-semiotic arch-invariant	I A	I B	II A	II B
Logico-thematic group	<i>Permanence and Mutability</i>	<i>Producer and his goods</i>	<i>Action and reaction</i>	<i>One's own and another's</i>
A	All things preserve their qualities and do not become other things under any circumstances (neutral things staying neutral, good things good, and bad things bad)	The producer and his goods are inseparably connected, each producer owning and enjoying the things he produces	Each action causes a corresponding reaction	One's own (native, habitual) is good, what is another's is bad; One's own is always better than another's
B	All things – neutral, good and bad ones – keep changing, and one thing may turn into another	There is no inseparable connection between the producer and his goods; No producer ever owns or enjoys the things he produces (or else, he owns and uses inferior ones)	Each action causes an incongruous reaction	One's own (to which one is used) is bad, another's is good; Another's things are better than one's own
C	Some things are changeable, and others are not	Sometimes the producer of the goods owns them and sometimes not; Sometimes he uses them and sometimes not	Sometimes the action causes a corresponding reaction and sometimes an incongruous one	Both one's own and another's are good; Sometimes one's own is better, and sometimes another's



The table 3.1 shows only a short part of Permyakov's whole-scale system. In the previously mentioned experience Chlosta and Grzybek (2000) tried to make a classification of German proverbs according to Permjakov's system. Proceeding item per item they found the classification a painstaking task. The difficulties are not only due to the complexity of Permyakov's system, but because it seems to be more exact than our everyday usage of proverbs. This seems to be related to the fact that we only have some *feeling* about what proverbs mean. Actually we use many proverbs only in some vague manner without bothering ourselves much about what they mean<sup>3</sup>.

### 3.8 The Matti Kuusi International Type System of Proverbs

Academician Matti Kuusi (1914–1998) was the Professor of Finnish and Comparative Folk Poetry Studies (today called folkloristics) at the University of Helsinki from 1959 to 1977. One of his areas of expertise was paremiology, research on proverbs. This particularly drifting genre of folklore led him to establish contacts with scholars around the world. One of the most esteemed paremiologist ever, Professor Archie Taylor (1890–1973) from California, the author of *The Proverb* (1931), was behind Kuusi's (1957) first international classification *experiment*, which was realized as a universal inquiry, when Kuusi published a question about a common but peculiar natural phenomenon explained in a proverbial phrase. What does the paraphrase *If it rains while the sun is shining* mean or what is its second part?<sup>4</sup>

In Finnish archives he had found several variations of the phrase, e.g. *piru piiskaa akkaansa*; *...vanhoipiikoi naijaa*; *...huoran lasta kastetaan* [...the devil is beating his woman; ...old maids will get married; ...a whore's baby will be christened]. He decided to write *the world history* of one paraphrase. Having a closer look at one single phrase he could also see how relative a folklore genre is according to its actual use in a certain culture. Universally and even inside a cultural area one and the same expression varies. It can be a folk belief, a particular way to explain this peculiar natural phenomenon, a paraphrase, a weather proverb (The code A3a 25 in Kuusi's classification), a riddle or a folk tale.

Kuusi got 3000 variants of the sunshine and raining paraphrase from 97 different cultural areas. He undertook to organize the complex material and got practice in comparing variations from different cultures.

<sup>3</sup> A private discussion between Outi Lauhakangas and Peter Grzybek in November 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor also provoked Kuusi to start as the first editor-in-chief of the journal *Proverbium*. His pioneering and active paremiological period at the head of the journal lasted from 1965 to 1974. A strong network of paremiologists formed when he invited proverb scholars to contribute to the same forum. New contacts brought proverb collections from every part of the world.

Kuusi's (1970) essential experiment on international classification sprang from his comparative analysis of African proverbs that he had begun almost by chance a few years earlier. He noticed that surprisingly many proverbs in Ndonga language, which was his point of departure, had same ideas as Finnish proverbs. This was a clear break with his Finnish predecessors using the historical geographic method and believing only on the theory of evolution. Kuusi emphasized that there must be a difference to study literary texts from oral tradition. The research material of folklore studies cannot be only text collections but you must be aware of the functions, performance practices and real users of this speech – if it is possible. Proverb collections were the basis of Kuusi's systematic index of international proverb types. Starting from comparisons of Finnish proverb texts to Nordic and European equivalents he broadened his search to all possible language areas and comparisons between non-Finnish proverbs. Kuusi was able to continue with his type-system of proverbs during his retiring age, when his daughter Outi Lauhakangas started transferring the proverb index of literature references into a relational database in 1990. At the same time they developed Kuusi's classification of international proverb types. This database was made for the purpose of folkloristic and linguistic research. The aim was and is not to collect all possible proverb texts from every possible language area to one big pool but to study structures of proverb texts and main themes of proverbial thinking and give sources for further research.

The database and classification of proverbs presented here is named *The Matti Kuusi International Type System of proverbs* (Lauhakangas, 2001). The database consists of three core elements:

1. A special library of proverb collections in the folklore archives of the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki,
2. A database of international proverb types and literature references on the internet,
3. A thematic and structural classification of international proverbs.

The concept of proverb type alternates between a concrete proverb title and a cluster of proverbs having the same idea. The type system gathers together similar proverb titles from different nations into an international or even a global type having a common idea. You can study the whole structure and proverb types on the internet address of the database<sup>5</sup>. An introduction to the background and construction of Kuusi's classification and material is presented in Lauhakangas' (2001) report. Here are the main themes of Kuusi's classification. You can notice while going through the titles that most of the groups are thematic.

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<sup>5</sup> *The Matti Kuusi International Type System of Proverbs*.  
In <http://lauhakan.home.cern.ch/lauhakan/cerp.html>

- A Practical knowledge of nature
- B Faith and our basic attitude
- C. Basic observations and socio-logic
- D. The world and human life
- E. Sense of proportion
- F. Concepts of morality
- G. Social life
- H. Social interaction
- J. Communication
- K. Social position
- L. Agreements and norms
- M. Coping and learning
- T. Time and sense of time

Anyway, some exceptions are indicated already on the main theme level. One of them is the theme C. Basic observations and socio-logic. The structural analysis Kuusi demonstrated for this section is comparable to Permyakov's logico-semiotic approach. The theme is named after Paul Goodwin's and Joseph Wenzel's (1981) term *socio-logic*, which refer to same kind of socially determined reasoning. From the titles of the classes under this theme you can notice how opposition pairs are applied (little in relation to big; appearance in relation to internal values).

- C1. Durability of X's nature / durability of identity
- C2. X yields /requires /belongs to X
- C3. Nothingness/emptiness yields /loses nothing
- C4. Little : big / a little : a lot
- C5. Signals & their meaning /interpretation
- C6. Appearance : internal values

Subgroups of the first class C1. *Durability of X's nature / durability of identity* are shown below as an example of the content of these classes.

- C1a X's basic nature/character will be unchanged; characteristics will not change
- C1b X is always X, even if...
- C1c there is no need to teach X things belonging to its character; hopeless to teach things not belonging to X's character
- C1d X will preserve X's habits and customs

The titles above describe well the kind of notation used in Kuusi's categories. One could consider these titles examples of the moulds of proverbs. Some of them are quite near the most general proverb types in the corresponding group. For example, in the subgroup C1d you will find a global proverb type C1d 19 *An old ox makes a strait*

*furrow*. Equivalent proverbs will be found through literature references. For example a Japanese synonymous proverb *An old horse doesn't forget his path*. As a cross-reference we shall find the subgroup G6f *the treatment of the elderly* that interprets the proverb type in a thematic context, where the comparison between the young and the old is in the focus. For example the proverb type G6f 15 is *Older and wiser*.

In order to move the Kuusi's database of proverbs to the internet for international use, we had to study the generality of proverb types. The language and cultural areas that form together the global brand are: Africa (Sub-Saharan), Islamic, European, Orient (old Eastern cultural area), Pacific. American cultures are not seen as being apart from European influence. If a proverb type is common to most of these language areas, it is considered a global type. The meaning and use of a specific proverb can vary from culture to culture.

Alongside the original index of Finnish proverb titles the titles of the international proverb types had to be translated into English. This was necessary, if original English equivalents were not available. This meant that the sum of proverb titles decreased from 8287 Finnish entries to 1808 English entries. Still the classification remained identical to the original Finnish type system and the reduction did not cause any empty subgroups. The tempting possibility to find any proverb you are interested in cannot yet be realized for those who cannot use the Finnish part of the database.

### 3.9 Comparison Between Permyakov's Logico-semiotic Categorization and Kuusi's Type System

In both suggestions of proverb classification the starting point has been a real proverb corpus, collections and archives of proverb texts with their explanations. Thus, both Permyakov and Kuusi have constructed empirical and inductive classifications. Both researchers have come to the conclusion that there are universal structures for proverbial creativity. They share the view that most of the proverbs gather around a finite number of opposition pairs. This can be seen in the titles of their classes.

Permyakov's aim has been to test his general theory of clichés and functionality of the logico-semiotic hypothesis concerning folklore items, ranging from proverbs to folk-tales. The ready-made categorization of proverbs has apparently led Permyakov choose suitable samples for each subgroup, although this process is difficult undertake again in order to scientifically validate it. Kuusi (1972) wanted to make an experiment of international classification of proverb types already when constructing his pilot article about the criteria of proverb systematization. He took numerous proverbs as a testing ground. His aim in this stage was also to give critical remarks on Permyakov's system of classification. This does not erase the fact that Kuusi had already simultaneously with Permyakov started to develop an international classification of proverb types. Kuusi abandoned later his plan to publish more far-reaching suggestions of

the classification, because he understood that the complexity of proverb semiotics, practically the difficulty of taking into account all possible cross-references, would be impossible to present in a printed form. Not until new possibilities in information technology had arisen with tools for making networks of internal references, he wanted to start his systematization work anew. (Lauhakangas, 2001: 16.)

As was shown in the previous chapter, Permyakov (1979: 249) gave examples of his way to deal with synonymic proverbs. Kuusi defines the synonymy of proverbs in the same way. Especially categorizing proverbs from different languages as belonging to the same type presupposes that we consider them synonymous proverbs. Now it is possible to compare Permyakov's grouping to Kuusi's combinations. Permyakov's two pairs of typical Russian synonymic proverbs are presented here with Kuusi's codes after each proverb. Every code of Kuusi's classification consists of

1. a main theme letter from A to T,
2. a class number inside the main theme,
3. a small letter telling about a subgroup, and
4. the individual number of every proverb type.

### 3.9.1 Permyakov's *is not worth* in Kuusi's System

When Permyakov introduces a class consisting of a structure and also of a meaning *is not worth*, Kuusi has put same proverbs to two different subgroups J1p *Tolerance of jokes and criticism* and C3e *from air, water or useless materials one gets no valuable or durable things*. The first one is a European and Islamic type and the second case is a global type that has cross-references to groups M5c *quality and ways of handling materials* and M6c *enterprise, perseverance and toughness is better than short-sightedness, giving up easily, the easy way*. Titles of subgroups are quite concrete (and quite long!) descriptions of the idea of each group of proverbs. The texts may come from different languages and they are translated to English, of course originally to Kuusi's own language, Finnish.

*The game is not worth the candles*, J1p 13  
*The goatskin is not worth the making*, C3e 18

### 3.9.2 Permyakov's *absence of* in Kuusi's System

*In the absence of fish a crayfish is a fish*  
*With no people around, even Foma is a nobleman*

This second pair of Permyakov's proverbs belongs to a same subgroup called E1e *the value of X increases through lack of Y* in Kuusi's international type-system

of proverbs. The first proverb is equivalent to an individual proverb type E1e 16. If you have a possibility to check the database in the internet you can notice that this proverb type is European, Islamic and oriental and it has cross-references to groups G4a, D3e, and L2c. This means that its various proverbs can be interpreted in different situations (and in different cultures) from different angles and they could be positioned to those subgroups as well.

The Foma-proverb above is not so clearly a part of any readymade individual proverb type. I can just say that it suits to this same subgroup. My hypothesis is that it is used likewise the other proverbs in Kuusi' subgroup E1e.

Let us look closer at Kuusi's whole main theme E, which has a title *Sense of proportion*. It has exceptionally only one group in the next hierarchical level E1 *Relativity of ranking / the essential unity of differing things*.

- E1a the incompleteness / uncertainty / relativity of everything
- E1b the esteemed also have their faults and imperfection (which must be endured)
- E1c an intelligent person can make mistakes, an able man can fail
- E1d minor, inferior, late etc. is better than nothing
- E1e the value of X increases through lack of Y
- E1f insignificant and despised things share basic features in common with the rest of us
- E1g the same origins / values / basic rights shared by human beings and nature
- E1h apparently opposite beings have basic features in common
- E1i 'coincidentia oppositorum'; the fusion of opposites
- E1j the wisdom of the 'middle road', avoidance of exaggerations and extremes, compromise is best
- E1k things look different when seen from different perspectives, paradoxes concerning luck in misfortune
- E1l internal contradictions among essential nature, action or situation

In order to get a better view to contents of these subgroups we can open the already presented subgroup E1e. I shall go through the English (translated) proverb types now available in the database. The first (nb 10) is a global proverb type *We never know the worth of water until the well runs dry*. The next title (nb 14) presented with an English translation is *Copper is a poor man's gold, pewter a pauper's silver*. In addition to the Finnish proverb text *Tina on köyhän kulta, vaski vaivaisen hopia* in the Finnish zone of the database this proverb type includes for example a synonymous African proverb: *The tooth of a pig is a poor man's ivory*.

The next type (again translated into English) in this subgroup is the one we already dealt with: *When there is no fish in the river, shrimps are valued* (E1e 16). The title text is taken and translated from a Chinese proverb. This proverb idea is almost global with the exception of the Sub Saharan Africa.

Then there is an example text known both in Finland and Estonia: *One has to screw the aunt since there is no other bride* (E1e 18). The same idea is familiar also in the Western Europe. Both the next proverb type *A drowning man will catch at any straw* (E1e 21) and the last one *In the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is a king* (E1e 26) are global proverb types.

Studying closer the proverb examples in the previous subgroup we could ask what are the criteria for these proverb types to be separated from each other. You could call the group title a generalised proverb type and deal with all those proverbs as synonymous texts. But we might as well ask, if there are any basis to join quite different proverbs to a single type. A problematic area of any classification work is to decide how to distinguish one proverb type from another without losing information about the relationship between them.

### 3.10 Automatic Data Processing and New Possibilities to Construct Proverb Databases

An obvious challenge for improvement of any categorization of proverbs and databases is lack of contextual data. Nonetheless, the classification signs serve as guidance for understanding the most common situations where these proverbs are used. Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt (2010) has made an analysis of the development from the printed dictionaries and proverb collections to modern database systems applied to proverb research. Taking into account multidimensionality and new possibilities to use networks we may find new ways to approach proverb material. Once proverbial collections are digitized, advanced search capabilities can be applied on them. These capabilities include morphology- and semantics-aware search (e.g. by stem, by syntactic criteria, by semantic domain), search across numerous and different information sources, and convenient presentation and manipulation of search results. Third, information technology offers convenient means for organization and classification of proverbs. Linking between various proverbial and non-proverbial resources, associating of textual data with multimedia data (video, audio, maps) and other widely used methods of organizing data allow for creation of powerful dynamic, multi-dimensional indices of proverbs. Such indices (also known as ontologies, using the terminology of information systems) are going to substitute the traditional proverb collections. (Kats & Lauhakangas, 2010: 114.)

A truly qualitative leap would be to connect to Kuusi's original database supplementary national proverbial databases proportioned to Kuusi's classification tool. Perhaps Permyakov's ideas could also be applied to this kind of combination. We should not also forget Aderemi Raji-Oyelade's (2004; 2008: 150) observation that there is a steady increase in the number of non-conventional proverb types which also deserve further interpretive classification. He sees that these new proverbs especially

popular in Africa assimilate ancient thoughts and observances but explode the conventional meanings and deconstruct the logic of traditional sayings.

### 3.11 Summary

Some lexicographers (Almind et al.) write about the neglected role of the common, non-academic user who has little need for an in-depth classification. Instead of over-theorizing they want to show, how an online dictionary puts the simplified theory into use and focuses on the user's needs, thereby reducing the necessity for complicated classifications. It is always good to put theories into use and in the case of theories about proverb categorization the criteria for evaluation should always be real and not artificially constructed. In order to test any classification of proverbs one should employ as testing grounds proverbs in their interactional contexts and texts from cultures as different from each other as possible. The demand for user's needs as the main criterion for classification should not prevent basic research on systemization of proverb corpora. In order to serve scientific paremiology and better comprehension of social psychological and cultural aspects of proverb use the need for in-depth categorization is clear. It must be based on deep familiarity of proverbs and proverb-like expressions as a genre of folklore and on knowledge of its interactional functions. This does not exclude developing user-friendly search systems for databases of proverbs.

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## 4 Semiotic and Semantic Aspects of the Proverb

### 4.1 Semiotics and the Proverb

The semiotic study of proverbs has long been a claim in the field of folkloristics. The earliest explicit claim in this direction goes back to Russian folklorist and semiotician Pëtr G. Bogatyrev, a co-author of Roman Jakobson, who, as early as in the 1930s, explicitly stated: “The investigation of proverbs in their semiotic aspect is one of the most grateful tasks for a folklorist” (Bogatyrev, 1971: 366). In contextually appreciating this statement, one should not forget that this was the time when, despite many valuable studies from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier, proverb research became an increasingly important topic. Let it suffice to mention Friedrich Seiler’s fundamental *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde* (1922), or André Jolles’ influential *Einfache Formen* (1930). Nevertheless, despite all achievements made at that time, the outstanding folklorist and paremiologist Archer Taylor, started his seminal book on *The Proverb* with the sharp and critical remark: “The proverb and related forms have long been objects of general interest and the occasion for many books, but they have attracted little serious and thorough study” (Taylor, 1931: vii).

Bogatyrev’s postulation remained unheard until the 1960s and 1970s, when along with the rise of structuralist approaches – first in the field of linguistics, then in anthropology – semiotics, with its genuinely interdisciplinary orientation, became increasingly important. In fact, various facets and aspects concerning the semiotics of proverbs began to be studied at that time, which had – more often implicitly, rather than explicitly –, been the object of paremiological study before, but now received attention from a different methodological point of view. Nevertheless, comprehensive and systematic semiotic analyses of the proverb still today represent some kind of research desideratum.

One of the major reasons for this state of the art is the fact that both the proverb, as the research object at stake, and semiotics, as the discipline in focus, are no traditionally established phenomena in the international scholarly world. Although the proverb belongs, in principle, to the discipline of paremiology, the latter has never been institutionally established in the academic world; rather, the proverb has traditionally been served as a research object for disciplines such as folkloristics, sociology, pedagogy, linguistics, and many others, all of them looking at the proverb from different methodological perspectives, asking different questions and, as a result, obtaining different answers. Likewise semiotics, that branch of science which studies signs, or systems, and the processes of sign generation (semiosis) and usage, has

rather been a methodological tool used by individual sciences, interested in a methodological generalization of their results.

In semiotic studies, it is commonplace, in line with Morris' *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938), to subdivide semiotics into three semiotic dimensions (see below), the distinction of which has subsequently become most widespread in the field of linguistics; yet, due attention must be paid to the fact that they refer to any kind of sign processes, not only, and not specifically, to linguistics which has, as a discipline, been of particular relevance for proverbs, too, being part of verbal folklore. Notwithstanding the fact all these aspects have become most relevant in the field of linguistics, the semiotic approach and the semiotic understanding of the three dimensions outlined is much for encompassing and comprehensive, and it covers linguistics as the science of linguistic signs, too, but is of larger concern and relevance.

Keeping this in mind, it is also of utmost importance to note that, despite the three-dimensional and triadic study of semiotics, a number of dyadic relations may be abstracted for study (Morris, 1938: 6):

- a) the *pragmatical dimension*,
- b) the *syntactical dimension*,
- c) the *semantical dimension*.

The three disciplines studying these dimensions are accordingly termed *pragmatics*, *syntactics*, and *semantics*: whereas, according to Morris' (1938) concept, pragmatics is concerned with the relation between sign and sign users, syntactics is directed towards the formal relations of signs to one another, and semantics concentrates on the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable. In this respect, it should be pointed out right away that already Morris emphasized the close interrelation between these three dimensions suggesting that they can only, for heuristic purposes, be distinguished and studied with a separate focus, but not really isolated, neither with the regard to sign usage, nor with the study thereof. Also, it should be noted, that more often than not, in the history of studies applying these concepts, implicitly or explicitly, semantics has some kind of dominated over pragmatics and syntactics, since it has always been common to ask for the function of pragmatical or syntactical factors and, by way of that, for the influence these dimensions have on the overall meaning (or even change of meaning). It seems, in this respect students of semiotics generally, and paremiologists specifically, do not differ from ordinary sign users, whose cognitive activity is principally characterized by what psychologists have termed the "effort after meaning" (Bartlett, 1932: 44) and identified as an anthropological constant (Hörmann, 1986).

Morris' rather rough approach, which owes much to the semiotic of Charles S. Peirce, has not remained unchallenged in the course of time: both the concrete definitions and the methodological approaches to each of these dimensions and their interrelations have fundamentally changed in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nevertheless, they have served as some kind of orientation point till today. It seems therefore

reasonable to take them as a starting point for an analysis of the semiotics of the proverb, on the one hand, and of proverb studies, on the other. With this perspective, it will easily be seen that the three semiotic dimensions cover traditional folkloristic and paremiological issues, which can thus be united under a common theoretical roof.

## 4.2 Semiotics and Its Dimensions

### 4.2.1 Pragmatics

Generally speaking, *pragmatics* focuses on “the relation of signs to interpreters” (Morris, 1938: 6); more specifically, it is “that portion of semiotic which deals with the origin, uses, and effects of signs within the behavior in which they occur” (Morris, 1946: 219). It is thus concerned with the use of a sign system in contexts. Having initially been a predominantly philosophical issue, including speech act theory, pragmatics has become increasingly important since the 1970s in the field of linguistics, last but not least as a reaction to rather *context-free* structural or generativist approaches. In fact, it was *context* which received more and more attention; it became particularly relevant to study the ways in which context contributes to meaning, i.e., how meaning depends not only on structural and linguistic knowledge of a message’s producer and recipient, but (also) on the context of an utterance, pre-existing knowledge about those involved, the inferred intent(ion) of the message’s producer, etc. In this respect, a number of different notions of context were distinguished, such as: (a) the physical context, referring to the *real-life* situational setting of a communication act, i.e. that situation in which the communication takes place; (b) the epistemic context referring to the background knowledge (or world knowledge) of a communication, which may be necessary for understanding, but logically speaking can of course be shared on partly by producer and recipient; (c) the linguistic context, often distinguishingly termed *co-text* instead, referring to that information into which a message is imbedded, i.e. which either preceded or succeeded the message in question, or which accompanied it simultaneously (e.g., specific prosodic elements, non-verbal communicative elements, etc.), (d) the social context, specifically referring to the relationship between producer and recipient, involving, among others, hierarchies or different degrees of intimacy between them, and thus having an impact on the success communication act. The recipient’s ability to understand another’s intended meaning has been called *pragmatic competence*; but of course producing and conveying a message includes, to a certain degree, the anticipation of the communicative imbalance between producer and recipient, and any producer’s strategy to avoid resulting problems is part of pragmatic competence, too.

With regard to *pragmatical* issues, paremiology has been concerned with the study of negotiating proverbs in natural communication (oral or written), and social life, i.e., with the analysis of speech act performances, focusing on the *why* and *how* of verbal exchanges. This line of research, despite all differences in detail, has thus basically concentrated on the proverb in its *context*, less on the proverb as a text: in fact, proverbs are studied with regard to contextual and situational implications in the process of social exchange, on the one hand, including all pragmatic restrictions which may be effective, and with regard to functional factors, on the other. Paremiological research along this line has of course been much more concrete, than simply stating that proverbs are indirect speech acts<sup>6</sup>; rather, quite concrete social and cultural interactions have been analyzed in detail. Studies in this direction have a long tradition. Raymond W. Firth, for example, who was later to become an important ethnologist and a leading representative of functional cultural anthropology, referred to the importance of proverb context as early as in 1926, when he wrote: “The essential thing about a proverb is its meaning, – and by this is to be understood not merely a bald and literal translation into the accustomed tongue, nor even a free version of what the words are intended. To convey the meaning of a proverb is made clear only when side by side with the translation is given a full account of the accompanying social situation, – the reason for its use, its effect, and its significance in speech” (Firth, 1926: 134). And on the threshold to modern, structural anthropology, Ojo Arewa and Alan Dundes, in their 1966 essay *Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore*<sup>7</sup>, explicitly postulated to complement the description of a proverb’s textual characteristics by a detailed description of the context in which it is used. Their main interest was not as much the question of the function of the proverb in general, as the description of a concrete proverb’s function in a specific context: “Notice that such as study of context is not the same as the more general study of functions of folklore. One can say that proverbs sum up a situation, pass judgment, recommend a course of action, or serve as secular past precedents for present action; but to say this does not tell us what the particular function of a particular proverb used by a particular individual in a particular setting is” (Arewa & Dundes, 1966: 71). Emphasis is laid here on the contextual boundary conditions of individual (proverbial) speech acts and proverb usage. Nevertheless, the ultimate object of this approach was twofold, of course: with regard to individual proverbs, the interest was to gain better insight into a proverb’s functioning and, by way of that, into the complex matter of its semantic functioning;

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6 Indirect speech acts, in the tradition of Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), refer to the situation when someone, in a given communication, says one thing (the locutionary act), and means something different (or additional), thus performing an illocutionary act, which has some (perlocutionary) effect on someone else.

7 This refers back, of course, to D. Hymes (1962) postulation of an *Ethnography of Speaking*, paradigmatically shifting the focus from *anthropological linguistics* to *linguistic anthropology*.

and with regard to the proverbial genre, the interest was to obtain a clearer picture of the proverb's social and cultural functions in general. This dual interest has since characterized pragmatic approaches to the proverb in the field of paremiology (see among others Briggs, 1985, Charteris-Black, 1995, Hasan-Rokem, 1982).

Summarizing the gist of this whole line of research, one can generally say that, on the whole, the predominant interest has been, to study the ways in which context contributes to, or changes, proverbial meaning, i.e., to analyze the overwhelmingly complex question how a proverb either obtains its meaning, or how it changes its meaning, or its function, depending on (a change of) the situational, contextual, or pragmatic boundary conditions of proverb usage.

#### 4.2.2 Syntactics

As to the syntactical dimension, it cannot be overemphasized that syntactics must not be identified with, or reduced to, the (study of) grammatical concept of syntax in linguistics, i.e., the rules and principles of sentence structures and processes by which sentences are constructed. The linguistic study of syntax may, of course, be sub-summarized under the broader concept of syntactics, but the latter, in its semi-otic understanding of the term, refers to (the study of) signs in their relations to one another generally.

Before pointing out the relevance of syntactics for paremiology, it seems necessary to emphasize that in this context, a number of further distinctions should be made, which have not always been kept apart as clearly as would have been desirable. Partly, this is due to Morris' own ambiguous statements, partly to later interpretations of his statements by other scholars. A major problem consists in the wrong identification of syntactics not only syntax, but also with syntagmatics, thus excluding paradigmatic sign relations from the field of syntactics. In his *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Morris (1938: 14) defined syntactics rather specifically as being concerned with "the consideration of signs and sign combinations in so far as they are subject to syntactical rules" (the latter being meant as formation and transformation rules in terms of formal logics); but he also, in a more general way, spoke of "the formal relation of signs to one another" (Morris, 1938: 6). Later refining these definitions in his book *Signs, Language, and Behavior*, Morris (1946: 219) saw syntactics not only generally dealing "with combinations of signs", but also as that "branch of semiotic that studies the way in which signs of various classes are combined to form compound signs" (Morris, 1946: 355). Whereas the first statement thus still refers to combinatorics and seems to imply a syntagmatic perspective, the second refers to any kind of relation between signs, possibly including paradigmatics, too, and the third specifically aims at the combination of signs from different classes being interrelated in one way or another. In order to cover all aspects of syntactics, it seems therefore reasonable to pay attention to the methodologically important juxtapositions of *paradigmatics*

vs. *syntagmatics* and *simultaneity* vs. *succession*, which stand in specific relations to each other.

When, per definition, syntactics includes (the study of) syntagmatic relations of a given sign concerning its relation(s) to other signs with which it is combined, this necessarily implies a specific succession or sequentiality, i.e., an extension in the temporal and/or spatial dimension. Following the above definitions, a syntactical approach needs not be syntagmatic, however; rather, it may include paradigmatic relations between signs as well (Posner, 1985), which concern a sign's relation(s) to signs within one and the same sign system and, consequently, no temporal or spatial extension. As a consequence, a paradigmatic focus implies simultaneity, in contrast to a syntagmatic focus, implying succession. In sum, a syntactical approach would thus not be restricted to syntagmatics, but include paradigmatics, as well and, as a consequence, not necessarily imply sequentiality. Moreover, syntactics would also include the (study of a) simultaneous combination of heterogeneous signs, i.e., signs from different sign systems being merged into a complex sign, or a sign complex.<sup>8</sup>

These distinctions, as theoretical as they may appear to be at first sight, are highly relevant for paremiological analyses, too. In fact, paremiological studies have always included syntactical studies, without necessarily having been understood or termed as syntactical in the sense outlined above. It goes without saying that no exhaustive or systematic account can be given here, but it may be helpful to give at least some examples:

a. Approaches to proverbs concerning the linguistic embedding of a verbal utterance into the linguistic context, for example, would be a typical case of a syntactical-syntagmatic approach: concentrating on the linguistic environment of a proverbial utterance would focus, among others, on the study of the verbal text preceding or succeeding a given proverb utterance, often referred to as *co-text* instead (Catford, 1965: 30), in order to distinguish such verbal embeddings from situational contexts. Such analyses would also attempt to identify introductory (*pre-proverb*) formulae, i.e., some kind of preceding verbal prompters, verbally introducing proverbs into a running conversation and separating them from the ongoing text, as well as extensions and elaborations, including stylistic extensions, strategies of commenting, proverb dialogues competitions, etc. Studies of proverb usage in a given situational context with particular regard to non-verbal communicative elements accompanying it, would be an instance of simultaneity-oriented syntactics, studying the combination of heterogeneous signs into a compound sign complex. What is relevant here is of course not the nonverbal channel as such, but the simultaneous combination of (different) signs; this instance is therefore different, of course, from studies of proverb

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<sup>8</sup> Heterogeneous signs may of course not only simultaneously accompany, but also precede or succeed a given sign, thus implying syntactical sequentiality as outlined above.

usage in particular societies, when proverbs are not orally expressed, by on drums, through gestures, in dancing, etc., without verbal accompaniment.

b. A syntactical-paradigmatic approach, as compared to this, asks for a definition of which paradigm is under study, since paradigms are not a priori given truths, but the a posteriori result of definition. Such a paradigm may be represented by all proverb variants and variations belonging to one and the same proverb (with a given language or even cross-linguistically), it may comprise all proverbs belonging to a specific structural type, e.g. all those including formulae like *Where ... there, Like ... like*, etc., or it may even concentrate on all proverbs of a given language, studying their interrelations, and it may as well study all proverbs, within a given culture or not, in their mutual interrelations, including what has been termed paremiological homonyms, synonyms, antonyms, etc.

As has been pointed out above, syntactical approaches would of course comprise linguistic syntax analyses, studying grammatical specifics of proverbs, as well. It should be noted, however, that in this case the concept of proverb as the object of research is, from a semiotic point of view, essentially different from its understanding in the examples above. In all previous examples, a proverb has been understood as a proverbial entity, i.e., as one sign studied in its relation to other signs. It has been thus ignored, at least temporarily, that a proverb itself is composed of more than one constituting sign, since a proverb, by definition, is composed of minimally two words, and each individual word is a sign in its own right<sup>9</sup>, the proverb thus turning out to be what has been termed a super-sign, i.e. a complex sign, or a sign complex.

Accepting the assumption that a word obtains its meaning only in co(n)text, it turns out that any change in this respect, as well as any pragmatic difference, will have impact on proverb meaning, showing once more how closely interrelated pragmatic, syntactical and semantical aspects are, and how fluently these aspects merge into each other, despite any heuristic focus.

### 4.2.3 Semantics

As compared to Morris (1938: 6) definition of semantics as “the relation of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable”, he later regarded it as dealing “with the signification of signs in all modes of signifying” (Morris, 1946: 219): whereas in the first case, we would thus be concerned with some kind of reference semantics, the later modification is more general in scope, rather focusing on the conditions which

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<sup>9</sup> There is no need to enter a more detailed discussion here as to the semiotic status of phonemes, as the smallest linguistic units bringing about a change of meaning, or of morphemes, as the smallest grammatical units, or the smallest linguistic units bearing meaning.



must be fulfilled for something to be denoted by a sign, or for a sign to serve as denoting, or signifying, something, respectively.

In the course of time, and mostly related to the fields of philosophy of language, on the one hand, and linguistics, on the other, the discipline of semantics has undergone important developments and sustainable changes. In the field of linguistics it has become common, irrespective of methodological differences, to distinguish different branches, or foci, of semantics, depending again on the specific focus of research: whereas *lexical semantics* is concerned with the meanings of words and morphemes, as well as the structure of a (mental) lexicon as a whole, *sentence semantics* studies how (i.e., by what kind of rules) the meaning of larger syntactic units, such as phrases, clauses, or sentences, can be described and eventually derived from individual words; *text semantics* concentrates on the combination of sentences, i.e., the representations of real or hypothetical (presumed, fictive, etc.) facts into coherent narrative, descriptive or argumentative structures; and *discourse semantics* concentrates on the level of texts in interaction (discussions, conversations, etc.) Quite obviously, these different aspects interact in specific ways.

What is important here is that all these aspects are essentially relevant for semantic studies in the field of paremiology, too. The proverb being defined as a folklore unit on the sentence level, sentence semantics is of course specifically concerned. Quite obviously, the study if or how from the meanings of individual words, as the constituents of a sentence, along with combinatorial semantic, morphosyntactic and syntactic rules relate to the meaning of syntactic entities (phrases, clauses, sentences), cannot be solved without information from lexical semantics: independent of the fact if different kinds of tropes and figures are included, or not, sentence meaning might well not emerge from the meanings of its components (see below). But it would be a too narrowing view to restrict paremiological semantics to these two aspects – ultimately, the meaning of a proverb is likely to transcend sentence boundaries. Depending on the definition of *text*, a proverbial sentence can be seen to be a full text in its own right, eventually embedded into a situational context and additional co-text. Likewise, the integration of a proverb into discursive structures parallels the importance of co(n)textual structures already pointed out above with reference to pragmatics and syntactics.

It is obvious that neither a historically nor a conceptually oriented survey of semantic approaches can be given here, be that with regard to semantics in general or to the narrower field of proverb semantics, only. In any case, it seems worthwhile emphasizing again, with regard to the three-partite division of semiosis outlined above, Morris' emphasis of the unity of the three dimensions involved, and referring to the fact that ultimately, that any semiotic process can only be adequately studied paying due attention to the indispensable interrelationship of all three dimensions. Not any one of them must be isolated from any one of the others except, temporarily, for heuristic purposes. Based on these general assumptions, it has become a commonplace in semiotics, specifically in process-oriented semiotics, that signs do

neither occur isolated from other signs, nor outside of a specific situational context; consequently, meaning is generally considered to emerge as a result of operations which sign users fulfill by way of texts (in a broad semiotic understanding of this term) in particular communicative situations.

Generally speaking, it should be pointed out that the notion of *semantics* has been ambiguously used in the past, and that we have been concerned with different readings of the term *semantics*. Most importantly, and irrespective of different methodological approaches complicating the situation, two different levels of abstraction should clearly be kept apart. When *semantics* was introduced as a scholarly term in the linguistic discourse by Bréal in 1883, its task was supposed to be the description of the meaning of words and of meaning change; this led to a rather colloquial usage of the term, semantics often being understood as a synonym for *meaning*. Proverb semantics, thus understood, would then be but the meaning of a proverb – indeed such readings can be found, e.g., in Lundberg's 1958 study on *The semantics of proverbs*, concentrating on contradictory interpretations (i.e., meanings) of proverbs within a given language.<sup>10</sup>

More adequately, however, and following the tradition outlined above, semantics should not be understood in terms of *meaning*, but of *the study of meaning*, or *science of meaning*. Semantics, in this understanding, thus would not be the object of study, but the discipline of studying the object; and since the object, in this case (i.e., the proverb), is a linguistic expression, this would ask for a description and study of (the process of generating) meaning. From this perspective, any attempt to *explain* or to *interpret* a proverb, i.e., to describe its meaning, could thus be classified as being semantic, and any description of proverb meaning would fall into the field of proverb semantics. It would be too easy, however, to leave this statement as it is: on the one hand, it is quite evident that no (proverb) meaning can ever be described without at least a minimum of meta-linguistic competence, be that implicit or explicit; on the other hand, ambition and scope of different meta-languages, or their degrees of abstraction, may be quite different, up to the level of specific theories of proverb meaning and meaning generation. Meta-language thus turns out to be a crucial factor in context of proverb semantics, and it seems reasonable to recall some elementary cornerstones about the status and function of meta-language.

### 4.3 Metalinguage

Generally speaking, meta-language is language about language. As compared to this, the language which is spoken about is called an *object language*; in case some

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<sup>10</sup> Later, Milner (1969) would elaborate on this observation, interpreting them as an intralingual, though intercultural phenomenon.

meta-language itself is made the object of study, i.e. functionally turning out to be the object, we speak about meta-meta-language. Any meta-language includes two main components (Baranov, 2007: 78): (i) the *initial alphabet of elements* or *units* (vocabulary of metalanguage) and (ii) the *allowed rules for the generation of well-formed metalanguage formulae* (expressions) from initial elements.

It goes without saying that not only is meta-language itself concerned by all three dimensions of semiosis (i.e., by pragmatic, syntactic and semantic aspects) but also may it concern all aspects of a given object language, not only the semantic dimension focused here, in terms of a *semantic meta-language*. As Baranov (2007: 78) correctly points out, with regard to phraseology, expressions of a semantic meta-language must convey the essential features of the meanings of the object language expressions.

In this respect, two positions may be distinguished, with regard to the completeness of description (Baranov, 2007: 81): for the first, the goal is a (maximally) complete analysis and exhaustive description of meaning, including all necessary and sufficient conditions for its correct use; according to the second, a semantic meta-language can describe only a part of the content of a language expression.

From a model theory perspective, a meta-linguistic expression can be regarded to be a model of an object expression; quite obviously, a meta-linguistics model can in practice cover but selected properties considered to be relevant in a given research context. As a consequence, the view on the object, as well as its description, will change depending on the meta-language chosen. Different meta-linguistic approaches and any theory of proverb meaning will therefore arrive at different semantic descriptions, and with each difference in describing a proverb's meaning the latter will seemingly change, to a certain degree.

There are, at least, two more factors to which due attention must be paid with regard to the influence of meta-language. First, one should not forget that the more general (broader, abstract) a given meta-language is, the more phenomena it will be able to cover, but on costs of the degree of specificity of description. And second one should be well aware of the fact that meaning is, after all, the outcome of a dynamic process – but any description of meaning is bound to arrive at a static result. Alone from this fact it follows that any attempt at describing a concrete meaning will always face serious difficulties, if it will not even be principally doomed to failure.

Estonian folklorist Arvo Krikmann has adequately drawn the necessary conclusions from these general and theoretical problems. On their background the proverb as a genre seems to be specifically characterized by a number of factors responsible for what he has termed its semantic indefiniteness: in addition to modal, functional, pragmatic, situational, and other factors, Krikmann (1971) particularly emphasized the importance of the chosen meta-language. According to him, it is simply impossible to define a proverb's meaning exactly, and he concludes: “[...] the meaning of a proverb [...] is, for a researcher or a user, a mere semantic potential. The final and maximally definite meanings of a certain text manifest themselves only in concrete actualizations of this text” (Krikmann, 1974: 5).

Ultimately, attempting to solve the problem, we are therefore faced with a methodological dilemma, since analyzing a proverb text we are concerned with two antagonistic tendencies. On the one hand, we are faced with the *absolute sum* of all *possible* meanings which represent a proverb's semantic potential. On the other hand, we have to do with the sum of all *real (actual)* meanings, as manifested in all its previous realizations, and since we do not know all these actual realizations, we usually have no chance to explicate the proverb's semantic potential in such a way that it corresponds to its actual meanings. This deficit is responsible for a number of possible error sources in any attempt to describe a proverb's meaning (Krikmann, 1974: 5):

- i. a semantic description is attributed to the text, which is too broad (or too general) – as a result, the description includes a number of unreal meanings, in addition to all real meanings;
- ii. the description is too narrow – consequently, part of all real meanings remain out of the consideration;
- iii. errors (1) and (2) occur simultaneously – in this case, the description introduces some unreal meanings and excludes, or neglects, a part of real ones;
- iv. the interpretation fails entirely and the formulation of the semantic potential does not include any real meaning.

Despite this seemingly hopeless situation there have always been (and will always be) attempts to describe proverb meanings, notwithstanding all theoretical problems pointed out – after all, there are simply concrete practical needs to do so, maybe even less for paremiology than for paremiography, striving for some kind of semantic arrangement of proverbs. In this respect, paremiologists and paremiographers, have always had to deal not only with the interaction of semantics with pragmatics and syntactics – it is yet another problem, which is essentially responsible for the proverb's semantic indefiniteness, namely, factors concerning its indirectness, figurativeness, non-literality, etc.

The assumption of indirectness has always, in one way or another, played an important role in the history of proverb scholarship, primarily with regard to semantic issues, including however pragmatic, linguistic, poetic and other approaches.

#### 4.4 “Indirectness” and “Non-literality”

From a pragmatic point of view, it might eventually be appropriate to classify a proverb as an indirect speech act. This concept goes back to ideas from the philosophy of language, mainly Searle's (1975) discussion of *Indirect Speech Acts*, based on his earlier *Speech Act Theory* (Searle, 1969), and referring back to Austin's (1962) well-known treatment *How to do things with words*. In this framework, we are concerned with a direct speech act, when a speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what s/he says (Searle, 1975: 59). But a speaker may also utter a sentence, mean what s/he

says, but additionally mean something more, or something different instead. In these cases, we are concerned with indirect speech acts, when “the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer” (Searle, 1975: 60).

On this basis, there have been a number studies on the speech act character of the proverb. And there have not only been attempts to characterize the proverb, due to its citational character, as a doubly indirect speech act (Norrick 1982), there have been efforts to define specific paremic speech acts – Nahberger (2000: 121), Nahberger (2004). Such attempts may be reasonable from a philosophical or maybe even pragmatic point of view. If, however, such classifications are helpful for semantic purposes (be that in a paremiological context or not), is an entirely different matter. Ultimately, the status of indirect speech acts has increasingly been principally called into question in the last years, not only due to the fact that the majority of speech acts in every day conversation have turned out to be indirect (Crystal, 1987: 121); profound skepticism has also come up for theoretical reasons, stating, e.g., that “there are no indirect speech acts” (Bertolet, 1994: 335), claiming “that indirect speech acts, if they do occur, can be explained within the framework of conversational implicature” (Green, 2009), or declaring “that the notion can be discarded with no significant methodological loss” (Chankova, 2009).

The question of figurativeness in proverbs has preoccupied generations of paremiologists, and monographic surveys of the proverb use to devote separate chapters to this question – Seiler, (1922: 149), Röhrich & Mieder, 1977: 90), and many others. More often than not, juxtapositions of the following kind have traditionally been put forward:

<i>metaphorical proverb</i>	vs.	<i>proverbial apothegm</i> (Taylor 1931)
<i>proverbe</i>	vs.	<i>dicton</i> (Greimas (1970)
<i>proverb proper</i>	vs.	<i>maxim</i> (Barley 1972)
<i>proverb proper</i>	vs.	<i>folk aphorism</i> (Permjakov (1979)

Although at first sight such distinctions, irrespective of differences in terminology, seem to refer to similar concepts, they may have been based on different assumptions: On the one hand, the difference may either have been assumed to be (a) *categorical* or (b) *gradual* (allowing for possible degrees and transitions between both); on the other hand, the juxtaposition may have been motivated either on the basis of specific (c) *textual* characteristics, or the difference have been seen in (d) *pragmatic* respects (i.e., in the act of proverb usage, strictly asking for a distinction of literal or non-literal usage of a proverb, rather than of literal and non-literal proverbs).

One might argue, or course, in favor of the notion that these different assumptions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and that we are rather concerned with different perspectives: from a text-oriented approach (c) one might, for example, treat

a proverb, be it categorically (a) or (b) gradually (more or less) literal or non-literal, as a homonymic and polyfunctional text (c). One might also classify a proverb as literal or non-literal, from an a posteriori perspective, without claiming that such a categorization is possible a priori, too, on the basis of information given in the text itself – after all, any word can be used metaphorically, and even the classical sentence *Colorless green ideas sleep furiously*, seemingly semantically anomalous at first sight, has repeatedly shown to be fully reasonable, if interpreted metaphorically.

Be that as it may, the problem of literal and non-literal meanings is too complex to be answered straight-forward. In any case, it seems reasonable to see a parallel here to what (Burger, 2007: 91) has suggested for phrasemes, namely, to speak of *literal reading*, rather than of *literal meaning*. While this wording emphasizes the recipient's active role and makes it clear that the distinction outlined may be a cognitive, rather than an exclusively text-based phenomenon. Moreover, it has generally been assumed that distinctions which can be made from text-oriented studies are relevant for, or paralleled by cognitive processes, as well, among others, Norrick (1985: 27) claims that a speaker “means what he says on the literal level, but he means something more in context”, particularly if one takes into account that the “literal meaning (or rather one literal meaning of several potential ones, as the components can be polysemic at the literal level) can be activated [...], but does not have to be of any importance in the actual use of language” (Norrick, 1985: 91).

Related issues have been the study of specific psycholinguistic studies of proverb comprehension, where a crucial question has been if understanding a proverb's literal meaning is an obligatory pre-condition for the decoding of its figurative meaning. Since Grzybek's (1984c) early summarizing discussion of results available at that time, much progress has been made in this field (e.g., Gibbs et al., 1996, Honeck, 1997). Various models have been propagated, starting from two-step *literal first* models, over *multiple meanings* models, up to *conventional meaning models*, to name but a few, all of them concentrating on the question, how paremic meaning is achieved, if and how (elements of) literal meaning may come into play or not. Unfortunately, in many relevant studies, many possibly interfering factors have never been systematically controlled, starting from a clear phrase-paremiological distinction between idioms, proverbial sayings and proverbs, including the differentiation of different kinds of proverbs as well as of different kinds of tropic process involved – be that on the lexical or the sentence level (see below) – up to differences depending on (individual) familiarity with the given proverb.

The above-mentioned point of different kinds of figurativeness concerns two aspects: on the one hand, this concerns individual tropes (such as metaphors,

metonymies, synecdoches, etc.) as lexical components possibly present in proverbs,<sup>11</sup> on the other hand, this relates to the proverb text as a whole, i.e., its overall paremic (transferred, indirect, non-literal, non-figurative, etc.) meaning. Although Seiler (1922: 152), in his *Deutsche Sprichwörterkunde*, drew on this difference as early as in 1922, both aspects which must be clearly distinguished have often have not been kept apart – both problems are principally different, yet closely related, depending again on the approach chosen.

## 4.5 Holistic vs. Componential Analysis, Analytical vs. Synthetic Clichés

In a more modern approach, Krikmann suggested to distinguish two different methodological approaches to explain proverb meaning:

(1) The first approach, which might be termed *componential*, regards the proverb text as **internally heterogeneous**. It tries to tell apart *content elements* (c-elements) from *formal elements* (f-elements). Formal elements are, among others, any kind of relational words or quantifiers, syntactic formulae, such as *every, all, if ... then, better ... than*, etc. All other words belong to the c-elements; these can be further subdivided into semantically ( $c_1$ ) *literal* and ( $c_2$ ) *transferred* (non-literal, figurative, tropical, etc.) elements, based on the assumption that there is, in principle, a literal reading of words, and a non-literal (figurative) one. The exact distinction between c-elements and f-elements may vary, of course, as well as the classification of specific kind of trope involved, depending on various factors; but all approaches along these lines share the assumption that figurativeness (non-directness, figurativeness, poeticalness, etc.) is not assigned to the proverb text as a whole, but is restricted to its individual elements (or even to the  $c_2$ -elements, alone).

(2) The second approach, which might be termed *holistic*, considers the proverb text as an *internally homogeneous* entity. All its elements are considered to belong to a specific *secondary* language, a proverb representing a *secondary modeling system*, i.e., a semiotic superstructure built upon (the basis, or principle of) natural language as a *primary modeling system*. From this perspective, approaches along the componential approach appear to be restricted to the analysis of the proverb as a linguistic entity,

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<sup>11</sup> In this respect, Norrick's (1985: 101) appeal to pay attention to these different kinds of tropes is important, although his assumption that no one has ever attempted to define or catalogue the types of figures proverbs contain commonly, is far from being correct, if one does not ignore older sources as, e.g., Klimenko (1946) detailed study of tropes in Russian proverbs.

studying it in the framework of sentence semantics (see above). In contrast, according to the holistic approach, a proverb is seen not only as a linguistic super-sign but as an even more complex superstructure, a paremic super-sign, in analogy to any poetic work of art. In this framework, the eventual occurrence of tropes on the lexical level may result in different subcategories of proverbs, but the overall classification of a proverb as being *completely poetical* would not be touched by this detail, the semantic description of a proverb thus asking for a specific meta-language beyond sentence semantics.

From a different perspective, we are thus faced again with the proverb's semiotic status as a sign complex, or a complex super-sign. Comparing these two approaches just outlined, there are some similarities between the two, since in both cases, lexical tropes may but need not be contained; furthermore, both do not exclude, or even claim that there is some information beyond the information given on a merely linguistic level. Yet, both approaches differ in important respects:

- a) the status and role of lexical tropes, particularly concerning their relation to the syntactic and proverbial whole, is treated differently;
- b) the need to develop a specific meta-language for the description of what is assumed to be some kind of additional information, is seen differently, and clearly relevant in the second approach only.

Whereas the first approach thus focuses on a componential analysis, eventually being negligent of the need to develop of a specific meta-language for the semantic description of the proverbial whole, in addition to its the second approach, with its particular emphasis on the additional (*secondary*) meaning, is faced with the need to offer a solution as to the interplay between lexical and proverbial levels, particularly with regard to figurative processes involved. Again, we have a parallel to the narrower field of phraseology, and one cannot but agree with H. Burger (2007: 92), for whom "one of the main semantic problems in phraseology is describing and explaining if and how the two meanings or levels of meaning are connected".

According to the componential approach, a proverb text thus is regarded to be not principally different from any other verbal text, except for the indirectness of the speech act of its utterance (see above), and for the eventual inclusion of lexical tropes. Under this condition, a proverb is submitted to semantic analyses in a linguistic framework. For approaches along these lines, *literal* meanings (or readings) of the proverb and/or its components are a pre-condition of analysis.

In this respect, the concept of *semantic autonomy* has been used in the field of phraseology, in order to study "how much and in what way the components of the phraseme contribute semantically to its overall meaning" (Burger, 2007: 96). Along these lines, idioms without semantically autonomous components have been termed non-compositional, those with semantically autonomous components have been termed compositional; as a consequence, such idioms have been termed non-motivated or opaque, on the one hand, and motivated or transparent, on the other, both



types also allowing for combinations leading to partly idiomatic (motivated, transparent) idioms (Burger, 2007:96).<sup>12</sup> The classification of a phraseme to be (more or less) motivated thus depends on a decision how the individual components contribute to the overall phraseological meaning. It seems that with regard to this point, things are considerably different in paremiology: although here, too, we may ask how the individual components contribute to the whole, and if, or how, these components can be motivated, these questions are not relevant for a classification of the proverb meaning as a whole, which is always motivated, even if possibly in different manners (see below).

Componential analyses in paremiology, however, tend to see the overall proverb meaning, which may frankly be admitted to exist, either as an emerging result of the (the analysis of) individual components, or it tends to be completely ignored and regarded as being out of scope. Quite typically, Norrick (1985: 9), for example, suggests that a semantic analysis of a proverb must begin with a literal reading<sup>13</sup>, before its *customary meaning* or *standard proverb interpretation* (in his terms) can be achieved. The *literal* meaning, in this context, is not the original proverb text, but a literal paraphrase of its *surface form*.<sup>14</sup> In Norrick's understanding, this intermediate step may be necessary for proverbs which contain, for example, archaic or peculiarly proverbial syntactic constructions or lexical items; according to Norrick (1985: 81) such proverbs (i.e., only such proverbs) are "not amenable to regular compositional semantic interpretation" – from what we learn that all other proverbs obvious are considered to be amenable. Whereas compositional analysis thus is regarded to be not only possible, but also necessary, in order to arrive at a proverb's *literal* meaning, there is, according to Norrick (1985: 82), no need to semantically analyze proverbs in order to provide them with what he terms *standard proverb interpretations*: since proverbs are not freely generated, "no analysis of their internal semantic structure is necessary to provide readings for them" (Norrick, 1985: 82). Both statements taken together, it becomes obvious that the semantic (compositional) analysis is confined to *literal* readings, and that the semantic analysis of proverb meaning as such ultimately is not even touched upon in his approach, except for everyday re-phrasings

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<sup>12</sup> In linguistics and semiotics, different kinds of *motivation* have been distinguished, originally referring to Saussure's distinction of arbitrary and motivated signs. In a more general sense, we are concerned with the derivation of form, meaning, function, usage, or historical development of simple or complex signs, on the basis of formal (morphological, syntactic, phonological, graphical), semantic, or sign-external aspects.

<sup>13</sup> Norrick uses both terms, obviously interchangeably, i.e., *literal reading* as well as *literal meaning*.

<sup>14</sup> The *literal* reading of the proverb *Like father, like son*, for example, would be *Father and son are alike*.

of proverbs' customary meanings.<sup>15</sup> Based on the *literal* reading, Norrick (1985: 81), assumes proverbs to be either literal or figurative, depending on the relation between the literal meanings determined for them and their *standard proverb interpretations*<sup>16</sup>; more specifically, he claims that if the literal reading *coincides* with the customary meaning, a proverb is literal, else figurative (Norrick, 1985: 1). Irrespective of the fact that the whole approach is highly problematic, from a theoretical point of view<sup>17</sup>, it turns out that proverbs which contain some kind of trope on the lexical level are classified as *figurative*, all others as *literal*.

At closer sight, the crucial question raised above, as to possible interrelations between lexical tropes and the paremic meaning of the proverb as a whole, thus turns out to remain unanswered, in this approach. And although it is conceded that "information beyond that present in a simple semantic decomposition of lexical items may play a crucial role in interpretation" (Norrick, 1985: 114), the same holds to as to the question how to semantically describe a proverb's customary meaning, as an inventorized unit, admittedly being considered as "belonging to a particular language" (Norrick, 1985: 1).

Whereas thus, in the framework of componential approaches, there even may be no need to develop a specific meta-language for paremic meaning, it is just this specific paremic content which renders the proverb a secondary modeling system, for the second approach. Here, a proverb is treated not only as a linguistic, but also, additionally and indispensably, as a paremic entity. In other words: from this perspective, a proverb is analyzed both as a text in ordinary language, as the primary modeling system, and as a specific paremic entity, belonging to a specific paremic plane of language, assumed to represent a second level of meaning.

This approach theoretically owes very much to literary and cultural semiotics. In this theoretical framework, linguistic analyses are of course not excluded – but (additionally) considering the proverb to be a specific paremic text, all text elements are

<sup>15</sup> At closer sight, even these demands are not met in Norrick's approach; after all, a standard proverb interpretation *Fear gives the ability to fly* of the proverb *Fear gives wings* (Norrick, 1985: 194) is more than far away from any kind of customary meaning, to give but one example.

<sup>16</sup> More specifically, depending on this relation, synecdochic, metonymic, metaphoric (and eventually further) types of proverbs may be distinguished – see e.g., Norrick (1985: 108).

<sup>17</sup> Although the *customary meaning* may eventually be described with terms from everyday language, this may not blind us to the fact that we are concerned with a different, meta-lingual function of language. The (meta-linguistic) description of a proverb's customary meaning and its literal reading may of course *coincide* formally, but not functionally, in this case both being but homonymous expressions. It is therefore profoundly misleading to speak of a coincidence between literal and customary meaning – a meta-language must principally not only have a logical lexicon not smaller than that of the object language, but it must also necessarily have variables belonging to a higher logical type than the variables of the object language. Thus, for both 'literal' and *figurative* proverbs the literal reading must differ from its meta-lingual description, and every change in the type of meta-linguistic description would let this conception collapse like a house of cards.

considered to fulfill semantic functions, and they must be strictly distinguished both from all elements of the primary language and from those of a given meta-language used for their semantic description (in both cases we would otherwise be concerned with homonymous elements). We will come back to details of the concept of secondary modelling systems, further below, and we will discuss what this concept has in common with approaches distinguishing between two kinds (or levels) of signification, a primary (denotative) and a secondary (connotative) one. There is more than one scholar who has advanced this view, but with regard to the question raised above, Permjakov's approach deserves some in-depth treatment here.

Permjakov's approach<sup>18</sup> is based on the fundamental distinction between analytical vs. synthetic clichés, relating not only to proverbs, but to all categories of linguistic stereotypes. The main difference between these two types of clichés is seen to consist in the way how the constituent signs are fused to a complex supersign (a term not used by Permjakov himself):

– *analytical clichés* can have only a *direct overall meaning*: even if an individual constituting element is used in a non-direct (i.e., transferred, or figurative) understanding, these stereotypes tend to remain mono-semantic, i.e. they have one concrete meaning and do not ask for some extended interpretation;

– *synthetic clichés*, as compared to this, are assumed to have an extended (transferred, figurative) overall meaning, in addition to the direct, which cannot (or not completely) be derived from the meanings of the individual components; synthetic clichés are considered to refer not only, as a linguistic supersign, to a specifically denoted segment of reality, but, as a paremic cliché, to all similar situations of which they are a model.

The crucial difference between analytical and synthetic clichés thus is the kind of overall motivation, which goes along with their mono- vs. polythematicity, on the one hand, and their quality of being a secondary modelling system or not. To give but one example as to the concept of polythematicity: prognostic sayings<sup>19</sup> such as *When swallows fly high, the weather will be dry* or *Low flies the swallow, rain to follow* would have to be considered as analytical clichés, being restricted to the observation of swallows' behavior and predictions derived from it, and allowing for no (or at least not asking for any) semantically extended interpretation; in contrast, the thematically similar proverb *One swallow does not make a summer*, as a synthetic cliché, also (or even only) works when referring to situations which have

<sup>18</sup> A synoptic survey of Permjakov's conception can be found in his 1970 book *Om поговорки до сказки*, which was translated into English in 1979 under the title of *From Proverb to Folktale*. However, his theory of proverbs was significantly elaborated upon in the 1970s and therefore is not contained in the English translation, which is obsolete, in this respect.

<sup>19</sup> Sometimes, such prognostic sayings have been termed *weather proverbs*, although the term *proverb* is reasonably better reserved for synthetic clichés.

nothing to do with swallows (or other kinds of birds), seasons of the year, etc.<sup>20</sup>, but rather, in a more general sense, to situations in which the (first) appearance of a specific phenomenon should not be (mis)interpreted as an obligatory index of the appearance of circumstances usually accompanying it.<sup>21</sup>

Thus attributing the proverbial genre to the category of synthetic clichés, it is important to emphasize that this concerns *literal* (*L*-proverbs) and *figurative* (*F*-proverbs) proverbs alike. In this respect, it is of utmost importance to emphasize that a proverbial text as a whole is always motivated, i.e., neither in *L*-proverbs nor in *F*-proverbs motivation can be absent; this is a clear difference in comparison to the situation in phraseology, where a phraseme may be fully motivated, partly motivated, or non-motivated, depending on the component's status, their function for the phraseological whole and the possibility to derive the latter from the individual components (Burger, 2007: 96).

Yet, both types of proverbs differ according to their motivational character: *F*-proverbs are (or can be) motivated figuratively, *F*-proverbs directly. The fact that not only *F*-proverbs, but *L*-proverbs as well are synthetic, so that the overall meaning of both can be understood to be extended (or transferred), may at first glance be as surprising, as well as the fact that not only *F*-proverbs, but also *L*-proverbs can contain individual (lexical) tropes – yet, these assumptions are fully in line with what has been termed a *holistic* approach above.

Under these conditions, the figurative character of proverbs appears in a different light, as compared to many traditional conceptions: now the question is foreground, which options and which restrictions there are as to the occurrence of tropes in *L*-proverbs and in *F*-proverbs. In the framework outlined, this question may be asked separately (a) on the basis of text properties, and (b) with regard to properties of the lexical components. Both perspectives are not completely independent of

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**20** In one way or another, this concept thus is based on conventionalized meanings of lexical signs. This does bit exclude, of course, that one might artificially construe a (situative) context, in which a figurative interpretation of a prognostic saying might be possible; however, in this case we would not be concerned with an analytic cliché any more, but with an instance of paremic homonymy.

**21** Ultimately, it is this Generic-Specific relation, which has been emphasized by cognitive linguists from the 1980s on (e.g., Lakoff & Johnson (1980), in context of a theory of metaphor, to be relevant for proverbs, too (e.g., Lakoff & Turner (1989 : 162). Notwithstanding the lack of empirical evidence, including the danger of overemphasizing subjective introspection (Gibbs et al. 1996), cognitivist linguistics has attracted much attention by phraseologists and paremiologists, ignoring the close resemblance of these ideas to Perlmutter's linguistic and folkloristic ideas, as pointed out by Krikmann (1984) in his critical review of the cognitivist approach. In this context, Krikmann suggests that the Generic-Specific metaphor might be better understood as a metonymy; this classification might be seen as a parallel to Norrick's (1985) classification of proverbs as *scenic species-genus synecdoches* – but in this case, the proverb as a genre would generally be concerned and not – as Norrick (2007: 389), basing his distinctions on the relation between 'literal' and customary meaning, sees it –, only a specific subtype of proverbs.

other because, according to Permjakov (1979: 113-115), for each of the two paremic types there are clear interdependencies between the properties of the components and global text properties.

In addition to further distinctive properties enumerated by Permjakov (1979: 10-112), the one which is most relevant for the treatment of figurativeness in proverbs and the distinction between *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs is the dichotomy between directly motivated and figuratively motivated components, the latter further being sub-divided into metaphorically motivated, on the one hand, and otherwise motivated components (i.e. metonymies, synecdoches, hyperboles, etc.), on the other. From this results an essential difference between the overall meaning of *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs:

1. the overall meaning of *F*-proverbs is always metaphorical, and no direct interpretation is possible here;
2. for *L*-proverbs, a direct interpretation is possible, notwithstanding the possible presence of figurative components.

This general distinction goes along with a number of differences as to constituting components:

1. both *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs may contain direct components:
  - a) in *L*-proverbs all components can be direct
  - b) in *F*-proverbs it is excluded that all components are direct
2. both in *L*-proverbs and in *F*-proverbs all components can be figurative (that means, neither *L*-proverbs nor *F*-proverbs must obligatorily contain a direct component)
3. both *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs may contain a metaphorical component:
  - a) if an *L*-proverb contains a metaphorical component, then it must also contain either another direct or a figurative (but in this non-metaphorical) component
  - b) in *F*-proverbs at least one of the components must be metaphorical
  - c) *F*-proverbs may contain, in addition to a metaphorical component, direct components; if, however, an *F*-proverb contains, in addition to a metaphorical component, further figurative components, these can only be metaphorical ones.

Table 4.1 summarizes the most important properties of *L*-proverbs and *F*-proverbs<sup>22</sup> (Permjakov, 1979: 122).

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<sup>22</sup> 'Proverbial aphorisms' and 'proverbs proper' in Permjakov's terminology

**Table 4.1:** Text and component properties of proverbs

	Text properties			Component properties				
	1	2	3	1	2a	2b	3	4
	Possibility of transferred interpretation with direct components present	Possibility of direct interpretation with transferred components present	Overall meaning always metaphoric	All components can be direct	All components can be metaphoric		Obligatory presence of direct component	Obligatory presence of metaphoric component
					Metaphoric transfer	Metaphoric + non-metaphoric transfer		
<b>L-proverb</b>	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	-
<b>F-proverb</b>	+	-	+	-	+	-	-	+

Against this background, proverbs such as *The apple does not fall far from the tree* or *Too many cooks spoil the broth* may of course quite easily be attributed to F-proverbs; with regard to L-proverbs, however, the matter is slightly more complicated, because not only *non-pictorial* proverbs such as *Nothing ventured, nothing gained* or *Exceptions prove the rule* would belong to *this category*, but also sayings containing lexical tropes, such as *Speech is silver, silence is golden* or *A lie has no legs*.

In practice, the classification of tropical and proverbial types may turn out to be more complicated, due fact that the exact definition of a component may be no straight-forward procedure, but the result of a set of complex interrelations. As has been mentioned before, according to Permjakov's text-based approach, analytical and synthetic clichés may be distinguished "depending on the character of links between the component words" (Permjakov, 1979: 106). This formulation is likely to be interpreted in favor of a *component-first approach*, implying that an analysis of the components' status allows for conclusions as to the status of the proverbial whole – in fact, the components' status is, however, but a result of using a proverb as a whole. The word *apple*, however (by default denoting a round fruit with red, yellow, or green skin, firm yellow-white flesh and little pips inside), remains to denote this fruit and not, for example, a pear, independent of the fact if an apple denoted by this word falls far from a tree or not, unless this word occurs, for example, in a proverbial sentence like *The apple does not fall far from a tree*, i.e., when used as a proverb, to refer to a situation which has nothing to do with apples. It is thus the use of the proverb as a whole, which turns the overall meaning out to be proverbial, and only *a posteriori*,

i.e., as a consequence of proverb usage, its individual components may turn out to be figurative, and then we can say something about the figurative status of their components in their intra-textual interrelations.

Starting the analysis from individual words may be an interesting occupation for linguists and folklorists, who are interested in theoretical possibilities. It may also be a necessary procedure in case of unknown proverbs (in this case representing a task to be solved, in this respect similar to riddling processes), or when either a proverb user or a scholar is concerned with proverbs from a culture other than the one s/he is enculturated in. Yet, there is no reason to assume this to be the standard direction of the genesis of proverbs' figurative meanings; rather, knowledge about proverb usage (including internalized about previous usages) in terms of cultural (paremiological) competence seems to play the crucial role. Researchers, oscillating between participation and observation, may eventually forget about this, in this case running into to a methodological trap known by the name of *metagenetic fallacy*.

The lessons to be learnt from these observations are manifold. First, it is obvious that *component-whole* strategies may exist, but that they may differ for ordinary users and analytical researchers. Moreover, and maybe more importantly, they may differ across users, depending on familiarity with a given proverb. In this context, the status of individual tropes is not independent of the status of the proverbial whole; but it would be wrong to assume that the components' status determines the status of the whole – rather, the status of the whole determines the components' status, which then can be understood to stand in specific intra-proverbial interrelations.

This concerns not only, of course, the fact that we are generally concerned with a trope, and not only can eventually determine a specific kind of trope, but also its further semantic interpretation: when used as a proverb as, e.g., in the proverbial sentence *A rolling stone gathers no moss*, individual component like *rolling*, *stone*, or *moss* may turn out to be used figuratively, but how rolling is interpreted (desirable flexibility and diligence, or hyperactivity?), if semantic features of *stone* are activated or not, or if *moss* is understood to be something like *material wealth* or a i.e., desirable to be obtained, or rather avoided,<sup>23</sup> depends, first of all, not on lexical semantic processes, but on the overall paremic meaning, concerning the proverb's overall relation to the denoted (extra-linguistic) segment of reality, which plays the crucial role in this respect.

As a result, it turns out that problems of proverb semantics obviously cannot be solved without reference to some kind of extensional semantics (i.e., taking into account, in one way or another, extra-proverbial reality), and that some concept is needed for what has repeatedly been termed the *proverbial whole*, the *abstract proverb idea*, or the *paremic information beyond the proverb text as such*. In other words: as it is admitted that a proverb contains paremic information beyond the

<sup>23</sup> Lundberg (1958), Milner (1969).

linguistic information given in the text (and that this additional information is not only provided ad hoc by verbal co-texts or situational contexts, but is part of cultural memory at large, based on previous textual and pragmatic experience), no componential semantic description will arrive at an adequate description of proverb meaning; as a consequence, paremiology is in need of having (a) to define referential aspects of proverb usage, and (b) to discuss how this additional information can be semantically described and if a special meta-language is needed for this description. For this purpose, a short theoretical discussion of semiotic foundations seems to be necessary.

## 4.6 Sign Concepts: System-based vs. Process-oriented Semiotics

In most sign concepts, particularly those used in the field of linguistics, and here first of all those which feel obliged, in one way or another, to the Saussurean tradition, a sign is understood as a binary relation between a signifying expression and a signified content<sup>24</sup>, as illustrated in Figure 4.1:



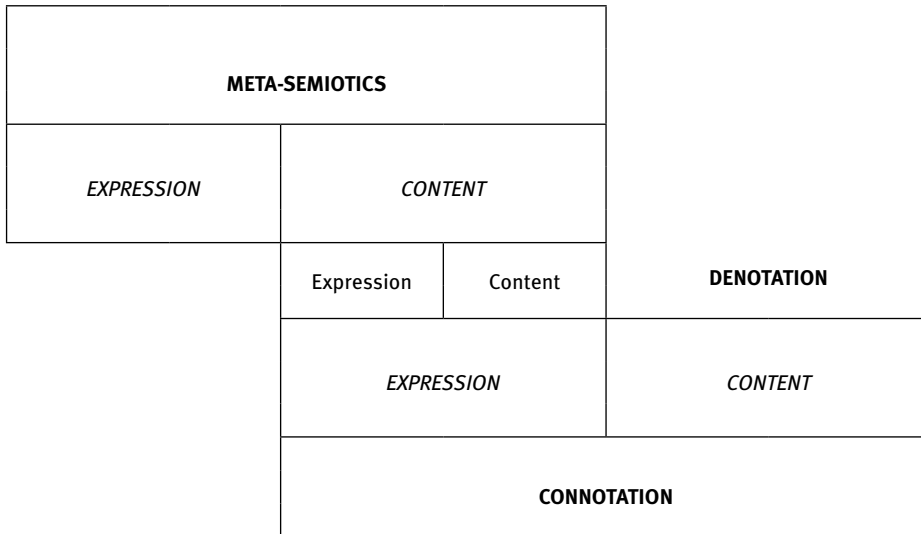
**Figure 4.1:** Bilateral sign concept

In this framework, a sign is considered to be an element of (or belong to) a given sign system, its meaning depending on its relation to (or rather difference from) the other signs of that system. On the basis of the sign's differential relations, the denotative level of signification is determined as the basis of any sign process, from which more complex relations are possible in two directions: either towards a meta-linguistic or towards a connotative sign. In the first case, the combined expression and content planes of a given (denotative) sign serve as the content of a meta-linguistic sign; in the second case, expression and content of the denotative sign function as the expression of a connotative sign. This approach goes back to Danish linguist Hjelmslev's ideas in his *Outline of Glossematics* (1957). It was later popularized by scholars such as Roland Barthes, who applied this concept not only to individual signs, but transferred it to texts (e.g., myths), using *text* in the broad semiotic meaning of this term, not restricting it to verbal texts, treating them as super-signs as outlined above. Usually, both

<sup>24</sup> The fact of Saussure's psychological (or cognitive) definition of the sign and its components is not of primary concern here.



processes are depicted separately; as compared to this, Figure 4.2 is an attempt to represent both levels simultaneously.



**Figure 4.2:** Simultaneous representation of both levels of sign

As can easily be seen, in this concept the question of an adequate meta-language is complicated by the fact that the meaning of a connotative sign, like that of a denotative, can only be described by meta-linguistic procedures. A crucial question thus is if that meta-language which covers the first (denotative) level of meaning, can (or should) also cover the second (connotative) level of meaning, or if special meta-language is needed for each of them.

Moreover, such a scheme is almost perfectly suited to evoke objections from a theoretical point of view for other reasons:

- a) it includes only two levels of signification, not taking into consideration the possibility that there might be multiple levels in the process of meaning generation;
- b) it appears to operate on both levels of signification with fixed assignments between expression and content, which may not be less relevant in semiotic reality;
- c) it seems to suggest the possibility of a strict distinction between denotation and connotation, neglecting fluent transitions between both;
- d) it gives rise to the impression that we might be concerned with an allegedly successive generation of connotative meaning, implying the need of a literal reading of the denotative meaning first, ignoring the option that the connotative meaning might be accessed directly, leapfrogging the denotative one.

Further objections might come not only from post-structuralist and deconstructivist positions, but from a process-oriented semiotic perspective as well. As compared

to system-based approaches, rooting in the Saussurean tradition, process-oriented approaches, particularly in the tradition of Charles S. Peirce<sup>25</sup>, are principally dynamic: semiosis here is characterized by signs principally referring to other signs, the process of meaning generation thus turning out to be, theoretically, an infinite regress. In this respect, Peirce's 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas meet current post-structuralist and deconstructivist ideas: not only is the assumption of a fixed relation between signifying and signified repealed, also becomes the strict separation of denotative and connotative structures of signification void. Whereas such views thus rub theoretical salt into the wounds of methodological shortcomings of structuralist approaches, they are not compatible with practical needs to describe meanings, e.g., for a lexicographic or, in our case, paremiographic purposes. In a way, they even seem to be inconsistent with the long and productive traditions in these fields, as insufficient, unsatisfactory or *authoritative* as the attribution of allegedly fixed meanings may seem to (post) modern theorists.

Such theoretical discussions must be as strange to paremiographer and paremiologists, striving for semantics descriptions of proverbs, as is the assumption of "invariant meanings" for contemporary post-structuralist and deconstructivist semiotic approaches. In this respect, it is important to note an essential difference between the original Peircean concept and these *modern* ideas: in contrast to current approaches, which see the principally infinite regress as an absolute and indispensable principle, the possibility to communicate is ensured in Peirce's pragmatic approach by the circumstance that at the end of the theoretically infinite regress in semiosis, there stands what he termed a final *logical interpretant*, which does not finish, but interrupt the potentially infinite semiosis.<sup>26</sup>

As compared to the system-bound bilateral sign concept above, process-oriented semiotics thus might eventually provide an alternative theoretical, but obviously impractical basis; this approach might also, under certain conditions, seem to be not fully in contrast to meaning descriptions in terms of a culturally accepted consensus. In this respect, one should not forget that although each process of meaning

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**25** Broadly speaking, in a Peircean framework, a sign process is a dynamic interaction of three components: the *representamen*, a functionally defined sign carrier, an *object*, and the *interpretant*, an interpreting consciousness. The *object* additionally is specified as an *immediate object* (as represented in the sign itself), and the *dynamic object* (only indicated by the sign, to be cognized by collateral experience only); similarly, different kinds of interpretants are distinguished, which need not be discussed here in detail. In any case, an interpretant must not be confused with the interpreter as the sign user.

**26** According to Peirce (Hartshorne & Weiss, 1931-1958), this logical interpretant is "what *would* finally be decided to be the true interpretation if consideration of the matter *were* carried so far as that an ultimate opinion *were* reached". The final interpretant thus ultimately is based upon some customary interpretive consensus, which in principle is only an ideal and can be achieved only by way of some (quasi-asymptotical) approximation.

generation is in principle an individual act of meaning generation and interpretation, in case of proverbs we are specifically concerned with collectively or culturally conventionalized and agreed-upon meanings. This view would not claim such culturally accepted meanings, or their descriptions, to be fixed, obligatory once and for all; rather, taking into account individual proverb use, all factors of semantic indefiniteness pointed out above would persist, the meaning description thus turning out to be exactly that semantic potential it has been postulated to be above. Seen from this perspective, connotative meanings and their semantic descriptions thus

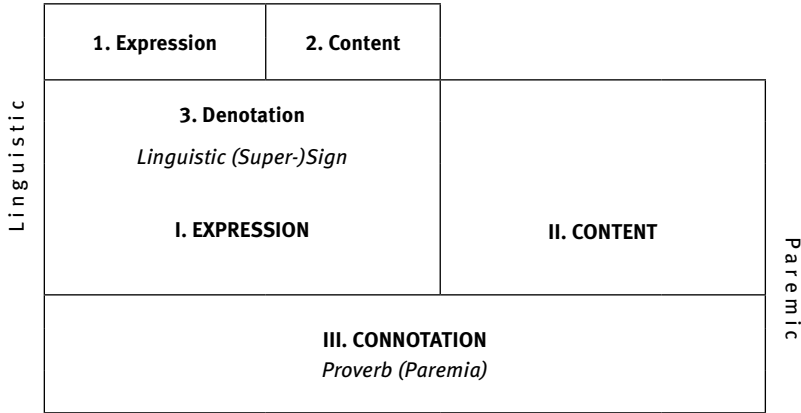
- would not be confined to two meanings, or levels of meaning, but include possibly multiple planes, of which the denotative and the connotative ones are those which most likely to incorporate inter-subjective consensus;
- would not imply any assumption as to successive stages in comprehension processes, i.e. they would not make, for example, any predictions as to some stepwise succession as, e.g., in terms of a denotation-before-connotation approach;
- would not go along with the authoritative claim to represent the only, true or ultimate meaning; rather it would be understood to be as one of many possible meanings in the course of an eventually longer (and theoretically infinite) chain of meanings;
- would represent some kind of temporary snapshot, subject to diachronic changes, rather than eternal truth;
- would remain to have the status of a semantic potential, along with other elements of semantic indefiniteness as acknowledged in the field of paremiology.

Under these conditions, semantic concepts distinguishing between a denotative and a connotative plane of signification might be unfettered from structuralist restrictions without at the same time forfeiting the chance to describe meanings which lend themselves to inter-subjective consensus within a given culture, despite all potentiality and tentativeness. The remaining methodologically crucial question how paremiologists can provide reliable semantic descriptions is a process which includes two different aspects: (a) insight into proverbs meanings, and (b) their meta-linguistic description. Both issues have been dealt with before: on the one hand, the inevitable oscillation between (intrinsic) participation and (extrinsic) observation, on the other hand, the choice of concrete meta-language in the process of finding a balance between specificity and generality.

Attempts to avoid getting lost in a circle of arguments and counter-arguments have referred to the above-mentioned concept of connotative semiotics, defining the proverb as a connotative semiotic super-sign. One of the first to apply this concept to proverbs was Canadian anthropologist Cr  peau, referring to a rather peripheral remark by Greimas (1970: 310), seeing proverbs as *connotative elements* [*  l  ments connot  s*]: “On the first level, signification is determined by denotation, i.e., by an immediate (albeit arbitrary) relation between designating and designated. On the second level, signification is determined by connotation, i.e., by a mediated relation between

connotating and connotated” (Crépeau, 1975: 288). Crépeau was not the first to propagate this concept: with explicit regard to proverbs Russian scholar Čerkasskij (1978) had already promoted this idea some years before him, assuming that the aggregate of expression and content is but the verbal realization on the linguistic level, at the same time representing the substance of expression for the supra-linguistic semiotic level of an *inhomogeneous* text, in which more than one sign system is simultaneously operative. In this context, Čerkasskij made an important distinction: according to him, a sentence such as *The apple does not fall far from the tree* is the complex sign to denote a particular, individual situation, of one may say that the text represents a verbal model of that situation; as a proverb, however, it serves as a sign not of an individual situation, but of a *class of situations*, and thus serves not (only) as a primary, but as a secondary modeling system.

Illustrating the application of these ideas to the concept of connotative semiotics outlined above results the graphical representation depicted in Figure 4.3.



**Figure 4.3:** Application of Čerkasskij’s and Crépeau’s ideas to the concept of connotative semiotics

Both Čerkasskij and Crépeau thus, independent of each other, developed similar ideas, although with slightly different (not necessarily contradictory) foci as to the conclusions drawn: whereas Čerkasskij paved the way for model-oriented interpretations, Crépeau emphasized the importance of analogy – two interpretations which do not necessarily contradict each.

## 4.7 Logics and Analogics

Crépeau (1975) illustrated the distinction between two levels of signification, and the importance of analogy, referring to the following proverb: *Dog of the king – king of*

*the dogs*. If the implicit analogy, so his argument, were to be determined on the basis of the first level of signification only, one would arrive at an absurd formulation like *DOG : KING :: KING : DOG*. In fact, however, we are rather concerned with a different analogy, which may be expressed in terms of *KING'S DOG : OTHER DOGS :: KING : DOG*. Crépeau's considerations are relevant in several respects, not only with regard to the important distinction of two levels of signification. They also deserve special mention here because they introduce the important concept of analogy,<sup>27</sup> which opens the doors in two directions: first, they allow for the conceptual integration with attempts to logically formalize proverbial structures; and second, they can perfectly be combined with theoretical concepts distinguishing different types of situation, relevant in context of the proverb and its usage. Both lines shall briefly be outlined here, starting with those attempts concerned with logical modelings of proverbial structures.

Earlier works in this direction, including those from Klaus (1964) or Kanyó (1981), focused on the level of denotation only; moreover, they tended to neglect important differences between phrasemes, idioms, and proverbs. As compared to this, Krikmann (1984) took into account the distinction of both levels of signification, and presented a coherent concept with a theoretically substantiated distinction between phraseological and paremiological entities. This distinction is based on the fundamental juxtapositions of phraseological information ( $P_x$ ) and paremic information ( $P_x \supset Q_x$ ), on the one hand, and existential ( $\exists_x$ ) and universal ( $\forall_x$ ) quantification (*there exists* and *for all*), on the other.<sup>28</sup>

In detail, it is a matter of scholarly tradition, of course, how the resulting categories may terminologically be distinguished from each other, and how they are logically symbolized. In any case, three kinds of basic categories<sup>29</sup> result from the above distinctions:

<sup>27</sup> In this respect, one should well be aware of the fact that, logically speaking, analogy principally includes the relation between two ordered pairs (of terms or concepts); quite characteristically, the ancient Greek term *ἀναλογία* (*analogia*) originally meant proportionality, in the mathematical sense, and eventually was translated into Latin as *proportio* as a set of equations in which two relations are equated. There is no need to go into details here as to a discussion of analogy – after all, one may still today side with John Stuart Mill's (1843) wise words saying that “There is no word, which is used more loosely, or in a greater variety of senses, as Analogy”. – Nevertheless, Crépeau may be seen fully right in arguing that proverbs need not necessarily be characterized by fully explicit four-term analogies.

<sup>28</sup> The background of these distinctions must be seen in philosophical and linguistic theory, where a proposition includes nomination, predication, junction, and quantification. In this context, nomination is a necessary condition for predication, the latter implying the attribution of a property to a subject (or object). Whereas phraseological information ( $P_x$ ) thus concerns nomination (which, grammatically speaking, is not restricted to nouns, but may comprise verbs, too), paremic information ( $P_x \supset Q_x$ ) contains, by definition, a predication, a proverb thus corresponding to a proposition, which may either refer to the relation between two (or more) objects, or to an object and (one of) its properties.

<sup>29</sup> It goes without saying that within each of these basic categories, a number of further subdivisions are possible and necessary.

Category	Logical formulation	Type
I	$\exists_x (x = a)(P_x)$ or $\exists_x (P_x)$	Phraseme
II	$\exists_x (x = a)(P_x \supset Q_x)$ or $\exists_x (P_x \supset Q_x)$	Proverbial phrase / saying
III	$\forall_x (P_x \supset Q_x)$	Proverb

Items to be classified as phrasemes thus are characterized by existential quantification and ask for the choice of an individual argument (denoted as  $x = a$ , or  $x_i$ ) complementing the phraseological information  $P_x$  as, e.g., in expressions such as *to spill the beans*, or *to bury the hatchet*, linguistically resulting in an expression such as *\*Peter spilled the beans*. As compared to this, proverbial phrases such as *to put the cart before the horse* or *to set a fox to keep the geese* would also be related to existential quantification with an individual argument, but – in contrast to phrasemes – contain paremic information ( $P_x \supset Q_x$ ), that is, concern the relation between two concepts and/or the attribution of a property to (at least) one of them. Finally, proverbs are by definition complete propositions, prototypically represented by items such as *The apple does not fall far from the tree* or *Water always flows downhill*, as heterogeneous as these may be. Two examples may seem to appear at first sight; in this respect, it is important to note that proverbs are logically, but not necessarily grammatically complete statements, universal quantification being obligatory and characteristic for them from a logical perspective.<sup>30</sup>

Items of all three classes have partly been dealt with by different disciplines: phrasemes and proverbial sayings have been in the focus of phraseology, or idiomatics, the lacking distinction between these two classes being favored by the fact that, in languages like English, they have been sub-summarized under the common term *idiom* without further distinction. Proverbial sayings and proverbs, as compared to this, have been studied by paremiology, the group of proverbial sayings thus having received scholarly attention from both fields.

One of the reasons for these disciplinary overlappings is of course the existence of fluent transitions between phrasemes and proverbial sayings as well as between the latter and proverbs. But such zones of possible interferences, which eventually make the attribution to one of the categories difficult, may also be related to differences in meta-language. Expressions such as *a wolf in sheep's clothing* or *to make a mountain out of a molehill* may, on the one hand, be paraphrased mono-lexically (e.g. in terms of *pretender*, *hypocrite*, *pharisee*, or *exaggerate*, *overemphasize*, respectively), resulting in the perception of one concept only; on the other hand, they may also be interpreted to explicitly relate two concepts with each other (e.g., something *small* and

<sup>30</sup> The fluent transitions from proverbial phrases to proverbs become most evident in verbal constructions like “One/You should (not) ...”.

*unimportant* vs. something *big* and *important*, or *peaceful looks* vs. *dangerous character*, etc.), thus the relation between two different concepts tending to being focused. By way of a pragmatic solution, it may seem reasonable, from a semiotic point of view, to consider such items to represent some kind of phraseo-paremiological homonyms (Grzybek & Eismann, 1994).

Quite obviously, the distinctions discussed here concern both proverbs' textual surface (i.e. the denotative level of signification) and the meta-linguistic modeling of their connotative meaning structures; in this case, the concrete attribution to one of the categories again depends on specifics of usage, rather than on textual characteristics only. Usage, however, now concerns not so much situational circumstances, but first and foremost cognitive processes, the relevant question concentrating on the point if a user tends to see the items verbalized in the given phraseo-paremiological expression to represent an individual concept or a specific relation between concepts – a task not only for the disciplines of phraseology and paremiology, but first and foremost for psycholinguistics, which might find a promising field of research here, using more refined theoretical distinctions than has hitherto been the standard.

Despite a number of open questions and unsolved problems outlined above, we can thus return to Crépeau's conclusion that a proverb's paremic meaning results from the structural integration of two levels of signification, which in general way can be represented in terms of the logical formula  $A : B :: C : D$ .<sup>31</sup>

## 4.8 Analogy, Double Analogy, and the Concept of Situativity

This analogy should not be confounded, however, with the analogical processes involved in proverb usage, as pointed out by folklorist Peter Seitel in a number of papers, in which he suggested a useful heuristic model (Seitel, 1969; 1972). Seitel's schema is based on the central assumption that the situation in which a proverb is used (the *interaction situation*) is of course not identical with the situation verbally represented in and by the proverb text (the *proverb situation*), and that both of them are not identical with the situation the proverb refers to<sup>32</sup>, i.e., the situation to which it is intended to be applied (the *reference situation*).<sup>33</sup> According to Seitel, proverb usage is

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<sup>31</sup> There is no need to deal here in detail with the circumstance that not in all proverbs, all terms of these relations must be explicitly expressed.

<sup>32</sup> A proverb may, of course, but need not refer to the situation in which it is used; but heuristically, both must be principally distinguished.

<sup>33</sup> Seitel's original term *context situation* is avoided here and replaced by the term *reference situation*, since *context* might erroneously be applied the interaction situation. Quite evidently, a proverb may refer to that situation, in which it is used, but this is not necessarily the case; as a consequence, it is better to clearly (heuristically, conceptually, and terminologically) distinguish them.

thus related to two distinct, though closely related processes: (i) the process of relating proverb situation to reference situation, and (ii) the speech act of applying the proverb in an interaction situation. This resulting differentiation is illustrated in Figure 4.4.

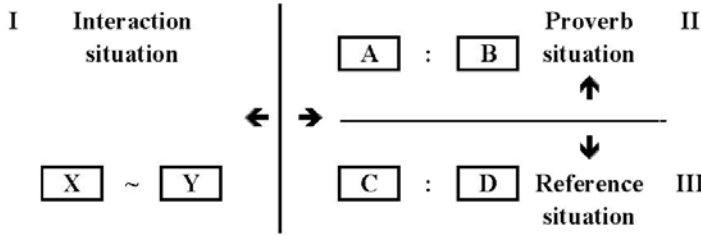


Figure 4.4: Basic distinction of three types of situation involved in proverb usage

As can be seen, proverb usage thus is related to two distinct though closely related processes: (a) the speech act of applying a proverb in a given interaction situation<sup>34</sup>, and (b) the process of relating proverb situation to reference situation. Concentrating on the second process, Seitel sees it as an analogy between the relationship of entities of the proverb situation and entities of the reference situation, which he expresses in terms of  $A : B :: C : D$  (Figure 4.4).

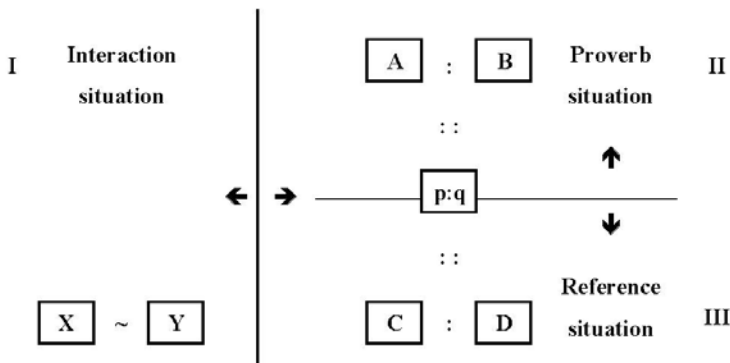
Quite obviously, the situational schema refers to the first, denotative level of the *proverb situation* (i.e. the proverb text), ignoring the existence of two levels of signification outlined about and the structural analogy resulting from it. In fact, we thus seem to be concerned with two different analogies which; unfortunately, both of them have been symbolized in an identical manner (i.e., by way of  $A : B :: C : D$ ), what may give rise to difficulties when attempting to integrate both views. In fact, such attempts, as e.g. suggested by Grzybek (1984a: 235), have not always been correctly understood (Honeck, 1997), last not least due to the fact that identical symbols have been used to refer to different things; as a consequence, it seems reasonable to explicate the argumentation stepwise again.

For the purpose of the necessary integration of both approaches, it seems first reasonable to maintain the symbolization  $A : B$  for the denotative signification of the proverb situation, and to replace Crépeau's symbols for the second level of signification (i.e.,  $C : D$ ) by the symbolic notation of  $p : q$ ; the structural analogy outlined by Crépeau would thus be symbolized as  $A : B :: p : q$ . Under this condition, the extra-linguistic reference situation can be symbolized as  $C : D$ , as in Seitel's schema; and since it is rather the paremic meaning of the second (connotative) level of signification, which is related to the reference situation, the analogy outlined by Seitel might

<sup>34</sup> Here and throughout this text, particular forms of proverb usage as, e.g., in literary texts, will not specifically be dealt with.



is then symbolized as  $p : q :: C : D$ . All in all, this would result in the double analogy  $A : B :: p : q :: C : D$ , as suggested by Grzybek (1984a), and as illustrated in Figure 4.5.

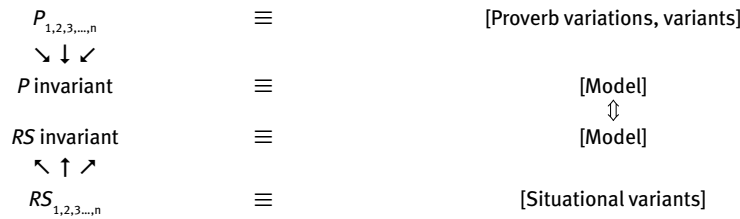


**Figure 4.5:** Double analogy in proverb usage

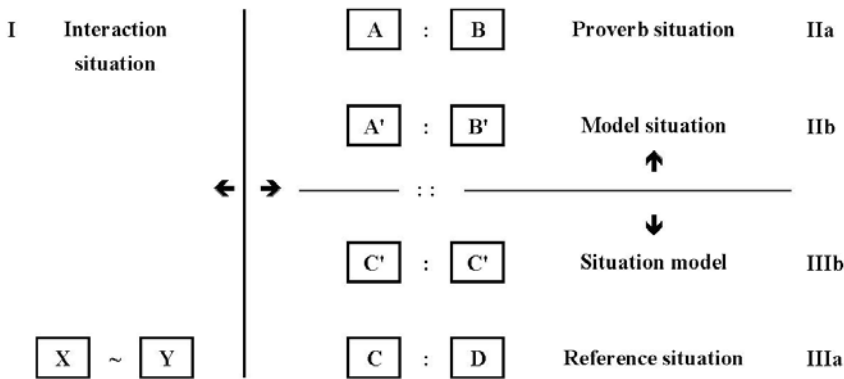
Although this schema, attempting to integrate two different concepts, pays due attention to the processes involved, it has later turned out that it needs some additional specification and modification (Grzybek, 1998; 2000; 2007; Chlosta & Grzybek, 2005), a major problem to be seen in the (at least implicit) identification of two abstraction results, which de facto are not identical. This becomes evident from a closer look at model-theoretical concepts, in line with modern paremiological ideas, which have emphasized the important role of models and modeling inherent in proverbs and proverb usage. Given a principally infinite set  $S = \{P_{1,2,3,\dots}\}$  of individual proverbs (i.e., of proverb texts), and given a principally infinite set  $R = \{RS_{1,2,3,\dots}\}$  of (possible) reference situations to which any one  $P$  of the proverbs may refer, all those proverbs from  $S$ , which express one and the same meaning, can be considered to be variants, or variations<sup>35</sup>, of one and the same proverb invariant, or *model situation*; and all those individual reference situations  $RS$  from  $R$ , to which a given proverb (or one of its variants, or variations) may refer to can be considered to be some situational class, or type, which is represented in terms of a *situation model*. These assumptions can be illustrated as follows:<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> As to a more detailed distinction between the notions of *variant* and *variation* (see Grzybek et al., 1994; Grzybek, 2012b; Chlosta & Grzybek, 2005)

<sup>36</sup> Although sets  $S$  and  $R$  both are, in principle, infinite, a given individual's proverb knowledge is, of course, characterized on the basis of a limited number of experiences with individual proverbs and situations, what is correspondingly symbolized.



At closer sight, we rather seem to be concerned with two different abstraction processes: first, it has been argued, a general (paremic) meaning is abstracted from the denotative text of the *proverb situation*, and the term *model situation* has been suggested to denote it; and second, the individual and unique *reference situation* as a situational *token* a proverb refers to must be sub-categorized under, or attributed to a general *type* (or class) of situations, which might be termed *situation model*. The resulting schema might thus be illustrated as in Figure 4.6:



**Figure 4.6:** Additional distinctions of proverbial situation types

The schema represented in Figure 4.6 does not contain (any more) the previous (at least implicitly contained) assumption of a single abstraction process, represented above by the relation  $p : q$  (Figure 4.5). Rather, Figure 4.6 expresses the idea that we are concerned with two (different) abstraction processes.<sup>37</sup>

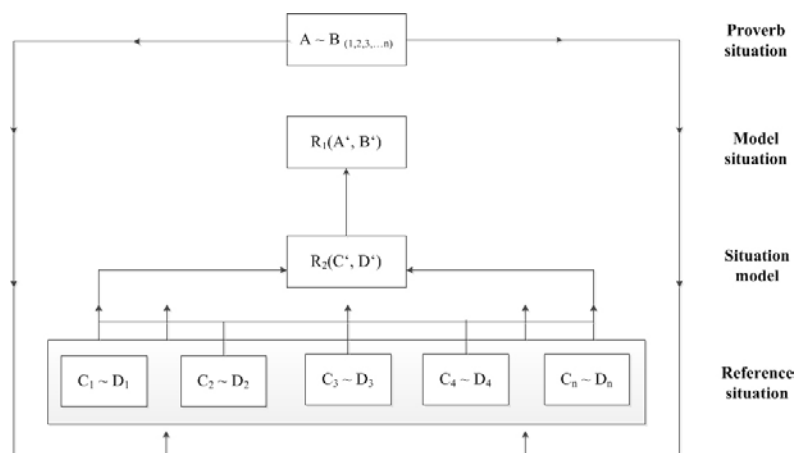
Comparing the basic implications of the conceptions illustrated in Figs. 5 and 6, one may say that the relation  $p : q$  is related to the proportional analogy of

<sup>37</sup> It may be appropriate to bring up some restrictions and caveats here. First, the assumption of two processes of abstraction does not necessarily imply that these take place simultaneously during any cognitive processing of a proverb; also, there is no need to discuss here in detail the complex (and controversially seen) interrelations between abstraction and analogy, i.e. to analyze the role of analogical reasoning in abstraction, or abstraction processes in analogy processing.

$A' : B' :: C' : D'$ , which might as well be expressed in terms of the relation of two distinct sets of related objects, i.e.:  $\{R_1(A', B')\} R \{R_2(C', D')\}$ . Seen from this perspective,  $p : q$  would but express the ground of the similarity between two relations of the sets ( $A', B'$ ) and ( $C', D'$ ), along with the assumption of at least one common feature between these sets, determining in what respect(s)  $A'$  is to  $B'$  (as  $C'$  is to  $D'$ ), the feature(s) resulting from an interpretative process. In other words, if (and only if), within a process of proverb usage, such a proportional analogy is drawn, on the basis of and resulting from some interpretive process, one can speak of successful proverb usage.

However, although this schema is much more elaborated and differentiated, it still contains a major problem, primarily to be seen in the alleged symmetry it expresses: this symmetry is, however, but a final state of successful proverb usage, and it might give rise to the (wrong) assumption that one might reliably arrive at the abstract meaning (i.e., the model situation) starting from a proverb's verbal surface, or without taking account of the reference situation (or rather the situation model related to it). Abstracting proverb meaning from the verbal surface of a proverb's text seems to be possible, particularly to persons enculturated in a given culture; after all, semantic potential and indefiniteness are increasingly reduced by any further (successful) proverb usage. Actually, however, such interpretations are based on previous encounters and experiences with usages of the given proverb – de facto, they are (more or less) reliable only a posteriori, knowing all (pragmatic and semantic) conditions and restrictions of usage and reference, that is, only if both some situation model and some model situation have repeatedly been related to each other. As a matter of fact, even paremiologists may fall (and have repeatedly fallen) into this meta-genetic trap, interpreting proverb texts by way of a (conscious or subconscious, correct or incorrect) transfer and extrapolation of proverb knowledge from their own culture(s).

Figure 4.7 is an attempt to schematically represent not only the synchronous final state, but the process of model generation in its genesis.



**Figure 4.7:** Genesis of proverb meaning – integration of heterogeneity, polyfunctionality, and polysemanticity

This schema illustrates, among others, that a semantic interpretation (and classification) of proverbial utterances is not reliably possible without knowledge of the culturally accepted contexts and admitted reference situations (i.e., the situation models). It also illustrates the close interrelation between pragmatics and semantics, emphasizing that the reliable generation of a model situation is impossible without the (repeated) exposure to adequate reference situation, i.e., the without repeated processes of referentialization (or the semiotically mediated knowledge about them).

Referring to the model-theoretic assumptions dealt with above, it is thus possible to derive an important aspect of a proverb definition in general, which might be phrased as follows:

*A proverb is a model of some situation denoted by it, if – eventually within a given INTERACTION SITUATION (I) – such a MODEL SITUATION (IIb) can be derived from a given PROVERB SITUATION (IIa), that stands in isological relation to some SITUATION MODEL (IIIb), derived from a concrete REFERENCE SITUATION (IIIa) and eventually previous ones.*

Given these assumptions, it is obvious that for participants of a given culture, scholars of paremiology among them, the description of model situation and situation model seemingly coincide or are identical – in principle they are, however, heuristically speaking, two faces of a double-faced coin called *successful proverb usage*. The illustration in Figure 4.7 does not only make it clear that it is not, or not necessarily, possible to derive the abstract proverb meaning from its verbal surface form; it also makes clear that a semantic description cannot be based on verbal information alone.

As a consequence, it seems plausible to claim that a semantic description – and, as a consequence, of semantic classification – of proverbs ultimately asks for the description of situations, or of model situations, to be more exact. The concentration

on modeled situation for the semantic classification has extensively been discussed by Permjakov whose conception still today provides one of the most elaborate systems for the semantic classification of proverbs.

## 4.9 From Proverb Semantics to Semantic Proverb Classification

In his *Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom*, Permjakov (1979: 317) claims proverbs to be “signs and at the same time models of various typical situations”. Consequently, he postulates that “a classification of the situations themselves” has to be worked out, if one wants to categorize proverbs on the basis of their meanings (Permjakov 1979: 306). Since the distinctions suggested above were not made at the time when Permjakov developed his ideas, his notion of *situation* was not as specified as in the differentiations above. On the one hand, this has led to a variety of misunderstandings and misinterpretations of his ideas (Schveiger, Kanyó, Švydkaja and others), which can and need not be discussed here in detail (see Grzybek 1984a); on the other hand, this led to inconsistencies in Permjakov’s own classifications, some of which were rather based on the denotative, rather than the connotative level of signification (i.e. on the proverb situation, not the model situation).

Nevertheless, given the descriptions above, Permjakov’s claim out to be completely reasonable and still today of high relevance, as long (or as soon) as we take into consideration neither the proverb situations nor the extra-linguistic reference situations as the basis for the semantic description and classification of proverbs, but the model situations of the second level of signification. With this in mind, it is a tempting question to ask, which situations, or what kind of situations, are modelled in proverbs, and how these situational models can be described.

Permjakov’s approach can be seen as a specification of what has been symbolized as the relation  $R(A', B')$  above. From his early writings on, Permjakov distinguished four different *Higher logico-semiotic invariants*, as he termed them. Two of them model the relationships between objects or between objects and their properties, the other two are more complex, modeling the dependence between the relationships of things and the relationships of their properties. In detail, we obtain the following four invariants:

Type	Description	Example
I A	Every object has a particular quality or property.	<i>Water always flows downhill.</i> <i>Each flower has its own flavor.</i>
I B	If there is one object, there is (will be) another object.	<i>No smoke without fire.</i> <i>Rain is followed by sunshine.</i>
II A	The relationships between the properties of objects depend on the relationships between the objects themselves.	<i>Like father, like son.</i> <i>The cat's death is holiday for the mice.</i>
II B	The interrelationships of objects depend on (the existence of) particular properties of these objects.	<i>If two quarrel, the third will laugh.</i> <i>A sparrow in the hand is worth two in the bush.</i>

The logico-semiotic classification is more complex than the examples above can show, and the system has been elaborated over the years by Permjakov himself; in its latest version in the *Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom*, each of the four types above is sub-divided into seven further categories (and allowing for further specifications and sub-classifications).

This logico-semiotic categorization is then necessarily complemented by a thematic classification: analyzing three proverbs such as (i) *No smoke without fire*, (ii) *No rose without thorns*, and (iii) *No river without bank*, all three would belong to invariant IA, each of them containing the statement that one of the two objects mentioned cannot exist without the second one. Still, the meanings of these three proverbs differ completely – the first (i) maintains that there can be no indication of an object unless the object itself exists; the second claims that there can be no good things without faults; and the third says that no whole can exist without any one of its obligatory parts. Consequently, a proverb's meaning is principally described by the two-fold reference: (a) to one of the logical categories, and (b) to a thematic pair (or a combination of pairs) such as *good – bad*, *cause – reason*, *hot – cold*, *male – female*, etc.), on the other.

The resulting proverbial model<sup>38</sup> may additionally be submitted to what Permjakov termed *paremio(logical) transformations*; according to this view, the basic paremiological model like *Own is good* may be logically transformed in various ways, the results belonging to one and the same proverbial type; this concerns first-order transformations (*Own is bad*) as well as second-order transformations (*Foreign is bad*), from which a number of further subtypes may be derived. Within this framework, not only explicit negations (*The face is no index to the heart* vs. *The face is the index of the heart*; (Norrick,

<sup>38</sup> Only in Permjakov's later writings, like his *Grammar of Proverbial Wisdom* (1979) the model is a two-fold complementation of separate logical and thematic components, whereas in his earlier writing (as his *From Proverb to Folk-Tale*, translated into English in 1979), both components were fused into logico-thematic classes.

1985: 162)) can be theoretically covered, but also proverbial synonyms (*Strike while the iron is hot* vs. *Make hay while the sun shines*) and antonyms (*Out of sight, out of mind* vs. *Absence makes the heart grow fond(er)*).

Permjakov's approach owes, of course, very much to structuralist approaches of the 1970s. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that, according to Permjakov, not more than 64 of such semantic oppositions – which are very similar to those found to be relevant in the semiotic analysis of culture in general –, are sufficient to describe ca. 97% of a culture's proverbial stock. Permjakov's system has suitably been called a *Mendeleevian Proverb Table*, and the question has been raised if his conception is kind of a *hocus pocus system* (Krikmann, 1971, Kuusi, (1972), comparing it to Kuusi's classificational schema as a *God's truth system*. Such a view might seem to be justified referring to Permjakov's claim to describe not only all actually existing, but also all possible (conceivable) proverbs with his model. The juxtaposition of these two kinds of system originates in linguistics, where it was brought into discussion by Householder (1952: 260): "On the metaphysics of linguistics there are two extreme positions, which may be termed (and have been) the 'God's truth' position and the 'hocus pocus' position. The theory of the God's truth linguists [...] is that language has a structure and the job of the linguist is (a) to find out what the structure is, and (b) to describe it [...]. The hocus pocus linguist believes that a language (better, a corpus, since we describe only the corpus we know) is a mass of incoherent formless data, and the job of the linguist is somehow to arrange and organize this mass, imposing on it some structure [...]." It was Jakobson (1962: 276) who repeatedly pointed out the futility of such a controversy; Householder (1952: 260), too, admitted that ultimately it seems to be rather a question of ideological-philosophical differences in approaching one and the same question, partially arriving at identical results, and confessed, "it may be that these two metaphysical viewpoints are in some sense equivalent." The direct relevance of these observations for Permjakov's and Kuusi's models has been pointed out by Voigt (1977: 167): "Kuusi directly departs from the given material, and he tries to arrive at the same results as Permjakov has, with the help of the deductive method."

As has been pointed out above, Permjakov's notion of *situation* was not as specified as this has later been suggested. As a consequence, his own semantic classifications are not void of interpretations which to the first, denotative level of signification, rather than the second, connotative level, i.e., the proverb's abstract meaning. In fact, his system might theoretically be used to describe both levels, although he ultimately had in mind the abstract *proverb idea* as a basis of his semantic classification. In illustrating the problem at stake with reference to but one example, it may be helpful, by way of a comparison, to refer to the Kuusi system (Lauhakangas, 2001). In the Lauhakangas-Kuusi system, the internationally broadly distributed proverb *One hand washes the other* would fall into the general category H *Social Interaction*, more specifically, category H3 (*Group Solidarity*), or H3A, respectively (*Solidarity to one's own people*). Permjakov attributed it to the invariant IB (see above), and within it into a sub-category entitled *Tendency of things to be close to each other; Friendship*

– *Hostility* (9LA), in combination with the semantic opposition of *Left* – *Right*; quite obviously, it is rather the concrete spatial relation of two hands, which is in the focus of this classification, both with regard to the logical and thematic classification. As compared to this, Grzybek and Chłosta (Grzybek & Chłosta, 2000), in their attempt to consequently apply Permjakov's system to the second level of signification, suggest to attribute it to the sub-category *Existential dependence of a thing or an action on another one* (8KA) of invariant IB, combining it with the semantic pair *Action* – *Reaction*, *If there is an action, there is / will be a reaction*. As can be seen, no statement as to the quality of action or reaction is included into the model, what makes clear, how difficult it is to take account of possible culture-specific pragmatic restrictions: for cultures which would use this proverb to refer to good favors as a reaction to good favors only, the addition of the thematic pair *good* – *bad* might be necessary. Quite evidently, this is related to the fact that semantic descriptions of proverbs – and neither Permjakov's nor Kuusi's systems are exceptions to this rule – principally cannot but provide metalinguistic descriptions of the given proverb's semantic potential in Krikmann's terms; further semantically relevant information – be that of functional, pragmatic, situational, deontic, modal, or other kind – at least to data cannot adequately be mapped onto the paremiological model.

It turns out that attention has to be paid to the important interdependence of three basic categories, which have been termed *polyfunctionality*, *polysemanticity*, and *heterosituativity* (Grzybek, 1984a). Whereas the concepts of *polyfunctionality* and *polysemanticity* refer to the fact that one and the same text may serve different functions and may represent different meanings, the concept of *heterosituativity* covers the fact that a proverb can convey different meanings, depending on the situation in which it is used. None of these three categories, which condition each other in one way or another, can be interpreted in isolation. And it seems to be for this specific interrelation that no ultimate meaning can ever be described to a particular proverb text.

On the one hand, this may sound like paremiological surrender; on the other hand, this corresponds to those degrees of semiotic freedom, necessary for successful proverb usages.

Systems like Permjakov's thus provide a way to theoretically describe and map the paradigmatic inventory of a culture's proverbial stock. In fact, this system is only partly deductively derived, consisting of a systematic extrapolation of initially inductive classifications; in semiotics, it has again been Charles S. Peirce who coined the term *abductive reasoning* to describe this scientific process, oscillating between induction and deduction. In our case, a paremiological system has resulted, in which the individual *slots* represent possibilities, which may be realized or not, within a given culture, thus also possibly containing so-called *empty cells* (as known in the field of phonology, as well), i.e. theoretical models for proverbial utterances, which are not even realized by concrete proverbs within a given culture.



## 4.10 Theoretical and Empirical Paremiology and the Semiotics of Culture

From the perspective of cultural semiotics, this opens new perspectives to study the (social and cultural) function of proverbs as a genre, allowing to ask the question, which proverbs are realized within a given culture, and which are not. In this respect, paremiology can immensely contribute to the more general study of culture from a semiotic point of view, or in a semiotic perspective.

But culture is a process, a synchronous snapshot, at best, being subject to constant changes. Searching an answer to the profile and size of a culture's proverbial stock, thus is dependent on the previous documentation of proverbs, which necessarily must represent some past, recent or not. Of course, proverbial stocks do not change within a day's time – trying to find an answer to the question outlined, and necessarily relying on (more or less) obsolete documentation, cannot be but paradigmatic by nature: the fact that a given proverb has been realized and documented within a given culture and thus has been part of it, does not mean that it is still used, and thus in function: after all, proverb collections consist of items which either may be current still today, or which were current in some past, but are not any longer, or even never have been used within the given culture, but translated from some other(s).

It is at this point, where empirical work comes into play – empirical paremiography as well as paremiology. Whereas empirical paremiography, in this context, contributes by way of collecting and documenting proverb usage, and the frequency of proverbs' occurrences (including the analysis of current corpora), empirical paremiology studies, by way of empirical methods, familiarity with proverbs, as an obligatory first step for further proverb-oriented studies. This is not the place to discuss relevant methods at some length here (see Chlosta & Grzybek 2004; Grzybek & Chlosta; 2009; Grzybek 2009; 2012a). Yet, Permjakov's attempts to empirically establish what he termed a *proverb minimum* deserves mention here, trying to find out, which proverbs are known by *all* members of a given culture or society. After Western readers were had been made acquainted with this approach (Grzybek, 1984b), which was first tested in 1991 with some language other than Russian (Grzybek, 1991), these ideas were broadly propagated in paremiology (Mieder, 1992); since then, relevant methods have been tested and developed over the last decades, resulting in the modified basic question. As a result, the crucial guiding question of empirical paremiology, from a contemporary point of view, may be phrased as follows: "Which proverbs are known in what (verbal) form by which members of the given culture, and which collective overlaps and intersections exist with regard to proverb knowledge and familiarity?" (Grzybek, 2012a)

Given the assumption that proverbs represent no isolation genre in the semiotics of culture, but are closely interrelated with all other genres, deep insight can be gained into cultural mechanisms from a semiotic point of view. It should have become

clear that theoretical as well as empirical works are necessary to provide a sufficiently broad picture, and that semiotic approaches are able to provide an adequate framework for any study in this direction.

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## 5 Structural Aspects of Proverbs

### 5.1 Structure and Style

The challenge of defining the proverb is one that has defied the will, patience, and intellect of scholars for millenia– from Homer, Plato, Aristotle, and other classical scholars, to more recent pioneers in the field, such as Archer Taylor, Bartlett Jere Whiting, Lutz Röhrich, and Wolfgang Mieder. Attempts at providing a definition have yielded varied results, but Taylor’s (1962: 3) now infamous quotation still holds relatively true: “An incommunicable quality tells us this sentence is proverbial and that one is not. Hence no definition will enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial.” This quotation is important, I believe, not for the acknowledgment that a finite definition isn’t possible – as a “proverb is not a species with its *genus proximum* and its *differentia specifica* as in a systemised science” (Guershoon, 1941: 15) – but because Taylor first raised the question of “an incommunicable quality”. In recent years, scholars have begun to investigate this abstract concept by identifying certain poetic and structural features that appear frequently in proverbs and which constitute, in very broad terms, the concept of proverbial style or what Shirley Arora (1984) has termed *proverbiality*. These devices are a veritable checklist for proverbial status: the more of these stylistic features a sentence possesses, the higher the level of proverbiality, and the greater the probability that the sentence is, or will be identified, as a proverb.<sup>39</sup>

The phonological, semantic, and syntactic devices that occur frequently in proverbs across languages may be termed *proverbial markers*. These internal and external makers are warning signs that indicate that a particular sentence is deviant from the surrounding discourse, in that it exhibits stylistic and structural adornments that are not typically found in naturally-occurring language. Furthermore, from a pragmatic perspective, it alerts the listener that the expression is important in some regard, be that in terms of its use, function, or meaning. Scholars have identified a range of devices which operate in ensemble to effect the concept of proverbial style, amongst which the most important are parallelism, ellipsis, alliteration, rhyme, metaphor, personification, paradox, and hyperbole (Mieder, 2004: 7). Structural elements are amongst the most universal and easily identifiable proverbial markers, and feature with high frequencies across world languages, both in terms of (i) the traditional fixed

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<sup>39</sup> “It stands to reason that the more markers a given saying possesses, the greater its chances of being perceived as a proverb at initial hearing; and conversely, a *genuinely traditional* but unmarked saying may well fail as a proverb the first time it is heard, merely because the listener does not recognise it as such.” (Arora 1984: 13)

formulae, and (ii) the set of optional syntactic devices that occur in proverbs, particularly syntactic parallelism, parataxis, and inverted word order in its various manifestations. Language-specific analyses of the use of proverbial markers have focussed on these structural elements in a wide number of languages, including Ancient Greek, Ancient Egyptian, (Cairene) Arabic, English, Esperanto, French, Hebrew, Hausa, Hungarian, Igbo, Irish, Italian, Latin, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Welsh, Yoruba, and numerous other African languages.<sup>40</sup>

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general overview of the unique architecture of proverbs across a range of languages. The first section will deal with the role of different sentence types in proverbs, both in terms of their linguistic structure and also their associated functions; the second section will outline the most common proverbial formulae, including some of the traditional and modern patterns; and finally, the various optional syntactic devices (or markers) will be described, particularly parallelism, inverted word order, and parataxis. As a means of showing the universality of proverb architecture, examples will be taken from a range of languages (together with an English translation), although the majority will be from the major English sources.

## 5.2 Sentences and Phrases

### 5.2.1 Sentence Type

Proverbs appear in a variety of different sentence types; from a syntactic perspective, these sentences may be classified into four distinct types according to the number of clauses and sub-clauses they contain. These sentence types are: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. (i) The most basic sentence is the *simple sentence*, which contains one main clause (subject and predicate) and no subclauses. They are typically simple, declarative, non-oppositional, and stylistically unmarked i.e. they

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<sup>40</sup> Guershon (1941) [Russian], Kilimenko (1946) [Russian], Mahgoub (1968) [Cairene Arabic], Rothstein (1968) [*aspects of Russian, French, Latin*], Levin (1968) [Russian], Thompson (1974) [Hebrew, Arabic], Silverman-Weinreich (1981) [Yiddish], Hasan-Rokem (1982) [Hebrew], Russo (1983) [Ancient Greek], Arora (1984) [Spanish], Sorrentino (1989) [Tamil], Tóthné Litovkina (1990) [Hungarian, Russian], Norrick (1991) [English], Tóthné Litovkina and Csábi (2002) [American English], Jang (2002) [Hausa], Valdaeva (2003) [English], Osoba (2005) [Yoruba], Agozzino (2007) [Welsh], Ezejideaku and Okechukwu (2008) [Igbo], Fiedler (2010) [Esperanto], Grandl (2010) [Ancient Egyptian], and Mac Coinnigh (2012; 2013) [Irish].

do not contain many stylistic markers.<sup>41</sup> They appear in both affirmative and negative form as can be seen in the examples (1-2) below:

(1) *Acqua cheta rovina i ponti.* (Italian) Affirmative (+)  
[*Silent waters run deep.*]

(2) *Comparaison n'est pas raison.* (French) Negative (–)  
[*Comparison is no reason.*]

(ii) *Complex sentences* contain one clause and one or more subclauses; the subclauses may be adjectival, nominal, or adverbial. The structural balance in these proverbs is asymmetrical, with the subclause being dependant on the main clause as can be seen in No. 3 below, i.e. the subclause *that will take no colour* cannot stand alone grammatically, and is tied to the main clause in which the subject *bad cloth* is contained. The subordinate clause often features a WH-subclause, which in English begins with one of the following: *what, where, who, why, or when* (see No. 4-5). A stylistic feature of these proverbs is the repositioning of the subclause into sentence-initial position, usually for the purposes of emphasis as also can be seen in No. 4-5.

(3) [*It is a bad cloth*] [that will take no colour].  
[Clause] + [Subclause]

(4) [*Quand le vin est tiré*], [*il faut le boire*]. (French)  
*When the wine is drawn, one must drink it.*  
[Subclause] + [Clause]

(5) [*Wer anderen eine Grube gräbt*], [*fällt selbst hinein*]. (German)  
*Who digs a pit for other falls into it himself.*  
[Subclause] + [Clause]

(iii) *Compound sentences* possess multiple independent clauses which are separated by a coordinator (in English these are *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*). There is a grammatical equality in these sentences, which balances the two clauses against one another through a central fulcrum in the shape of the coordinator. These examples often display a type of semantic equality or contrast, which is created through the replication of the syntactic pattern. In No. 6 below we can see the two independent

<sup>41</sup> Recent corpus studies by Mac Coinnigh (2012) and Tóthné Litovkina (1990) have shown this type of sentence to be the most prevalent in Russian, Hungarian, and Irish-language proverbs. Whilst Wolfgang Mieder (2012: 144) has stated that most modern Anglo-American proverbs are now straightforward indicative sentences also.



clauses *Falseness lasts an hour and truth lasts till the end of time* located contiguously with the conjunction *and* acting as the central pivot.

(6) *عاش الس لا مابق على ا قحلا ؤلوجو ؤعاس لطابل ا ؤلوج* (Arabic)

[*Falseness lasts an hour and truth lasts till the end of time.*]

[Clause] + [coordinator – *and*] + [Clause]

Often verbs are omitted from these proverbs and instead phrases are simply structurally juxtaposed with the implicit suggestion that there is an underlying semantic relationship (I will discuss this in more detail later in the paper when dealing with asyndetic coordination and parataxis).

(iv) The *compound–complex sentence* is the most syntactically complicated type as it often features a multiplicity of clauses and subclauses. The minimum syntactic requirement is for at least two clauses and one subclause. The complex, extended structure is prohibitive to proverb composition, presumably because they are more difficult to memorise and recall in speech situations:

(7) *When the oak is before the ash, then you will only get a splash; when the ash is before the oak, then you may expect an oak.*

[Adverbial subclause] + [Clause] ; [Adverbial subclause] + [Clause]

Closely related to the aforementioned sentence types is the *nominal sentence*. This refers to a type of sentence with a predicate lacking a finite verb. Words and phrases are juxtaposed for the purposes of emphasis and intensity, but either there is no explicit grammatical connection between these phrases or the verbal construct has become redundant over time and is omitted. An oft-cited example of a nominal sentence is the proverb in No. 8 in which the substantive verb *to be* is omitted:

(8) *The more – the merrier.*

### 5.2.2 Sentence Function

Sentences typically have four different functions: declarative (or indicative); interrogative; imperative; and exclamatory, which can be drawn together into two larger main groups: Affirmative and Communicative. Proverbs exhibit all these different functions, although some may be more frequently used than others. The first function is declarative (or indicative) which is a favoured one in proverbs – as it is in natural speech – as it conveys information or ideas in the form of a statement (No. 9). Interrogative sentences, on the other hand, take the form of a question. The two most common types in proverbs are (i) the *Yes/No Interrogative*, which can either

elicit a yes or no response (No. 10), and (ii) the *WH-Interrogative*, which elicits an open-ended response. These may, of course, be used rhetorically in proverbs, so that a response is not required as in example (No. 11).

### Affirmative

declarative/indicative

(9) *Bad news travels fast.*

interrogative

(10) *Does a chicken have lips?*

*Yes/No Interrogative*

(11) *What would you expect from a pig but a grunt?*

*WH-Interrogative*

The *communiative* sentences types feature the imperative form in which an order is given. These, as we can imagine, were extremely common – although Mieder (2012: 147) has recently shown that this is no longer the case – as proverbs often give advice, counsel and instructions on how individuals should behave in both specific contexts and in general life. Once again, the affirmative and negative imperative patterns are found frequently (No. 12-13). The exclamatory sentence expresses strong emotion such as anger, surprise, frustration, confusion, elation, joy, love, sorrow, etc. From a grammatical perspective, formal English requires that it begin with either *what* or *how* (e.g. No. 14), but in reality any declarative sentence can become exclamatory in natural speech, and this is reflected in writing by the inclusion of an exclamation mark at the end of the structure (No. 15).

### Communicative

imperative

(12) *Look before you leap.*

(13) *Entre l'arbe et l'écorce il ne faut pas mettre le doigt.* (French)

[*Don't go between the tree and the bark.*]

exclamatory

(14) *What goes around comes around!*

(15) *All's fair in love and war!*

## 5.3 Syntax and Structure

### 5.3.1 Proverbial Formulae

All languages possess certain structural formulae that exhibit a high degree of peculiarity towards the proverb as a linguistic form, as Archer Taylor (1962, 16) states “New proverbs have often been made on old models. Certain frames lend themselves readily to the insertion of entirely new ideas”. Studies have shown that these structural formulae are common to a wide range of languages, which is evidence that proverbs generally have a shared syntactic architecture as well as a similar core-set of values and morals. A few of the most salient traditional formulae that are to be found internationally are *He who..., ...; If/when,... (then); Like ..., ...; Better ... , than ...; Every ... has its own...* (Krikmann, 1998: 52). For example, the form *Better X than Y* is one of the most widely dispersed and can be seen in the following examples:

(16) *Más vale un presente que dos después.* (Spanish)  
[*Better one now than two in the future.*]

(17) *Besser arm in Ehren als reich in Schanden.* (German)  
[*Better a good name than riches.*]

(18) *Parempi karvas totuus kuin makea valhe.* (Finnish)  
[*Better a bitter truth than a sweet lie.*]

The high incidence of these particular formulae in international collections of proverbs is undoubtedly related to the fact that proverbs were distributed throughout Europe and beyond in four major periods of linguistic borrowing: (i) the dissemination of proverbial forms from classical antiquity through the Latin language, especially the medieval Latin proverb tradition, pioneered by Erasmus of Rotterdam’s *Adagia*, which witnessed the translation of proverbs into European languages; (ii) the translation of the Bible in Europe and beyond, which dispersed both formulae from classical antiquity and metrical patterns associated with wisdom literature; (iii) the creation and distribution of new proverbs in medieval Latin, the lingua franca of the Middle Ages; and (iv) the spread of literature in the globalized age through the mass media (see Mieder, 2004: 10-13). As well as universal proverbs emanating from these sources, there are also indigenous proverbs peculiar to one or more languages, which sometimes appear later as loan proverbs in a neighbouring country’s repertoire. The transferal and borrowing of proverbs formulae in these periods are best viewed in cross-linguistic studies, particularly Paczolay’s *European Proverbs* (1997) and Emanuel Strauss’ *Dictionary of World Proverbs* (1994) which provide numerous examples of similar structures throughout the proverbs of many world languages.

Just as languages evolve and change, the nature of the proverb also alters to suit changing times and circumstances. From a diachronic perspective, we can look back at proverbs over the centuries and see that, from a structural vista, the vicissitudes of linguistic development caused certain formulae to rise to prominence at certain times whilst, on the other hand, some popular forms gradually became redundant on account of lack of use. For example, as recently as 1931 Taylor mentions the international form *Young X, old Y* as a common template, but in modern times this form is extremely rare—only having one example in the *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Speake, 2003: 344).<sup>42</sup> In spite of the conventional belief that proverbs are based on a small number of traditional formulaic structures, Wolfgang Mieder's (2012) most recent study of modern Anglo-American Proverbs – and by modern we mean after 1900 – has shown that this is not actually true in the modern age. Traditional formulae are no longer prevalent in the process of composition and promulgation of new proverbs. His data shows that ten of the traditional formulae each occur in less than 1.7% of modern Anglo-American proverbs and, more significantly, eight of these occur in less than 1% of the corpus. These traditional formulae can be seen below where I have added some other languages as a means of explicating the material:<sup>43</sup>

X is Y

(19) *Aeg on raha*. (Estonian)

[*Time is money*.]

X is better than Y / Better X than Y

(20) *Bättre tige än illa tala*. (Swedish).

[*Better to keep quiet than to speak badly (of someone)*.]

It's not X, it's (but) Y

(21) *It's not what you know, it's who you know*.

When you X, (you) X

(22) *When you're good, you're good*.

also

When you X (you) (Y)

*Kun menee sutta pakoon, tulee karhu vastaan*. (Finnish)

[*When you flee from a wolf, you run into a bear*.]

<sup>42</sup> Young saint, old devil

<sup>43</sup> I have combined the type *X is better than Y* and *Better X than Y* as, from a structural perspective, the latter is a merely an emphatic form of the former base sentence type.

No X, no Y

(23) *Ei ole huult, ei ole huunid.* (Estonian)<sup>44</sup>

[*No care, no buildings.*]

X is (are) X

(24) *A deal is a deal.*

There is no such thing as X

(25) *There's no such thing as bad publicity.*

There are no X, only (just) Y

(26) *Det finns inget dåligt väder, bara dåliga kläder.* (Swedish)

[*There is no bad weather, only bad clothing.*]

One man's X is another man's Y

(27) *One man's meat is another man's poison.*

Modern Anglo-American proverbs, according to Wolfgang Mieder (2012: 144-147), now favour straight-forward indicative formulae, which appear to be void of many of the traditional proverbial markers, especially syntactic and phonological devices. The modern structures appear to be simplified, reduced formulae as can be seen from the six classes mentioned in his study:

A(n) / noun / verb...

(28) *A diamond is forever.*

A(n) / adjective / noun / verb ...

(29) *A wise head is better than a pretty face.*

The / noun / verb ...

(30) *The world hates a quitter*

You can't (cannot) / verb ...

(31) *You can't unscramble eggs.*

Don't (do not) / verb ...

(32) *Don't believe everything you think.*

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<sup>44</sup> Sincere thanks to Professor Arvo Krikmann who furnished me with a comprehensive list of Estonian and Russian examples.

Never / verb ...

(33) *Never work with children or animals.*

### 5.3.2 The Wellerism

In Alan Dundes' article „*On the Structure of the Proverb*” (1975), he notes that “there appears to be a finite number of proverb compositional or architectural formulas”, and amongst these structures he notes the wellerism. The wellerism is a proverbial subtype that has a distinctive syntactic formula and is used for purposes of irony or humour. Typically the formula is triadic with three distinct parts: *a statement (often a proverb) + a speaker + context (phrase or subclause)* as in No. 34. The context may also be replaced by inserting another individual to whom the speaker is addressing the statement: *a statement (often a proverb) + a speaker + a listener* as in No. 35.

(34) “*Much noise and little wool,*” *said the Devil when he sheared a pig.*

[statement/proverb] + [speaker] + [context i.e. subclause]

(35) “*Two heads are better than one,*” *as the cabbage-head said to the lawyer.*

[statement/proverb] + [speaker] + [listener]

Often the third *contextual* element is not required as there is sufficient incongruence between the speaker's characteristics and the statement to facilitate humour or irony. For example, the phrase *I see* can be used literally in its primary semantic form, i.e. *I perceive with my two eyes*, or it can also be figuratively invoked to mean *I understand*. This ambiguity creates an incongruity with the adjective *blind*, which is the source of the irony as can be seen in No. 36. These do not often feature proverbs as the statement, however.

(36) “*I see,*” *said the blind man.*

[statement] + [speaker]

Structurally, it is also possible to place the speaker at the start of the sentence and then insert the statement, but this form is much less common than the canonical form.

(37) *For as the old maid remarked about kissing the cow, “It's all a matter of taste.”*

[speaker] + [context] + [statement/proverb]<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Mieder and Kingsbury (1994: 135).

Two major collections of wellerisms are well worth consulting for a more complete overview of the genre, namely: *A Dictionary of Wellerisms* by W. Mieder and S. A. Kingsbury, and *Wellerisms in Ireland: Towards a Corpus from Oral and Literary Sources* by Fionnuala Carson Williams.

### 5.3.3 Anti-proverbs

The formulation of *anti-proverbs*<sup>46</sup> (Mieder, 1982) is also responsible for the perpetuation of traditional formulae. We may define an anti-proverb as “an allusive distortion, parody, misapplication, or unexpected contextualization of a recognized proverb, usually for comic or satiric effect” (Doyle, Mieder & Shapiro, 2012: XI). One of the methods for creating an anti-proverb is to amend one element of an existing proverb e.g. a noun, an adjective, a verb, etc. by replacing it with another item from the same grammatical category.<sup>47</sup> The item may be a homonym or homophone, but these pairs are limited, and it more likely is a word that phonologically resembles the sound of the original (e.g. No. 38), where *here* is replaced by *hair*. Often the alteration merely involves the substitution of one letter for another to affect a pun (No. 39-40), the addition of an extra letter (No. 41), or the substitution of a word (No. 42). What is important to note in all these examples is that the syntactic structure is not changed. This is a method by which new life can be breathed into older structures so that they may enjoy another period of currency. Here are a few examples from the largest collection of anti-proverbs, *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs*, by T. Litovkina and Mieder’s (2006: 18) collection:

(38) **Hair** today, gone tomorrow < Here today, gone tomorrow.

(39) The **pun** is mightier than the sword < The pen is mightier than the sword.

(40) A good beginning is half the **bottle** < A good beginning is half the battle.

(41) Strike while the **irony** is hot < Strike while the iron is hot.

(42) Great **aches** from little **corns** grow < Great acorns from little acorns grow.

<sup>46</sup> Originally coined as *Antispruchwort* (anti-proverb).

<sup>47</sup> See Mieder and Litovkina (2006: 17-26) for a discussion of the various types of proverb transformations responsible for anti-proverbs.

## 5.4 Structural Markers

### 5.4.1 Syntactic Parallelism

Linguistic studies on the stylistic markers that feature in proverbs, by scholars such as Taylor (1931),<sup>48</sup> Mahgoub (1968), Silverman-Weinreich (1981)<sup>49</sup> Arora (1984), Jang (2002), and Mac Coinnigh (2012), have shown that parallelism – both structural parallelism and semantic parallelism – is one of the most significant and frequently occurring internal devices in proverbs. Rothstein has argued that it fulfils three main functions in proverbs. Structural or syntactic parallelism is a rhetorical device used for the purpose of emphasis or foregrounding. It involves the contiguous juxtaposition of syntactically parallel elements of the proverb text, such as individual lexical items, phrases, clauses, or sentences, for the purpose of suggesting analogical relationships or comparisons (see Rothstein, 1968: 269). For example in No. 43, the first half of the structure – *The dead to the tomb* – is directly parallel to the second half – the living to the rumba. The conjunction *and* separates the two parallel structures in medial position and invites an interpretation that will contrast the two phrases i.e. that the natural order dictates that when one is dead the tomb is where he/she should be, and that when one is alive, he/she should be at the rumba. It is essentially an exhortation to enjoy life.

(43) *El muerto a la tumba y el vivo a la rumba.* (Spanish)<sup>50</sup>  
 [The dead to the tomb and the living to the rumba (=dance).]

There are two main methods by which the elements can be placed in parallel (i) *Syndetic coordination*, and (ii) *Asyndetic coordination*. In syndetic coordination the terms are explicitly linked by conjunctions such as *and*, *or*, and *but*, and the elements of the proverb are bound together in a cohesive grammatical unit (No. 44). Whilst in asyndetic coordination the conjunctions are absent, but the conjoins are syntactically mirrored or coordinated so as to suggest an analogical relationship between the elements (No. 45).

Syndetic coordination

(44) *Ein Feind ist zuviel, und hundert Freunde nicht genug.* (German)

<sup>48</sup> “A rhetorical trait which is found in parallelism of structure with its almost inevitable accompaniment, contrast.” (Taylor, 1931: 143)

<sup>49</sup> “Ellipsis of the verb (usually accompanied by other stylistic features such as parallelism or contrast) is another important grammatical clue (of proverbiality).” (Silverman-Weinreich, 1981: 77)

<sup>50</sup> Arora (1984: 28).



[*One enemy is one too many, and hundred friends are not enough.*]

Aysndetic coordination

(45) *Nemico diviso, mezzo vinto.* (Italian)

[*Enemy divided, half won.*]

Other related structural features that increase the level of the analogy or comparison often buttress syntactic parallelism. The first is *grammatical parallelism*, which is a more rigid form of syntactic repetition in which the grammatical class of each individual element is mirrored in the bipartite structure that follows. This is extremely common in short phrases where the grammatical structure is quite basic, often relating to a simple Noun Phrase (NP) involving *Noun + Adjective* (No. 46) or the *Noun + Verb* structure (No. 47). Extended forms of grammatical parallelism are also found, however, as in No. 48 where the parallelism is linked at a grammatical level to the pattern which features in both halves of the structure, although it is separated by the conjunction *but*: *NP plural + verb (present tense) + NP plural + infinite verb + NP plural*. The second feature is that of *lexical repetition*, where lexical items are duplicated in the structure. This is an integral part of syntactic parallelism that is almost impossible to examine in isolation. The examples below show how individual lexical matches in the proverbs (i.e. *other*, *God*, *young folks/old folks/fools*) are used for comparative purposes, as it invites a focussed contrastive reading of the non-identical elements.

(46) *Andere Länder, andere Sitten.* (German)

[*Other countries, other customs.*]

(47) *Бог дал, Бог и взял.* (Russian)

[*God has given, God has taken.*]

(48) *Young folks think old folks to be fools, but old folks know young folks to be fools.*

In some instances the parallel noun-phrase or clause may be syntactically reversed in the second half of the proverb, what we may term inverted parallelism, as in the formula  $A^1 A^2: B^2 B^1$ . This is a rhetorical device from classical times called chiasmus (sometimes referred to as the Criss-Cross Pattern), which adds both a poetic rhythm and semantic contrast to the proverb (see Taylor, 1931: 140; Norrick 1991: 121). The following example (No. 49) from the Irish language is an example of chiasmus:

(49) *Is fearr eolas an oilc ná an t-olc gan eolas.*

$A^1 \quad A^2 \quad B^2 \quad B^1$

[*Better the knowledge of misfortune than misfortune without knowledge.*]

$A^1 \quad A^2 \quad B^2 \quad B^1$

Another feature associated with syntactic parallelism is medial ellipsis or *gapping* (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990: 279; Fabb, 1997: 147). This is the omission of a lexical element, usually a verb, in the second half of the binary structure.<sup>51</sup> The implication being that it is so implicitly understood from the initial corresponding element that it becomes redundant in the second or subsequent element of the proverb. Gapping is to be found in a number of proverbs containing asyndetic coordination as can be seen in the following example (No. 50) where both the relativized form of the verb *gets* [*a fhaigheann*] and the object *cold* [*fuair*] are both present in the first sentence, whilst they are absent, yet implicitly understood, in the subsequent conjoin. The reader must elicit the missing element i.e. the verb and adjective from the first colon. The same is true in No. 51, where the substantive verb [*will be*] is omitted but implicitly suggested.

(50) *As a ceann a fhaigheann an bhean fuacht; as a chosa an fear.* (Irish)  
[Out of her head gets the woman cold; out of his feet \*gets\* the man \*cold\*].

(51) *The last will be first, and the first \*will be\* last.*

It is worth mentioning at this stage that a closely associated feature of syntactic parallelism is that of semantic parallelism, in which the meaning of the parallel elements exhibit a semantic relationship – either synonymous or antithetical. In synonymous parallelism the parallel elements of the proverb express a similar (or tautological) meaning; the second element essentially reiterates the meaning of the first “in different but equivalent terms”.<sup>52</sup> For example in No. 52, the parallel elements *far-fetched* and *dear-bought* both relate to the aspects of the exquisite tastes of certain ladies i.e. that articles should be expensive and exotic. The two adjectives essentially express a similar quality in different terms. Whilst in antithetical parallelism the second element expresses the opposite of the first. This may occur in rigidly structured antonymic way where each lexical item is directly in apposition to the first e.g. in No. 53 the verbs *marry* vs *repent*, and the adjectives *haste* vs *leisure*, are in direct opposition; or in more a broader way, where the general meaning or sentiment is reversed, as in No. 54 where it is suggested that the person physically closest to the church *nearer the church*, is the least devout, using the figurative expression *farther from God*.

[A] vs [B]

(52) [*Far-fetched*] and [*dear-bought*] is good for ladies.

<sup>51</sup> This is termed forward/right gapping and is the more common than backward/left gapping.

<sup>52</sup> These terms are borrowed from Robert Lowth, who first introduced the concept of parallelism to the field of poetics in his translation of *Isaiah* (London, 1779).

(53) [*Marry in haste*] and [*repent in leisure*].

(54) [*The nearer the church*], [*the farther from God*].

## 5.5 Emphatic Word Order

Emphatic word order is a device for rearranging the structure of a sentence so that particular constituent elements can be foregrounded for the purposes of emphasis. There are a number of different methods through which syntax may be rearranged in proverbs for this purpose of which the most common are: clefting, left dislocation, topicalisation, and sub-clausal fronting.

### 5.5.1 Clefting

Clefting involves re-arranging the basic word order of an unmarked sentence, and fronting constituents, such as nouns, adverbs, and adjectives, to sentence initial position. The clefting of basic sentences is one of the main ways to achieve emphasis or foregrounding of a particular constituent. This type of alteration may be invoked in the proverb for emphatic, exclamatory or contrastive purposes. When it occurs with other optional stylistic and poetic markers, it has the effect of increasing the level of *proverbiality* of an expression.<sup>53</sup> In English the fronted element follows an introductory structure such as: *It is/was...*

(55) *It's **an ill bird** that fouls its own nest.* [clefted sentence]  
*A ill bird fouls its own nest.* [canonical sentence]

(56) *It's **a good horse** that never stumbles* [clefted sentence]  
*A good horse never stumbles.* [canonical sentence]

### 5.5.2 Left-dislocation

Left-dislocation is a feature of spontaneous or narrative style and is used for purposes of emphasis or to clarify ambiguity in cases where the topic contains a lengthy relative clause. It involves placing the constituent element in sentence-initial position and an anaphoric pronominal coreferent placed in its canonical position in the following

<sup>53</sup> See Arora (1984), Silverman-Weinreich (1981:75), and Mac Coinnigh (2012) for treatments of *emphatic word order*.

main clause. In No. 57 the subject of the sentence contains a subclause i.e. *who lies with dogs*, so the entire subject is foregrounded in sentence initial position, and then the prepositional pronoun *he* used as a coreferent in the following clause. Repetition of the topic through left dislocation is one of the most salient structural alterations found in proverbs.

(57) *An té a luíonn leis na madraí, éireoidh sé leis na dreancaidí.* (Irish)  
[He who lies with the dogs, he will rise with the fleas.]

### 5.5.3 Topicalisation

In topicalization, the constituent element is clefted into sentence initial position and a gap left in the main clauses which it is construed as filling (Gregory & Michaelis, 2001: 1665).

In No. 58, the Biblical proverb from Matthew XII. 34 (Authorized Version) is a example where the basic sentence is reconstructed and the noun phrase *out of the fullness of the heart* is placed in initial position for the purposes of emphasis. Similarly, the object of the Yiddish proverb – a counterfeit coin – is fronted in No. 59.

(58) *Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaks.* marked  
*The mouth speaks out of the fullness of the heart.* unmarked

(59) *a falshe matbeye farlirt men nit.* (Yiddish) marked  
[a counterfeit coin – one doesn't loose]<sup>54</sup>

### 5.5.4 Sub-Clausal Fronting

Subordinating subclauses are fronted in many proverbs for emphasis, especially conditional and adverbial subclauses. It is widely believed that the initial elements of sentences are regarded as more important than latter ones, and in these examples the foregrounding creates a sense of apprehension or expectation, which is then completed in the main clause that follows.

(60) *Quando il gatto non c'è il topo balla.* (Italian)  
[When the cat's away, the mice will play.]

<sup>54</sup> Silverman-Weinreich (1981: 75).

(61) *Wenn das Haupt krank ist, trauern alle Glieder.* (German)  
[When the head is sick, all members mourn.]

(62) *En la duda, abstente.* (Spanish)  
[When in doubt, abstain.]

## 5.6 Parataxis

Parataxis (equal *para* arrangement *taxis*) is one of the most frequently occurring syntactic features in proverbs. This term refers to the linking of constructions of the same grammatical and semantic level through juxtaposition or punctuation, instead of using formal conjunctions, either coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) or subordinating conjunctions (*although, because, since, unless*). When constructions are linked together in close proximity, a semantic relationship between them is inferred through other methods e.g. logical, temporal, or causal connections, or through manner (Wales, 2001: 285). The coordination challenges the listener to interpret the grammatical and semantic relationships to infer a meaning. Ordinary naturally occurring speech is peppered by paratactic constructions and it is no coincidence that it is also found in proverbs.<sup>55</sup>

Parataxis can occur at the level of the individual lexical item, the phrase, or indeed the clause, but there is a clear preference for simple phrases. In speech, of course, there would be a caesura between the binary elements to clearly delineate the introduction of a second structure. In printed collections of proverbs, this caesura is indicated by the use of punctuation marks to indicate a fulcrum separating the elements. Phrases are the most commonly found structure located in parataxis, but sentences are also found as can be seen in the examples below. In English, ellipsis of the verb, most often the substantive verb *to be*, is frequently found in these paratactic constructions:

(63) *A mali estremi, estremi remedi.* (Italian)  
[Extreme disease, extreme treatment.]

(64) *El poeta nace, el orador se hace.* (Spanish)  
[The poet is born, the orator is made.]

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<sup>55</sup> It is found in international collections proverbs in languages including, Ancient Greek, Arabic, Czech, English, French, German, Latin, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Yiddish, yet statistical analyses such as Maghoub (1968: 37), Silverman-Weinreich (1981: 76) and my own study of Irish proverbs (Mac Coinnigh 2012, 2013) show that it is not amongst the primary proverbial markers.

(65) *Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on you.*

Parataxis does not only occur in binary constructions however, and a particular type of proverbial comparison, or enumerative proverb, links multiple constituent units together like the example in No. 66 below:

(66) *For want of a nail the shoe was lost; for want of a shoe the horse was lost; for want of a horse the man was lost.*

Hauser (1980: 26) has contended that parataxis often displays a paucity of “conspicuous links” between the juxtaposed constituents. This is not true of proverbs, however, as there are, more than not, other syntactic, phonemic, or semantic markers which emphasize the connection between the elements. Amongst the most important are semantic parallelism (antithetical and synonymic), rigid grammatical parallelism, lexical repetition (word category repetition), and phonemic devices such as rhyme and alliteration. The proverb *After dinner rest a while, after supper walk a mile* is an example of this type of successful parataxis.

*After<sup>1</sup> – dinner<sup>2</sup> – rest<sup>3</sup> – a while<sup>4</sup> || after<sup>1</sup> – supper<sup>2</sup> – walk<sup>3</sup> – a mile<sup>4</sup>.*

The structure is syntactically identical and follows the pattern *preposition<sup>1</sup> – noun<sup>2</sup> – verb [imperative]<sup>3</sup> – indefinite noun<sup>4</sup>* in both sides of the structure. This symmetric framework indicates a semantic correlation. Not only are the grammatical categories identical but we also see that the mood of the verb, i.e. imperative, is the same. From a lexical perspective, there is lexical repetition in the initial position (<sup>1</sup>) with the preposition *after*; the verbs *rest* and *walk* are semantically opposed (*antithetical parallelism*) which creates a distinct binary contrast, and the nouns *dinner* and *supper* are semantically linked by being members of the same lexico-semantic category i.e. daily meals. This intricate balance of similarity and contrast in the parallel elements is like a mathematical puzzle, which the listener must decipher to access the meaning. The rhythmic quality, which adds to the memorability of the proverb, is also significant in this example as the nouns *while* and *mile* display perfect rhyme. These phonemic markers occur in conjunction with varying degrees of lexical repetition and syntactic parallelism, and identify the proverbs as salient utterances that are quite distinct from naturally occurring speech patterns.

### 5.6.1 Relationship Between Juxtaposed Phrases / Clauses

Phrases joined by asyndetic juxtaposition have a relationship that is implied rather than explicitly stated. The semantic connections are not always clear, especially in decontextualised printed collections, yet cultural literacy and experience of proverb

performance enable us to identify some common relationships. These relationships may be classified by three main types: (i) Equality or Identification [ $X=Y$ ]; (ii) Cause and Effect; and (iii) Antonymy or Contrast.

(i) *Equality or Identification* [ $X=Y$ ]

Paratactic structures indicate a relationship of equality or similarity between the two phrases i.e. the first is equal, or similar, to the second. The association may be schematically paraphrased by the formula [ $X = Y$ ]:

(67) *First come, first served.*

(68) *The greater the sinner, the greater the saint.*

(ii) *Cause and Effect*

A causal relationship is also found between the constituents, of the *cause and effect* or “cause-consequence” sequence (Boyle, 1996: 118). In this framework, the realization of the first phrase renders the second phrase a natural consequence. These proverbs may be read by the closely-associated formulae [If there is X, then there is Y] or [If one has A, then one gets/has B]:<sup>56</sup>

(69) *Full cup, steady hand.*

(70) *No pain, no gain.*

(iii) *Contrast and Antonymy*

Phrases are also set against each other for the purpose of contrast and antonymy. The effect is to enhance the overall meaning of the two separate noun phrases by placing them in parallel to one another, so that meaning of the entire proverb is more important than the sum of the overall equal noun phrase constituents. These contrastive proverbs are the most stylised and lyrical and are based on bipartite and quadripartite syntactical repetition:

(71) *Lá brónach dá phósadh, lá deorach dá chur.* (Irish)

[A sad day for one's marriage; a tearful day for one's burial.]

(72) *Selon l'argent, la besogne.* (French)

[What pay, such work.]

<sup>56</sup> For a broader examination of parataxis in fixed expressions, proverbs and sayings in English, including many productive examples, see Culicover (2010).

## 5.7 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, we can say proverbs of all languages demonstrate a closer resemblance to one another in terms of their structure than they do in aspects of their semantics. We have seen that proverbs features all possible manner of sentence type – simple, compound, compound-complex, and nominal – although some languages display a preference for one over the other. Functions also vary, but there appears to be a clear preference for simple indicative statements over the majority of other forms in modern English-language proverbs. Of particular note, is the disappearance of the imperative forms – as Mieder states (2012: 147) “Perhaps this is due to the fact that people today are less willing to be told what to do or not to do. In other words, the obvious didactic nature of many traditional proverbs appears to be on the decline.” Change is also visible in the proverbial formulae that are used as a skeletal structure for the composition of new proverbs for modern times; old formulae are clearly on the wane. This opens up a new field of investigation for paremiologists as we need to know what formulae have replaced them. Paremiologists can no longer be wed to older published collections of proverbs, but we must actively seek out proverbs and proverbial expressions that are current in today’s world. The analysis of types of proverbial formulae is a necessary accompaniment to such work, as not only will it provide us with a description of our current proverb formulae, but it will also enable us to examine changes that have occurred in individual languages from a diachronic perspective. The stylistic devices used in proverbs may also be changing in accordance with the decline of older formulae and the creation of new forms. The increase in anti-proverbs may to some small extent counteract any major changes in style, but it will be interesting to see if parallelism, parataxis, and emphatic word order continue to feature in proverbs as optional markers. The emphasis on straightforward indicative sentences may leave syntactic devices more redundant than they have been in previous generations, but if this is true then there may be corresponding compensatory rise in other devices, possibly semantic tropes, puns or word-play. Comprehensive linguistic studies of proverb corpora in a wide range of languages are a pre-requisite to the validation of such hypotheses.

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## 6 Pragmatic and Stylistic Aspects of Proverbs

### 6.1 Introduction and Theoretical Framework

Proverbs possess diverse stylistic and pragmatic potential and thus fulfill many different functions within a text. The aforementioned fact can be accessed in relevant works on the topics of stylistics and pragmatics as well as in various publications from the field of phraseology and paremiology.

Traditional stylistics<sup>57</sup> observes phraseology in general, including proverbs, particularly with regard to *elocutio*, or in other words, with regard to the manner of their objective-and-situation-related linguistic interpretation. In this connection, stylistics focuses predominantly on the normative linguistic approach. Traditional stylistics is a theory about “good” style, therefore it focuses on qualities of style such as correctness, clearness, appropriateness and conciseness. It also discusses the choice and effects of individual linguistic or lexical devices respectively, which act as stylistic instruments or stylistic elements to which proverbs are assigned as well. In traditional stylistics we proceed from the premise of a language system and assume that the system offers stylistically relevant lexical (and grammatical) verbalization possibilities with inherent style-forming potential. The essence of a stylistic device emanates from its standardized deviation from natural language use. Stylistic devices are linked to various effects (influencing attention, meeting aesthetic standards – *ornatus* as a means of adorning and ennobling the pattern of communication, diversity of expressions, exemplification etc.).

The functions of lexical stylistic devices mainly emanate from their connotations. In this regard, we speak about stylistic markedness or stylistic labeling (with regard to a specific level of style or register), and about stylistic coloring in terms of function and semantic expressivity (i.a. Sowinski, 1991; Sandig, 1986; Fleicher & Michel & Starke, 1993). Lexicography in particular distinguishes between the following types of register: *Literary*, *neutral*, *colloquial*, *slang* and *vulgar*, which are assigned as labels to lexical items based on their characteristics. Lexicography also distinguishes between the following types of semantically-expressive stylistic coloring: *facetious*, *euphemistic*, *pejorative*, *crude* etc. (Sowinski, 1991: 129). For example, the proverb *Solang der Arsch in die Hosen passt, wird keine Arbeit angefasst* [ww: As long as the pants fit the ass, laziness shall cause no distress] featured in the Duden 11 (2013) dictionary, is marked as *crude*, while the proverb *Wer nie sein Brot im Bette aß, weiß nicht, wie*

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57 Traditional stylistics is founded in the rhetorical theory on connotative (impressive) function and convincing (persuasive) effect of language communication

*Krümme! piken* [ww: Whoever has never eaten their bread in bed, does not know how crumbs pick] is marked as *colloquial*.

The modern discipline of linguistic stylistics<sup>58</sup> on the other hand proceeds from the premise of a different approach towards understanding the notion of style and aims at “complete stylistic analysis of a specific text” in communicative contexts, based on the proposition that “each statement can be ascribed its respective style” and that style represents both language use and text production (Sandig, 2006: 2). “Style is the HOW – it represents the significant function-and-situation-related variation of language use” (ib.: 1). Stylistics of such kind is pragmatically oriented, since style is regarded as a manner of performing an act (Sandig, 1986 & 2006). It is founded from a text-linguistic perspective since it holistically describes style as a feature of texts, thus it does not address only the individual elements of style. It rather addresses aspects such as plot structure, cohesion, coherence, topic progression, situationality, materiality, culturality, as well as other structural features of text. Furthermore, it is acquiring a more and more distinctive interdisciplinary character by becoming amenable to argumentation theory, persuasion research, and discourse analysis (Bußmann, 2002: 652). The holistic pragmatic action-function-and-effect potential of proverbs is in the focus of observation in such contexts, but can be described only if observed in specific textual constellations.

It can thus be ascertained that the traditional, conservative concept of stylistics regards proverbs as stylistic devices, to which it assigns individual characteristic stylistic attributes outside of textual use, while modern stylistic theories understand style as a functional-pragmatic factor and focus on observing proverbs in complex textual-situational contexts of use.

Similarly to modern, pragmatically-oriented stylistics, pragmatics also proceeds from the premise that vocabulary elements of various kinds, including proverbs, possess many textual functions. Although Filatkina (2007: 134) states that pragmatics – as a scientific sub-field of linguistics – shows “a lack of interest in phraseological problems” and this “substantial void becomes apparent [...], if it is compared to the vast amount of attempts to explain grammatical and syntactical phenomena with the assistance of pragmatics” (also Kindt, 2002), the study of phraseology has taken the findings of pragmatics into consideration since the 1970s.<sup>59</sup> For example, descriptive pragmatic approaches can be observed when determining the scope of phraseology. The most important approach in this regard is the introduction of the class of pragmatic phrasemes or routine formulae, which can only be described with pragmatic categories (greeting phrases, congratulatory phrases, and other). Proverbs

<sup>58</sup> It became established in the field of German Linguistics particularly due to the influential works of Barbara Sandig.

<sup>59</sup> Filatkina (2007) provides a comprehensive overview of descriptive pragmatic approaches in the field of phraseological research.

also belong to the aforementioned class (Harnisch, 1995; Lüger, 1999), because their functionality can only be identified and described in detail in textual and discourse contexts. Coulmas (1981) includes proverbs in his deliberations on the “pragmatic foundation of idiomatics” as well. He justifies his approach by stating that proverbs have the capacity to constitute speech acts (see Nahberger, 2002).

From a historical point of view, proverbs have fulfilled various functions, “ranging from instructions within the confines of monastic education, quick-witted responses in accordance with the rules of conversation at a royal court, all the way to comments emanating from the humanist intellectual discourse regarding the experiential content of the proverb” (Eikermann, 2002: 95; quoted from Filatkina, 2007: 151).<sup>60</sup> Presently, we are speaking about the *social function* of proverbs (termed by Grzybek, 1984), since they are “regarded as socially accepted formulations of convictions, values, and norms particular to a specific culture and era” (Burger, 2010: 107). In concrete communicative situations, they can function as expressions of *speech acts* such as warning, persuasion, argument, confirmation, comfort, appeasement, conviction, admonition, reprimand, assessment, characterization, explanation, description, justification, or summarization (Röhrich & Mieder, 1977). In such cases, we speak about the *contextual (pragmatic) function* of proverbs. The relationships between both functions is to be observed as a reciprocal relationship, because “for example, a proverb can support an argument (= contextual function) only if the speaker and the recipient understand it as a formulation of a general rule (= social function)” (Burger, 2010: 108). A few contextual examples of the usage of proverbs use shall illustrate the aforementioned. The proverbs featured in examples (1) and (2) are explicitly expressing values and norms that are part of the socio-cultural convention, while the proverb featured in example (3) is used as a means for verbalizing advice.

(1) *Ich bin schon lange alleinerziehend und frage mich, ob ich vielleicht in manchen Dingen zu streng war. **Erst die Arbeit und dann das Vergnügen** [ee: Business before pleasure], so bin ich erzogen worden.* (SprichWort, 2010)

(2) ***Lügen haben kurze Beine** [ee: Lies have short legs] ... so haben es die meisten schon in der Kindheit gelernt. Es lohnt sich nicht zu lügen, mit Lügen schadet man sich und andern.* (SprichWort, 2010)

(3) *„Sie sollten nicht mit zu viel Ehrgeiz an die Sache herangehen“, riet Jung den etwa 100 Zuhörern zu Beginn. **Eile mit Weile** [ee: Haste makes waste] sei vielmehr das*

<sup>60</sup> Proverbs in ancient legal texts reveal specific functionality. Ancient Germanic Law, which was passed on through oral tradition, is reflected and preserved in written form through the use of proverbs – legal rules and principles are portrayed and culture-historical contexts explained. *De er zu der mul kumt, der melt e.* [First come, first served] (Filatkina, 2007: 151; Janz, 1992).

*Motto. Bevor der Anfänger oder Wiedereinsteiger überhaupt mit dem Sport beginne, sei erst einmal ein Gesundheitscheck fällig. (SprichWort, 2010)*

The pragmatic theory of action<sup>61</sup> represents an important step within the scope of pragmatic or holistic stylistic observation of proverbs respectively (Kühn, 1987; Čermák, 1998; Lüger, 1999). Based on this premise, it is possible to consequently, systematically, methodically and methodologically observe their illocutionary<sup>62</sup> und perlocutionary<sup>63</sup> potential.

For all functions of proverbs can be applied that (1) they can be identified only in specific contexts; (2) a proverb can, in principle, be assigned various functions (polyfunctionality); and (3) a specifically and intentionally applied proverb can fulfill many functions at the same time (functional cluster). Thus, an important realization is implied that proverbs cannot be attributed any functions per se without being inserted in a specific context. The functions of proverbs can only be identified through a context-and-situation-based interpretative analysis.

Lüger (1999) presents a fundamental functional-pragmatic study on German proverbs. However, part from this volume, the pragmatic potential of proverbs is prevalently treated separately in works focusing on types of texts such as works on language use in political discourse (i. a. Koller, 1977; Elspaß, 1998), in advertising (i.a. Hemmi, 1994), in literary and journalistic texts (i.a. Lüger, 1989 & 1999; Racette, 1997; Eikermann, 1999; Nöcker & Rüther, 2002; Preußner, 2004; Umurova, 2005; Lewandovska, 2008; Ptashnyk, 2009), or in works on verbal communication (Nahberger, 2004). Based on previous findings it can be generally assessed that proverbs can be specifically and intentionally used in a functional-stylistic manner, which can bring forward a huge spectrum of stylistic-pragmatic effects. One can observe the differences regarding the text-type-related use of proverbs, namely their polyfunctional character is more distinctive in literary texts, as well as other kinds of opinion-based, persuasive types of text (journalistic commentaries, advertising texts). This is connected with the

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<sup>61</sup> Speech acts are generally regarded as objective- or goal-oriented activities respectively. Rather than objectively given occurrences, they represent occurrences interpreted by the recipient. They are effectively “constituted only after they have been interpreted and attributed to an occurrence by the recipient.” (Lüger, 1999: 144).

<sup>62</sup> Illocution denotes the function of an utterance or the performative character of a sentence respectively. In addition to their meaning, utterances also contain a specific illocutionary force, a property which enables them to function as advice, cautions, recommendations etc.

<sup>63</sup> Perlocutions are understood as the consequences of a speech act that follow the completion of a speech act. Pragmatics states „dass man illokutionäre Akte vollzieht, indem man sich äußert, und perlokutionäre Akte dadurch, dass man sich äußert” [that one performs an illocutionary act by uttering a statement, while a perlocutionary act or effect respectively is the result of one having had uttered a statement]

simultaneous activation of the literal and idiomatic way of reading a proverb (Burger, 2010).

To summarize: A consensus is in place that an analysis and interpretation of the stylistic-pragmatic functionality of proverbs is possible only in a context, that is on the basis of concrete texts. Since the following considerations are largely based on pragmatically oriented and text-linguistically influenced stylistics, it has to be emphasized at the very beginning that both studies – the study of stylistics as well as the study of pragmatics – are difficult to separate clearly, therefore on several places there will be certain instances of overlapping<sup>64</sup>.

The following introductory lead is of methodical-methodological nature. The identification and evaluation of stylistic-pragmatic characteristics and functions of proverbs is substantially subject to interpretation. The style-related intentions of each author and the reader-specific stylistic effects can namely be deduced only by assessing individual situations and by analytically observing individual textual statements in communicative contexts based on our linguistic and stylistic competence (Sandig, 2006: 29). Consequently, the following part will feature a discussion on the functional stylistic and i.e. pragmatic potential of proverbs, more precisely what proverbs can cause and achieve, and not what proverbs actually cause and achieve, due to the fact that it is difficult to assess the effects empirically, and in the scope of the present paper even impossible.

The following chapters will present an overview of the stylistic and pragmatic aspects of proverbs from two perspectives. Based on the perspective of traditional stylistics, section 2 discusses the (supposedly) inherent stylistic features that substantiate the specific stylistic-pragmatic effect potential of proverbs. In section 3, proverbs are described from the perspective of a holistic, functional-pragmatic perception of style, whereas it is their communicative- discourse potential that will be put under discussion. Section 4 provides an outlook on the possibilities for future research. The empirical basis for the following considerations consists of mainly German proverbs,<sup>65</sup> in this case the presentation predominantly leans on contemporary German linguistic proverb-related findings.

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<sup>64</sup> A substantiated explanation of the correlations between stylistics, pragmatics, and text linguistics is, for example, presented by Ptashnyk (2009: 176).

<sup>65</sup> The majority of the textual examples have been accessed from the German paremiological database SprichWort (<http://www.sprichwort-plattform.org/>) and from the German OWID Sprichwortwörterbuch (<http://www.owid.de/>) dictionary of proverbs. Individual examples were also borrowed from project papers and graduation theses of German Philology students from the Faculty of Arts of the University of Maribor.

## 6.2 Stylistic of Proverbs

As it has already been stated, the traditional stylistic considers proverbs as lexical stylistic devices, or elements of vocabulary that have a considerable stylistic potential (see Koller, 1977; Kühn, 1987 & 1994; Sowinski, 1991; Fleicher & Michel & Starke, 1993; Dietz, 1999; Filatkina, 2007; Sandig, 1986 & 2007; Wirrer, 2007; Burger, 2010). It assigns characteristic stylistic properties to proverbs, aside of their usage in the text, according to which they can also assist in constructing the style of a text. These properties are particularly visible when it comes to the usage of slightly modified proverbs that represent a deviance from the expected and conventional due to which their stylistic markedness rises. The stylistic features include properties like rhetorical figures, belonging to stylistic levels and stylistic colouring, together with the question of their degree of expressivity. The following chapters are going to shortly elaborate on certain aspects mentioned here.

### 6.2.1 Proverbs and Rhetorical Devices

If we consider the terminology of the classical rhetoric, we can state that proverbs account to the *Ornatus* (ornament) of the speech, as they use their properties as rhetorical figures. It means that their communicative potential is founded in the first place in their rhetorical form. (Sandig, 2007: 161). In the German and Slovenian proverbial lore we can therefore observe different phonetic-prosodic, syntactic and semantic figures, as will be shown in the examples below:

a) Phonetical-prosodical figures:

Rhyme in different variations (internal rhyme, end rhyme, alliteration)

**Eile mit Weile.** (German) [ee: Haste makes waste]

**Borgen macht Sorgen.** (German) [ee: Better buy than borrow]

**Ohne Fleiß kein Preis.** (German) [ee: No pain, no gain]

**Mit Geduld und Spucke fängt man jede Mucke.** (German) [ee: Softly, softly, catchee monkey]

**Kindermund tut Wahrheit kund.** (German) [ee: Children and fools tell the truth]

**Brez dela ni jela.** (Slovenian) [ee: No pain, no gain]

**Gliha vkup štriha.** (Slovenian) [ee: Birds of a feather flock together]

**Probieren geht über studieren.** (German) [ee: The proof of the pudding is in the eating]

**Jedem Tierchen sein Pläsierchen.** (German) [ee: Different strokes for different folks]

Rhythmical pattern

**Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen.** (German) [ee: Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today]



*Morgen, morgen, nur nicht heute, sagen alle faulen Leute.* (German) [ee: Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today]

*Kjer se prepirata dva, tretji dobiček ima.* (German) [ee: When two people quarrel, the third one rejoices]

#### b) Syntactic figures:

Figures of addition (repetition, accumulation): anaphora, epiphora, anadiplosis, kyklos, tautology

- anaphora, repetition of a word at the beginning of the following part of the sentence

**Andere** Länder, **andere** Sitten. (German) [ee: *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*]

**Aus** den Augen, **aus** dem Sinn. (German) [ee: Out of sight, out of mind]

- epiphora, repetition of a word at the end of the following part of sentence

Geteiltes **Leid** ist halbes **Leid**. (German) [ee: A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved]

Wer **A sagt**, muss auch **B sagen**. (German) [ee: In for a penny, in for a pound]

*Kdor se zadnji smeje, se najslajše smeje.* (Slovenian) [ee: He laughs best that laughs last]

*Kdor hitro da, dvakrat da.* (Slovenian) [ee: He who gives quickly gives twice]

- anadiplosis, repetition of the last word of a sentence at the beginning of the following sentence

Wer zuletzt **lacht**, **lacht** am besten. (German) [ee: He laughs best that laughs last]

Wo Rauch **ist**, **ist** auch Feuer. (German) [ee: There's no smoke without fire]

- kyklos, repetition of a word as a frame

**Nikoli** ne reci **nikoli**. (Slovenian) [ee: Never say never]

**Pomagaj** si sam in bog ti bo **pomagal**. (Slovenian) [ee: Help yourself and God will help you]

- tautology, repeating the contents to enhance its effect

**Sicher** ist **sicher**. (German) [ww: Sure is sure]

**Versprochen** ist **versprochen**. (German) [ee: A promise is a promise]

Figures of omitting: ellipsis

- ellipsis, omitting one or more of the grammatically necessary parts of sentence

[Das] Ende [ist] gut, alles [ist] gut. (German) [ee: All's well that ends well]

Konec [je] dober, vse [je] dobro. (Slovenian) [ee: All's well that ends well]

Figures of positioning/repositioning: parallelism, oxymoron

- parallelism, sequence of identical syntactic structures

*Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat.* (German) [ee: Time will tell]

*Vertrauen ist gut, Kontrolle ist besser.* (German) [ee: Trust, but verify]

*Dvakrat premisli, enkrat stori.* (Slovenian) [ee: Think twice before you act/speak]

- parallelisms, sequence of clauses with identical contents

**Auge um Auge, Zahn um Zahn.** (German) [ee: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth]

**Oko za oko, zob za zob.** (Slovenian) [ee: An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth]

– parallelism, sequence elements with contrastive content

**Kdor visoko leta, nizko pade.** (Slovenian) [ee: Pride comes before a fall]

**Was sich liebt, das neckt sich.** (German) [ee: Teasing is a sign of affection]

– oxymoron, linking oppositions that usually exclude each other

**Weniger ist mehr.** (German) [ee: Less is more]

**Eile mit Weile.** (German) [ee: Haste makes waste]

**Manj je več.** (Slovenian) [ee: Less is more]

**Hiti počasi.** (Slovenian) [ee: Haste makes waste]

c) Semantic figures (tropes):

Comparison

**Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man.** (German) [ee: As you make your bed, so you must lie on it]

**Wie der Vater, so der Sohn.** (German) [ee: As father, as son]

**Kakor ti meni, tako jaz tebi.** (Slovenian) [ee: Tit for tat]

Metaphor (with personification)

– empty bag standing for hungry people

**Ein leerer Sack bleibt nicht stehen.** (German) [ww: An empty bag cannot stand upright]

**Prazna vreča ne stoji pokonci.** (Slovenian) [ww: An empty bag cannot stand upright]

– dogs for people

**Hunde, die bellen, beißen nicht.** (German) [ee: Barking dogs never bite]

– still waters for people

**Stille Wasser sind tief.** (German) [ee: Still waters run deep]

Metonymy (with personification)

– pars pro toto, full stomach for people who are fed

**Ein voller Bauch studiert nicht gern.** (German) [ww: A fat belly, a lean brain]

**Poln želodec nerad študira.** (Slovenian) [ww: A fat belly, a lean brain]

– pars pro toto, lots of hands for lots of people

**Viele Hände, schnelles Ende.** (German) [ww: Many hands make light work]

**Več rok več naredi.** (Slovenian) [ww: Many hands make light work]

The rhetorical-stylistic potential of such proverbs is very versatile and reaches from exemplification, explanation, specification, intensifying, accentuation, and exaggeration to pointing, poeticizing, concealment and heightening the images and expressivity (among others in Sowinski, 1991: 130; Sandig, 2007: 161). The effects that are accomplished are actually the noticeable deviation from the expected in certain

contexts, i.e. from what is actually normal and stylistically neutral in certain communicative contexts.

### 6.2.2 Proverbs and Stylistic Registers

According to Koller (1977: 54), the stylistic potential of proverbs exists in their belonging to different stylistic registers. It is actually an aesthetic quality, namely the “distinction that goes back to the three styles of the ancient rhetoric [...], literary, normal, and colloquial” (Bußmann, 2002: 654; Sowinski, 1991: 127). The corresponding registers are thus connected with the positive (literary-elevated) and negative connotations (colloquial). The lexicography mentions here *the term stylistic labeling*, and we can very often read registers as *vulgar- rough- colloquial- simple/neutral – below neutral*, whereas in the new lexicography the starting point are the three “main registers”: *above neutral – neutral – below neutral* (Sandig, 2006: 291). This is due to the fact that the *subregisters* in the negative scope of connotation (*colloquial, slang*) are very difficult to distinguish clearly (more information about this can be read in the Chapter 2.3 of this paper), but also because the lexicographically inherited stylistic labels are less based on theory and, practically seen, not consistent and therefore questionable (Burger, 2010: 195). The labeling of proverbs as colloquial in older lexicography was introduced by Koller (1977: 59) and was based on the widespread opinion that they occur in everyday situations; therefore the label *colloquial* is to be understood as an indicator of their occurrence in speech and not as a register. In written communication proverbs function as colloquial expressions with higher expressivity and clarity. Besides, labeling proverbs as colloquial is often connected with their folkloristic and figurative character.

We can conclude that Sandig (2006: 291) was right when he stated the “there are no sharp boundaries” between the stylistic registers, mostly because the variable individual experience and language or stylistic competence, as well as the versatile usage of proverbs. It is therefore appropriate to start from the fact that some expressions isolated from the text are very difficult to assign to a stylistic register. It is namely “due to the connection with elements of other language levels and also with the versatile text features” (Sandig: 291). In other words: if we attempt to obtain a comprehensible assigning to stylistic registers, it is necessary to consider the complex factors of proverb usage in context.

### 6.2.3 Proverbs and Stylistic Colouring

As it has already been mentioned, the stylistic potential of proverbs implies also the so called *stylistic colouring* with their functional and semantically-expressive nature (Sowinski, 1991: 129).

Under functional stylistic colouring, there are the connotations understood, “which a word /here it is a proverb/ receives through its way of creation and functional usage” (Sowinski, 1999: 129). Proverbs receive their stylistic potential according to their usability/not usability in certain communicative areas/text types (*diatextual label*), according to their occurrence in oral and written communication (*diamedial label*), their appearance in formal/informal situations (*diaphasic label*), according to the usage restricted to a social group (*diastratic label*). An example of diamedial label of a proverb would be *colloquial* (see Koller’s quote above, 1977), which, unlike the unmarked *neutral*, is considered to be limited in terms of usage to the spoken language. A diaphasic label is *formal/informal*, according to the criteria of level of formality in a communicative situation. Under diatextual marking could be a *poetic/literary/administrative* understood for the preferred proverb usage in literary, poetic and administrative types of texts. A diastratic marking is e.g. *familiar/child language* and stands for the restrictive usage within a social group (Hrisztova-Gotthardt, 2010: 123 according to Hausmann, 1989).

Under the term semantic-expressive style colouring there is a “transposition of stylistic synonyms in the same context or /.../ expressions that exhibit additional connotations within a stylistic register or more stylistic registers” understood (Sowinski, 1991: 129), the lexicographic markings being *humorous, euphemistic, pejorative, ironic etc.* Here also we can consider the problem of an isolated assigning of certain markings to concrete proverbs, as discussed above. Therefore it can happen that the same proverb is marked differently or several times in dictionaries, as is shown in the case of the following proverb: *Adel verpflichtet/noblesse oblige: bildungssprachlich, oft scherzhaft* [the gentry indebted: formal, usually humorous] (Duden Universalwörterbuch), *oft ironisch* [usually ironic] (Duden 11), no marking (Duden online).

#### 6.2.4 Proverbs and the Feature of Expressivity

Proverbs (and similar strongly idiomatic non-sentence-like phraseological units) are understood as particularly expressive, strongly eidetic lexical means with a metaphoric foundation based on Bally’s understanding of stylistics (1909), according to which particular lexical means are predestined for conveying expressive content. In contrast to non-idiomatic expressions, proverbs possess so-called *semantic added value* in the sense of *emotional-expressive coloring* (Schmale, 2010: 99 and works referenced there). The main question in this regard is if the expressive potential is inherent to proverbs and if proverbs are expressive *a priori* or if expressivity is just a feature, which proverbs develop during actual textual usage in a particular interaction situation only. The assumption of presupposed expressivity emanates from the briefly outlined lexicographic practice, in accordance with which individual expressions, which are isolated from text, are, for example, labeled with style markers referring to an emotional-expressive register. Drescher (1997) postulates a contextual dependency of

the expressive feature of lexical utterances (phraseological in particular), according to which it can be realized, identified, and analyzed only in concrete contexts. The following example from a German talk show shall be used for the purpose of illustration:

(4) *F fragt einen jugendlichen Straftäter, ob er nachts gut schläft*

*F: dann sacht ma:n- ähm (n) schlechtes Gewissen is nich n gutes Ruhekippen also- geht di:se Geschichte mit einem in die Nacht rein, [...] also träumst du davon* (cited from Schmale, 2010: 107)

A precise analysis of the sequence organization does not reveal a high degree of expressivity for the proverb *Ein gutes Gewissen ist ein sanftes Ruhekippen* [ee: *A clear conscience is a good pillow*] – which was intensely modified to express negation (the modified statement roughly translated into English establishes the fact of a guilty conscience not being a good pillow) – compared to the degree of expressivity attributed to the subsequent non-phraseological paraphrase (Schmale, 2010: 107). Thus, proverbs with figurative metaphors cannot be regarded as more expressive than non-phraseological expressions per se. The degree of expressivity clearly does not depend on structure-based metaphorical vividness alone (or primarily) (see paragraph 2.1), but it depends more on the contextual, situational factors. A possible exception is represented by proverbs, which topic are emotions and therefore yield expressivity. For example:

(5) *Liebe macht blind* [ee: *Love is blind*], heißt es, und ohne in Erklärungsnot zu geraten, kann man behaupten: Im streng medizinischen Sinne stimmt das nicht. Will man damit aber ausdrücken, dass ein wenig der Blick für die Realität verloren geht, dann ist da etwas dran. (SprichWort-Plattform)

Since the present paper proceeds from the argument that expressivity represents a quality of proverbs that can be established only by analytically observing respective context-dependent relations, it seems appropriate to speak about “possible sequential expressivity” (Schmale, 2010: 104). An important factor for the higher degree of expressivity are the so called conversational processing or meta-discursive activities (Schmale, 2010: 101), that accompany the usage of individually selected idiomatic expressions and can be interpreted as indicators of or hints to the degree of expressivity of a text segment or an expression containing proverb:

(6) *Der Spruch klingt banal, hat aber immer Gültigkeit: Zeit ist Geld* [ee: *Time is money*]. Deshalb helfen den Eisenbahn-Gesellschaften auch die besten Image-Kampagnen nichts, wenn der Lkw trotz Staus, Mautschranken und Zollstellen seine Fracht früher beim Kunden abliefern kann.

Proverb-specific modifiability,<sup>66</sup> or, in other words, a deviation from what is expected as the norm in concrete communicative situations that triggers surprising effects at the same time, contributes to increases in the degree of expressivity as well. However, the various effects of modifications strongly depend on the recipient's previous knowledge. The recipient has to be able to identify the usual form – the form objectively regarded as “normal”, in order to understand specific modifications – the creative, playful usage of language has to be identified. In this regard, Ptashnyk (2009: 187) refers to an “intriguing, expressive, and unexpected verbalization of thought”; for example *Liebe geht durch die Steuerprüfung* [roughly adapted into English as *The way to a man's heart is through tax auditing*]; a modification of the proverb *Liebe geht durch den Magen* [ee: *The way to a man's heart is through his stomach*], implying that whoever has an aptitude for cooking, will not struggle to gain the affection of others.

To summarize: Proverbs generally become stylistically relevant in textual contexts and having specific conventional rules of usage in the background, whereas any deviation from a norm or from the usual, anticipated usage in a communicative situation increases the stylistic potential and triggers certain effects at the listener/reader. For this reason, the stylistics of proverbs shall henceforth also be observed from the perspective of pragmatics.

### 6.3 Pragmatic Aspects of Proverbs

The term pragmatics commonly refers to the study of language use and theory of speech acts in concrete communicative situations (Linke & Nussbaumer & Portmann, 1996: 169). If a speech act is perceived as an intention-driven and goal-oriented act of writing or talking, then the central aspects of the so-called *phraseopragmatics* (Lüger, 1999), are aspects of function “what is uttered with communicative intent, fulfils a function, and has a purpose” (Lüger, 1999: 177). As indicated in the introductory part of this paper, proverbs possess many textual functions and can function as expressions of speech acts in concrete communicative situations. We will therefore observe which functions proverbs fulfill in specific communicative situations, what is their purpose, their speech-act potential, and what do they mean as expressions in communication.

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<sup>66</sup> Ptashnyk (2009) presents a comprehensive analytical illustration of phraseological modifications and their respective textual functions.

### 6.3.1 Argumentative Functions of Proverbs

Proverbs often and effectively contribute to the linguistic forming of argumentative structures (Kindt, 2002: 278; Wirrer, 2007: 175). The argumentative potential of proverbs has been known since the classical period of rhetoric. Aristotle, for example, regarded the so-called maxims, to which he assigned proverbs as well; as the most important argumentative tools, and the argument itself as the most important tool of persuasion. Proverbs are particularly relevant in argumentative contexts because they represent generalizing statements “about factual and normative regularities (in the broad sense), which can act as argumentative *warrants*” (Kindt, 2002: 280). They do not explain the concrete or the particular, but rather the general and the abstract, and can therefore function as generalized advice, instructions how to act, justifications of actions, or explanations of actions. Hence, they possess particular persuasive power due to which they serve as convincing arguments in relevant contexts (Wirrer, 2007: 175)<sup>67</sup>.

How are then proverbs utilized for the purposes of argumentation? In the following, three aspects of the argumentative potential of proverbs will be observed with reference to Wirrer (2007) and his multi-perspective explanation of phraseology (and proverbs) with regard to the notion of argumentative function.

a) The argumentative function of proverbs is based on their syntactic-logical structure.

The hypothesis is based on the widespread opinion according to which proverbs; as hinted above; are regarded as universal statements or generalizing propositions respectively, which provide arguments, i.e. justifications and explanations for acts.<sup>68</sup> In Wirrer (2007), the potential claim of generalization is both specified and relativized. In this regard there are proverbs that contain explicit universal quantifiers<sup>69</sup>:

**Aller Anfang ist schwer** [ee: All beginnings are difficult] → It applies for all beginnings that they are difficult;

**Alle Wege führen nach Rom** [ee: All roads lead to Rome] → It applies for all roads that they lead to Rome; it applies for all different ways and manners that they can lead to success or reaching the goal;

<sup>67</sup> According to Searle’s explanation of illocutionary acts (1983) argumentative speech acts are classified as assertives (statements, claims etc.), with which the speaker makes reference to the level of validity and reliability (primarily to the verity or falsity) of an argument and thus performing a perlocutionary act (the speaker achieves an effect that goes beyond the illocutionary act). See paragraph 3.2.

<sup>68</sup> Burger (2010: 118): “Since proverbs are generally universal statements, they are suitable for supporting particular statements as inference rules in argumentative contexts.” Although according to Burger, this particular function is a historical function, which is not regarded as central in contemporary proverb usage.

<sup>69</sup> A universal quantifier is considered as a basic predicate logic symbol that is verbalized in German as *alle* (all) or *jede/r* (each, every) respectively.

**Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied** [ee: Every man is the architect of his own fortune] → It applies for every person that they are the architect of their own fortune; it applies for everyone that they are able to actively and positively influence the outcome of certain situations and are therefore solely responsible for what they achieve.

The following context-based example shall illustrate the aforementioned:

(7) **Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied** [ee: Every man is the architect of his own fortune]; *so könnte das Credo unserer Leistungsgesellschaft lauten. Und da ist auch viel Wahres dran. Wir haben die Verantwortung, unser Leben zu gestalten.* (OWID Sprichwörterbuch)

The validity of the content of the proverb implying that everyone is “able to actively and positively influence the outcome of certain situations and are therefore solely responsible for what they achieve” (see OWID Sprichwörterbuch) is valid on the individual level, while also being transferred to the social level at the same time.

On the other hand, there are also proverbs without explicit quantifiers where the potentially generalizing content becomes recognizable only if the missing quantifiers are inferred<sup>70</sup>. This means that the respective recipient complements them based on active previous knowledge. This may possibly lead to different interpretation of the text and the corresponding argument. For example:

*Ausnahmen bestätigen die Regel* [ee: The exceptions prove the rule] → It applies for all/some/many exceptions that they prove the rule;

*Ende gut, alles gut* [ee: All's well that ends well] → If the end is well, then all is well → It always/often applies that: If the end is well, then all is well;

*Wer rastet, der rostet* [ee: He who rests, rusts] → It applies for all/some/many who rest that they rust.

The following example shows that inferences can also emanate from doubts in and negations of a generalized statement:

(8) *Mit dem eigenständigen Tarifvertrag haben die Kontrahenten ihren wichtigsten Konfliktpunkt offensichtlich vom Tisch. [...] Ende gut, alles gut also? Wohl kaum. Mit Ruhm bekleckert haben sich beide Seiten in den vergangenen Monaten nämlich nicht gerade.* (OWID Sprichwörterbuch)

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<sup>70</sup> Inference is an act or a process whereby textual information is complemented by active previous knowledge in a manner that enables the recipient to draw conclusions and derive meaning from the context.



The possible doubt in the validity or the negation of the proverb-specific universal statement (→ It always/often applies that: If the end is well, then all is well) leads to the conclusion that the argumentative function of proverbs, which is founded in the syntactic-logical structure, is not stable or not absolutely given. It can only be carried out and understood in an interpretative and concrete contextual frame.

b) The argumentative function of proverbs is based on their occurrence in syllogistic structures.

Aristotelian rhetoric regards proverbs as elements featured in syllogisms<sup>71</sup>: they either verbalize one of the two premises (propositions) or the conclusion.

In the following example, the proverb represents the second premise (*Ausnahmen bestätigen die Regel* [ee: *The exceptions prove the rule*]), from the generalizing interpretation of which (→ *Alle Ausnahmen bestätigen die Regel* [All exceptions prove the rule]) a conclusion is derived (→ *in Spielhallen darf man rauchen* [Smoking is allowed in gambling establishments]):

(9) *Grundsätzlich gilt das Rauchverbot in allen Gastronomiebetrieben und öffentlichen Räumen, aber **Ausnahmen bestätigen bekanntlich die Regel**: In niedersächsischen Spielhallen zum Beispiel darf geraucht werden, [...]* (OWID Sprichwörterbuch)

Contrary to the previous example, in the following example the proverb functions as a conclusion (*Was sich liebt, das neckt sich* [ee: *Teasing is a sign of affection*]). Based on the generalizing interpretation (→ *Alle, die sich lieben, necken sich* [All who love each other, quarrel]), the conclusion is regarded as an inductive conclusion derived from the first (→ *Christoph wird von Stefan beschimpft* [Christoph is being berated by Stefan]) and the second premise (→ *Christoph ist Stefans bester Freund* [Christoph is Stefan's best friend]):

(10) *Und obendrein muß Christoph in Schach gehalten werden, denn der beschimpft ihn abwechselnd mit „Olte Hex!“ und „Kampfmaschine!“. Also entspinnt sich zwischen den beiden ein Dialog, der genauso gut aus dem Büroalltag gegriffen sein könnte: „Olte Hex!“, „Macker!“ [...] usw. Christoph ist Stefans bester Freund und **was sich liebt, das neckt sich** eben.* (OWID Sprichwörterbuch)

<sup>71</sup> Syllogism are logical arguments in which one proposition (the conclusion) is inferred from two or more others (the (major or minor) premises) of a specific form. Each of the premises has one term in common with the conclusion in a major premise, this is the major term (i.e., the predicate of the conclusion); in a minor premise, it is the minor term (the subject) of the conclusion. The premises and the conclusion are statements that are either true or false

c) The argumentative function of proverbs is based on the fact that they verbalize topoi.

Proverbs also occur as linguistic realizations of topoi within syllogistic argument structures. Topoi are understood as “argumentative resources from which the individual making an argument derives what best fits their purpose” (Ottmers 1996; quoting Wirrer, 2007: 180). Proverbs are regarded as such argumentative means because they are ideal for verbalizing one particular or several different topoi<sup>72</sup>: the topos of time, cause, consequence, potentiality, means, similarity etc.<sup>73</sup> There are following dominant topoi that can be deduced from the proverbs below: *Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat* [ee: *Time will tell*] → time; *Übung macht den Meister* [ee: *Practice makes perfect*] → cause; *Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen* [ee: *In for a penny, in for a pound*] → consequence; *Wer wagt, gewinnt* [ee: *No guts, no glory*] → potentiality; *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse* [ee: *Good bait catches fine fish*] → means; *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* [ee: *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*] → similarity. Although, it can be determined only after observation of the textual usage which topos is in the foreground. Let us compare the following two contextual examples:

In the example (11) it is the topos of similarity in the foreground; but the typical usage of the proverb *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* [The apple doesn't fall far from the tree] does not convey similarity alone. It additionally conveys genetically and otherwise determined traits one shares with their ancestors<sup>74</sup> – consequently, the particular proverb also represents the topos of cause (Kindt, 2002: 280):

(11) ***Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm***: Jack Osbourne [...] befindet sich zum Drogen- und Alkoholentzug in einer Klinik. Schuld an der Sucht sei unter anderem der Rummel um seine Person[...] Sein Vater Ozzy Osbourne kämpft seit Jahrzehnten gegen seine Drogen- und Alkoholsucht. (OWID Sprichwörterbuch)

On the other hand, the topos central to the proverb *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse* [ee: *Good bait catches fine fish*], used in example (12), is the topos of means, while the topoi of potentiality (→ die Aussicht mit den Wählern zu sprechen [the prospect of speaking with the voters]) and consequence (→ die Wähler dadurch für die aktuelle politische Idee zu gewinnen [to convince the voters to embrace the topical political agenda as a result]) can be identified as well. The lexis and the usage of metaphors are

<sup>72</sup> Wirrer (2007: 181): “It can be generally assessed that [...] topoi and phrasemes express varying degrees of affinity.”

<sup>73</sup> Wirrer (2007: 181) provides an illustration of the topoi and the corresponding phrasemes (incl. proverbs).

<sup>74</sup> The examples of meaning and usage illustrated in the OWID Sprichwörterbuch dictionary of proverbs: “Is said when children in the course of their lives develop the same way as their ancestors, because there are certain characteristics or ways of behaviour within a family that are being passed on to next generations or inherited.”

bound to the proverb-specific eidetic character (*Raclette, auf den Geschmack bringen* [raclette, to whet one's appetite]) and additionally enhance the argumentative function of the proverb:

(12) **Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse.** *Isabella Stäheli will übers Raclette mit den Wählern ins Gespräch kommen und sie so auf den grünen Geschmack bringen.* (OWID Sprichwörterbuch).

The argumentative potential of proverbs is substantiated on various levels. It is substantiated in their syntactic-logical formal structure, in their usage in syllogistic schemes, as well as in their usage as means for verbalizing argumentative topoi. It appears though, as if the convincing effect of proverbs in argumentative contexts grounds primarily on the category-specific topos of authority (Wirrer, 1999: 431; Hoffmann, 2009: 11). Proverbs are perceived as so-called universally applicable expressions of folk wisdom with a convincing effect. Until the period of enlightenment the authority of the argumentative proverbial saying was highly regarded, whereas later these were degraded as stereotypical sayings. Currently we speak about a shift in the function of proverbs and consequently about the loss of their argumentative function (Burger, 2010). As it has been shown, proverbs are still being used as argumentative means. Referring to Hoffmann (2012), proverbs reflect important structures of argumentative thinking in a speech community, which are still being used, as before. It has not yet been established what their validity and their efficiency ground on. It may be assumed that the category of authority does not play an important role anymore and that the general psychological and social principles, combined with their connectedness with the abstract patterns of everyday argumentation, are what is central here.<sup>75</sup>

Based on the fact that proverbs are still being used both commonly and frequently in argumentative contexts, it would be of advantage to subject proverbs to additional research from the argumentation-theoretical and pragmalinguistic point of view.

### 6.3.2 Proverbs as Items of Speech Acts in Non-argumentative Contexts

As presented above, proverbs are frequently used to carry out speech acts in argumentative contexts, but they are also used similarly frequently to perform speech acts in non-argumentative contexts. Pragmatics, or speech act theory (introduced by Austin and Searle) to be more precise, distinguishes between representative (assertive), direct, commissive, expressive and declarative speech acts, and proceeds from the assumption that phrasemes (including proverbs) also contribute to the textual

<sup>75</sup> Hoffmann (2012) presents a detailed study on the argumentative structures of German proverbs.

realization of speech acts. Proverbs can therefore function as *assessments, demands, advice, warnings, threats* etc.

#### a) Proverbs as xpressions of representative (assertive) speech acts

Representative or assertive speech acts express the commitment of the speaker/writer to stating the truth (*to declare, to ascertain, to claim, to report, to describe, to notify, to inform, to predict, to classify* etc). The proverb *Alles hat ein Ende* [ee: *All good things must come to an end*], featured in example (13), represents an assertion, while the proverb *Übung macht den Meister* [ee: *Practice makes perfect*], featured in example (14), represents a prediction.

(13) „Jeder Sommertag könnte der letzte sein. Das denke ich jetzt öfter. **Alles hat ein Ende**“, sagte er leise und schaute dabei wehmütig aus dem Fenster. (Sprichwort-Plattform)

(14) **Übung macht den Meister**. Und regelmäßiges Training macht Beine, Bauch und Popo topfit für den Sommer. (Sprichwort-Plattform)

#### b) Proverbs as expressions of directive speech acts

Directive speech acts are used as demands directed to the recipient/reader in order to convince them to take a particular action or to refrain from taking a particular action (*to demand, to assign, to request, to order, to threaten, to advise, to allow, to advise, to forbid, to force*; as well as other imperative verbs). The proverb *Den Mutigen gehört die Welt* [ee: *Fortune favors the brave*], featured in example (15), is used to emphasize a demand, the proverb *Man kann nicht auf zwei Hochzeiten tanzen* [ee: *You cannot dance at two weddings*], featured in example (16), is used to express a restriction, the proverb *Erst denken, dann handeln* [ee: *Think before you act/speak*], featured in example (17), can be interpreted as advice, while the proverb *Übung macht den Meister* [ee: *Practice makes perfect*], featured in example (18), expresses encouragement.

(15) Keine Ausreden mehr, kein Herumreden mehr, Handeln ist gefragt. **Den Mutigen gehört die Welt**, die Zauderer werden vergessen. Alle schauen auf die ÖVP und erwarten etwas – das muß man in den Parteizentralen doch erkennen. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(16) „Warum sollen wir in Europa nicht zwei Pässe haben“, fragt ein Mann, der sich als „Türke mit deutschem Paß“ zu erkennen gibt, einen älteren Herrn. „**Man kann nicht auf zwei Hochzeiten tanzen**“, sagt der. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(17) „**Erst denken, dann handeln**“, raten die Dreieicher Grünen dem Magistrat und dannamentlich dem Sozialdezernenten und Ersten Stadtrat Berthold Olschewsky (CDU). Es

geht um die geplante Erweiterung des Jugendzentrums in der Sprendlinger Benzstraße. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(18) Nun können wir gemeinsam tanzen und können mit Sicherheit behaupten, dass das Tanzen unser größtes Hobby ist. Also: Wenn es am Anfang nicht klappt – nur nicht aufgeben – **Übung macht den Meister** (SprichWort-Plattform)

#### c) Proverbs as expressions of commissive speech acts

Commissive speech acts commit a speaker to (voluntarily) do or refrain from doing something in the future. A speaker uses commissives to express intent (*to promise, to assure, to threaten, to guarantee, to comply* etc.) Under the proverb *Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben* [ww: Postponed is not abandoned], featured in example (19), a promise/as reassurance can be implied, the proverb *Man beißt nicht die Hand, die einen füttert* [ee: *Do not bite the hand that feeds you*], featured in example (20), can be understood as a warning, the proverb *Wer wagt, der gewinnt* [ee: *No guts, no glory*], featured in example (21), expresses a guarantee, while the proverb *Wer schön sein will, muss leiden* [ee: *Beauty knows no pain*], featured in example (22), can be interpreted as acceptance of an otherwise unreasonable approach:

(19) **Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben**, das versichert [...] Bernd Michelitsch, der Projektleiter des Hotels [...]. Zwar soll es nun doch erst 2009 eröffnet werden, an ein Aus für die Pläne ist aber nicht gedacht. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(20) Ob dies als Drohung zu verstehen sei? Haider: „So geht man nicht mit einem Partner um, der den anderen bis zur Stunde gut behandelt hat. **Man beißt nicht die Hand, die einen füttert.**“ (SprichWort-Plattform)

(21) Alles was Sie anpacken gelingt. Waage: **Wer wagt, der gewinnt.** Venus schenkt Ihnen viele zauberhafte Stunden mit Ihrem Herzblatt. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(22) **Wer schön sein will, muss leiden.** Das spürt jetzt auch Victoria Beckham. Weil sie seit Jahren nur super-hohe High-Heels trägt, sind ihre Füße total kaputt. (SprichWort-Plattform)

#### d) Proverbs as expressions of expressive speech acts

Finally, proverbs are also used to carry out expressive speech acts. The speaker's current state of emotion plays here a central role (*to apologize, to praise, to criticize, to congratulate, to complain, to reprimand, to console*). This way the proverb *Irren ist menschlich* [To err is human], featured in example (23), expresses an apology, the proverb *Das Werk lobt den Meister* [ww: The work praises the craftsman], featured in

example (24), expresses praise, the proverb *Eigenlob stinkt* [ee: *A man's praise in his own mouth stinks*], featured in example (25), expresses criticism, while the proverb *Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man* [ee: *As you make your bed, so you must lie on it*], featured in example (26), expresses reproof.

(23) **Irren ist menschlich**, besagt ein Sprichwort. Das stimmt, jeder macht einmal einen Fehler – das muss zu verzeihen sein. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(24) Mit dem grossen Spielrasen, einem weiträumigen Hofplatz, den Teerflächen, den grosszügigen Veloständern und dem geplanten Kinderspielfeld ... wird auch das Umfeld der Mehrzweckhalle für Schule und Dorfbevölkerung zu einer Attraktion werden. **Das Werk lobt den Meister**. Die Schulgemeinde tritt als Bauherr auf. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(25) Die Kanzlerin klopfte sich zufrieden auf die Schulter: Deutschland sei bei der Eindämmung der Finanzkrise unter Europas führenden Nationen. Das **Eigenlob stinkt** gleich mehrfach. Zum einen investiert etwa Frankreich gleich sechs Mal mehr Geld pro Jahr zur Ankurbelung der Wirtschaft: 26 statt zaghafte sechs Milliarden Euro. Zum anderen verdient das Maßnahmenpaket, das die Kanzlerin durch den Bundestag brachte, kaum den Namen Konjunkturprogramm. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(26) **Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man** bekanntlich. Von daher verwundert es schon, mit welchem ungeeigneten Werkzeug manche Heimwerker sich ans Basteln, Schrauben und Renovieren machen. (SprichWort-Plattform)

However, it is difficult to clearly identify and distinguish between the various functions of proverbs in non-argumentative communicative contexts. Due to the dominant interpretative methodological approach towards observing the functions of proverb usage<sup>76</sup>, it is often possible to detect combinations of functions, among which one or more functions can be prevalent.<sup>77</sup> In this regard, the proverb *Aller Anfang ist schwer* [ee: *Every beginning is difficult*], featured in example (27), may express either an apology, praise and/or consolation (expressive speech acts), while it can also be perceived as argumentative justification at the same time.

(27) Es ist eine knifflige Arbeit, die Sorgfalt und eine leichte Hand erfordert. Eine Menge Leisten landen im Müll. „Das macht gar nichts, **aller Anfang ist schwer**“, tröstet Linke, der das Bemühen der Jungen honoriert. (SprichWort-Plattform)

<sup>76</sup> Lüger (1999: VII): “Describing the aspects of function requires the application of interpretative methods.”

<sup>77</sup> In this regard, Kindt (2002: 284) refers to vast complexes of action, which facilitate the argumentative and non-argumentative communicative functions of proverbs.

Therefore, it is valid to pose the question if certain types or groups of proverbs may particularly be suitable for carrying out individual speech acts, and if particular proverbs may be preferred as means for performing individual speech acts, (as has been ascertained with regard to the verbalization of *topoi* above). To my knowledge, something similar has not been concluded yet, so that further research on the topic of speech-act-related functions of proverbs remains still an important desideratum for paremiological pragmatics.

### 6.3.3 Proverbs in Text-constituting and Text-structuring Functions

Proverbs are considerably used as means of organising and structuring the text (Burger, 1987; Lüger, 1999: 190; Rothkegel, 2000; Sandig, 1996; 2007: 168); Ptashnyk, 2009: 180). What is meant here is the facilitation of coherence and cohesion, in other words, the construction of thematically structured texts, that can be interpreted as *cohesion-and-coherence-providing functions* or *text-forming potential* respectively (Dobrovol'skij, 1980; Sabban, 2007).<sup>78</sup> The functional potential of proverbs regarding text-organizing and text-structuring is generally substantiated in their structural and semantic separability and particularly in their relation to individual texts types (Sabban, 2007: 239).

The contribution of proverbs to text-organizing is often related to the manner in which they are positioned in a text. Even though proverbs can essentially appear in any textual position, the usage of proverbs is functional-pragmatically heterogeneous and stylistically conspicuous (also due to their distinctive modifiability) when they are featured in prominent parts of a text; such as the beginning or the end of a text, the beginning or the end of a text segment, the title, the subtitle, or even in the text (segment) frame. This particularly applies to opinion-based journalistic texts. Therefore, the following examples of proverb usage have been chosen from this particular type of text. The following will be observed in this regard:

- a) The proverb located at the beginning of a text (segment) (*anteposition* according to Čermák, 1998);

The proverb determines the topic of a respective text and institutes the general situational frame – the function of introducing the topic (Lüger, 1999: 193; Ptashnyk, 2009: 183) or constituting it globally (Sandig, 2007: 168).

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<sup>78</sup> The term *text-forming potential* emanates from Soviet phraseological research (Černyševa) and its function-oriented observation of phraseology in textual contexts.

(28) **Scherben bringen Glück** [ee: *Shards bring happiness*]- *das gilt auch in der Ukraine. Bei ihrer ersten Probe für den Eurovision Song Contest hatte die ukrainische Sängerin Ruslana mit ihrem »Wild Dance« letzte Woche die gläserne Bühne [...] in Istanbul zertrümmert; im Finale am Samstagabend siegte sie auf der hastig erneuerten Glasfläche souverän.* (SprichWort-Plattform)

Proverbs are often prominently featured in the titles or the subtitles<sup>79</sup> of mass media texts. Proverbs featured in headlines enable short, concise and opinion-based (expressive) introductions of the topic and thus perform an *attention-directing pragmatic-stylistic function*, acting as “retainers” (Rothkegel, 2000: 240). They are supposed to establish contact with the reader, facilitate and possibly evoke their attention, and provide an incentive for reading (all in the function to emotionalise), while establishing coherence with the content of the respective text at the same time.

(29) **Kommt Zeit, kommt Rat** [ee: *Time will tell*]

*Europa scheitert nicht an einer 58-tägigen Urteilsfindung. Karlsruhe ist gut beraten, sich für die Urteile die notwendige Zeit zu nehmen.*  
(<http://www.theeuropean.de>)

The attention-directing effects of proverbs, which are located at the anteposition, often emanate from occasional modifications that are adapted to the content of a text, as they are perceived as marked stylistic deviations from the anticipated norm in particular situation-related communicative contexts. In example (30), the lexical expansion, along with the semantic alteration (the addition of the lexeme *nicht* [not]) of the usual proverb *Ende gut, alles gut* [ee: *All's well that ends well*] to *Ende gut, nicht alles gut* [All's not well that ends well], classifies both the central topic of the text (difficulties that have become apparent after the end of the festival) and its expressive value

(30) *Berlinale in der Krise*

Ende gut, nicht alles gut

**Die Berlinale steckt in einer schweren Krise im Wettbewerb der großen Festivals.**

(<http://www.tagesspiegel.de>, 16. 2. 2013)

The prominent featuring of proverbs in titles or at the beginning of a text is often indicated through additional typographical marking in the form of altered typography or through the addition of quotation marks, indicating the speaker's/writer's intention to influence the recipient's/reader's attention;

<sup>79</sup> However, in this regard Čermák (1998) speaks about non-prototypical usage of proverbs.



(31) »**Unkraut vergeht nicht**« [ee: Bad weeds grow tall]

*Formel-1-Weltmeister Michael Schumacher hat sich beim ersten öffentlichen Auftritt nach dem Horror-Crash in Monza gut erholt gezeigt und freut sich auf den Großen Preis von Italien. (SprichWort-Plattform)*

(32) »**Einmal ist keinmal**« [ee: Once does not count]- *das mögen viele denken, die zum ersten Mal zu illegalen Drogen wie Cannabis greifen. Aber wie gefährlich solche Substanzen sind, unterschätzen gerade Jugendliche, die erstmals mit Cannabis in Berührung kommen. (SprichWort-Plattform)*

When particular media and specific contexts are considered (newspaper articles, advertising, comics, cartoons, online media communication), the usage of proverbs for the purpose of gaining attention is often supported by non-verbal means (images, artwork). Such means are applied to illustrate particular contexts or, in other words, to visualize the literal meaning of proverbs, which can enhance the pragmatic effects of proverb usage.<sup>80</sup>

In example (33), the proverb *Der Krug geht so lange zum Brunnen, bis er bricht* [ee: The pitcher will to the well once too often], located in the anteposition, is understood as expressive emphasis of the central statement of the text (the city wells are degenerating). The generalizing content of the proverb (questionable action lead to failure) is projected to a concrete situation and introduces what is to follow in the text (description of unreasonable actions that facilitated the decaying of the wells). The explicit repetition of an element of the proverb (*Brunnen, City-Brunnen* [wells, city wells]) and of assorted components of the proverb's content (*verkommen, defekt, trocken* [degenerate, out of order, dry]) in the proceeding text leads to semantic correlation on the surface of text, facilitates a literal reading approach, establishes cohesion and coherence:

(33) *Brunnen in der Stadt verkommen*

*Stuttgart – **Der Krug geht so lange zum Brunnen, bis er bricht.***

*Dieses Sprichwort gilt vor allem für die Sparpolitik bei den 250 städtischen Brunnen in Stuttgart. Für jedes Wasserspiel darf das Tiefbauamt dieses Jahr nur noch 4515 Euro ausgeben. 2010 waren es noch 7792 Euro – 3277 Euro mehr!*

**Resultat: Obwohl die Stadt kurz nach Ostern alle City-Brunnen anstellen wollte, sind jetzt – vier Wochen später – viele von ihnen noch defekt und trocken. Und in den Becken sammelt sich Dreck, Unrat, Müll!**

(<http://www.bild.de>, 28. 4. 2013)

<sup>80</sup> Interesting examples concerning the relation between texts and images are presented by Lüger (1999: 167; 170).

In this regard, Ptashnyk (2009: 187) refers to the *function of thematic progression*; the progression of the topic of a respective text, and in this coherence-inducing frame rightfully includes the expressive, argumentative, emphasizing, and accentuating stylistic-pragmatic functions of (modified) phraseological expressions (including proverbs). Lüger (1999: 190) refers to this process as *sequence control* and emphasizes its text-structuring function: “Sentence-like phraseological units /are/ preferably used for the purposes of structuring [...]: for initiating a sequence or the entire text, as well as for the purpose of summarizing or concluding extended segments of text respectively“ (Lüger 1999: 193).

b) The proverb located at the end of a text (segment) (*postposition* according to Čermák, 1998);

The most important function of a proverb, which is located at the end of a text or text segment respectively, is to summarize what has been stated before (generalizing and/or commenting pointed emphasis).

(34) *Bislang zahlen die Jüngeren, soweit sie arbeiten, für die Rentner. Im Bonner Frühling wird davon geträumt, jeden seine Rente selbst ansparen zu lassen, was ein großer Schritt von der Solidarität zur Individualisierung wäre. **Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied*** [ee: Every man is the architect of his own fortune]. (SprichWort-Plattform)

(35) *Unter einem Polterabend versteht man den Brauch, einem Brautpaar vor dessen Heirat durch das Zerschlagen von Porzellan ein Gelingen der Ehe zu wünschen, nach dem Sprichwort: »**Scherben bringen Glück**«* [ee: Shards bring happiness]. (SprichWort-Plattform)

It is not only the specific, stylistically conspicuous conclusion of a text sequence understood here, through the figurative character of a proverb emerges a certain expressivity of expression, and with it also the “aesthetic or persuasive *topping* of a text”(Sandig, 1996: 290). The usage of phraseological expressions (including proverbs) in such manner is often text-type-specific. Phraseological units often represent the focal “point” – the punchline of a joke or an anecdote (Wotjak, 1994 & 1999).

c) Proverbs in the function of a text (sequence) framing elements

Proverbs are particularly used in opinion-based journalistic text types (articles, squibs etc.) for the purpose of establishing the structural frame of a respective text;

(36) *„**Wir sitzen alle in einem Boot**“* [ee: We are all in the same boat] *ist eine Charakterisierung von Solidarität in der Erklärung der beiden großen Kirchen zur sozialen und*

*wirtschaftlichen Lage. Sie haben Recht. **Wir sitzen in einem Boot.** Aber einige müssen rudern.* (Die Zeit, 28. 3. 1997; example quoted from Ptashnyk, 2009: 203).

The pragmatic text-organizing or text-structuring function is based on the repetitive occurring of a proverb in a contextual frame, in which the main statement (the text or a text segment) can be interpreted as expressive and argumentative.

To summarize: Proverbs are often featured in prominent parts of texts relevant to text structure: in the headline, at the beginning and at the end of a text. This way they function as text-constituting and text-structuring elements. The prominent featuring of proverbs in a text hints at conspicuous usage and facilitates additional stylistic and pragmatic effects such as influencing the attention of the recipient/reader, an increase in the degree of expressivity, emotions etc. Proverbs evidently contain features, which enable specific usage of text. Therefore, it would be of advantage to systematically observe and to determine the relations between proverbs and texts from the perspective of text linguistics. The correlation between types of phraseological expressions and text types or, in other words, between the features and functions of proverbs and text types, would be of particular interest in this regard. In concrete terms, the question hinted by Sabban (2007: 238) could thus be posed as follows: How can proverbs be used based on their distinct properties to contribute to the various dimensions of texts in an extraordinary, if not crucial manner?

## 6.4 Conclusion and Outlook

The observation of the stylistic and pragmatic aspects of proverbs within the scope of this paper was conducted from the perspective of traditional stylistics and from the perspective of the modern pragmatic and text linguistic concept of style. We have seen that the traditional narrow understanding of style considers proverbs as stylistic devices and assigns them characteristic stylistic labels aside of the textual usage. If we however understand style as a functional-pragmatic textual dimension, it is essential to observe proverbs in complex textual-situational contexts.

This concise presentation of stylistics and pragmatics of proverbs is not thorough or absolute in terms of interpretation. Particularly on the grounds of the extraordinary diversity of proverbs, the present paper is intended as an initial orientation and aspires to be considered as an impulse for further research in this area. A requirement for further studies is evident in many respects. With regard to the frequently criticized lexicographic practice, it would be necessary to determine the criteria and principles for the classification of labels for denoting register and the type of style coloring. It would be interesting to observe if particular types or groups of proverbs are particularly suitable for realizing individual speech acts, and if particular proverbs may be preferred as means for realizing speech acts to a larger degree than others.

Additionally, it would also be of advantage to ascertain if all proverbs appear in argumentative contexts in equal measure, and if certain proverbs are preferred in specific situation-and-text-type-based contexts with regard to their respective degree of argumentative force. What is generally missing as well are theoretical methods for assigning functions to proverbs in textual and discursive contexts based on the usage of proverbs in concrete, context-related statements (see Kindt, 2002: 277). From an interlingual perspective, it would be necessary to establish so-called functional interlinguistic paremiological equivalence in order to consider stylistic-pragmatic parameters of comparison to a greater extent when determining equivalence relations. Proverbs contain significant stylistic-pragmatic potential, which is why there is a demand for a holistic pragmalinguistic approach towards studying the usage of proverbs. In conclusion, it is to be emphasized that detailed studies of the stylistic-pragmatic potential and functions of proverbs require interdisciplinary research, which consider the stylistic-pragmatic perspective, the perspective of text linguistics, the perspective of corpus linguistics, as well as the perspective of contrastive phraseology/paremiology.

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## 7 Cognitive Apects of Proverbs<sup>81</sup>

### 7.1 Introduction

From the cognitive point of view proverbs are linguistically and culturally coined frames. Especially in spoken language, these frames work well for knowledge transfer due to their conciseness. Usually, proverbs are linguistically easy to identify based on their stereotyped character and consistence. Their economised form helps the speaker to remember and recognise them easily. Therefore, proverbs can be referred to as verbal stereotypes of knowledge which allow their users to comment on, standardise and evaluate new situations with the help of known social clichés. Against this background, we pose the following questions: What makes proverbs *stereotyped*? Which influence has the linguistic form of proverbs on our ability to memorize and duplicate them? Which role do proverbs play for social knowledge transfer? Henceforth, we will discuss the above questions under a cognitive point of view. We will concentrate on Lakoff and Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* as frame to create a cognitivist understanding of proverbs (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992).

### 7.2 Lakoff and Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*

The *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* by George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson is based on the assumption that “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 3).

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<sup>81</sup> We would like to thank Dana Gläßer for her conscientious translation and Wolfgang Mieder (Burlington, Vermont) for his critical review and suggestions.



Around 1980, this thesis<sup>82</sup> was revolutionary. It is premised on a then new cognitivist approach which has been defined more precisely through the central term *metaphorical concept* (MC):

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 3).

The new idea behind Lakoff and Johnson's theory is that metaphors are no longer seen as purely linguistic phenomena, but from the cognitivist point of view as a basic rational instrument of orientation and world interpretation:

In cognitive linguistics, the metaphor leaves its past as a mere embellishment once and for all behind. She is no longer a stylistic device to illustrate a circumstance visually, but she is part of the *knowledge* of this circumstance as well as a part of its perspectival *evaluation*. Simultaneously, in terms of language she is irreplaceable in the communication of new thoughts or new semantic contents. She serves as a link between the known and the unknown, the specific and the abstract. And she serves as a link between language and cognition (Drewer, 2003: 10).<sup>83</sup>

The question remains of why metaphors work so well for both the creation of frames and the transfer of knowledge. According to Lakoff and Johnson the main function of a metaphor entails making abstract and complex contexts linguistically and cognitively more comprehensible using well-known images. Therefore, metaphors systematically close the loop between a cognitively elusive field of experience, the so-called *target domain* of the metaphor, with a more comprehensible second field of experience, the *source domain* of the metaphor, by projecting a part of the source

<sup>82</sup> Lakoff and Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* is *revolutionary* and *non-revolutionary* at the same time, Liebert (1992: 12ff): On the one hand, the idea that *metaphors* are primarily no longer seen as linguistic-rhetorical patterns, but rather as *cognitive concepts*, has affected the present discussion fundamentally. On the other hand, the influence of the American theory of cognition has been blinded out (see the bibliography of *Metaphors We Live By* which contains merely 20 entries, out of which three are by Lakoff himself!) as well as its widely ignored European precursors.

<sup>83</sup> Ger. original: "In der Kognitiven Linguistik lässt die Metapher ihre Vergangenheit als bloßes Schmuckstück endgültig hinter sich. Sie ist nicht länger ein Stilmittel, um einen Sachverhalt bildhaft zu veranschaulichen, sondern sie ist Teil des *Wissens* über diesen Sachverhalt sowie Teil seiner perspektivischen *Bewertung*. Gleichzeitig ist sie auf sprachlicher Ebene bei der Kommunikation neuer Gedanken bzw. neuer semantischer Gehalte unersetzlich. Sie schlägt eine Brücke zwischen dem Bekannten und dem Unbekannten, dem Konkreten und dem Abstrakten. Und sie schlägt eine Brücke zwischen Sprache und Kognition."

knowledge onto the target domain<sup>84</sup>. Please remark that instead of isolated components entire bodies of knowledge/ frames are created. Hence, we call the feature of cognitively creating abstract knowledge on the basis of specific images *projection*.

### 7.3 Metaphorical Concepts

In this section we would like to explain the central term of the proverb and *metaphorical concept* (MC) TIME IS MONEY using the trope about *time and money* as an example. This concept is unique in each time and culture, but has developed in our modern Western industrial society in the first place. Not only does it reflect an apparently quite natural everyday experience in dealing with *time* and *money* in market-based societies, but it also pre-structures our speech about this (new) experience in multiple variations. The following chart illustrates this correlation with (a slightly modified version of) Lakoff and Johnson's examples (1992):

#### Metaphorical Concept TIME IS MONEY

You're **wasting** my time.  
 This gadget will **save** you hours.  
 I don't **have** the time to **give** you.  
 How do you **spend** your time these days?  
 I've **invested** a lot of time in her.  
 I don't **have enough** time to **spare** for that.  
 You're **running out** of time.  
 You need to **budget** your time.  
 Is that **worth your while**?  
 Do you **have** much time **left**?  
 He's living on **borrowed** time.  
 You don't **use** your time **profitably**.  
 I **lost** a lot of time when I got sick.  
**Thank you for** your time.

The relationships between the expressions listed above, the metaphorical concept and the typical everyday activities within a society can be distinguished regarding the following three levels:

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<sup>84</sup> See the following example Time is Money: *money* is the easily comprehensible source domain whereas *time* is the elusive target domain of this metaphor.

Language: In phrasing the metaphorical concept we orientate ourselves initially by the language use: Some expressions “...refer specifically to money (*spend, invest, budget, profitably, [...]*), others to limited resources (*use, [...], have enough of, run out of*), and still others to valuable commodities (*have, give, lose, thank you for*)” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 9).

Cognition: „The metaphorical concepts TIME IS MONEY, TIME IS A RESOURCE, and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY form a single system based on subcategorization, since in our society money is a limited resource and limited resources are valuable commodities. These subcategorization relationships characterize entailment relationships between metaphors. TIME IS MONEY entails that TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, which entails that TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 9).

Actions: Not only do we talk in an exemplified way nor do we have only one respective metaphorical concept, but we act that way, too: “telephone message units, hourly wages, hotel room rates, yearly budgets, interest on loans, and paying your debt to society by ‘serving time’. These practices [...] have arisen in modern industrialized societies and structure our basic everyday activities in a very profound way” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 8).

According to Lakoff and Johnson the accomplishment of the metaphor entails the ability to operate on all three levels (and not only on the language level). Further on, metaphors can become more intense in a reciprocally *feed-backed* way<sup>85</sup>.

## 7.4 Epistemological Essentials

The *Conceptual Metaphor Theory* by Lakoff and Johnson<sup>86</sup> is based on an epistemology which contradicts the objectivistic understanding of thinking and meaning:

Thought is [...] not understood as a reflection of reality. In fact, the aspect of being able to deal with the world as a human has priority, the optimal human function in his environment. Both

<sup>85</sup> With this model it is possible to explain the opposite, i.e. the decrease of the graphic quality: some metaphors fade because their corresponding actions no longer exist, e.g. in German *Ich fühle mich wie gerädert*. [ee: I feel absolutely whacked.]. The German expression goes back to one of the most horrible kinds of execution: in the past, a criminal was sentenced to have his bones or limbs broken by a wheel in order to weave him onto the wheel’ – Röhrich, Lutz (1994). *Lexikon der sprichwörtlichen Redensarten* (Band 4). Also see the items: *sich wie gerädert fühlen* which means to feel exhausted through big efforts as well as *wie zerschlagen fühlen* [to feel knocked up] (Röhrich, Lutz, 1994: 1220).

<sup>86</sup> Mark Johnson’s *The body in the mind* (1987) deserves a particular mention here; Liebert (1992) and Baldauf (1997: 60).

the human nature and his style of interaction with the world coin his thoughts, which will now come across as *embodied* (Baldauf, 1997: 65).<sup>87</sup>

Johnson claims that the human body and what we experience with it is the starting point of every theory of meaning. It is supposed to show “how physical experiences, perceptions and well-rehearsed physical procedures [...] [coin] the meaning of language and things” (Liebert, 1992: 35). To put it simply, *higher thinking* is based on a *pre-linguistically* or *pre-conceptually* experienceable *embodiment* in the end. Thus, Johnson as well as Lakoff represents the “primacy of the structure of the pre-conceptual embodied experience” (Liebert, 1992: 36). Lakoff and Johnson’s approach emanates from the priority of the cognitive opposite to language. Therefore, the creation of meaning goes one-way from the pre-linguistic experience, from images and corporeality towards their manifestation in language:

[If] basic ideas emerge directly from non-conceptual, graphic or basic level structures, they are determined by both these pre-conceptual structures just like the so deriving ideas. There is no way back from language or ideas to experienceable structures (Liebert, 1992: 79).<sup>88</sup>

We will comment on this idea again subsequently.

## 7.5 Proverb Concepts (PCs)

Especially in the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries, proverbs were used to express the cultural identity of a particular society (or nation, time,

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**87** Ger. original: “Denken wird (...) nicht als eine Spiegelung der Realität verstanden. Im Vordergrund steht vielmehr der Aspekt des Zu Rechtfindens des Menschen in der Welt, die bestmögliche Funktion des Menschen in seinem Umfeld. Sowohl die Beschaffenheit des Menschen als auch die Art seiner Interaktion mit der Welt prägen das Denken, welches folglich als körpergebunden (*embodied*) verstanden wird.“

**88** Ger. original: “(... Wenn die Grundbegriffe direkt aus nichtbegrifflichen, bildschematischen und Basisebenen-Strukturen emergieren, sind sie und damit abgeleiteten Begriffe von diesen beiden vorbegrifflichen Strukturen determiniert. Es gibt keinen Weg von der Sprache oder den Begriffen zu Erfahrungsstrukturen zurück.”

profession etc.). Like in fairytales and folk songs, proverbs reflected the *soul of a nation*<sup>89</sup>.

From the cognitivist point of view, proverbs can be perceived as stereotyped speech-forms that, like metaphors, are based on socially efficient *cognitive concepts*!

The underlying hypothesis is that many proverbs and metaphors share a similar or even identical cognitive structure. Evidence for this link between metaphors and proverbs can be found in their equivalent imagery<sup>90</sup>. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* already states that proverbs "...are explicitly referred to as metaphors; even if it is not explicitly said that metaphoricity is an obligatory feature of proverbs, or only optional (though common)" (Grzybek, 1998: 133).<sup>91</sup>

The cognitive influence of proverbs as well as metaphors rests upon the *pre-linguistic* and *pre-conceptual* imagery although there is a difference between *figurative* (or metaphorical) and *non-figurative* proverbs<sup>92</sup>. Especially in so-called motivated<sup>93</sup> proverbs this correlation is conveyed, such as *No rose without a thorn*. The message of this *rose-metaphor* is easily understood: *Even the most beautiful things have (minor) disadvantages*.<sup>94</sup>

In the extension of Lakoff and Johnson's approach, we will now take the manifold parallels between the cognitivist interpretation of metaphors and proverbs into account in order to define metaphors and the comprehension of proverbs. Let us look at the following analogies:

**Imagery:** Many paremiologists regard the imagery as the central characteristic of proverbs.

**89** Röhrich & Mieder (1977: 70). In the polemic about *Die Deutschen und Franzosen nach dem Geist ihrer Sprachen und Sprichwörter* [The Germans and the French in the spirit of their languages and proverbs] by J. Venedey (1842) it says: "In language and proverb does the German substance live...". According to Venedey, we can draw conclusions on the values rooted in a society from the firmly established sentences of a language. German expressions like *Freundes Stimme ist Gottes Stimme* [The voice of a friend is God's voice] or *Gleichgesinnt macht gute Freunde* [Like-minded makes good friends] point to the fact that friendship is something higher for the German and displays his non-material need whereas in French a material interest clearly dominates" (Lüger, 1999: 60).

**90** Permjakov considers the pictorially motivated overall meaning as a necessary criterion for *actual proverbs*, see also Grzybek (1984) or Lüger (1999: 68ff.) for general phraseology.

**91** Ger. original: "(...) explizit als Beispiele von Metaphern bezeichnet; wenn auch nicht explizit gesagt wird, ob Metaphorizität als obligatorisches oder lediglich fakultatives (wenn auch häufiges) Charakteristikum von Sprichwörtern anzusehen ist."

**92** *Figurative proverbs* are based on pictures and therefore are seen as *true (metaphorical)* concepts. Example: *No rose without a thorn*. *Non-figurative proverbs* are *literal (non-metaphorical)* proverbs which are generally understood word for word. Example: *To err is human*. Taylor (1932) differentiates between *metaphorical proverb* and *proverbial apothem*, Barley separates *proverb proper* from *maxim* and Permjakov distinguishes *actual proverbs* from *popular aphorisms* (Grzybek, 1998: 134).

**93** Lüger (1999).

**94** Duden 11: *Redewendungen*, 624.

Projection / Model function: Both metaphor and proverb have a similar function in *bridging* new concepts with known ones: They are linguistically stereotyped models for a standardizing organization of new concepts (situational or other).

Form: Proverbs as well as metaphors have a concise *form* which is based on holism.<sup>95</sup>

Taking these similarities into account, we need to accept proverb concepts (PCs) in order to define proverbs (Lewandowska & Antos, 2001). That is to say the comprehension of proverbs is predicated on certain cognitive concepts which can be compared to metaphorical concepts (MC). Not only do these concepts pre-structure our thoughts and actions to a great extent, but at the same time they put linguistically catchy words into our mouth.

We will now look at the role of PCs in two proverb examples whose lexical units are easily understood, but not their proverbial sense. The first example is from Kenya: *With the brother's stick the brother is beaten*.<sup>96</sup>

It is almost impossible to catch the meaning of this proverb, which is incredible because it contains a “pictorial message [...] that [does] not seem completely incomprehensible in the [...] translation at first sight” (Lüger, 1999: 20). Despite its *verbal image* we need the knowledge of the underlying proverb concept for a full comprehension. This concept can be based on cultural background knowledge among others. Here, the Kenyan proverb means as much as *You will be blamed for the actions of your relatives; for them you expose yourself to the rage of others or have to accept other disadvantages*.

The second example is from China and translates into English as follows: *He is the grass on the wall*.<sup>97</sup>

Like with metaphors or certain idioms, for instance, most people would not be able to extrapolate the meaning of this proverb merely from its wording. That is why we use it as a proverb here. This Chinese proverb has the following meaning: *It does not matter in which direction the wind blows, the grass always bends in the same direction*<sup>98</sup>. The underlying concept can be described as: Wherever a peer-group pressure emerges, the correct match will help to avoid it.

<sup>95</sup> Liebert (1992: 14). For more details – see 6.1 and 6.3.

<sup>96</sup> Schlee (1991: 166), cited in Lüger (1999: 20).

<sup>97</sup> Günthner (1994: 266), cited in Lüger (1999: 20).

<sup>98</sup> The two proverb meanings are cited in Lüger (1999: 20). Interestingly, Lüger additionally presents the German equivalent for further comprehension: *sein Mäntelchen nach dem Wind hängen* [to turn one's coat] or *sein Fähnchen nach dem Wind drehen* [to jump on bandwagons].

## 7.6 Structural Elements of Proverb Concepts

### 7.6.1 Linguistically Concise Form

We recognize proverbs as *proverbs* due to their linguistically concise *form* (gestalt). This term derives from the field of *gestalt psychology*. Lakoff “introduces [it] as a profound and universal explanation model into the linguistic discussion” (Liebert, 1992: 24). A form in the sense of the gestalt psychology is characterized by two features, known as structural qualities: *transposability* and *supra-summativity*.<sup>99</sup>

We will now expand on the first feature *transposability*. Transposability means independence of the material. If we sing or whistle a melody, change the tune or play it with this or that instrument up or down one octave, we will always recognize the same melody, even if the stimulation pattern is electro-acoustically different (Liebert, 1992: 16).<sup>100</sup>

In a transferred sense, it means: *recognizing* a melody is similar to *recognizing* a *linguistic stimulation pattern* as a proverb (or rather proverb-alike formula) if you are able to *transpose* the information of the proverb form onto a specific *sense*. In other words, proverbs are perceived as proverbs independently of their *material*, e.g. their individual language or particular variations. The same holds true for the proverb concept which has to remain discernible despite its specific phrasing.

### 7.6.2 Syntactic-semantic Structure

In the field of paremiology, it is often pointed out that proverbs have particular syntactic and semantic structural features. Typical syntactic features are summarized under the term *construction forms*:

Construction forms of a proverb distinguish between two-word [phrases] (ger. ‘*Eigenlob stinkt*’ (eng. equivalent *He that praises himself spatters himself*), lat. ‘*varietas delectat*’ (eng. *Variety delights.*), ger. ‘*Bargeld lacht*’ (eng. equivalent *Cash is king.*)) and three-word phrases (ger. ‘*Rost frisst Eisen.*’ (eng. *Rust penetrates steel.*), ger. ‘*Arbeit macht frei*’ (eng. *Work brings freedom.*). Imperative forms often meet the moral demand of the proverb (e.g. ger. ‘*Hilf dir selbst, so hilft dir Gott*’ (eng. *Heaven helps those who help themselves*), ger. ‘*Verliebe dich oft, verlobe dich selten, heirate nie!*’ (eng. *Often fall in love, seldom get engaged, never marry!*)) as do formulas like should,

<sup>99</sup> The term *supra-summativity* will be further investigated in connection with the issue of *holism*. See the section after next.

<sup>100</sup> Ger. original: “Transponierbarkeit bedeutet Unabhängigkeit vom Material. Ob wir eine Melodie singen oder pfeifen, sie in verschiedenen Tonarten, eine Oktave höher oder tiefer mit diesem oder jenem Instrument spielen – stets erkennen wir die gleiche Melodie, obwohl elektroakustisch völlig verschiedene Reizmuster vorliegen.“

must and must not (e.g. ger. 'Man soll den Tag nicht vor dem Abend loben' (eng. equivalent *Do not count your chickens before they are hatched.*), ger. 'Alte soll man ehren, Junge soll man lehren' (eng. *Honour the old and teach the young.*) (Röhrich & Mieder, 1977: 60).<sup>101</sup>

These construction forms are also called *structural models*<sup>102</sup>. Here are two German examples:

*Lieber den Spatz in der Hand, als die Taube auf dem Dach.* [ee: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.]

*Lieber ein lebender Feigling als ein toter Held.* [ee: Better a living dog than a dead lion.]

The underlying structural model can be outlined in the following way:

LIEBER (BESSER) A ALS B<sup>103</sup>

This model is also productive in other languages:

Spanish: *Más vale soltero andar que mal casar.* [ee: Rather remain single than marry badly.]

Dutch: *Liever brood in de zak, dan een pluim op de hoed.* [ww: A piece of bread in the bag is better than a feather on your hat]

English: *Rather get an upset stomach than let anything go back to the innkeeper.*

Italian: *Meglio l'uovo oggi che la gallina domani.* [ee: The egg today is better than the chicken tomorrow.]

For the Spanish, Dutch, English and Italian examples the underlying structural models are listed below:

Spanish: MÁS VALE A QUE B

Dutch: LIEVER A DAN B

English: RATHER (BETTER) A THAN B

Italian: MEGLIO A CHE B

In German, other proverbial structure models and variations include the following:

A IST A (tautology): *Dienst ist Dienst, Schnaps ist Schnapseng.* [ww: Duty is duty, liquor is liquor.]

<sup>101</sup> Ger. original: „Bei den Bauformen des Sprichworts kann man zunächst Zweiwort-Figuren („Eigenlob stinkt“, ‚Varietas delectat‘, ‚Bargeld lacht‘) und Dreiwort-Figuren unterscheiden („Rost frisst Eisen“, ‚Arbeit macht frei‘). Dem moralischen Anspruch des Sprichworts entsprechen häufig imperativische Formen („Hilf dir selbst, so hilft dir Gott“, ‚Verliebe dich oft, verlobe dich selten, heirate nie!‘) und insbesondere die Formeln man soll, man muß, man darf (nicht) (...) (z.B. ‚Man soll den Tag nicht vor dem Abend loben‘, ‚Alte soll man ehren, Junge soll man lehren‘).“

<sup>102</sup> Röhrich & Mieder (1977: 60) also call them *thinking-stencils*.

<sup>103</sup> All German examples here and hereafter are taken from Röhrich & Mieder (1977).



A BLEIBT A: *Doof bleibt doof, da helfen keine Pillen.* [ww: Stupid remains stupid, there is no cure.]

A IST B (identity phrase): *Zeit ist Geld* [ee: *Time is money*]

WIE MAN A, SO AUCH B: *Wie man sich bettet, so liegt man.* [ee: As you make your bed so you must lie in it]

A SCHÜTZT NICHT VOR B: *Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht.* [ee: There is no fool like an old fool]

Again most of these models can be found in a variety of other languages. Here are the corresponding examples:

A IS A: English: *A friend in need is a friend indeed.*

A IS B: English: *Time is money.*

A ER B: Icelandic: *Hefndin er sæt.* [ee: Vengeance is sweet]

TAL A, TAL B: Portuguese: *Tal pai, tal filho.* [ee: Like father, like son]

QUALE A, TALE B: Italian: *Quale uccello, tale nido.* [ww: Like the bird, so is his nest]

A A NÃO EVITA B: Portuguese: *A idade não evita estupidez.* [ee: There is no fool like an old fool]

Syntactic-semantically, these structural models are similar to the cognitive concepts which have been hypothesized by Lakoff and Johnson for their conceptual metaphors. The three different types of conceptual metaphors are listed below:

Structural metaphor: ARGUMENT IS WAR

Orientational metaphor: HAPPY IS UP; SAD IS DOWN

Ontological metaphor: INFLATION IS AN ENTITY<sup>104</sup>

Last but not least, from the cognitive perspective *transposability* is a key element to create PCs.

### 7.6.3 Holism

What is holism? Most definitions emphasize two aspects: 1. We follow the general principle: *The whole is more than the sum of its parts!* 2. With only a few (culturally specific) meaningful characteristics it is possible to create a complete image or a certain meaning entirely, e.g. smileys. The feature of *transposability* (see 6.1) is also based on this kind of holism. In the following, we add a feature which is known as *supra-summativity* in the sense of the gestalt psychology: “The whole melody can sound mournful or merry, but not its individual sounds, i.e. the characteristics of the

<sup>104</sup> All examples are taken from Lakoff & Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (1992).

whole form (here: the melody) are not the characteristics of its parts (here: the individual sounds) and vice versa” (Liebert, 1992: 17).<sup>105</sup>

*Supra-summativity* as a form of *holism* is known as *idiomaticity* within the field of phraseology. In paremiology, it is discussed in connection with *imagery*. In so far, it is correct as metaphors can act as images when seen as a whole. But: Not every single proverb must be based on imagery, but on holism however! Johnson discusses supra-summativity as image schemas: “Image schemas are neither specific pictures nor abstract propositions, but rather holistic forms with simple internal structures and can be ‘applied’ to a good deal of perceptions and events” (Drewer, 2003: 13).<sup>106</sup>

Holism that rests on supra-summativity: What is the consequence for explaining *proverb concepts*? Let us look at an example by Permjakov who attributes the variety of proverbs worldwide to relatively few deep-structured image schemas (Permjakov 2000: 70). He summarizes the following proverbs from different cultures into group 20:

- 20 KA *The sun warms the flower and the dunghill likewise* (Tamil)
- 20 KB *You would not tell the same to the blacksmith as to your wife* (Rwanda)
- 20 LA *The sun shines the same way for everybody* (Tadjik)
- 20 LB *Even the sun does not shine the same way for everybody* (Karelian)

These four proverbs are summarized under one construction type only. In his reasoned notation Permjakov (2000: 70) describes it the following way: “If a certain thing has a relation to other things which are connected in a certain way, the relation to one of them concurs with the relation to the other one of them or not.”<sup>107</sup>

Immediately, it becomes clear that this abstract kind of construction type is hardly memorable for speakers, not least because Permjakov’s expressions cannot create mental images. Proverb concepts, however, are constructed as models for new situations and offer the agent not only isolated, but also supra-summatively connected information. Plus: Cognitivist explanations of this kind have the advantage that these four proverbs can be assigned to two opposing PCs:

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**105** Ger. original: “So kann zwar eine Melodie traurig oder fröhlich klingen, nicht aber die einzelnen Töne, d.h. Eigenschaften der ganzen Gestalt (hier: der Melodie) sind nicht Eigenschaften der Teile (hier der Einzeltöne) und umgekehrt.“

**106** Ger. original: “Bildschemata sind weder konkrete Bilder noch abstrakte Propositionen, sondern vielmehr holistische Gestalten mit einfachen internen Strukturen, die sich auf unendlich viele Wahrnehmungen und Ereignisse ‚anwenden‘ lassen“

**107** Ger. original: “Wenn eine bestimmte Sache eine Beziehung zu anderen Sachen aufweist, die auf bestimmte Art und Weise miteinander in Verbindung stehen, so fällt ihre Beziehung zu der einen von diesen mit ihrer Beziehung zu der anderen von ihnen zusammen oder nicht.“

PC 1: EVERYBODY PROFITS FROM A GOOD THING

PC 2: SOMETHING GOOD DOES NOT STRIKE EVERYBODY

#### 7.6.4 Structural Simplicity

Proverb concepts need to be *simple in structure*. By this means, they can be used as models for new situations of use. Therefore, *structural simplicity* is the basis for their downright *proverbial ability* to be used in completely different (and also new) situations. Structural simplicity comprises the following aspects:

**Basic Level Concepts:** Humans create their cognitive concepts on an *intermediate abstraction level*: Hinting at results from Cognitive Sciences, Lakoff<sup>108</sup> and Johnson point out that there are basic level concepts “which do not automatically meet a logical categorization: As an example, neither do we use the superior concept ANIMAL nor the subordinate concept DACHSHUND, but the holistic basic level concept DOG.”<sup>109</sup> These basic level concepts on an intermediate abstraction level are well-suited candidates for the creation of proverb concepts.

**Perspectivation:** Lakoff and Johnson point out that “the metaphorical structuring of concepts is [...] partial”<sup>110</sup>. That is to say in creating a meaning metaphorical concepts, on the one hand, *highlight* something, on the other hand, *hide* other aspects of the same *reality*<sup>111</sup>. This results from the fact that we can only perceive the world from one specific perspective.

**Idealized Cognitive Models (ICM):** Categorizing a situation, *Proverb concepts* idealize inevitably. In other words, they not only have to block out many aspects, but they add up, as well: “We do not find circles, rectangles or triangles in nature, not in the mathematical sense. Still an idealized cognitive model of a circle makes sense to orientate oneself within reality or for the construction of objects [...]” (Liebert, 1992: 52).

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**108** “Lakoff’s key assumption for the basic level quotes: It holds true for both people and objects: Within a hierarchic classification a certain level, the so-called level of genus, excels in universally being the psychological basis of cognition for each speech community” (Liebert, 1992: 60).

**109** Drewer (2003: 18). Ib.: “Basic level concepts’, or fundamental experiences of an intermediate abstraction level, are well-suited “candidates“ for a metaphorical projection. Already toddlers acquire these concepts which are easy to remember and enable a holistic perception of form.”

**110** You find more in Lakoff & Johnson (1992). They give the following example: Theories are buildings. This metaphor is plausible if you, for instance, consider the *foundation of a theory*. The concept becomes implausible if you say, for example: *His theory is covered with gargoyles*. Hence, metaphorical concepts have *used* and *unused* parts.

**111** Further information on this in Lakoff & Johnson (1992). Ib.: “The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another [...] will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept [...] a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor”.

Due to their nature, *idealized* PCs reduce and simplify reality to a certain degree, but they rather construct it within their function as *thinking models* (Liebert, 1992: 52).<sup>112</sup>

### 7.6.5 Cultural Frame

To fully understand proverb concepts it is necessary to consider the cultural frame of proverbs (at a certain point of time). As an example, a new proverb emerged in the Germany of the 1970s: *Eine Frau ohne Mann ist wie ein Fisch ohne Fahrrad*. [A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.]

Non-German-speakers might ask themselves: Is it maybe about the relationship between *fish*, *women*, *bicycles* and *men*? Only if you consider the *cultural* and *time-typical knowledge* of the emancipation movement of women, it is clear that the key word thematizes the *relationship* of *emancipated women* and *men*; and the meaning of the proverb becomes obvious. The appeal in this proverb lies in the exemplification of this relationship with the slightly absurd use of a non-existing relationship between *fish* and *bicycles*; but only if you know the correct cultural frame or have become accessible to it.<sup>113</sup> When the knowledge of a *cultural frame* fades away, proverbs remain identifiable as proverbs, but they lose their significance as a proverb.

Let us explain a drastic example of an old proverb<sup>114</sup>:

*Frauen und Teppiche wollen geklopft werden*. [ww: Women and carpets want to be beaten]

In this fortunately no longer used proverb women are ranged with fitments quite naturally, not even taking the obvious gender discrimination into account. What is highlighted gaudily with the word *want* in the then men-ruled society, is the assumption that it belongs to the functionality of these objects to be *beaten*. Behind this, we

<sup>112</sup> “In order to throw certain aspects into sharp relief (operating on the principle of *highlighting*) it is possible to project the ICM (‘Idealized Cognitive Models’) of different experiences on a target. Hereby, the abstract field of *politics* [...] can be structured metaphorically by the ICM of *games*, *sports*, *theatre*, *trade* and *war* [...] which each foreground other aspects” (Baldauf, 1997: 80).

<sup>113</sup> This proverb has already been recorded lexicographically and therefore acknowledged as a new proverb obviously; (Duden 12: *Zitate und Aussprüche*, 178). Meanwhile the German proverb seems to have been taken up by the Polish language in the word-for-word translation: *Kobieta bez mężczyzny jest jak ryba bez roweru*; Pani Vol. 2(2003, 30), in the text titled *Natychmiast kogoś mieć* by Agnieszka Graff, who is the author of the very controversial book *Świat bez Kobiet* [The world without women]. If this proverb is understood by the Polish indeed, is doubtful according to a small private survey among Polish women or colleagues. In the newest phraseology and proverb dictionaries of my knowledge the new proverb is not listed.

<sup>114</sup> Lüger (1999: 59).

find the perspectivation of an assumed implicitness: In order that carpets and women remain in tidy or good condition you have to treat them accordingly. The seemingly stringent logic of the proverb lies behind this analogization which must have been adopted in the PC at that time. In this example, the as good and rightfully depicted male violence is completely hidden.

#### 7.6.6 Ability to Project

Like metaphors, proverbs function as *mappings*. Owing to this feature, both similar proverbs in one language and proverbs from different cultures can be grouped into a joint PC. Let us compare the following proverbs:

English: *Rome wasn't built in a day*<sup>115</sup>

Polish: *Nie od razu Kraków zbudowano* [ww: Cracow was not built instantly]

German: *Lübeck ist in einem Tage gestiftet, aber nicht in einem Tage gebaut*<sup>116</sup> [ww: Lübeck

is donated in one day, but not built in one]

German: *Gut Ding will Weile haben* [ww: Good things require time.; ee: Rome wasn't built in a day.]

Apparently, these proverbs express something *similar* or *the same*. Therefore, we assume that all four proverbs are based on the same concept: SUCCESS REQUIRES TIME.

#### PC

##### SUCCESS REQUIRES TIME

##### Proverbs

*Rome wasn't built in a day.*

*Nie od razu Kraków zbudowano.*

*Lübeck ist in einem Tage gestiftet, aber nicht in einem Tage gebaut.*

*Gut Ding will Weile haben.*

If we have a closer look, we notice distinct shades of meaning. Let us start with the first two examples. Nobody would claim seriously that either *Rome* or *Cracow* have been built instantly. The implicature which results from the contravention of maxims aims at the justification for a long action. In the last example the focus is on something different: As a confirming statement it expresses that many sophisticated actions are planned quickly indeed, but cannot be realized as quickly. The quality of the long

<sup>115</sup> Röhrich, Vol. 4 (1994: 1252). You use this proverb if “you (want to) explain yourself why something takes longer than expected [...]”.

<sup>116</sup> Simrock (1988: 338).

lasting action is highlighted here (*a good job will take a while*). These differences can be registered as follows:

The realization of a complex action takes a considerable time

SOPHISTICATED ACTIONS ARE QUICKLY DECIDED ABOUT, BUT TAKE TIME UNTIL THEIR COMPLETION

SUCCESS REQUIRES TIME

What can we conclude for the mapping? In formulating Success needs time, the PC has the strongest ability to project. Against this backdrop, we understand why Lakoff and Johnson chose easy structures for their metaphorical concepts.<sup>117</sup> Proverb concepts create a joint *cognitive basis* for the *intercultural* comprehension of proverbs in different languages because of their ability to project. As a rule: the easier a PC is in structure, the stronger is its projection-ability for the (intercultural) comprehension of proverbs.

#### 7.6.7 Ability to Implicate

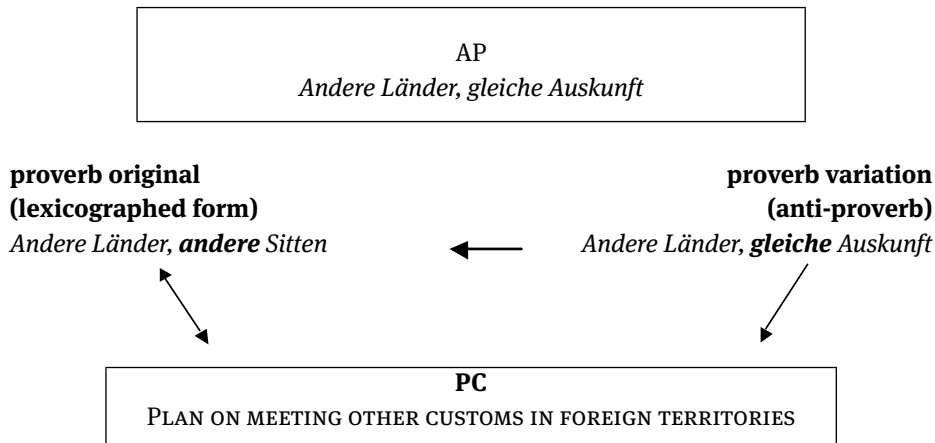
Proverb concepts are *complex cognitive* concepts. Therefore, we have to postulate an *implicature-ability*<sup>118</sup> for them. It is necessary in order to explain why we are able to instantly understand so-called anti-proverbs” (Mieder, 1982). Let us look at the following example<sup>119</sup>: In an advertisement the German proverb *Andere Länder, andere Sitten*<sup>120</sup> [ww: Other countries, other customs] has been converted into *Andere Länder, gleiche Auskunft* [ww: Other countries, the same information]. Why can a client understand that despite the change? The key to this new understanding of the anti-proverb (AP) is based on our ability to *implicate*. We can reconstruct this ability to some extent in the following way:

<sup>117</sup> In the appendix of her dissertation Baldauf (1997: 305-338) lists a plethora of metaphorical concepts with a thoroughly *easy structure* (it goes as far as dissolving syntax), e.g. Emotionality is warmth, Costs are heavy, Much is height/Size, Intimacy is physical closeness.

<sup>118</sup> See the explanation by Auer (1999: 94): “Grice uses this coinage (*implicature* – A.L.) as a kind of ending which is necessary to get from what was said [...] onto what was meant [...].”

<sup>119</sup> The example dates from an advertisement in the Spiegel magazine Vol. 39 (1999: 119). You find the full script of the analysed advertisement in Lewandowska & Antos (2001).

<sup>120</sup> [ee: When in Rome, do as the Romans do].



In the process of creating a meaning of proverb variations we make reference to:

- common linguistic features with the proverb original
- the concept which might underlie the proverb original
- formulations which differ from the proverb original
- the meaning of the proverb original.

We have to draw conclusions which are very much alike Grice's *implicatures*. If you try to phrase these implicatures for the example above the result could be as follows:

An expression is obviously used as *slogan* in an advertisement: *Andere Länder, gleiche Auskunft*.

- The slogan displays a similarity in its first part (*Andere Länder*"), but differs considerably from the original in its second part (*gleiche Auskunft*).
- This deviation shares the same dyadic structure like the original proverb and does not seem to be a misquoted proverb, but a planned variation!
- As would seem natural, the starting point for the new concept of the proverb variation is the proverb concept of the original **PLAN ON MEETING OTHER CUSTOMS IN FOREIGN TERRITORIES**.
- The PC contradicts the wording of the slogan *Andere Länder, gleiche Auskunft* notably, even if only partially.
- As a consequence, there is an opposition between the meaning of the original PC and the new meaning of the anti-proverb. Both are in concessive proportion to each other: *Although foreign countries are 'otherwise' indeed, in this case you do not need to plan on different customs*.

Thereby, the new concept of the proverb variation arises: **DESPITE THE OTHERNESS OF OTHER COUNTRIES, EVERYTHING WILL REMAIN UNAFFECTED**. This kind of interlinked

implicature is not only a model to extrapolate from the proverb surface (what was said) to what was meant, but it also shows that PCs do not necessarily have to be cognitively firmly established. Instead they can be *deduced* or rather have to be deduced. In this respect, the ability to implicate illustrates the *dynamic* aspect of PCs.

## 7.7 The Relation of MCs to PCs

Comparing Lakoff and Johnson's metaphorical concepts (MCs) with the now specified proverb concepts (PCs), the question arises: what is *the relation between these two types of concepts*? It seems acceptable to say that metaphors and (metaphorical) proverbs are functionally equivalent because both are based on the same type of (complex) concepts. That is why the reception of Lakoff and Johnson's Conceptual Metaphor Theory plays an important role here.

Critically judged, it could be that not all proverbs are based on metaphors. While “‘figurative’ (actual) proverbs are visually motivated, the motivation of ‘literal’ proverbs is direct”.<sup>121</sup> Here language alone has to carry out what a metaphor does in figurative (metaphorical) proverbs. To be more precise: the concepts of literal (non-metaphorical) proverbs are produced through statements of propositions. Let us look again at the above mentioned example. Stating that Rome, Lübeck and Cracow have not been built in one day does not mean that we refer to a (simple) picture like in, for instance: *No rose without a thorn*. The proverb about Rome/Lübeck/Cracow makes reference to the *metaphor of building*, but it is based on a wisdom which could be paraphrased in the following way: The one who builds a house of a city, needs a lot of time. Therefore, the statement that cities are not built in one day cannot be viewed visually (i.e. pre-linguistically coined). On the contrary, the cited proverb and a proposition form a frame together which refers to an individual and cultural life experience. This kind of propositionally coined proverb will indeed be able to illustrate a circumstance or situation.<sup>122</sup>

Here, the direction of the foundation is decisive: It is a difference if a metaphor (e.g. the *rose-metaphor*) is the foundation of the proverb concept or if the proverb

<sup>121</sup> According to Grzybek (1998: 146) with reference to Permjakov's theory of proverb motivation.

<sup>122</sup> You find a similar distinction in Grzybek (1998: 148): “Against the backdrop of what was said, [German] proverbs like *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm* [ee: The apple doesn't fall far from the tree (stem)]; *Auf Regen folgt Sonnenschein* [ee: Every cloud has a silver lining]; *Viele Köche verderben den Brei* [ee: Too many cooks spoil the broth], and others can be assigned to figurative proverbs easily, while not only ‘nonpictorial’ proverbs like *Wer wagt, gewinnt* [ee: Who dares, wins]; *Aller Anfang ist schwer* [Every beginning is difficult]; or *Ausnahmen bestätigen die Regel* [ee: Exceptions prove the rule] belong to the group of literal proverbs, but also others like *Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold* [ee: Speech is silver, silence is golden] or *Lügen haben kurze Beine* [ee: A lie has no feet] despite their incorporated images.”



illustrates a circumstance itself (e.g. *Build a city* as the image for a time-consuming action). That is to say, *literal* proverbs are able to visualize circumstances by all means. You could also say these proverbs are able to *paint a picture*; but only *with language and not with the help of a pre-linguistic imagery*.

Our last example will show that the sophisticated concept of a non-metaphorical proverb can be based on language instead of an image: *Gut Ding will Weile haben* [ww: Good things require time.] In contrast to the proverbs about *city planning*, it is obvious that in this last example nothing is *painted* any more, it does not even illustrate an experience. Therefore, propositionally coined proverbs can express something, independently of imagery.

Hence, we have to record *against* Lakoff and Johnson: The world can be understood without any metaphors, *solely through our language*! It does not, however, invalidate the significance of Lakoff and Johnson's use of metaphors. Many abstract things can indeed be understood through metaphors. Taking this knowledge into account, we receive a differentiated view of the constitution of complex concepts. For second-class non-metaphorical (or non-figurative) proverbs it means that metaphorical concepts and proverb concepts of literal proverbs differ according to their cognitive foundation!

Interim conclusion: On the one hand, we have PCs which are *functionally equivalent* to MCs, and on the other hand, we have to postulate PCs which have circumstances and *language* as foundations. We find this not surprising. Theoretically speaking, the strict separation above proves unsatisfying. This holds true not least because traditional paremiology already points at the gradual nature of the transition from abstract (literal) to metaphorical proverbs.<sup>123</sup> Lüger (1992: 72ff.) seizes on this differentiation and extends it by pointing out various *levels of imagery*. He emphasizes: "Imagery is no feature which a priori belongs to the respective idioms in any case." The combination of verbal and non-verbal has to be considered as well as valuations or contexts:

Imagery in sentential idioms has something [...] to do with the effectivity of texts, the intended reaction of the audience or reader. It makes utterances flashier, or even more attractive and helps to make them graspable and remembered more easily, conditions permitting. (Lüger, 1999: 71).<sup>124</sup>

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**123** Grzybek (1998: 135) explains that Seiler (1922) already highlighted the „impossibility to separate strictly“. „Further the difference between proverbs where the imagery takes possession of the whole proverb on the one hand, and others where the imagery only covers a part of the saying, on the other hand.“

**124** Ger. original: "Bildhaftigkeit in Satzphraseologismen hat also (...) auch etwas mit der Wirksamkeit von Texten, mit den angestrebten Reaktionen beim Hörer oder Leser zu tun: Sie macht sprachliche Äußerungen auffälliger, vielleicht auch attraktiver, und sorgt unter Umständen dafür, daß diese leichter erfaßt und besser behalten werden."

Nevertheless, imagery supports the attractive grasp of complex circumstances, but it is no precondition for the linguistically founded comprehension (like Lakoff and Johnson suggest with their *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*).

This has theoretical consequences. Let us recall: In their approach, Lakoff and Johnson assume that the cognitive is prioritized over language. The creation of meaning goes *one-way* from the pre-linguistic experience, from images and corporeality towards their manifestation in language. Liebert adds that basic ideas and all consequently deriving ideas are determined by pre-conceptual structures and that the direction from language to experienceable structures is irreversible (1992: 79).

Hence, according to Lakoff and Johnson there is no “determining direction from language past cognition to perception” (Liebert, 1992: 77). As we have seen with non-metaphorical proverbs they rest upon *the power of language* instead of metaphors. Here, the determining direction is reversed. Lakoff and Johnson’s exclusiveness of the determining direction is therefore criticized by Liebert (1992: 79) with good reason: “We have to assume a *correlation* in which terms (as cognitive basic models) are understood as linguistically fixed in their pre-linguistic experience. These terms form this experience due to their linguistic fixation.”<sup>125</sup>

Now we assume a two-way *determination of cognition and language* in rather simple concepts, especially in proverbs which practically cannot be understood without their cultural background. In the following German examples, the required *interplay* between *cognition*, *language* and *culture* are demonstrated:

*Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen.* [ee: In for a penny, in for a pound]  
*Mitgefangen, mitgehangen* [ee: Cling together, swing together]

In cognitive linguistics, the comprehension of both proverbs can be ascribed to a pre-linguistic causality experience and express a cause-effect relationship. They also illustrate how this relationship is expressed and differentiated in language. In the first example, a (probably unpleasant) consequence of an action is pointed out referring to the order of the alphabet as if *painting* them. This illustration only works for people who are familiar with the European alphabet. If you have not been socialised in our culture, it will prove difficult to understand the second example as well. Here, in connection with history (*The prototypic punishment for felony is going to the gallows!*) a cause *The one who follows...* is linked to a bitter consequence *...will go to the gallows as well*.

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<sup>125</sup> Ger. original: “Es muß eine Wechselbeziehung angenommen werden, in der Begriffe (als Kognitive Rundmodelle) zwar als sprachlich instantiierte Fixierung vorbegrifflicher Erfahrung verstanden werden, diese Begriffe aber die Erfahrung durch eben ihre sprachlich instantiierte Fixierung auf bestimmte Art formen.”

The bottom line is that: Both proverbs make reference to certain pre-linguistic experiences, which is to say to the link between causes and effects. But *how* these experiences are expressed in the proverbs depends on the cultural or historic conditions and their resulting knowledge *frames*. We deal with a very typical *mix ratio* of *pre-linguistic* and *cultural-linguistic* conception. What is the consequence for the relationship between *metaphorical concepts* and *proverb concepts*? Without negating the significance of Lakoff and Johnson's *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*, it has to be complemented in the following way:

*Not only* can proverb concepts be created through *imagery*, but through *language as well*! In contrast to Lakoff and Johnson, when we create proverb concepts the *determining direction* has to be *two-way*: On the one hand, metaphors are fundamental for our comprehension of proverbs. On the other hand, we create PCs on the basis of the (propositionally coined) language. Often, these two directions will *correlate* as well. If we pursue this path, the cognitivist approach will have to be embedded in an overall theory which allows the creation of concepts through "cognition" and "language"<sup>126</sup>.

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Peter Ďurčo

## 8 Empirical Research and Paremiological Minimum

### 8.1 What a Paremiological Minimum Ought to Be?

Paremiology is researching the origin, development and the existence of paremies, i. e. proverbs, folk and weather sayings and riddles. Attempts to establish a paremiological minimum have still been oriented on the concept of the set of proverbs that all members of society know or an average adult is expected to know. So the concept of paremiological minimum has been in fact reduced to proverbs, which an average adult is expected to be familiar with. Thus, the proper term used should be the proverbial minimum. The traditional methods used to elicit answers from informants are based on the lists of proverbs or proverb beginnings and informants are asked to state their active or passive knowledge or add the missing part. Another method used is to list all the proverbs which could informants think of during a certain period.

One of the first scholars who used demographic methods with proverbs was the American sociologist William Albig (1931). 68 university students were asked to list all the proverbs they could think of during a thirty minute period. A total of 1443 proverbs were written down, out of which 442 were different proverbs (Albig, 1931: 532).

The concept of paremiological minimum was first developed by Grigorij Permjakov (1973, 1982). The spontaneous question “And what is then a paremiological maximum?” couldn’t be answered reliably at least due to following reasons. Firstly, there are different opinions what a proverb is, what the boundaries of it in comparison to other types of multiword units and other fixed sentences are, secondly there are no comprehensive collections or exhaustive demographic investigation of all proverbs in a language. The biggest proverb collections include as a rule a mixture of all types of fixed phrases from different historical periods. The author of the biggest collection of German proverbs Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander included in his work *Das Deutsche Sprichwörter-Lexikon* (1867)<sup>127</sup> more than 250 000 items. Valerij Mokijenko estimates the number of proverbs in Russian at more than 150 000 items (Mokijenko, 2012: 81).

The demographic attempts have still been limited to small samples of items examined by small numbers of informants, not representative regarding age, sex, regional and educational dispersion of the population. Gregorij Permjakov<sup>128</sup> conducted in 1970s paremiological experiments to find out the minimum set of Russian proverbs that all people know. A group of informants living in and near Moscow were

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<sup>127</sup> [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanders\\_Deutsches\\_Sprichw%C3%B6rter-Lexikon](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wanders_Deutsches_Sprichw%C3%B6rter-Lexikon)

<sup>128</sup> See the detailed bibliography of G. L. Permjakov’s work in Grzybek, 1984.

supposed to mark unknown proverbs from the list of 1491 items. The other group of 100 informants had to complete the rest of the first part of a proverb. The base for the minimum consisted of 538 proverbs with the average knowledge more than 90%. Permjakov set the first 500 proverb as the paremiological minimum, which have been later reduced at 300 items for smaller bilingual paremiological dictionaries, e. g. Russian-German (Permjakov, 1985) and Russian-Bulgarian (Permjakov & Vlachov, 1986).

Paremiological minima have been done for some other languages as well. The Czech paremiological minimum by Schindler (Schindler, 1993) is based on a list of proverb beginnings to which informants were asked to add the missing part. F. Čermák, the author of another paremiological minimum of Czech, criticizes this approach of Schindler naming following problems: “The problem is, where does this list come from and on what basis is it based and selected, since, obviously, one cannot go out asking people to answer several thousand questions, i.e. the full list based on a large proverb dictionary. The second problem is more subtle. Due to linear character of our speech, it is obvious that it is the beginning of one’s speech, rather than its end, which should be used in the elicitation method and suggested to in such a research” (Čermák, 2003: 15). A third point named by Čermák is that “the enquete method strives to arrive at what is usually termed as *knowledge* of proverbs. However, it is not quite clear, unless this is explicitly and carefully investigated by the questionnaire, what this boils down to. Does this mean an active or a passive knowledge, to what degree in the latter case and how reliable are the answers obtained” (Čermák, 2003: 16)?

An alternative approach to get a paremiological minimum of Czech by Čermák is based on examination of very large corpora. F. Čermák sees the enormous advantage in researching the proverb use in actual contexts, what makes it possible to see, document and study full variability of proverbs, which has not been possible before (Čermák, 2003: 16f). His research has been based on a large paremiological data-base, assembled for over 15 years. 243 frequent proverbs have been tested against the 100 million words of the Czech National Corpus<sup>129</sup>. This paremiological minimum contains the first 100 most frequent proverbs of the Corpus (see Čermák, 2003: 26-30).

The research on the familiarity of English proverbs is discussed by Wolfgang Mieder in his study *Paremiological Minimum and Cultural Literacy* (1994). Regarding the Anglo-American scene he states a meager stage of establishing the paremiological minimum; “it will require much work before this scholarly dream becomes reality” (Mieder, 1994: 307). The same conclusion is made by Heather Haas in her study about familiarity of proverbs in the United States (Haas, 2008: 319)<sup>130</sup>. She also summarizes

129 <http://korpus.cz/>

130 <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/20487611?uid=3739024&uid=2129&uid=2&uid=70&uid=4&sid=21102694102223>

the previous works on proverb familiarity and the paremiological minimum in the United States (Haas, 2008: 323-328).

An attempt to establish a kind of minimum of cultural knowledge of Anglo-American proverbs for the average educated person was using the list of 265 proverb published in *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Hirsch & Kett & Trefil, 1988) based on previous Hirsch's analysis of national periodicals (Hirsch, 1987). He reasoned that if a major daily newspaper refers to an event, person or thing without defining it, he assumes that the majority of the readers will know what that item is. As Mieder notes, that Hirsch does not state how he came up with his list and he doubts that Hirsch got all of these texts out of newspapers or magazines. It says nothing about the general frequency of appearance of any item (Mieder, 1994: 309).

Mieder's set of high frequent proverbs is based on his previous archive sample of 1200 proverbs of the historical English and Anglo-American proverb collections which was compared with the large collection from Barlett J. Whiting *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (1989) containing more than 5500 entries based on materials from over 6000 books, and countless magazines and newspapers. This small list contains 33 proverbs with more than 13 references in observed texts (Mieder, 1994: 311-312).

In the research of proverb familiarity and cross-regional comparisons of the paremiological minimum in the United States made by Haas, college students from four regions of the United States completed the so called proverb generation task and a proverb familiarity rating task to determine "which texts from former generations are still current today" and "how familiar" people are "with proverbs today" (Haas, 2008: 329). In the generation task, students listed as many proverbs as they could think of "off the top of their heads" during a twenty-minute or twenty-five-minute recall period. Only 20 proverbs were generated by more than 10% of 156 respondents. In the proverb familiarity task, 193 students indicated their familiarity with 315 proverbs included because previous researchers had identified them as being relatively familiar or common. The proverbs were rated on a 4-point scale, in which the rating categories were defined as: 1. Not at all familiar: "I have never heard this phrase in this form before.", 2. Slightly familiar: "I believe I have encountered this phrase in this form before, although not often.", 3. Moderately familiar: "I encounter this phrase occasionally. I'm sure I've heard it several times before.", 4. Very familiar: "I encounter this phrase quite frequently; I've heard it on numerous occasions." (Haas, 2008: 330). The optimistic conclusion of this study is that a truly national paremiological minimum may well be achievable because of clear evidence that proverbs familiar in one region can generally be expected to be familiar in other regions as well (Haas, 2008: 319). We fully agree with the statement of Haas that there is no *right* research method any more than there is a *right* informant or research sample (Haas, 2008: 335).

There are also different attempts to establish paremiological minima for German language. The paremiological minimum from Grzybek (1991) contains 77 and in

Chlosta & Grzybek & Roos (1994) 65 items, and was based on achievement testing method of completing the missing parts of 275 proverbs through 125 respondents.

Our research of German proverbs is based on the competence test correlated with corpus based examination of the text frequency of proverbs from standard lexicographic sources (Đurčo, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2005a, 2006). The familiarity of 385 proverbs is based on questionnaire data by 220 informants from Germany, Austria and Switzerland<sup>131</sup>, which were tested for their frequency in DeReKo<sup>132</sup>. We have discovered that the proverbs most frequently used in everyday speech do not have necessarily the same status as the proverbs most used in published writing. In contrast to the concept of paremiological minimum we prefer the concept of a paremiological optimum<sup>133</sup>. Our paremiological optimum of 150 proverbs is then a correlation of the most familiar proverbs with the highly frequented proverbs in corpus. A paremiological minimum is then a set of proverbs based on empirical demoscopic research that only a specific group of informants knows or is familiar with.

A set of highly frequented proverbs by Steyer (2012a) is also based on the corpus analysis. There were 1000 traditionally lexicographic registered proverbs tested in DeReKo. The outcome of this corpus analysis was a list of 300 most frequent proverbs. This set of proverbs was used as a base for the elaboration on principles of digital multilingual paremiography (Đurčo & Steyer, 2010; Steyer & Đurčo, 2013; Steyer & Hein, 2010) in the EU-project SprichWort-Plattform<sup>134</sup>. The results of the project were published in Steyer (2012b). Paremiological experiments to paremiological minima exist also for Hungarian (Tothné Litovkina, 1996; Vargha & Litovkina, 2007) and Croatian (Grzybek & Škara & Heyken, 1993).

## 8.2 Why Do We Need a Paremiological Minimum or Optimum?

The long history of the existence and lexicographic registration of proverbs lead scholars to considerations of their development, presence and occurrence in everyday use in the current language. The visionary program and methodological approach for such a research has been defined by Matti Kuusi, one of the leading scholars in the field of paremiology: “What is now needed is for a team of scholars from such

<sup>131</sup> In this attitude test the informants should grade on a four-level scale (1. Known and used, 2. Known but not used, 3. Unknown, but understandable, 4. Unknown and not understandable) their knowledge or familiarity of a proverb.

<sup>132</sup> <http://www1.ids-mannheim.de/kl/projekte/korpora/>

<sup>133</sup> The concept of a paremiological optimum is based on the correlation between the best known proverbs by users and their high frequency in text corpora, see the Part 4.

<sup>134</sup> EU-Projekt SprichWort. Eine Internetplattform für das Sprachenlernen (2008-2010, 143376-LLP-1-2008-1-SI-KA2-KA2MP).



disciplines as folklore, linguistics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, paremiology, and demography to work out an even more elaborated questionnaire to be used with several thousands [...] citizens. The result of such an integrated study would in true give us a precise idea of how proverbs are used and viewed today and which proverbs belong to the [...] paremiological minimum. Once national paremiological minima are established we will also be able to determine the most frequently used international proverb types through comparative proverb collections. Such work will eventually lead to an international paremiological minimum for the world's proverbial wisdom" (Kuusi, 1985: 22-28).

A skeptical position to establish an *ideal* common paremiological minimum is held by Mokijenko. He states that the concept of a common paremiological minimum is not realistic. There exists a certain zone of familiar proverbs only, which comprise a core of national paremiology. But this core is very variable and differentiated among people. It depends on the particular social factors like age, education, origin, but also on the individual preferences of speakers, what discourages the determination of a general valid common paremiological core (Mokijenko, 2012: 83f).

Despite this skeptical and pessimistic opinion the fact is that proverbs are effective verbal devices and we must have a certain paremiological optimum at our disposal in order to participate in meaningful communication. Such an optimum has its obvious benefits for mono- and bilingual paremiography and paremioidactics as well. The most frequently used proverbs of the modern age in spoken and written communication should be included in various dictionaries and textbooks. It means that we need not only one paremiological minimum, but various specific minima for teaching mother tongue and foreign languages on different levels. We also need a common set of proverbs for culturally literate and effective communication of the average educated person as well, which could be considered as a paremiological optimum.

### 8.3 How to Get a Paremiological Optimum? An Empirical Approach

The scholars' common opinion is that the study of a today's paremiological minimum of any group of people must be based on scientific demographic research. The problem is how to get a core set of proverbs for such demographic research?

The ways how to get such a sample are:

- Excerption from texts (from fiction, non-fictional and journalistic texts)
- Excerption from dictionaries and proverb collections (from historical and contemporary periods)
- Analysis of corpora (through the examination of the frequency of proverbs in very large or huge corpora)

- Direct observation (through a long-term observation and archiving the proverbs from everyday spontaneous and spoken-media communication).

Each method has its advantages and limits and brings heterogeneous or even antagonistic results. It means that we need different methodological approaches which will meet all methodological requirements and cover all aspects and characteristics of proverbs. The methods have to be seen not as contradictory but complementary attempts how to get real and objective data about the observed material.

Empirical research should give answers at least to the following questions:

1. Which proverbs from former generations are still in use today?
2. How familiar are people with proverbs today?
3. Which proverbs traditionally registered in contemporary dictionaries belong to the active and passive vocabulary of persons?
4. Which of them are not used by people nowadays?
5. Are there differences in the familiarity of proverbs regarding age, sex, regional and educational background?
6. What is an individual's score of paremiological competence compared with the overall paremiological competence of all informants?
7. In which form do traditional proverbs exist today?
8. Which are the truly new proverbs of the modern age? (Mieder, 1994: 299).

This sociologically and linguistically oriented catalogue of questions ought to be extended with no less important psychological aspects, i.e. how people acquire, use and interpret proverbs, idioms and figurative language in general in everyday communication (e. g. Buhofer, 1980; Häcki Buhofer, 1989, 1997, 1999; Häcki Buhofer & Burger, 1992, 1994; Ďurčo, 1990, 1992, 1998; Everaert et al, 1995; Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1991; Cacciari & Tabossi, 1993; Gibbs, 1985; Gibbs & Nayak, 1989; Gibbs & O'Brien, 1990).

The attempts to testing knowledge or familiarity of proverbs may be prescriptive (the informants judge the prepared lists of proverbs, which they should know) or descriptive (free observation of spontaneous elicitation of proverbs, which people are really familiar with). There are six types of testing methods used as a rule to examine the paremiological competence of informants.

1. Competence tests. Informants should mark known and unknown proverbs from a list.
2. Achievement tests. Informants should complete the missing part of a proverb.
3. Introspection tests. By these self-reporting tests informants should write down spontaneously within a certain period of time all the proverbs which they use or know.
4. Attitude tests. This tests uses attitude scales to determine individual and group preferences for proverbs. Informants should grade on a scale their knowledge or familiarity of a proverb.

5. Cognitive tests. In this free response tests informants should interpret the meaning of proverbs to prove their active knowledge of it.
6. Experience tests. Informants should comment, if, when and how do they and/or other people use proverbs.

The paremiological experiments still used, however, do not meet the substantial methodological principles of testing, such as standardization, objectivity, comparability, reliability and validity because of low sociolinguistic representativeness accompanied with arbitrary compiled lists of examined proverbs without sufficiently defined selection criteria<sup>135</sup>.

The measurability of the knowledge or familiarity of proverbs shouldn't be in principle questioned, however the critique concerns the creation of the experimental set of proverbs in due to subjective and intuitive estimations of paremiologists and paremiographers creating their experimental lists (Grzybek & Chłosta, 1993: 113). As problematic also appear the justification and drawing up of the limits for what is a general or common knowledge (see Chłosta & Grzybek, 1997: 244). Permajakov sees the limit for the *common knowledge* by 97%, Grzybek by 95% and Schindler by 90%. But we may also set the limit for the average knowledge by 50%, if we would obtain the data from a sociolinguistically reliable and representative demoscopic research of the population.

Critique concerns also the weak procedure of the presentation of the prescribed form of proverbs in experiments due to lack of information what the standard variant of a proverb really is (Chłosta & Grzybek, 1997: 257). Grzybek sees in the checking of predefined answers also the danger of defective intuitive assessment of informant supposing he knows the proverb (Grzybek, 1998: 114).

We obtain also very different results by using active (to elicit the spontaneous reaction) or passive (to check prescribed answers) testing procedures. L. Cox (1997) has discovered in his experiments that the overall paremiological thesaurus of students is very low, i.e. the number of identic elicited proverbs is not very high, but the individual paremiological thesaurus, i. e. the whole number of all individually elicited proverbs from all informants, is very high.<sup>136</sup> This can be an evidence that the active and passive paremiological competence is not only much higher as an experiment can find out but also it is the evidence that the acquisition, usage and understanding of proverbs in semantic memory by an individual person proceed very differently and the information is coded and stored unevenly (Cox, 1997: 45). In contrast

<sup>135</sup> See the detailed discussion and critique of empirical paremiology, paremiological experiments and testing methods in Grzybek & Chłosta (1993), Chłosta & Grzybek (2004); Grzybek (2012).

<sup>136</sup> In the experiment by Cox 229 informants have elicited spontaneously 232 proverbs, in the next experiment were the students asked to register during a week all proverbs which come to mind. 42 informants registered 1250 different proverbs.

to passive experiments, where the knowledge of 100% was very often registered, the active experiments deliver as a rule only an overall knowledge of 30%.

Despite all this problems the empirical experiments may deliver relevant socio-linguistic information not only about the territorial, age specific and culturally bound status of proverbs but also data to their actual status and changes in current habitual language use. The paremiological experiments help us to examine the paremiological competence, which is the active and the passive knowledge of proverbs by an individual elicited through a paremiological experiment and also the paremiological performance which is the active and the passive overall knowledge of proverbs by all informants in a paremiological experiment.

The way out in order to overcome the dilemma between methodological requirements and feasibility of paremiological experiments consists in testing nationwide groups of persons, and in the frequency analysis of huge written and spoken corpora (Grzybek, 1992: 211; Grzybek & Chłosta, 1993: 96). The open problems are still the reduction of large lists of proverbs and the demoscopic representative sample of respondents. It is not possible and also not reasonable to distribute big paremiological samples among respondents.

## 8.4 The Concept of a Paremiological Optimum. A Complex Approach

Defining research objective is the most exacting step in designing a research plan. One of the ways how to get a more accurate picture reflecting the reality is to use a combination of multiple research methods. Paremiological research may also benefit from such a combination of introspective (induction, deduction, synthesis) and empirical methods (demographic research, psycholinguistic experiment, an extensive analysis of corpora, statistics), in particular where answers are required to the questions as follows:

- Which paremiological elements included in collections as a standard set are part of an active or a passive vocabulary of language users?
- What is the degree of matching between the presented standards and the individual or common usage, to what extent the users accept these standards when speaking, and to what extent the current linguistic or lexicographic description matches the reality?
- What are the differences in awareness of linguistic phenomena and their usage when taking account of the age of language users, their educational background and the region where they live?

Such combined analysis was employed in our research into the Slovak paremiology (Ďurčo, 2004, 2005b, 2005c, 2007). It was undertaken to ascertain the level of

awareness of traditional paremiological units currently registered in lexicographic collections. Our goal was to find out which paremiological units registered in lexicographic collections are currently really familiar to Slovak language users and actively used by them.

It is not possible to investigate all proverbs with their numerous variants so it is reasonable to desist from the extensive empirical research. A compromise solution is the reduction of the material for the experimental corpus in the following five steps.

1. Analysis of the lexicographic registration of proverbs in older and current dictionaries.
2. Determination of the core set of proverbs and their *basic forms* through the reduction of the paremiological material by the expert's knowledge of linguists, lexicographers, paremiologists and ethnologists.
3. Analysis of the knowledge and familiarity of the selected proverbs and their variants by respondents through an on-line questionnaire.
4. Analysis of the occurrence of the preferred proverbs from questionnaires and their variants in huge corpora.
5. The comparison and correlation of the most familiar proverbs with the most frequent proverbs in corpora.

The same method has been used as well for the Slovene language (Meterc, in press), what has enabled to compare formal, semantic and suprasemantic (diasystemic) equivalency of Slovak and Slovene proverbs on the identical empirical and methodological basis (Ďurčo & Meterc, in press). The empirical and corpus based research allows a fully new approach to comparison and typology of equivalence of in paremiology (Ďurčo, 2012, 2013) and to the typology of variability of proverbs (Ďurčo, 2008).

## 8.5 An Example: Paremiological Optimum of Slovak Language

### 8.5.1 Method

The research consisted of five phases: 1. Selection of a data set and design of a questionnaire, 2. Reduction of the core set of proverbs through experts, 3. Questionnaire survey to determine commonly known proverbs, 4. Frequency analysis of the best known proverbs in the Slovak National Corpus, 5. Creation of a paremiological optimum. To make a survey more effective, an electronic version of the questionnaire was elaborated, as an online Access application. The questionnaire is available at [www.reflectangulo.net/index.php?loc=fraz](http://www.reflectangulo.net/index.php?loc=fraz) and enables the users to upload it. This website also provides all the information on how to install the programme, fill in the questionnaire and how to send it via Internet.

An initial form necessary to be filled in to start the corpus includes the following metadata concerning a respondent: age, gender, education, dialect regions where the respondent was grown up and where he currently lives. After filling in the initial form and submitting a password chosen by the respondent, the questionnaire will start.

Formulating the questions and a way to elicit responses are crucial questionnaire design issues. Due to an extensive nature of examined data, the formulation of offered responses should have been as simple as possible to elicit spontaneous responses. The programme offers, inter alia, an option of interrupting the questionnaire at any time. The screen always shows one item only – a particular proverb, and a respondent is required to assign one of the offered responses to it:

1. I know and I use the proverb.
2. I know, but I do not use it.
3. I do not know the proverb, but I understand it.
4. I do not know the proverb and I do not understand it.

Respondents have also the fifth option, namely giving their own wording of the proverb which is at variance to that given in the questionnaire. In addition, the programme enables the change of response to any previously listed proverb. At the end, the respondent may give any other proverbs he knows and uses although not listed in the questionnaire.

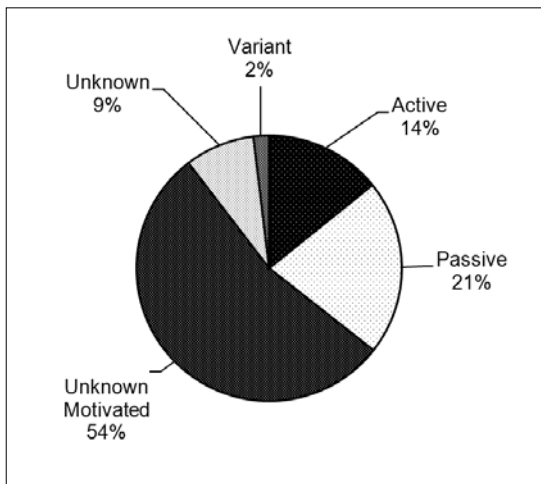
### 8.5.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire consists of 2834 items. The data set used in this questionnaire survey was created on the basis of following sources: The Selection of Proverbs and Sayings from the Collection of A. P. Záturecký (it includes 13000 units) made by prominent Slovak experts in phraseology and paremiology, a linguist J. Mlacek and an ethnologist Z. Profantová (1996). The authors selected approximately 3000 units from the Záturecký's collection that, in their opinion, are of certain relevance for current language users; proverbs entered in a phraseological dictionary by E. Smiešková (1977); proverbs included in a current normative dictionary *Krátky slovník slovenského jazyka* (Kačala & Pisárčiková, 2003), and also proverbs quoted in the publication Miko et. al. (1989). This particular publication includes all the idioms and proverbs that occurred in the textbooks for elementary and secondary schools in Slovakia in the seventies through nineties, thus the children had heard, read or used them. Our experimental questionnaire was drawn up using all the above sources. Numerous variants of the same proverbs differing only in an initial pronoun, word order or lexicon were unified. However, the respondents were given the opportunity to write the variant of a proverb familiar to them. The steps described above resulted in the creation of the questionnaire corpus that reflects the topical Slovak paremiology included in current handbooks.

### 8.5.3 Empirical Survey Findings

There were 42 respondents (24 women and 18 men) originated from all the regions of Slovakia. The respondents' average age was 43 years of age (men 45, women 42). Due to a relatively small number of respondents, we were unable to get relevant results in respect of familiarity of proverbs by age groups. However, an expected tendency to higher knowledge and familiarity has been registered by older informants.

The generally known and actively used common paremiological core set is relatively small. The respondents indicated just around 16% of proverbs (including different variants) as part of their active vocabulary. A chart below shows the overall frequency for each response category:

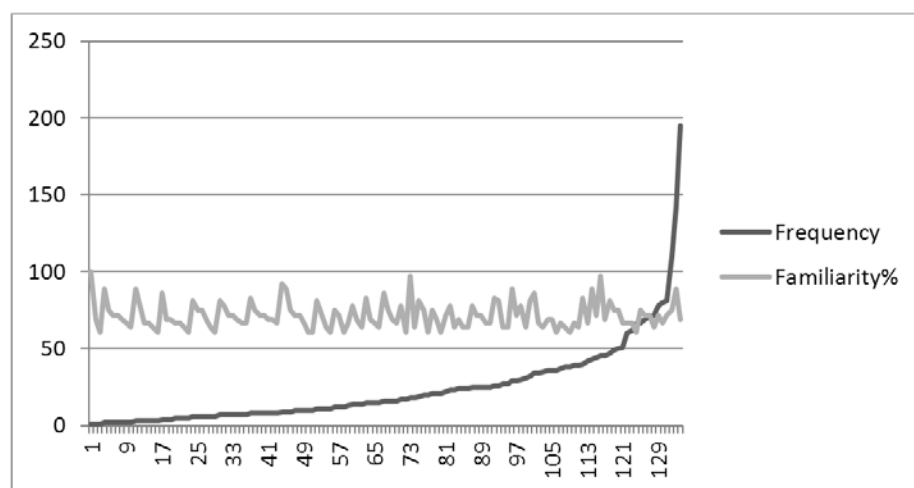


Based on the responses, five sets of proverbs have been formed. The first set consists of proverbs that the respondents indicated as part of their active vocabulary. The set of actively used ones includes approximately 250 proverbs (= active usage stated by more than 50% of the respondents), the set of familiar but not used by the respondents includes only 50 proverbs (in compliance with a criterion more than 50% of respondents). The biggest set (approx. 1900) consists of proverbs that the informants indicated as unknown, although they supposed to understand their background motivation and also their meaning. More than 50% of the respondents placed only approx. 100 proverbs, out of the total number 2834 unit, into the set of unknown and not understandable. The respondents rarely gave variants of proverbs and they accepted submitted forms without commenting on them. In our opinion, the variance issue should be more adequately and effectively examined in language corpora using the methods of corpus linguistics.

### 8.5.4 Corpus Analysis Findings

Comparisons in the area of idiomatics show huge differences in frequency between spoken and written language. The proverbs that had been placed by the respondents into active spoken usage were therefore confronted with their occurrence in the Slovak National Corpus.<sup>137</sup>

The chart below shows a relation between the level of active usage of proverbs by the respondents (60-100% level of knowledge or familiarity) and their absolute occurrence in the Corpus (1-195 occurrences):



Great differences in the corpus frequency of proverbs suggest at first sight an evident disproportion among examined parameters. In order to determine the paremiological optimum, it is necessary to correlate both parameters, namely to find the top intersection of familiarity level given by speakers and the frequency of occurrence in the Corpus.

The proverbs *Kto sa hanbí, má prázdne gamby*. [ww: Who is ashamed, his mouth remains empty. ee: Fortune favours the brave.] *My o vlku a vlk za humnami/dverami/humny*. [ww: Speak of the wolf, and the wolf is behind the barns/doors. ee: Talk of the Devil, and he is bound to appear.] *Aká diera, taká záplata*. [ww: Like hole, like patch. ee: Pay somebody back in his own coin.] *Múdry sa nik nenarodil*. [ee: No one is born a master.] have had no occurrence in the Corpus.

<sup>137</sup> prim0.1, prim0.1-public. Slovenský národný korpus. Bratislava: Jazykovedný ústav Ľ. Štúra SAV 2003. WWW: <http://korpus.juls.savba.sk>.



Maximum disproportions between the spoken language and the text frequency were ascertained in respect of the following proverbs. The proverbs listed below had above-average familiarity among the respondents, but below-average frequency in the Corpus:

1. *Aká práca, taká pláca.* [ww: You get paid as much as you deserve for your work. ee: No pain, no gain].
2. *Aká otázka, taká odpoveď.* [ww: Like question, like answer. ee: Ask a silly question and you get a silly answer.]
3. *Kto neskoro chodí, sám sebe škodí.* [ww: He who is late causes harm to himself. ee: Time and tide wait for no man.]
4. *Aj zajtra je deň.* [ee: Tomorrow is another day.]
5. *Aj steny majú uši.* [ee: Walls have ears.]
6. *Ako sa do hory volá, tak sa z hory ozýva.* [ww: The way you call into a forest, the way it echoes back. ee: You get as much as you give. What goes around, comes around.]
7. *Nemá všetkých pohromade.* [ww: He has not all (his five senses) together. ee: He hasn't got all his marbles. He's not right in the head. He is as mad as a March hire.]
8. *Samochvála smrdí.* [ww: Self-applause stinks. ee: Stop blowing your own trumpet!]
9. *Babka k babce, budú kapce.* [ww: Bob to bob, there will be felt boots. ee: A penny gained is a penny saved.]
10. *Vie, odkiaľ vietor fúka.* [ee: He knows which way the wind is blowing.]
11. *Učený nikto z neba nespadol.* [ww: No man has fallen from the sky learned. ee: No one is born a master.]

This list gives the most frequent occurrences in the Corpus (more than 50 occurrences):

1. *Nie je všetko zlato, čo sa blyští.* [ee: All that glitters is not gold.] 50
2. *Dobrá rada nad zlato.* [ee: A piece of good advice is better than gold.] 51
3. *Nijaká kaša sa neje taká horúca, ako sa uvarí.* [ww: No porridge is eaten hot when just cooked. ee: Things never are as bad as they seem.] 52
4. *Škoda plakať nad rozliatym mliekom.* [ee: It is no good/use crying over the spilt milk.] 60
5. *Hop alebo trop.* [ee: Sink or swim. Make or break.] 62
6. *Padla, trafila kosa na kameň.* [ww: The scythe has hit a stone. ee: He met his match.] 66
7. *Už je ruka v rukáve.* [ww: Arm is already in the sleeve. ee: To be hand in glove with sb.] 67
8. *Nič netrvá večne.* [ee: Nothing can last forever.] 69
9. *Jabko nepadá ďaleko od stromu.* [ww: The apple never falls far from the tree. ee: Like father like son. He/she is a chip off the old block.] 70
10. *Oko za oko, zub za zub.* [ee: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.] 72

11. *Stará láska nehrdzavie*. [ww: Old love never gets rusty. ee: Old love never dies. Old love never goes cold.] 78
12. *O tom už aj vrabce na streche čivirikajú*. [ww: Sparrows tweet about it on the roof. ee: A little bird told me. It's an open secret.] 80
13. *S jedlom rastie chuť*. [ee: The appetite grows with what it feeds on. The more one has, the more one wants.] 81
14. *Božie mlyny melú pomaly, ale isto*. [ww: The mills of God grind slowly, but surely. ee: The mills of God grind slowly.] 93
15. *Účel svätých prostriedky*. [ww: The purpose consecrates the means. ee: The end justifies the means.] 110
16. *Prišlo na lámanie chleba*. [ww: It came to breaking the bread (cutting the bread). ee: When it comes to the crunch.] 142
17. *Zakázané ovocie najlepšie (najviac) chutí*. [ww: Forbidden fruit tastes best. ee: Forbidden fruit is the sweetest.] 195

## 8.6 Paremiological Optimum of Slovak Language – correlation of the knowledge/familiarity and the corpus frequency

1. *Zakázané ovocie najlepšie (najviac ee: chutí)*. [ww: Forbidden fruit tastes best ee: Forbidden fruit is the sweetest.]
2. *Prišlo na lámanie chleba*. [ww: It came to breaking of bread (cutting the bread) ee: When it comes to crunch.]
3. *Božie mlyny melú pomaly, ale isto*. [ww: The mills of God grind slowly, but surely. ee: The mills of God grind slowly.]
4. *Účel svätých prostriedky*. [ww: The purpose consecrates the means. ee: The end justifies the means.]
5. *S jedlom rastie chuť*. [ee: The appetite grows with what it feeds on. The more one has, the more one wants.]
6. *Stará láska nehrdzavie*. [ww: Old love never gets rusty. ee: Old love never dies. Old love never goes cold.]
7. *O tom už aj vrabce na streche čivirikajú*. [ww: Sparrows tweet about it on the roof. ee: A little bird told me. It's an open secret.]
8. *Jablko nepadá ďaleko od stromu*. [ww: The apple never falls far from the tree. ee: Like father like son. He/she is a chip off the old block.]
9. *Už je ruka v rukáve*. [ww: Arm is already in the sleeve. ee: To be hand in glove with sb.]
10. *Nič netrvá večne*. [ee: Nothing last forever.]
11. *Oko za oko, zub za zub*. [ee: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.]
12. *Bez vetra sa ani lístok (list) (na strome) nepohne*. [ww: No leaf /on the tree/ will move without wind. ee: There's no smoke without fire.]

13. *Hop alebo trop.* [ee: Sink or swim. Make or break.]
14. *Výnimka potvrdzuje pravidlo.* [ee: The exception proves the rule.]
15. *Škoda plakať nad rozliatym mliekom.* [ee: It is no good/use crying over the spilt milk.]
16. *Padla, trafila kosa na kameň.* [ww: The scythe has hit a stone / has fallen onto the stone. ee: He met his match.]
17. *Nie je všetko zlato, čo sa blyští.* [ee: All that glitters is not gold.]
18. *Iný kraj iný mrav.* [ww: Different countries, different manners. ee: When in Rome do as the Romans do.]
19. *Bližšia košeľa ako kabát.* [ww: The shirt is nearer to the body than the coat. ee: Charity begins at home.]
20. *Trpezlivosť ruže prináša.* [ww: Patience brings roses. ee: Patience is the best remedy for every trouble. Everything comes to him who waits.]
21. *Každý začiatok býva ťažký.* [ww: Every beginning is always hard. ee: The first step is always the hardest.]
22. *Nijaká kaša sa neje taká horúca, ako sa uvarí.* [ww: No porridge is eaten hot when just cooked. ee: Things never are as bad as they seem.]
23. *Bez práce nie sú koláče.* [ww: There are no pies without work. ee: Success never comes easily. No gain without pain.]
24. *Risk je zisk.* [ww: Risk is the profit. ee: Nothing ventured nothing gained.]
25. *Vodu káže a víno pije.* [ee: He preaches water and drinks wine.]
26. *Čert nikdy nespí.* [ee: The devil never sleeps.]
27. *Palica má dva konce.* [ww: A stick has two ends. ee: There are two sides to everything.]
28. *Nekrič hop, kým si nepreskočil.* [ww: Do not say “hop” before you jump over. ee: There is many a slip twixt cup and lip.]
29. *Čo je veľa, to je veľa.* [ee: Enough is enough.]
30. *Dobrá rada nad zlato.* [ee: A piece of good advice is better than gold.]
31. *Kto hľadá, nájde.* [ww: He who seeks, will find. ee: Seek and ye shall find.]
32. *Koniec dobrý, všetko dobré.* [ee: All’s well that ends well.]
33. *Odvážnemu šťastie praje.* [ee: Fortune favours the brave.]
34. *Čo sa stalo, už sa neodstane.* [ww: You cannot change what has already happened. ee: What’s done cannot be undone.]
35. *Všade dobre, doma najlepšie.* [ww: Everywhere is well, at home it’s best. ee: East, west, home’s best.]
36. *Lepší vrabec v hrsti ako holub na streche.* [ww: A sparrow in one hand is worth a pigeon on the roof. ee: A bird in one hand is worth two in the bush.]
37. *Kto prv* [ww: skôr ee: pride, *ten prv* [ww: skôr ee: melie. [ww: He who comes sooner shall mill sooner. ee: First come first served.]
38. *Remeslo má zlaté dno.* [ww: A trade has a gold bottom. ee: If you know a trade you will never starve.]

39. *Múderejší ustúpi.* [ww: He who retreats is wiser. ee: Better to bend the neck than bruise the forehead.]
40. *Človek mieni, Pán Boh mení.* [ee: Man proposes, God disposes.]
41. *Aká práca, taká pláca.* [ww: You get paid as much as you deserve for your work. ee: No pain, no gain.]
42. *Aj zajtra je deň.* [ee: Tomorrow is another day.]
43. *Ešte nikdy nebolo tak zle, že by nemohlo byť ešte horšie.* [ww: Never was so bad, that it couldn't be worse. ee: Bad is called good when worse happens. The evil can be every time worse.]
44. *Trafená hus zagága.* [ww: A shot goose will make gaggle. ee: If the cap fits wear it.]
45. *Ja nič, ja muzikant.* [ww: I am nothing, I am a musician. ee: I have nothing to do with it.]
46. *Podľa seba súdim teba.* [ww: I judge you by myself. ee: Don't judge others by yourself.]
47. *Reči sa hovoria a chlieb sa je.* [ww: Speech is spoken and bread is eaten. ee: It's just so much hot air.]
48. *Jedna lastovička leto nerobí.* [ee: One swallow doesn't make a summer.]
49. *Ako sa do hory volá, tak sa z hory ozýva.* [ww: The way you call into a forest is the way it echoes back. ee: You get as much as you give. What goes around, comes around.]
50. *Vrana k vrane sadá.* [ww: A crow sits next to a crow. ee: Birds of feather flock together.]
51. *Kto sa smeje naposledy, ten sa smeje najlepšie.* [ww: He who laughs, last laughs the best. ee: He who laughs last laughs longest.]
52. *Čas sú peniaze.* [ee: Time is money.]
53. *Láska hory prenáša.* [ee: Love can move mountains.]
54. *Kto druhému jamu kope, sám do nej (s)padne.* [ww: He who digs a pit for another falls into it himself. ee: People are often caught in their own trap.]
55. *Čo sa za mladi naučíš, na starosť akoby si našiel.* [ww: What you have learnt young, you will find useful when old. ee: What's learnt in the cradle lasts till the tomb. In youth we learn, in age we understand.]
56. *Nehas, čo ťa nepáli.* [ww: Do not extinguish what is not burning you. ee: Don't mend what ain't broken.]
57. *Ani z voza, ani na voz.* [ww: Not from carriage, no on carriage. = In no way.]
58. *Čo na srdci, to na jazyku.* [ww: What is in the heart that is on the tongue. ee: Have one's heart in one's mouth.]
59. *Nemá to ani hlavy, ani päty.* [ww: It has neither head nor heel. ee: It has neither rhyme nor reason.]
60. *Lož má krátke nohy.* [ww: A lie has short legs. ee: A lie has no legs.]
61. *Kto neskoro chodí, sám sebe škodí.* [ww: He who is late causes harm to himself. ee: Time and tide wait for no man.]
62. *Aký požičaj, taký vráť.* [ww: Like borrow, like repay. ee: Tit for tat.]

63. *Komu niet rady, tomu niet pomoci.* [ww: You cannot help the one who does not listen to advice. ee: There's no helping those that won't help themselves.]
64. *Zvyk je železná košeľa.* [ww: Habit is an iron shirt. ee: Habit is second nature.]
65. *Istota je istota.* [ww: Safe is safe. ee: Better to be safe than sorry.]
66. *Aká otázka, taká odpoveď.* [ww: Like question, like answer. ee: Ask a silly question and you get a silly answer.]
67. *Babka k babce, budú kapce.* [ww: Bob to bob, there will be felt boots. ee: A penny gained is a penny saved.]
68. *Každý chvíľku ťahá píľku.* [ww: Everybody pulls the saw just for a while. = Everybody's dominance/power is limited. ee:
69. *Keď neprší, aspoň kvapká.* [ww: Even if it does not rain, at least it drips. ee: Every little bit helps.]
70. *Kto chce psa biť, palicu nájde.* [ww: He who wants to beat a dog finds a stick. ee: Give a dog a bad name.]
71. *Strach má veľké oči.* [ww: Fear has big eyes. ee: Fear has magnifying eyes]
72. *Aj steny majú uši.* [ee: Walls have ears.]
73. *Učený nikto z neba nespadol.* [ww: No man has fallen from the sky learned. ee: No one is born a master.]
74. *Vie, odkiaľ vietor fúka.* [ee: He knows which way the wind is blowing.]
75. *Nešťastie nechodí po horách, ale po ľuďoch.* [ww: Misfortunes never walk in the forest, but they happen to people. ee: Accidents will happen.]
76. *Vrana vrane oko nevykole.* [ww: A crow will never peck out a crow's eyes. ee: Dog does not eat dog.]
77. *Samochvála smrdí.* [ww: Self-applause stinks. ee: Stop blowing your own trumpet!]
78. *Príde na psa mráz!* [= There will be a bad outcome for him/her.]
79. *Čo si kto navaril, nech si aj zje (to nech si zje).* [ww: As you cooked the meal, so must you eat it. ee: As you make your bed, so you must lie on it.]
80. *Dva razy meraj, raz strihaj!* [ee: Measure twice, cut once! Look before you leap.]
81. *Komu sa nelení, tomu sa zelení.* [ww: He who is not lazy will get green. ee: The early bird catches the worm. No pain, no gain.]
82. *Čo oči nevidia, to srdce nebolí.* [ee: What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve over.]
83. *Nemá všetkých (päť) pohromade.* [ww: He has not all [ww: his five senses ee: together. ee: He hasn't got all his marbles.]
84. *Aj malé ryby sú ryby.* [ee: Even small fish are fish.]
85. *Sľuby sa sľubujú, blázni sa radujú.* [ww: Promises are promised, fools enjoy it. ee: Promises, promises!, Fine words butter no parsnips.]
86. *Pomaly ďalej zájdeš.* [ww: You get farther at slow pace. ee: The more haste, the less speed.]
87. *Čas je najlepši lekár.* [ww: Time is a best doctor. ee: Time heals all wounds.]
88. *Kto mlčí, ten svedčí.* [ww: He who remains silent gives his consent. ee: Silence is consent.]

89. *Čas všetko zahojí/vylieči.* [ww: Time heals everything. ee: Time is a great healer.]
90. *Hlavou múr neprebiješ (neprerazíš).* [ww: Your head won't break a brick wall. ee: You're/ It's banging your head against a brick wall.]
91. *Hovoriť striebro, mlčať zlato.* [ee: Speech is silver but silence is gold.]
92. *V núdzi poznáš priateľa.* [ww: In the need you know/recognise a friend. ee: A friend in need is a friend indeed.]
93. *Svetská sláva – poľná tráva.* [ww: Wordly fame – field grass. ee: It's just a flash in the pan. Fame is short-lived.]
94. *Príležitosť robí zlodeja.* [ee: Opportunity makes the thief.]
95. *Ako prišlo, tak odišlo.* [ee: Easy come, easy go.]
96. *Kôň má štyri nohy, a predsa sa potkne.* [ww: The horse has four legs, but it stumbles. ee: It's a good horse that never stumbles.]
97. *Vyčkaj času ako hus klasu.* [ww: Wait for time like a goose for spike. ee: All in good time. Everything comes to him who waits.]
98. *Darovanému koňovi nepozerať (nehľadáť) na zuby.* [ww: Don't look a gift horse at the teeth. ee: Don't look a gift horse in the mouth.]
99. *Čo môžeš urobiť dnes, neodkladaj na zajtra!* [ee: What you can do today, never put off till tomorrow.]
100. *Keby nebolo keby, boli by sme všetci v nebi.* [ww: If there wasn't for the if, we would all be in heaven. ee: If it wasn't for the "ifs", you would be rich.]

## 8.7 Conclusions

The survey like this did not offer the opportunity to ascertain whether the respondents also correctly understand the proverb. However, this fact is irrelevant for the purposes of sociolinguistics as the respondents' intuitive evaluation is significant. Future research will also have to take into account the real linguistic competence, the linguistic correctness, and also to examine the accuracy of the understanding of proverbs through cognitive tests.

Further research should focus on examining the linguistic competence by using smaller sets of selected proverbs. These tests should be based on the so-called active paremiological core set. The focus should be also given to testing the set of proverbs from the third group where the respondents were supposed to understand the proverb, due to the motivation of the units and to the respondents' intuition. When conducting this survey, different paremiological experiments should be applied, e.g. the modified Permjakov's method. For instance, in order to increase the objectiveness when examining the intuitive evaluation by a respondent, it is more advisable to present the second part of a proverb requesting him to fill in its beginning. Such research has to involve a significantly higher number of respondents. A questionnaire should be user-friendly and eligible for filling out in a comfortable manner. Our on-line application

has proved to be very successful. Extensive sets of proverbs may be tested by using it and moreover, an on-line questionnaire enables to address much more speakers and to select and qualify a sufficiently representative sample of prospective respondents. That reduces the greatest problem of paremiological experiments, namely that a small group of informants does not accurately represent the population in terms of demography and sociolinguistics.

Findings from such a questionnaire would give an insight into the current paremiology. They may serve as a basis both for wider sociolinguistic research and for their lexicographic description. Ascertaining the awareness of proverbs and their occurrence in huge corpora offers a coherent insight into the formal aspects of existing proverbs. The use of formal language may, within the framework of corpus linguistic, lead to improved analysis of the form of the set phrases and the idiomatics as well. The corpus analysis may also give answer to the question of paremiological neology. With respect to paremiology, it may bring about a new way of the description of paremiological models. The gathered information on outdated and unknown proverbs would serve as a source material for historical paremiological research.

Paremioididactics is another field that may benefit from such research. Based on the data, there may be a paremiological optimum and various paremiological minima created, usable in teaching of mother tongue and foreign languages. The results would also contribute to international paremiological research as an empirically proven basis for the purposes of contrastive paremiology. The empirical and corpus based research will allow a fully new approach to the comparison and typology of equivalence in contrastive paremiology.

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## 9 Proverbs from a Corpus Linguistic Point of View

### 9.1 Introduction<sup>138</sup>

This chapter is not a general introduction to corpus linguistics. Instead, I will focus on some aspects which are particularly relevant for the empirical study of proverbs in written language.<sup>139</sup> My examples will be based on German written language corpora, specifically the *Deutsches Referenzkorpus* [German Reference Corpus] (DeReKo) which is located at the Institute for the German Language in Mannheim. The corpus analysis tool used for accessing the corpus data is COSMAS II (CII). However, the questions, search strategies and examples presented in this chapter should be transferable to other corpora and languages. I will discuss how a user who is interested in proverbs can *exploit* the corpus and which kind of knowledge he can gain in this way. It will become clear that no computer makes thinking obsolete – in the end it is always the human who needs to interpret the results. However, automatic methods can be very useful as they allow high quality pre-structuring of mass data. The most important skill is asking the computer questions as intelligently as possible. Mastering this skill and the methods associated with it is something everyone must learn for themselves by practical experience. As the proverbs say: *Grau is alle Theorie* [ww: Grey is all theory; ee: An ounce of experience is worth a ton of theory] and *Übung macht den Meister* [ww: Practice makes the master; ee: Practice makes perfect].<sup>140</sup>

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**138** I thank Annelen Brunner for translating this chapter into English.

**139** For more in depth information I recommend: Sinclair, 1991; Sinclair, 2004 who was a pioneer of corpus linguistics; Tognini-Bonelli, 2001 and her definitions of the empirical concepts ‘corpus-based’ and ‘corpus-driven’; McEnery & Wilson, 2001; Lüdeling & Kytö, 2008; McEnery & Hardie, 2012 (introductions in English); Mukherjee, 2009; Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister, 2010; Perkuhn & Keibel & Kupietz, 2012 and the website from Bubenhofer, 2006-2013 (introductions in German); for more about corpus-based phraseology and computer linguistic aspects of phrasemes Cowie, 1998; Heid, 2007; Moon, 1998; Moon, 2007; Rothkegel, 2007 Granger & Meunier, 2008; Ptashnyk & Hallsteinsdóttir & Bubenhofer, 2010; Sailer, 2007 and Steyer i. a. 2003; Steyer 2004; overview in Steyer, 2013. also Mieder, 2009.

**140** For finding English proverb equivalents I used the OXFORD Dictionary of Proverbs (Speake, 2008) as well as dict.cc (Dict.cc).

## 9.2 Why Corpora?

The other day, my children said to me: *Das Leben ist kein Ponyhof* [ww: Life is not a pony farm; ee: Life isn't always a bowl of cherries]. This sentence meant nothing to me. I only know, for example, *Das Leben ist kein Wunschkonzert* [ww: Live is not a request show]. However, they insisted that the pony-farm sentence is a common German proverb, as they used it frequently in their social circle. Checking the internet and the corpora confirmed their claim and my ignorance. Test yourself and your friends: which proverbs spontaneously come to your mind? Which do you think are outdated and which modern? You will see that there are big differences between speakers. Of course there is something like a *proverb memory* of a language community, but your ability to recognize proverbs and your habits of proverb use depend heavily on your specific language biography. No speaker has mastery of all sociolects and dialects. Each speaker has a very limited, very subjective subset of knowledge about proverbs. Even proverb collections and dictionaries only help in a limited way. Without doubt they are a precious and essential part of cultural heritage. But these collections do not contain undisputable facts about the real use of a proverb in contemporary language or its constant changes and adaptations. Many proverbs will be passed on from collection to collection, from dictionary to dictionary and a collective *example memory* will be formed. This is unsatisfactory for second language learners who will be confronted with material that does not adequately reflect the current state of the language.

Long-standing empirical solutions for this problem have been surveys (asking for level of recognition and familiarity) or completion and association tests. With these methods you can gain valuable insight about the distribution of proverbs and their role in a language community.<sup>141</sup>

During the last decades, new possibilities for recognizing and describing language use have been opened up by the compilation of large electronic text databases (corpora). Corpora are collections of written or spoken texts. Typically the corpus data is digitalized i.e. machine readable and saved on a computer. In addition to the text data itself, corpora can also contain metadata, which describe the data, and linguistic annotations (Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister, 2010: 8).

Many corpora are collections of electronic texts which have been compiled to address a specific research question and are selected for parameters such as author, source, topic, text type, time period or medium. In our context these are special proverb corpora, e.g. searchable collections of texts or text excerpts from data bases which contain proverbs.

But there is also another type of corpora. These are not built with a specific research goal in mind but try to incorporate a representative subset of a language and

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**141** Overviews can be found in Grzybek, 2012 and Juska-Bacher, 2012. One goal of these studies can be to determine so-called 'paremiological minima' or 'paremiological optima' (Ďurčo in this volume).

therefore strive for a broad coverage in regard to time, text type, regional variants etc. They are called general language corpora or reference corpora. However, it must be emphasized that there will never be a corpus that can truly represent a language in its entirety, though a huge corpus certainly gets closer to this goal than a small one.

One of the earliest reference corpora is the British National Corpus (BNC) which was built in the 1960s. The largest general language corpora for German which are publicly available free of charge (with registration, no download) are:

- The corpus of the *Digitales Wörterbuch des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Digital dictionary of the 20th century] (DWDS corpus)
- The *Deutsches Referenzkorpus* [German Reference corpus] (DeReKo) of the Institute for the German language in Mannheim (DeReKo 2013).

Under development is currently the C4 corpus, a combination of the DWDS corpus, the *Schweizer Text Korpus* [corpus of Switzerland], the Austrian Academic corpus and the *Korpus Südtirol* [corpus of South Tyrol] (Korpus C4).

An additional large resource for language studies these days is the World Wide Web. Internet searches gain importance in phraseology and paremiology as well (Umurova, 2005; Colson, 2007; Ptashnyk & Hallsteinsdóttir & Bubenhofer, 2010), though evidence from this empirical source should not be used without close checking and careful interpretation (Steyer, 2013).

I would like to close this introduction with a caveat – hopefully not too disheartening: Proverb use in the corpus is only a snapshot in time, one of the many facets of communication. All conclusions that you can draw are therefore only representative for this language snapshot. As many corpora are dominated by newspaper and journal texts you learn a lot about how journalists and professional writers use proverbs. This does not mean that the saleslady in the shop round the corner speaks the same way. So you can never say: I did not find this proverb in the corpus therefore it does not exist. Or: This proverb appears this many times, therefore it is one of the most frequent proverbs in my language. This would not be good scientific practice. What you can say is: This proverb appears frequently in my modern language corpus, therefore it cannot be outdated (as long as your examples are real uses of the proverb). If a proverb has variants which are not from a single source, but from different sources and different times, you can also claim that these are typical and not singular variations. So if nothing else, the typical examples of proverb use that can be found in modern corpora are definitely a good reference to decide which proverbs are most useful to learn and to use for second language learners.

### 9.3 Corpus Linguistic Approaches to Proverb Study

The corpus-empirical approach has only recently started to impact on paremiology. Pioneering work has been done by Ďurčo, among others 2005), Čermák, among others 2006 and by the EU-Project SprichWort (2008-2010, 143376-LLP-1-2008-1-SI-KA2-KA2MP) (Steyer, 2012 a and b; SWP).<sup>142</sup>

Generally, two corpus linguistic approaches to the study of current proverb use can be distinguished:

- Knowing a proverb, because it is codified in a dictionary or as an entry in the mental lexicon of speakers and then searching this proverb in the corpus (corpus based) (3.1).
- Detecting a proverb in a corpus (corpus driven). One prominent approach for this is the statistical collocation analysis of paremiological keywords (e.g. cultural symbols like numbers, colors, animals or body parts) or introductory formulas like *proverb*, *saying*, *slogan* or *says an old wisdom* (3.2).<sup>143</sup>

Regardless of the methodological approach, all contemporary corpus analysis tools provide multiple ways of visualizing the search results. Apart from a list of sources which can be sorted in different ways, two presentation formats are standard today:

- concordance lines (keyword in context: KWIC)
- full text results.

The KWIC format is helpful for recognizing base forms of proverbs, fixedness and variance and pragmatic markers (3.1.1 – 3.1.3). Full text results give information about the meaning of the proverb and its usage context (3.1.4).

#### 9.3.1 Corpus-based Questions About Proverbs

##### 9.3.1.1 Proverb – Yes or No?

According to the proverb definition of Röhrich & Mieder, 1977 the following criteria (amongst others) must be considered when identifying a proverb:

- 1) Do the components appear in the form of a sentence or a non-finite clause – like *Ohne Fleiß kein Preis* [ee: No pain, no gain] – that is equivalent to a sentence?

<sup>142</sup> Another corpus-based project was EPHRAS (EPHRAS).

<sup>143</sup> I will not elaborate on the method of n-gram analysis for automatically finding frequent word clusters, as it needs some expert knowledge and special tools and is also not yet commonly applied in proverb studies. An overview over applications of this method gives Bürki, 2012.

- 2) Are they not – or at least not only – used as quotations with a cited source but have become part of everyday language as an expression of wordly wisdom?
- 3) Do they express generalized experiences or value judgements?

While 3) can only be determined by a qualitative interpretation, corpus analysis gives valuable indications in regard to 1) and 2).

Searching for proverbs in a general language corpus is no trivial matter. There are few or no assumptions about the occurrence and behaviour of a proverb that can be made in advance. Therefore each proverb candidate must be examined individually in an iterative alternation of automatic analysis and the formulation of hypotheses.<sup>144</sup> During this process, it is crucial to have as few preconceived notions about the form of the proverb as possible because again and again corpus evidence proves our intuition wrong. If I search for a fixed sentence in the corpus, I will only find this sentence. All possible variations, extensions and reductions will not be covered by this search. Therefore it is a good strategy to start with a wide search which is then gradually restricted.

The first step is to check whether the lexical components of the proverb candidate appear in the same sentence at all. Consider the proverb candidate *Alte Ochsen machen gerade Furchen* [ww: Old oxes make straight furrows]. In this case *Ochse* [ox], *Furche* [furrow] and *alt* [old] never appear together in the corpus. This is evidence that this proverb is probably outdated.

If the search for the lexical components in the same sentence was successful, this can indicate a proverb. KWIC concordance lines help to quickly check an important proverb criterion (Lüger, 1999): whether the form is that of a sentence or a non-finite clause equivalent to a sentence. For example searching for *Speck* [bacon] and *Maus* [mouse] in the same sentence already gives a clear picture of the proverb *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse* [ww: With bacon one catches mice; ee: Good bait catches fine fish].

(1)

K00 *Mit Speck fängt man die Mäuse – und mit Dollars Leichtathleten.*  
 RHZ06 *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse, aber keine Stimmen.*  
 RHZ00 *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse, weiß der Volksmund.*  
 RHZ06 *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse und mit Käse die Narren*  
 DPA09 *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse, aber keine Wähler.*  
 Z06 *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse – und macht man auch Mäuse*

<sup>144</sup> The following strategies for validating proverbs in a corpus were developed from experiences in the EU project „SprichWort“ (SWP) where for the first time a comprehensive corpus validation was conducted for 2000 German proverbs (Steyer, 2012 b). All examples for searches and their result numbers are based on DeReKo. The exact search queries are documented in Steyer, 2013; Umurova, 2005; Āurčo, 2006; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, 2010 and Hrisztova-Gotthardt & Gotthardt, 2012 use specialized search strategies as well. A comprehensive corpus -based study of English proverbs from a diachronic perspective was conducted by Aurich, 2009. also Charteris-Black, 1999.



NUN91 *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse, mit Kultur gewinnt man Kunden.*

For the proverb candidate *Niemand ist ohne Fehl und Tadel* [ww: Nobody is without faults and blames; ee: Nobody is perfect] however, searching for the components *Fehl* [fault] and *Tadel* [blame] together gives a high number of results, but the complete proverb sentence was rarely found. In this case, only the propositional phrase *ohne Fehl und Tadel* [ww: without fault and blame] is fixed but the contexts vary:

(2)

F95 Wer *ohne Fehl und Tadel* ist, der werfe den ersten Stein.  
 N92 löste diese Aufgabe *ohne Fehl und Tadel*. Mehr noch:  
 O94 die Musik ist *ohne Fehl und Tadel*;  
 M98 selbst Heilige sind nicht frei von *Fehl und Tadel*.

For other proverb candidates the wide search must be restricted gradually to capture the real instances of proverb use. An example is the proverb *Zeit ist Geld* [ee: Time is money]. Even if you allow only one word between the components *Zeit* [time] and *Geld* [money], you get a lot of hits that have nothing to do with the proverb, but capture the binomial pair *Zeit und Geld* [time **and** money] – the same happens, by the way, when searching for *time* and *money* in the English corpus BNC. Only when integrating the verb form *ist* [is] into the search, you will find the proverb. The following KWIC examples are from the BNC:

(3)

A3C 74 *Time is money* and, after money, time is what the masses  
 crave most.  
 ABK 149 *TIME is money*.  
 ANY 1167 That costs time, and *time is money*.  
 ASF 1442 It was soon realized by many of the middle class that  
 ‘*time is money*’ and consequently must be carefully regulated  
 and used economically.

For the proverb candidate *Viel Lärm um nichts* [ww: Much noise about nothing, ee: Much ado about nothing] the search must be heavily restricted, with many components and a close focus. Searching for *Lärm* [noise] and *nichts* [nothing] in the same sentence in DeReKo gives more than 3000 results, however these include many instances that have nothing to do with the proverb, e.g. *Die Fahrer hören nichts vom Lärm* [The drivers hear **nothing** of the **noise**]. After including *viel* [much] and *um* [about] into the search, about 77% of the hits capture the sentence *Viel Lärm um nichts*. However, these results must be further examined, as many of them are citations, referring to the comedy of William Shakespeare. We are interested in how the sentence is used as proverb therefore we try to exclude as many words as possible that

indicate a Shakespeare context in any form. The final, very complex search query is: Search for *viel* and *Lärm* and *nichts* in the same sentence, but the sentence must not include *Shakespeare* or *Komödie* [comedy] or *Uhr* [clock]<sup>145</sup> or *Kino* [movie theatre] or *Film* [movie] or *Regie* [stage direction] or *Branagh*<sup>146</sup> or *Branaghs* or *Schauspieler* [actor] or *Hollywood* or *Hollywoods* or any compound words with *Theater* [theatre]. This search yields still over 1500 hits for *Viel Lärm um nichts* and you can now assume that these reflect its usage as a real proverb.

This double life as a quotation and as a proverb is very frequent phenomenon in the corpus, as you can see from the fact that references to the real or supposed origin of a proverb are very common. For example, the biblical or Latin roots of the proverb are mentioned or the person who is credited with its creation. These markers should not be treated as true or false statements about authorship, but as indicators for origin contexts which are still present in the minds of the speakers. For example, in the context of the proverb candidate *Zeit ist Geld* [ee: Time is money] you often find references to Benjamin Franklin:

(4)

Handel und Wandel nahmen neue Formen an, sodass der amerikanische Staatsmann Benjamin Franklin den stehenden Begriff «Zeit ist Geld» prägte. Ein Geist der Unrast begann um sich zu greifen. (St. Galler Tagblatt, 28.10.1999)

There is a transition zone for proverb candidates which are already frequent in the corpus, but cannot (yet) fulfil the proverb criterion that they are applicable in many contexts of communication. For example, the proverb candidate *Es gibt kein schlechtes Wetter, nur schlechte Kleidung* [ww: There's no bad weather, but only bad clothes] is only used in weather contexts and only with the meaning that any weather can be endured wearing the right clothes and that you should therefore not cancel your outdoor activities because of the weather.

(5)

Frei nach dem schlauen Spruch „Es gibt kein schlechtes Wetter, nur schlechte Kleidung“ halten sich die Jungen und Mädchen in der Betreuungszeit ausschließlich im Wald auf, auch bei Regen und Schnee. Da leistet die mitwachsende Kinderlederhose gute Dienste (Rhein-Zeitung, 29.10.2008)

<sup>145</sup> The appearance of *Uhr* indicates a time table, as in (movie) theatre programs.

<sup>146</sup> Kenneth Branagh is the director of one of the most successful movie adaptations of the Shakespeare play from the year 1993 (*Much Ado About Nothing*).

However, it is easy to imagine this proverb in a sense: “If you prepare appropriately, you can master or enjoy any situation”. The following usage example from the corpus already hints at an evolution towards such a status as a saying of worldly wisdom:

(6)

Wenn man glaubt, das Glück geschenkt zu bekommen, liegt man falsch. Wenn mich einer fragt: Wie war im Urlaub das Wetter?, antworte ich stets: *Es gibt kein schlechtes Wetter, nur schlechte Kleidung*. So ist es nämlich auch mit dem Glück-lichsein. (die tageszeitung, 01.07.1997, S. 22)

An important feature – e.g. in CII – is the possibility to sort the search results chronologically. Such lists give indications whether a proverb is more likely archaic or newly coined. You can also examine aspects like the earliest occurrence or a decrease in use frequency. For some proverbs, corpus analysis even allows the reconstruction of the evolution from an original quotation to a proverb, for example for the German proverb *Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben* [ww: He who comes late is punished by life]. This proverb is as transformation of the original sentence from Mikhail Gorbachev *Gefahren warten nur auf jene, die nicht auf das Leben reagieren* [ww: Dangers await only those who do not respond to life] during a state visit to the former East Germany in October 1989, shortly before the fall of the Berlin Wall. (Mieder, 2004; Mieder, 2010; Steyer, in print). Figure 9.1 shows the chronological list of hits (899)<sup>147</sup>.

You can see, that this proverb is documented for the first time in DeReKo indeed in 1989. More than 30 years later, you find many examples for the use as a true proverb in the corpus, like the following:

„Limburgerhof als Stadtteil von Ludwigshafen? Die Stadt hätte sicherlich nichts dagegen. Die Frage ist nur: Ist dies das strategische Interesse von Limburgerhof? Ein Sprichwort sagt: *Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben*. Für Limburgerhof heißt das: Entweder jetzt die Chance mit Neuhofen zu ergreifen oder aber später zum Spielball fremder Interessen zu werden“ (Die Rheinpfalz, 20.08.2012, S. 23).

And many young people do not know the context anymore, as a small survey amongst students showed me. The sentence is truly established as a proverb.

<sup>147</sup> Query: &wer /s0 (&kommen oder &spätkommen) /s0 &Leben /s0 &bestrafen.

Hits	Texts	Year
11	10	1989
36	34	1990
11	10	1991
18	18	1992
20	18	1993
9	8	1994
12	12	1995
32	32	1996
54	54	1997
52	51	1998
94	89	1999
55	53	2000
39	39	2001
38	36	2002
39	37	2003
43	42	2004
32	32	2005
44	42	2006
35	33	2007
39	38	2008
63	60	2009
36	34	2010
61	52	2011
26	26	2012
899 all in all		

**Figure 9.1:** Chronological list of *Wer zu spät kommt, den bestraft das Leben*

### 9.3.1.2 Fixedness and Variance

One of the central questions in proverb studies and proverb lexicography is about fixedness and variance of proverbs. On the one hand there are variations which happen at the syntactic and morphological level, as in this example of the proverb *Der Fisch stinkt vom Kopf* [ee: The fish always stinks from the head downwards]:

(7)

T05 *Der Fisch stinkt vom Kopf her*, sagt der Volksmund.  
 NUZ09 Chinesen haben ein unappetitliches, aber wahres Sprichwort: *Der Fisch stinkt vom Kopfe her*.  
 NUN05 »Am Kopf fängt der Fisch das Stinken an« ist eine alte Weisheit.

On the other hand, there is the substitution of certain components with other lexical elements. These variations can be found by using restrictive search queries as explained above. For example to find variations of the proverb *Übung macht den Meister* [ww: Practice makes the master] you can search for *Übung macht den/die/*

*das* [Practice makes the] WITHOUT *Meister* [master] or *macht den Meister* [makes the master] WITHOUT *Übung* [practice]:

(8)

*Übung macht den X-Meister* [ww: Practice makes the X-master]

M99 *Übung macht den Handball-Meister*

M99 *Übung macht auch hier den Zaubermeister*

These are variants which use compounds with *Meister*, e.g.: *Practice makes the master of handball/magic*.

(9)

*Übung macht den X* [ww: Practice makes the X]

A97 *Übung macht den Radioprediger*

A00 *Übung macht den Schützen*

A09 *Übung macht den Feuerwehrmann*

F99 *Übung macht den Gourmet*

In these variants *Meister* is substituted, e.g.; *Practice makes the radio preacher/marksman/fire fighter/gourmet*.

(10)

*X macht den Meister* [ww: X makes the master]

B06 *Technik macht den Meister*

B07 *Energie macht den Meister*

B07 *Vorsicht macht den Meister*

E99 *Doch erst Playoff macht den Meister*

Here, *Übung* [practice] is substituted, e.g.; *Technique/Energy/Caution/Playoff makes the master*.

It is also possible to find variations with more abstract search queries,<sup>148</sup> e.g. *Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen* [ee: Who says A must say B]:<sup>149</sup>

<sup>148</sup> So-called proverb construction plans or schemas are already mentioned in Röhrich & Mieder, 1977. See also Burger, 2010.

<sup>149</sup> In this case, the exact search query in COSMAS II syntax would be: (\$wer /+w2:2 &sagen /+w1:1 &müssen /+w5 &sagen) %s0 (\$a und \$b).

(11)

R99 Wer „**Puppe**“ [doll] sagt, muss auch „**Barbie**“ sagen  
 RHZ06 Wer **Argentinien** [Argentina] sagt, muss auch **Tango** sagen  
 T10 Wer **Beatles** sagt, muss aber auch **Rolling Stones** sagen

In this case, the proverb variants play with the abstract meaning ‘one thing necessarily calls for another’ of the pattern *Who says X must say Y*, e.g.: *doll* → *Barbie*; *Argentina* → *Tango*; *Beatles* → *Rolling Stones*.

### 9.3.1.3 Proverb Frequency

Calculating proverb frequency is a complex problem which has no standard solution. There will be different results depending on the corpus and the search query that was used. Consider the proverb *Not macht erfinderisch* [ww: Necessity makes ingenious; ee: Necessity is the mother of invention]. If you use a restrictive search query like “*Not* [necessity] directly followed by *macht* [makes] directly followed by *erfinderisch* [ingenious]” you get more than 900 hits for the proverb in exactly this form. If you widen the search and allow all morphological forms of the verb *machen* [make], the number of hits already increases by approx 40. If in addition to that you allow wider gaps between the components so that you also capture occurrences with an introductory formula (*Not macht **bekanntlich/sagt man*** [ww: as is generally known/as they say] *erfinderisch*) or minimal lexical additions (e.g. particles like *Not macht **eben immer/nun mal/schließlich*** [ww: always/after all/as you know] *erfinderisch*) the number of hits for this example increases by approx. 600!

As you can see, there can be no absolute proverb frequencies (this is also true for multi-word expressions in general). Statements about frequency are only meaningful if you make transparent on which corpus basis and with which search queries the numbers have been obtained (Appendix 2). It is also recommended to refer to proportional frequencies or frequency trends rather than absolute numbers.

### 9.3.1.4 Meaning and Usage<sup>150</sup>

Corpus analysis gives us an empirically sound way to find out what aspects are always parts of the meaning of a proverb and what aspects are typically connected to the use of the proverb and form its wider context. Pragmatic aspects of meaning in particular are often perceived from a very subjective perspective. Corpus analysis helps to get a more objective view as it identifies usage properties which repeat themselves and are therefore typical. Thus, meaning can often be captured in a more accurate and

<sup>150</sup> In addition to Steyer, 2013, this section is based mainly on Steyer & Hein, 2010; Steyer, 2012b; Hein, 2012; Steyer & Ďurčo, in print.

nuanced way than by pure introspection. For example, the proverb *Die Ratten verlassen das sinkende Schiff* [ww: The rats are leaving the sinking ship] on first glance refers to someone who notices a danger in time and flees.<sup>151</sup> However, corpus evidence clearly points to the following meaning-in-usage (cited from the article on the SprichWort platform, Steyer & Hein, 2010):

(12)

Bedeutung / Besonderheiten im Gebrauch [meanig / current usage]

„Sagt man, wenn sich Verantwortliche bei von ihnen mit verschuldeten negativen Entwicklungen oder Schwierigkeiten zurückziehen und sich damit aus der Verantwortung stehlen“ (Steyer & Hein, 2010)

[English translation of this paraphrase: “Is used when someone draws back from negative consequences or problems he has caused and by doing so shirks responsibility.”]

Korpusbeleg [corpus citation]:

*Die Ratten haben das sinkende Schiff verlassen.* Der irakische Oppositionspolitiker Hassan Halboos ist fest davon überzeugt, dass Tausende von Helfern Saddam Husseins ihre Uniformen ausgezogen und sich unters Volk gemischt haben. (RHZ03/APR.09770 Rhein-Zeitung, 12.04.2003; “Saddams Helfer tarnen sich”)

Sometimes corpus evidence shows that there is a pragmatic aspect that is always tied to the use of a proverb, such as a negative connotation *Die dümmsten Bauern haben die dicksten Kartoffeln* [ww: The dumbest peasants have the biggest potatoes; ee: Fortune favors fools]. In most cases pragmatic aspects like ‘devaluation’ are not present for all, but still for many of the usage instances from the corpus. The following usage aspects can typically be found with the help of corpus analysis:

- Context of usage; e.g. typically in sport reports: *Man ist so alt, wie man sich fühlt* [ww: You are as old as you feel]; *Rache ist süß* [ww: Vengeance is sweet]; *Knapp daneben ist auch vorbei* [ww: Narrowly missed is still missed];
- Function in communication, e.g. typically as ‘admonition’: *Erst denken, dann handeln* [ww: First thinking, then acting]; *Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall* [ee: Pride goes before a fall]; *Die Konkurrenz schläft nicht* [ww: The competition does not sleep];

<sup>151</sup> The basis for this proverb is an old belief among sailors the rats rather flee towards the open sea than drown with the ship (Duden, 11, 2013: 593).

- Text type, e.g. typically in horoscopes: *Der Klügere gibt nach* [ee: The cleverer give in]; *Eile mit Weile* [ee: Haste makes waste]; *Wer rastet, der rostet* [ee: You snooze, you loose].

Examining corpus evidence also gives a good idea of the textual integration of proverbs. For example, by doing an alphabetical sort of the KWIC lines, you can easily see frequent elements in front of the proverb. In the case of the proverb *Der Schein trügt* these are conjunctions like *aber*, *denn* or *doch* [ww: **But/Because/However** appearances are deceitful; ee: **But/Because/However** you can't tell a book by its cover]:

(13)

WPD11 **Aber** *der Schein trügt*: In einer Bar wandern  
 RHZ11 **Aber** *der Schein trügt*. Auch diese Felder  
 HMP09 **Aber** *der Schein trügt*: Während der 27-Jährige sorglos  
 seine PIN eingibt,  
 F01 **Denn** *der Schein trügt* nie in Maastricht:  
 F95 **Denn** *der Schein trügt*, lernen wir,  
 BRZ10 **Denn** *der Schein trügt*: Trotz der Minusgrade  
 T87 **Doch** *der Schein trügt*: Unser Backwerk entsteht aus dem  
 Mehl nur weniger  
 T86 **Doch** *der Schein trügt*

Other typical textual context elements can be: frequent modification with adverbs or particles like *Der Ton macht **eben/halt/nun mal** die Musik* [ww: The sound makes PARTICLE the music (the particles mean roughly 'after all'); ee: It's not what you say, but how you say it]; frequent sentence mode, e.g. question: *Ende gut, alles gut?* [ee: All's well that ends well?], frequent negation: *Die Zeit heilt **nicht** alle Wunden* [ww: Time does **not** heal all wounds]; frequent use as an opening phrase for a topic: *Der Schein trügt*: [ww: *Appearances are deceitful*; ee: **But** You can't tell a book by its cover:] frequent use as a parenthesis: *Aber andererseits, **sicher ist sicher**, lud er zum Empfang [...] ein* [ww: But on the other hand, **sure is sure**; ee: just to be sure, he invited to the reception]; frequent reduction to only a part of the proverb: *Reden ist Silber* [ONLY: Speech is silver] or *Schweigen ist Gold* [ONLY: Silence is golden], frequent syntactical transformation: *süße Rache* [sweet revenge from Revenge is sweet].

### 9.3.2 Proverbs – Corpus Driven

The second corpus analytical approach is the automatic extraction of multi-word units – including proverbs – from the corpus. A useful method that is available in many corpus analysis tools is collocation analysis which calculates the significant partner words of a target word. A sophisticated implementation of this method can be used



via COSMAS II (Belica, 1995).<sup>152</sup> Collocation analysis allows us to find common multi-word units that cluster around proverb key words like *Geld* [money]; *Welt* [world]; *Liebe* [love] or *Mensch* [human], but also around introductory formulas.<sup>153</sup> Figure 2 shows a clipping from the collocation profile of the introductory formula *bekanntlich* [as is generally known]:<sup>154</sup>

collocation    syntagmatic pattern

<b>erfinderisch</b>	Not macht bekanntlich [...] erfinderisch
<b>Totgesagte</b>	Totgesagte [leben] bekanntlich länger
<b>Magen</b>	Liebe geht bekanntlich durch den Magen geht
<b>Kleinvieh</b>	Kleinvieh [macht] bekanntlich auch Mist
<b>Hochmut</b>	Hochmut [kommt] bekanntlich vor dem
<b>mahlen</b>	der Mühlen mahlen [...] bekanntlich langsam
<b>heiligt</b>	Der der Zweck heiligt [...] bekanntlich die Mittel
<b>belebt</b>	Konkurrenz belebt [...] bekanntlich das Geschäft
<b>geduldig</b>	Papier ist bekanntlich [...] geduldig
<b>Derbys</b>	Derbys [haben] bekanntlich ihre eigenen
<b>stinkt</b>	Der Geld Fisch stinkt [...] bekanntlich nicht vom
<b>Tüchtige</b>	Glück hat bekanntlich nur der Tüchtige

Figure 9.2: Clipping from the collocation profile of *bekanntlich*

You can see that the partner words point towards several common proverbs.

In addition to that, collocation analysis gives valuable hints in regard to typical usage situations as attested by many context-based approaches (Sinclair, 2004; Stubbs, 2001 and many other). The clippings in Figure 9.3 are from the collocation profile of *Die Ratten verlassen das sinkende Schiff* [ww: The rats are leaving the sinking ship], (section 3.1.4).

<sup>152</sup> The following examples have been calculated with the collocation analysis tool developed by Belica, which is available via COSMAS II. In contrast to other tools, this tool also outputs common syntagmatic patterns. Other tools for collocation analysis or collocation resources are e.g. available at DWDS. Another tool for various languages is Sketch Engine (SkE; Ďurčo, 2010).

<sup>153</sup> About the corpus-based analysis of proverb markers or introducers Čermák, 2004; Ďurčo, 2005.

<sup>154</sup> The clippings from the collocation profiles are cited without quantitative information, as they just serve as an illustration of the general principle. Documenting and explaining the parameters and numbers would be beyond the scope of this contribution. Further information can be found in the collocation analysis tutorial (Perkuhn & Belica, 2004).

collocation	syntagmatic pattern
1)	
<b>Spruchwort</b>	Spruchwort [Die] Ratten verlassen das
<b>Devise</b>	Devise ... Ratten
<b>bekanntlich</b>	Ratten ... bekanntlich
<b>Redewendung</b>	die Redewendung daß die ... Ratten das ...
<b>Motto</b>	nach dem Motto Die ... Ratten verlassen das
2)	
<b>Exodus</b>	Ratten ... das verlassen sinkende Schiff ... die Kabila-Regierung ... Exodus
<b>Titanic</b>	Ratten ... Titanic
<b>Untergang</b>	verlassen ... Untergang
<b>Panik</b>	Panik ... verlassen
<b>fliehen</b>	fliehen ... Ratten
<b>Kapitän</b>	Ratten ... verlassen das sinkende Schiff die der ... Kapitän
<b>Seeleute</b>	Ratten ... Seeleute
<b>Bord</b>	Ratten verlassen das sinkende Schiff ... der ... Bord
<b>Ufer</b>	Ratten ... Ufer
<b>Unglück</b>	Ratte ... Unglück
<b>Flucht</b>	Ratten das sinkende verlassen Schiff ... Flucht
<b>Welle</b>	Welle ... Ratten
<b>Chaos</b>	Chaos ... Es ist die ... Ratten
<b>Brand</b>	verlassen ... Brand
3)	
<b>Multis</b>	Multis ... Multis ... Ratten
<b>Diktator</b>	Ratte ... Diktator
<b>Regierungen</b>	Ratten verlassen das sinkende Schiff ... Regierungen
<b>Geschäftsführerin</b>	Geschäftsführerin ... Ratte
<b>Milosevic</b>	Milosevic ... verlassen
<b>Rücktritt</b>	Rücktritt ... Ratte

Figure 9.3: Clippings from the collocation profile of *Ratten–verlassen–Schiff*

Significant partner words in the wider context of this proverb indicate

- 1) that this sentence is commonly used as a saying of worldly wisdom (e.g. *proverb/maxim/as is generally known/saying/motto*),
- 2) that the nautical origin metaphor is often referenced, (e.g. *Titanic/sinking/panic/captain/escape/to disembark* etc.),
- 3) that the behaviour described by the proverb is typically attributed to persons or social groups that hold leadership positions, (e.g. *dictator/governments/manager/Milosevic* etc.).

Finally, collocation analysis can help to analyse proverb patterns and schemas. Figure 9.4 shows a clipping from the collocation profile of the proverb pattern *Wer X, der Y* [ww: He who X Y], an even more abstract pattern of *Who says X must say Y* (discussed in section 3.1.2).

collocation	syntagmatic pattern
<b>rastet</b>	Wer [...] rastet der rostet
<b>rostet</b>	Wer [rastet der] rostet
<b>suchet</b>	Wer suchet der findet
<b>findet</b>	Wer [suchet sucht der] findet
<b>bestellt</b>	Wer [...] bestellt der bezahlt
<b>anschafft</b>	Wer anschafft der zahlt
<b>dopt</b>	Wer dopt der fliegt
<b>sündigt</b>	Wer schläft der sündigt nicht -
<b>schreibt</b> bleibt	Wer schreibt der bleibt
<b>schlägt</b>	Wer [...] schlägt der geht
<b>lügt</b>	Wer [schreit der] lügt der ...
<b>gewinnt</b> wagt	Wer wagt der gewinnt
<b>austeilt</b>	Wer austeilt der muss muß
<b>erntet</b>	Wer sät der erntet
<b>aufmuckt</b>	Wer aufmuckt der ...
<b>schläft</b>	Wer [...] schläft der sündigt

Figure 9.4: Clipping from the collocation profile of the pattern *Wer* GAP OF ONE WORD, *der*

Typically realisations of the pattern *Wer X, der Y* are: *Wer rastet, der rostet* [ww: Who rests rusts; ee: You snooze, you lose]; *Wer wagt, gewinnt* [ee: Who dares wins].

Collocation analysis not only generates lists of significant partner words and syntagmatic patterns as shown in the clippings above, but also sorts KWIC concordance lines and full text results according to their context patterns. These should always be included in the interpretation. Below you can study some KWIC lines (12) and full text results (13) for the proverb *Wer austeilt, der muss auch einstecken können* [ww: He who dishes it out, must also be able to take it].

(14)

K97 Nein, mich kann man nicht beleidigen. *Wer austeilt, der muß auch einstecken können.*

PNI haben wir uns schöne Auseinandersetzungen, auch verbal, geliefert. *Wer austeilt, der muss auch einstecken können,* okay.

PRP Man muß auch nicht zimperlich sein. *Wer austeilt, der muß auch einstecken können.* Herr Kollege Dr.

Mertes,

(15)

Nein, mich kann man nicht beleidigen. *Wer austeilt, der muß auch einstecken können.*

Was hätte Matthias Schuh werden sollen, wenn es nach seinen Eltern gegangen wäre? (Kleine Zeitung, 17.05.1997, Ressort: Menschen; „Mich kann doch niemand beleidigen!“)

In dem Bereich, den ich früher hier vertreten durfte, haben wir uns schöne Auseinandersetzungen, auch verbal, geliefert.

*Wer austeiht, der muss auch einstecken können, okay.* Aber Sie werden bei allen Auseinandersetzungen verbaler Art mit der früheren niedersächsischen Umweltministerin oder auch mit dem jetzigen Umweltminister von mir nie Ausdrücke wie „mangelnder Sachverstand“, „keine Ahnung“ oder so etwas gehört haben. (Protokoll der Sitzung des Parlaments Landtag Niedersachsen am 30.07.1999. 30. Sitzung der 14. Wahlperiode 1998–2003. Plenarprotokoll, Hannover, 1999 [S. 2734])

Man muß auch nicht zimperlich sein. *Wer austeiht, der muß auch einstecken können.*

Herr Kollege Dr. Mertes, eines geht nicht. (PRP/W13.00035 Protokoll der Sitzung des Parlaments Landtag Rheinland-Pfalz am 17.07.1997. 35. Sitzung der 13. Wahlperiode 1996–2001. Plenarprotokoll, Mainz am Rhein, 1997)

It must again be stressed that collocation analysis only gives pointers and can never replaces human interpretation.

## 9.4 Summary and Outlook

This chapter gave a first overview of how proverb research can benefit from corpus linguistic approaches. My main goal was to illustrate the general principles. Corpus linguistics revolutionizes especially application-related areas like *proverb lexicography and didactics* which are already focussed on language usage. An example for a strictly corpus-based approach is the above-mentioned EU-project SprichWort. Future research should aim towards comparing the results of corpus linguistic methods with those of proverb surveys and of the traditional historical paremiology. A vision would be the creation of new proverb collections or modern proverb information systems which combine all this knowledge in a meaningful way.

However, corpus linguistic proverb research also opens new perspectives in regard to linguistic theory, e.g. a connection with construction grammar and with a new, pattern-based phraseology. As paremiologists who use corpus linguistic methods generally work with a large data basis, they view regularities in many similar cases of usage. A new quality of research is not only achieved by using more data, but also by discovering structures which have been hidden from human perception before. There is a chance to find unusual cross-connections and unexpected relations. Because of this, you can now study proverbs as part of the larger picture of language and vocabulary.

Empirical corpus research once again raises the general issue of the special status of proverbs on the one hand and their role in the network of multi-word units on

the other hand: Corpus empirical evidence shows that speakers consciously recall fixed phrases and use them for their special communicative function of condensing complex messages. At the same time, the limitless number and variance of introductory formulas in the corpus is evidence that speakers do not make a fine distinction between *proverb*, *saying*, *slogan* or *motto*, but that only the concept *sentence as message* is important.

The corpus linguistic perspective also shows that proverbs themselves can be realisations of more general patterns and schemas (example *Wer X der Y*) and share attributes and characteristics with non-proverb multi-word units. Pilot studies suggest that proverbs often represent the prototypical realisations of those schemas and, as lexically fixed expressions, are more salient in the mind of the speakers, while non-proverb units of the same schema tend to be subject to creative ad-hoc variations. This raises the question why some proverbs have hardly any variants while others have many. As you can see, strictly corpus-based proverb studies can create a fresh impetus for a pattern-based theory of the lexicon.

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## Appendix 1

High frequent proverbs of the Sprichwort Platform (SWP) with Numbers of hits and queries (DeReKo 2013) (17.10.2014):

1. <i>Weniger ist mehr.</i>	3.579 \$weniger /+w1 ist /+w3 \$mehr
2. <i>Der Schein trügt.</i>	2.738 Schein /+w3 trügt
3. <i>Ende gut, alles gut.</i>	2.638 Ende /+w3 gut /+w3 alles
4. <i>Aller guten Dinge sind drei.</i>	2.511 \$aller /+w3 guten /+w3 Dinge /+w5 (\$drei ODER 3)
5. <i>Die Hoffnung stirbt zuletzt.</i>	2.364 Hoffnung /+w3 stirbt /+w5 zuletzt
6. <i>Was lange währt, wird endlich gut.</i>	2.216 \$was /+w3 lange /+w3 währt /+w5 gut
7. <i>Aller Anfang ist schwer.</i>	1.894 \$aller /+w3 Anfang /+w5 schwer
8. <i>Der Weg ist das Ziel.</i>	1.833 Weg /+w1 ist /+w3 Ziel
9. <i>Viel Lärm um nichts.</i>	1.725 (&viel /s0 &Lärm /s0 nichts) %s2 (Shakespeare ODER Shakespeares ODER Shakespeare's ODER &Uhr ODER &Kino ODER &Theater ODER Branagh)
10. <i>Zeit ist Geld.</i>	1.605 Zeit /+w1 ist /+w5 Geld
11. <i>Totgesagte leben länger.</i>	1.560 Totgesagte /+w3 leben /+w5 länger
12. <i>Aufgeschoben ist nicht aufgehoben.</i>	1.540 \$aufgeschoben /+w3 „nicht“ /+w5 aufgehoben
13. <i>Alles hat seine Zeit.</i>	1.514 \$alles /+w3 hat /+w5 seine /+w5 Zeit
14. <i>Not macht erfinderisch.</i>	1.366 „Not“ /+w3 macht /+w5 erfinderisch
15. <i>Ehre wem Ehre gebührt.</i>	1.330 (Ehre /+w2:2 Ehre) /+w5 gebührt
16. <i>Die Konkurrenz schläft nicht.</i>	1.317 Konkurrenz /+w3 schläft /+w5 „nicht“
17. <i>Ausnahmen bestätigen die Regel.</i>	1.289 &Ausnahme /+w5 bestätigen /+w5 &Regel
18. <i>Kleider machen Leute.</i>	1.270 Kleider /+w3 machen /+w5 Leute

19. *Vertrauen ist gut, Kontrolle ist besser.* 1.132 Vertrauen /+w3 gut /+w5 Kontrolle  
/+w5 besser

20. *Wer rastet, der rostet.* 984 \$wer /+w3 rastet /+w5 rostet

## 10 Paremiography: Proverb Collections

### 10.1 Definition of Proverbs, Proverb Collections and Proverb Dictionaries

#### 10.1.1 Definition of Proverbs

The repeated reference to the impossibility of defining a proverb, according to Taylor (1931: 3), who writes about an “incommunicable quality [that] tells us this sentence is proverbial and that is not”, does not help either the laity or the scholars further; rather, it indicates its problematic character. Proverbs can be defined, among others, either according to the classical theory of features or to the prototype theory. While the classical theory necessitates rigid principles and a rigid definition system with necessary and sufficient markers and clear category borders, the prototype theory makes transitions between categories possible. Issues with markers of proverbiality that can contain didactic content, metaphoricity and prosody (Norrick, 2007: 381) (e.g. *A rolling stone gathers no moss*; *The apple never falls far from the tree*) are in accordance with the classical theory. However, “the notion of proverbiality is itself (...) a matter of prototypicality” (Norrick, 2007: 382), therefore non-metaphorical and non-rhythmic sentences with didactic content or elliptic structures can belong to the category of proverbs, too (e.g. *The exception proves the rule*; *It is never too late to learn*; *Business before pleasure*; *Easy come, easy go*).

#### 10.1.2 Definition of Proverb Collections and Proverb Dictionaries

Proverb collections and proverb dictionaries could be seen, more or less, as representatives of the above-mentioned different proverb definition types. On the one hand, there are proverb collections where proverbs can be interpreted within the framework of the prototype theory, i.e. they interpret proverbs in a broader sense, and with this in mind, they include better examples of the proverb category (e.g. *The apple doesn't fall far from the tree*) and worse examples too, i.e. proverbial comparisons (e.g. *as busy as a bee*), wellerisms (e.g. “*Everyone to his own taste,*” *as the farmer said when he kissed the cow*), weather proverbs and superstitions (e.g. *When it rains and the sun shines, the devil is beating his grandmother*), even idioms (e.g. *kick the bucket*). On the other hand, there are proverb dictionaries where proverbs can be interpreted within the framework of features (sentence, rhyme, alliteration, ellipsis, moral authority, didactic intent et al.), i.e. they interpret proverbs in a narrow sense and so they codify

only proverbs that are generally sentential statements (e.g. *Still waters run deep*; *The shoemaker's son always goes barefoot*; *Too many cooks spoil the broth*).

This theory is not in accordance with the reality. Akbarian (2012: 1) mentions “the inconsistency between what such a dictionary claims to include and what it actually includes”. He analyzed Bertram (1996) and states that only 67 per cent of the entries in this dictionary (*NTC's Dictionary of Proverbs and Clichés*) are proverbs. 33 per cent of them are non-proverb items (e.g. *a chip off the old block*). As Akbarian states, there are lots of other idiom and proverb dictionaries mixing several kinds of phraseological items. Spears (1987) is an example of an *idiom dictionary* (*NTC's American Idioms Dictionary*) containing many proverbs too, beside idioms. Similarly, the dictionary of Hungarian proverbs by T. Litovkina (2005) includes idioms and other phraseological items. Even the *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (Wilson, 1970) “makes no distinction between ‘proverbs, proverbial phrases and proverbial similes’” (Benjafield, Frommhold, Keenan et al., 1993: 27).

The present study concentrates on dictionaries containing only or mainly proverbs. To simplify the usage of terminology, in the following, the terms *proverb collection* and *proverb dictionary* will be used interchangeably. There are some reference resources that are deliberately restricted to proverbs. Mieder, Kingsbury & Harder (1992: xii) “have included only true proverbs (...) (and) have excluded proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, superstitions, wellerisms, and idioms”. Similarly, Beyer & Beyer (1984) excluded German idioms, winged words, aphorisms, and slogans. Paczolay's work (1997) is also a collection of *pure* proverbs.

The main issues with proverb collections relate to their usage. The following chapter is therefore structured according to the usage of proverb collections. As printed and electronic proverb collections, like dictionaries generally, differ on structure and usage, they should be treated hereinafter separately.<sup>155</sup>

## 10.2 Usage of Printed Proverb Collections

### 10.2.1 Which One to Use?

The selection of suitable proverb collections depends on the interest of the user and the situation. Users interested in the development of proverbs can prefer historical proverb dictionaries like Whiting (1968) and Wander (1867-1880). These dictionaries list different forms of proverbs, among other things, their older forms and variants.

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<sup>155</sup> This study focuses on contemporary proverb collections. As to the history of German proverb collections Mieder 1984.

There are a few proverb dictionaries that organize their proverb stock according to the subjects proverbs refer to. If we look, for example, for German proverbs referring to economy and diligence (*Von Sparsamkeit und Fleiß*), we can find 45 suitable proverbs in Müller-Hegemann & Otto (1965). Similarly, there are 42 German entries in Beier, Herkt & Pollmann (2002) referring to diligence.

Bilingual and multilingual proverb dictionaries can be useful for those interested in proverbs equivalents. In Paczolay (1997) e.g. there are 106 European proverbs with their equivalents in 55 languages. Predota (2003: 95) names three main categories of English proverb collections: “scientific [Wilson, 1970], popular-scientific [Simpson, 1985] and those destined for the teaching of foreign languages [Mieder, 2003]”.

### 10.2.2 How to Find a Proverb in a Proverb Collection?

Proverbs are prevalingly ordered alphabetically by keywords (e.g. Mieder, Kingsbury & Harder, 1992) in proverb collections, i.e. the dictionary has an alphabetical outer access structure (Wiegand, Beißwenger, Gouws et al., 2010: 328). The keyword is generally the first noun, if there is not a noun available, the first adjective, adverb or verb. Many proverb dictionaries list the same proverb several times, some of them even under (almost) all words. The multiple listing facilitates the finding of proverbs to a great extent.

Some proverb collections organize the entries alphabetically, but according to their first component. (e.g. Bertram, 1996; Spears, 1987). This is not a user-friendly approach. If one does not know the standard form of the proverb, this method cannot help one to find it in the dictionary. Generally, there is an index in these types of dictionaries, like the phrase-finder index in Spears (1987), where all proverb components are listed. This access structure facilitates the looking-up process.

In thematically ordered proverb collections (e.g. Müller-Hegemann & Otto, 1965), the starting point is the theme proverbs are assigned to, which appear as alphabetically ordered keywords. Regularly, there is a registry of themes/ keywords in the appendix that helps the user to find the searched proverb (or winged word).

### 10.2.3 What Kind of Information is Contained Under a Proverb Entry?

As usual, semantic, pragmatic and in some cases etymological information is assigned to proverb entries, beside their form. The availability of these issues varies depending on the dictionary. On one side, Simrock (1988) contains a mere German proverb list without further information, Couzereau’s dictionary (1997) is just a list of German proverbs and their English and French equivalents, whereas on the other side, Wander (1867-1880) and Wilson (1970) provide data concerning the meaning, usage and etymology of proverbs.

### 10.2.3.1 Information on Standard Proverb Forms and Variants

If we take a look at proverb dictionaries, we can see that the least information they are giving us about the proverb is its standard, canonical form. Yet, many proverbs have several formal variants, which are mostly marked with a slash (alternative words) or parentheses (addition). In Mieder, Kingsbury & Harder (1992), each variant is listed consistently. For *A new broom sweeps clean*, nine variants are listed (Figure 10.1).

2. A new broom sweeps clean. *Vars.:* (a) A new broom never sweeps clean. (b) A new broom sweeps clean, but an old broom knows all the corners. (c) A new broom sweeps clean, but an old one gets in the corners. (d) A new broom sweeps clean, but an old one knows where the dirt is. (e) A new broom sweeps clean, but an old one scrapes better. (f) A new broom sweeps clean, but the old broom knows the corners. (g) A new broom sweeps clean; the old one knows the corners best. (h) A new broom sweeps the cleanest. (i) A new broom sweeps well. *Rec. dist.:* U.S., Can. *1st cit.:* 1542 *Unpublished Poems from the Blage MS*, ed. Muir; US1752 Clinton in *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, N.Y.Hist.Soc. *Collections* (1917–37). *20c. coll.:* ODEP 564, Whiting 47, CODP 161, Stevenson 246:12, T&W 44, Whiting(MP) 75.

**Figure 10.1:** Variants of the English proverb *A new broom sweeps clean* in Mieder, Kingsbury & Harder 1992

Traditionally, there can be *variants* as regular changes, and *modifications* as occasional changes, differentiated. This distinction was made mainly in the German literature concerning phraseology (*Varianten* vs. *Modifikationen*, Burger, Buhofer & Sialm, 1982). Recently, the term *variant* is more often referred to both phenomena. However, there is a term for occasional formal variants of proverbs, called *anti-proverbs*, which is the subject of three volumes of the popular dictionary of German anti-proverbs (*Antisprichwörter*) by Mieder (1982, 1985, 1989) and Mieder & Litovkina (1999). Indeed, the effects of these intentional alterations are relevant in persuasive texts, e.g. advertisements, down to present day. Under proverb variants in Mieder, Kingsbury & Harder (1992) there are also anti-proverbs listed (Figure 10.1).

### 10.2.3.2 Information on Meaning of Proverbs

Meaning is the most important information on understanding proverbs. As for figurativeness, proverbs can be classified into the group of figurative or idiomatic (*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush*) and of non-idiomatic proverbs (*Better late than never*). Problems arise, generally, with idiomatic proverbs because the meaning of the whole cannot be deducted from the meaning of the components. Although cognitive metaphor theories do not accept this point of view (Gibbs, 2001), the description of idiomatic, or metaphoric proverbs is rightly needed in proverb dictionaries.

Semiotic proverbs research played a major role in exploring the semantics of proverbs, among others their implicative, analogic and metaphoric character (Kanyó, 1981). Thus, the semantic item giving the meaning of proverbs in dictionaries can benefit from this issue. The generalized abstract meaning (or the model situation or the proverb idea, Grzybek, 2007: 205) is the most important semantic information to be codified. Unfortunately, there are few proverb collections that consistently codify the meaning of proverbs, it is more frequently done in dictionaries for non-native speakers.

**A rolling stone gathers no moss.** a proverb which describes a person who keeps changing jobs or residences and, therefore, accumulates no possessions or responsibilities. □ *“John just can’t seem to stay in one place,” said Sally. “Oh well, a rolling stone gathers no moss.”* □ *Bill has no furniture to bother with because he keeps on the move. He keeps saying that a rolling stone gathers no moss.*

**Figure 10.2:** Information on the meaning of the English proverb *A rolling stone gathers no moss* in Spears (1987)

### 10.2.3.3 Information on Usage of Proverbs

Pragmatic information needs to be distinguished from semantic information on proverbs, insofar as the abstract meaning of the proverb can have special reference that can also be called a reference situation (Grzybek, 2007). In other words, proverbs are polysituational items, i.e. there may be several situations a proverb can be applied to. Spears (1987: 97) presents two examples for the proverb *First come, first served*: The first example is about the purchase of tickets (*They ran out of tickets before we got there. It was first come, first served, but we didn’t know that.*), the second one can be about any other situation where one has to line up to get something (*Please line up and take your turn. It’s first come, first served.*). In proverb dictionaries, the codification of information on the usage of proverbs is even rarer than the information on

their meaning. It is rather context-related or corpus-based phraseological dictionaries or general monolingual dictionaries that contain semantic or pragmatic information on proverbs. The first edition of Duden-Redewendungen (Scholze-Stubenrecht, 2013) was the first prominent phraseological dictionary of the German language to illustrate the entries, among others proverbs, with up-to-date citations, i.e. authentic corpus-based examples. The entry for the proverb *Viele Köche verderben den Brei* [ee: Too many cooks spoil the broth] contains a semantic description and two examples from the internet (Figure 10.3).

**Koch: viele Köche verderben den Brei:**  
*wenn bei einer Sache zu viele mitreden,  
 mitentscheiden, kommt nichts Gutes dabei  
 heraus: Viele Köche verderben den Brei!*  
 Zwei Jugendzeitschriften und eine gemeinsame Ausgabe? ... Wir habens gewagt ([www.jpberlin.de](http://www.jpberlin.de)). Dies ist der Punkt, den eine Person allein machen sollte – viele Köche verderben den Brei ([www.jura.uni-sb.de](http://www.jura.uni-sb.de)).  
 † Hunger.

**Figure 10.3:** Entry for the German proverb *Viele Köche verderben den Brei* in Scholze-Stubenrecht (2013)

The entries, among them a very small number of proverbs, are demonstrated merely by examples in the German idiom dictionary by Schemann (1993), without information on meaning.

### **den letzten beißen die Hunde *ugs***

1. ... Es ist besser, wir hauen ab! Diese Sauferei wird ein teurer Spa – und den letzten beißen die Hunde! – Was, der letzte soll die ganz Zeche zahlen? Das ist doch nicht möglich!
2. ... Jetzt aber raus! Wenn ich in zwei Minuten noch jemanden i der Klasse sehe, hagelt's Strafarbeiten. Raus, sage ich – den letzte beißen die Hunde! – Was passiert denn mit dem letzten, Herr Hofmeister? – Frag' nicht so blöd! Raus!

**Figure 10.4:** Entry for the German proverb *Den letzten beißen die Hunde* in Schemann (1993)

The latter approach is more user-friendly, contrary to most proverb dictionaries: Examples in contexts can demonstrate many pragmatic features of proverbs (varying



forms, communicative functions, metalinguistic comments, position of proverbs in text) (Kispál, 2000).

#### 10.2.3.4 Proverb Exercises

Exercises cannot be found in general proverb collections. Even the well-known collection of English proverbs (Mieder, 2003), which is a carefully annotated selection of 1200 proverbs intended for German learners of English as a foreign language, does not contain exercises. However, exercises can be a useful addition to the traditional parts of dictionaries. Unlike general dictionaries written in the first place for native speakers, dictionaries for non-native speakers present things differently. English dictionaries for non-native speakers generally contain exercises, just like some German dictionaries for non-native speakers.

For instance, there is a relatively old German proverb collection that was compiled for learners of German as a foreign language (Frey, Herzog, Michel et al, 1973), which has a proverb dictionary part and a part with proverb exercises. This popular booklet was often criticized because of the proverbs listed in it, as according to the results of the empirical proverb research they do not belong to the best-known proverbs. Nevertheless, it contains a short and more or less appropriate explanation as to the meaning of proverbs and five different exercise types for the usage of the German proverbs it contains (Kispál, 2007).

- 2.
1. Früh übt sich, was ein Meister werden will.
  2. Nichts ist so fein gesponnen, es kommt doch an die Sonnen.
  3. Von nichts kommt nichts.
  4. Ehrlich währt am längsten.
  5. Was ein Häkchen werden will, krümmt sich beizeiten.
  6. Wer den Pfennig nicht ehrt, ist des Talers nicht wert.
  7. Unrecht Gut gedeiht nicht.
  8. Was Hänschen nicht lernt, lernt Hans nimmermehr.

Man soll nichts Unrechtes tun	Man soll schon als Kind so viel wie möglich lernen	Man soll sparsam sein

Figure 10.5: A matching exercise on German proverbs in Frey, Herzog, Michel et al. (1973)

## 10.3 Usage of Electronic Proverb Collections

The term *electronic proverb collections* can be applied to CD, DVD and online dictionaries as well. These formats are generally just electronic versions of the printed dictionaries with the same content. For instance, Wander (2001) is a CD version of the printed dictionary of German proverbs by Wander (1867-1880). One can find various settings in CD dictionaries, as is shown in Figure 10.6., the entry for the German proverb *Stille Wasser sind tief* [ee: Still waters run deep] in Wander 2001 (Figure 10.6).

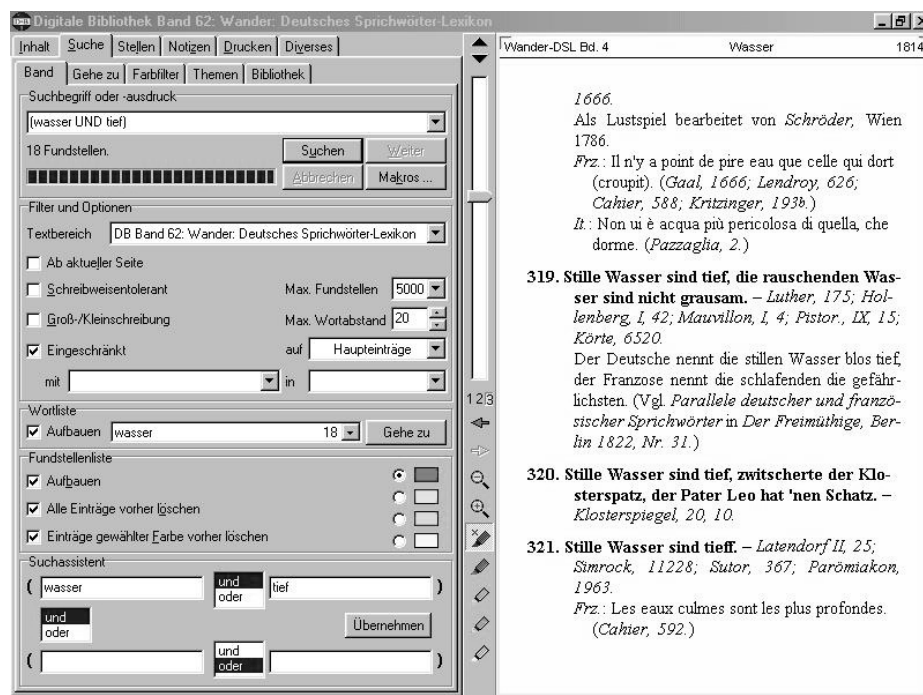


Figure 10.6: Entry for the German proverb *Stille Wasser sind tief* in Wander (2001)

There are several advantages of the electronic format, particularly its revolutionary contribution to the system of references of proverbs (Kispál, 2004), but CDs and DVDs are no longer convincing nowadays. While in the 2000s the demand for these formats rose (Kispál, 2007), in 2010s it is the online appearance which is gaining popularity and importance.

Because of the very low number of proper CD and DVD dictionaries, as well as their decreasing relevance, there will be several aspects of online proverb dictionaries

discussed in the following chapters, exemplified by the multilingual online dictionary *Sprichwortplattform*.<sup>156</sup>

### 10.3.1 How to Find a Proverb in an Electronic Proverb Collection?

One of the most important advantages of electronic formats is the increased searching speed. It is much faster to find a proverb in electronic proverb collections than in printed ones. For example, in *Sprichwortplattform* there are six different outer access structures that enable the quick find of search items: alphabet, component, lemma, variant component, variant lemma, and keyword. The keywords are obtained from the text of the semantic information and enable searching for the topic of the proverbs (Figure 10.7). With this in mind, in *Sprichwortplattform*, most of the demands for different proverb search options suggested by Hrisztova-Gotthardt (2010: 167), are fulfilled.

**Datenbank**

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Bitte wählen Sie die Liste der Sprichwörter in Ihrer Sprache:

- Deutsch
- Slowenisch
- Slowakisch
- Tschechisch
- Ungarisch

Die Sprichwörter können Sie auch über die folgenden Listen auffinden:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deutsch</b></li> <li>• Sprichwortkomponenten</li> <li>• Lemmata</li> <li>• Variantenkomponenten</li> <li>• Variantenlemmata</li> <li>• Schlüsselbegriffe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Slowenisch</b></li> <li>• Sprichwortkomponenten</li> <li>• Lemmata</li> <li>• Variantenkomponenten</li> <li>• Variantenlemmata</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Slowakisch</b></li> <li>• Sprichwortkomponenten</li> <li>• Lemmata</li> <li>• Variantenkomponenten</li> <li>• Variantenlemmata</li> <li>• Schlüsselbegriffe</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Tschechisch</b></li> <li>• Sprichwortkomponenten</li> <li>• Lemmata</li> <li>• Variantenkomponenten</li> <li>• Variantenlemmata</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Ungarisch</b></li> <li>• Sprichwortkomponenten</li> <li>• Lemmata</li> <li>• Variantenkomponenten</li> <li>• Variantenlemmata</li> </ul>
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**Figure 10.7:** Outer access structure for proverbs in *Sprichwortplattform*

### 10.3.2 What Kind of Information Contains a Proverb Entry?

In electronic dictionaries, however possible, there is a proverb description justified, which is corroborated by the requirements mentioned in Hrisztova-Gotthardt's work (2010: 109) regarding the structure and function of electronic proverb databases. These include data source, variants, regional, dialectal usage, style, frequency, communicative functions, connotations, origin, thematic classification, and meaning. An electronic proverb dictionary therefore ought to contain this cluster of information. Hrisztova-Gotthardt (2010: 105) emphasizes, among other things, the necessity of the codification of modern proverbs. Yet, the provisional characteristic of many of the above-mentioned anti-proverbs does not justify the inclusion of these proverb types

<sup>156</sup> www.sprichwort-plattform.org

in general proverb dictionaries, although there are dictionaries that include anti-proverbs as regular proverb variants (e.g. Mieder, Kingsbury & Harder, 1992, Figure 10.1). Since according to the perspective of language learning and usage, understanding puns is considered to be very useful, it is justified to list some anti-proverbs in dictionaries as examples.

### 10.3.2.1 Information on Standard Proverb Forms and Variants

Sprichwortplattform contains actually existing, empirically verifiable proverbs from five languages: Czech, German, Hungarian, Slovak, Slovene. For the presentation of proverb form variants, there is an article position in Sprichwortplattform. The proverb *Gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer* [ee: Once bitten, twice shy] has the variants *Das gebrannte Kind scheut das Feuer* and *Ein gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer*, which are listed under *Formvarianten* (Figure 10.8). Proverb forms with several occurrences in the corpus are considered as standard proverb forms, and the others are variants.

#### Formvarianten

Das gebrannte Kind scheut das Feuer. [Beleg 4]

Ein gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer. [Kommentar](#) [Beleg 5]

**Figure 10.8:** Variants of the German proverb *Gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer* in *Sprichwortplattform*

### 10.3.2.2 Information on the Meaning of Proverbs

The lack of information on the meaning and usage of proverbs is one of the biggest defects of printed proverb dictionaries. In *Sprichwortplattform* the meaning and usage of proverbs have been extracted from the corpus empirically in a bottom-up process. The description of this (and all other) information is therefore based on the excerpt from the corpus. In the following example, there is information from *Sprichwortplattform* displayed, based on 18 corpus extracts or citations (*Beleg*) for the German proverb *Nachts sind alle Katzen grau* [ee: All cats are grey in the dark].

**Bedeutung(en)**

Sagt man dafür, dass eigentlich unterschiedliche Dinge oder Menschen unter bestimmten Bedingungen gleich erscheinen. [Kommentar](#) [Beleg 1] [Beleg 2] [Beleg 3]

**Gebrauchsbesonderheit(en)**

In den Korpusbelegen wird das Sprichwort häufig auf Unterscheide zwischen Dingen und Menschen bezogen, die tatsächlich durch Dunkelheit nicht erkennbar sind. [Beleg 4] [Beleg 5] [Beleg 6]

In bestimmten Korpusbelegen wird das Sprichwort

– auf das Konzept 'grau sein' im Sinne von eintönig, langweilig oder nivellierend bezogen. [Beleg 7] [Beleg 8] [Beleg 9]

– in Bezug auf das Aussehen von Katzen verwendet. [Beleg 10] [Beleg 11]

**Varianten****Formvarianten**

In der Nacht sind alle Katzen grau. [Beleg 12]

Bei Nacht sind alle Katzen grau. [Beleg 13]

**Ersetzung von Komponenten**

X sind alle Katzen grau. [Beleg 14] [Beleg 15]

Nachts sind alle

X grau. [Beleg 16] [Beleg 17] [Beleg 18]

**Figure 10.9:** Information based on corpus excerpts for the German proverb *Nachts sind alle Katzen grau* in Sprichwortplattform

**10.3.2.3 Information on Usage of Proverbs**

As for the usage of proverbs, there are often several restrictions that are expected to be codified in an appropriate dictionary. Under the position *Gebrauchsbesonderheiten* [special usage features], pragmatic restrictions on proverbs are recorded in Sprichwortplattform. The German proverb *Lege nicht alle Eier in einen Korb* [ww: Don't put all your eggs in one basket] occurs strikingly often, for example, in horoscopes. However, its content is questioned and often used in connection with patience (Figure 10.10).

**Gebrauchsbesonderheit(en)**

In den Korpusbelegen wird das Sprichwort häufig

– auf den Aspekt des Geduldig-Seins bezogen: Hier wird ausgedrückt, dass jemand Geduld haben muss, um seine Ziele zu erreichen. [Beleg 4] [Beleg 5]

– in der Textsorte 'Horoskop' verwendet. [Beleg 6] [Beleg 7]

– als Name eines Brettspiels verwendet. ([http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eile\\_mit\\_Weile](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eile_mit_Weile)) [Kommentar](#) [Beleg 8]

In bestimmten Korpusbelegen wird

– die Aussage des Sprichworts negativ beurteilt: Hier wird ausgedrückt, dass es problematisch sein kann, Handlungen oder Reaktionen hinauszuzögern. [Beleg 9]

– die Sprichwortkomponente 'Eile' häufig mit schneller körperlicher Fortbewegung gleichgesetzt. Dabei wird oft, aber nicht zwingend, Bezug auf das richtige Verhalten bei sportlicher Betätigung genommen. [Beleg 10] [Beleg 11]

**Figure 10.10:** Pragmatic restrictions on the German proverb *Lege nicht alle Eier in einen Korb* in Sprichwortplattform

### 10.3.2.4 Exercises on Proverbs

Exercises should be integrated into electronic dictionaries in a practical way. There can be a module for exercises as part of the proverb dictionary. *Sprichwortplattform* has three modules: database (dictionary), exercises, and community. The proverbs of the dictionary are integrated into the exercises. In the dictionary module, there is a direct link next to each proverb which leads the user to the exercises grouped into two categories (according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), into categories B1-B2 or C1-C2). These are special exercises, mainly structured on the basis of the markers of proverbiality, intended for advanced learners (Kispál, 2012).

**Bedeutungsbereich: Handeln**  
 Sprache: deutsch Phase: Anwenden 1 Niveau: P

---

**Niveau:** Parom.

**Aufgabe:** Ein typisches Merkmal der Sprichwörter ist ihre Satzwertigkeit. Welche Wortverbindung ist demnach ein Sprichwort? Klicken Sie die richtige Antwort an.

1.

- ☐ Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied.
- ☐ Mit einem blauen Auge davonkommen.
- ☐ Mehr Glück als Verstand haben.
- ☐ Glück im Unglück haben.

2.

- ☐ Der frühe Vogel fängt den Wurm.
- ☐ Grillen fangen.
- ☐ Von früh bis spät.
- ☐ Den Vogel abschießen.

3.

- ☐ Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen.
- ☐ Etwas durch die Blume sagen.
- ☐ Das Sagen haben.
- ☐ Das A und O.

Auswerten Zurücksetzen Lösen

**Figure 10.11:** A multiple choice exercise on the proverb feature *sentence* in German proverbs in *Sprichwortplattform*

## 10.4 Conclusion

In most cases, proverb collections include idioms and other phraseological items. Collections containing mainly proverbs, except of few, are often mere lists without any information on their meaning and usage. Proverbs are ordered alphabetically mostly by keywords. In thematically organized proverb collections, the starting points are alphabetically ordered topics to which proverbs are assigned.

Whereas in the 2000s the demand for CD and DVD dictionary formats rose, in the 2010s the online appearance is gaining an immense importance. Nowadays there are user-friendly online proverb dictionaries and databases needed, like e.g. the multi-lingual *Sprichwortplattform*, with various search options and relatively well known, empirically verifiable proverbs with information on their meaning and usage. Future empirical proverb lexicographic studies should provide more printed and especially

online proverb collections that meet the many demands put in front of modern proverb dictionaries discussed in this study.

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## 11 Contrastive Study of Proverbs

### 11.1 Introduction

If we undertake the time-consuming but extremely pleasurable task of reading two (or more) proverb dictionaries in different languages from beginning to end, when we finish reading, we will be struck by something very peculiar. We will have seen that on the one hand there are great areas of sameness between the two proverb corpora, mostly in terms of the syntactic structures of the individual proverb sentences, their logical patterns, the themes they address, and especially the messages, lessons, or kind of advice they put across. On the other hand, our attention will be drawn to some specific differences that relate to the images used in the proverb texts, especially those of *queer* or *exotic* animals, plants, weather conditions, everyday objects, kinship terms, social practices, local foods and dishes, etc., as well as various strange and unique natural and cultural settings. Proverb scholars have long come up with an explanation to these peculiarities, pointing out that they naturally occur due to the different places of origin of the individual proverbs and their specific geographical, historical, social and cultural environments. Proverbs come from a great variety of places that may be anywhere on our planet, e.g., the African savanna, the Australian bush, the Canadian tundra, the Mediterranean seaside, the little village in the Balkans, the Russian steppe, or, in the case of some more recent coinages, any of the more or less uniform urban areas in the *affluent world* or *global village*. It makes sense then, that the greater the distance in time and place, i.e. the more remote and specific the languages and the people (nations) represented in the proverb corpora compared are, the greater these differences and peculiarities will be. And vice versa, the closer the people that have created them in terms of geographical location and historical period are, the more similar they would be.

This very peculiar, dual nature of the proverb genre *per se* as well as of any given proverb system as such has for centuries been arousing the curiosity of linguists, folklorists and literary scholars, who have striven to devise various working methodologies or adapt old ones in their desire to find out why exactly proverbs should be so diverse and yet so very similar. Do the common proverbs in two or more cultures point to certain fundamental human features that hold good for the whole species *homo sapiens* as such? Do the more peculiar ones point to insurmountable cultural differences which may make communication unexpectedly difficult, even completely impossible? Does the core of common, species-wide proverbs in a given proverb system prevail, or do the specific ones account for its larger part? Scholars have been trying to formulate the right questions about the extent to which the specific character of proverbs can become meaningful, and others about exactly how their dual

nature relates to the commonly shared human traits across all historical periods. The cross-cultural contrastive research done so far has thus brought about the emergence of a large variety of methods for comparing and contrasting proverbs in different languages, some painstakingly rigorous, logically consistent and systematic, others – of a more intuitive and artistic nature.

By showing and discussing some examples of contrastive proverb studies, this chapter will attempt to outline a comprehensive picture of the major approaches that have been suggested, developed and applied by the proverb scholars who pursue the relatively new field of comparative (i.e. cross-cultural) and contrastive paremiology. It will be seen that most of these scholars have no doubts about the uniqueness of any one individual proverb system – the more or less entire body of proverbs in a language. We will also outline some areas where more research is needed. This chapter will not be dealing with contrastive phraseology, neither will it discuss at length the problems concerned with the comprehension, explanation and translation of proverbs, although these will also be briefly mentioned. In order to match a proverb in a foreign language correctly to a local equivalent, or to show how it differs from a local counterpart, the proverb scholar needs first to discover its meaning, which, as practice shows, cannot be done but by first translating it literally and then matching it to a projected situation and interpreting it in the context of its own culture. This chapter will not be dealing with the problem of comparing proverb texts diachronically either, although it is common knowledge that tracing the evolution of the meaning and form of a proverb, or the convergence and divergence of a group of similar proverbs across time shows very clearly how the current, present-day text has come into being.

## 11.2 Comparative and Contrastive Approach

In linguistics, the terms *comparative* and *contrastive* have come to mean two distinctive approaches: the *comparative* approach focuses on the similarities between two (or more) sets of the same class of items, while the *contrastive* approach is mostly concerned with explicating, studying, describing and explaining the differences between linguistic items on the synchronic plane. In paremiology and paremiography however, these terms are often used as synonyms (Mieder & Dundes, 1994: viii; Voigt, 2013: 363, 365, 366, 368). Let us however note, that by comparative, i.e. diachronic research proper, both in linguistics and in proverb study, we are to understand diachronic, or historical study which takes into account the evolution of a text, or the chronological change of some aspects of a proverb text or group / class of proverbs. An example of this kind of research will best illustrate the difference. In her article “Comparative analysis of [the] binary opposition ‘man-woman’ in Russian-French proverb world pictures”, V. N. Shoutina (2009, quoting T. P. Nikitina), discusses the change of style and content in the 12<sup>th</sup>- and 13<sup>th</sup>-century proverbs in France, which reflects very closely

the great change of manners in French society, when the courtly and chivalrous 12<sup>th</sup>-century values only about a century later were replaced by the much more pragmatic, even cynical values of the emerging bourgeois culture of the townspeople. The two texts below illustrate this difference. The first proverb below is said to have originated in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, while the second – in the 13<sup>th</sup> century:

a) *Se assez miauz morir ne vuel / A enor, que a honte vivre* [ww: Better to die an honorable death, than live in shame]

b) *Chacun pour soi et Dieu pour tous* [ee: Everyone for himself, only God for all].

In this chapter, the term *contrastive* will therefore be used in its more widely accepted, broader meaning in paremiology: it will encompass the synchronic (and panchronic, i.e. timeless) comparative (cross-cultural), and contrastive approaches mentioned above, ignoring the diachronic approach. We will first dwell on the reasons prompting the search for common ground and for differences between proverbs from different cultures. After that we will look at the ways in which this is done with certain aspects of proverb texts regarding the criteria, which are selected or specifically designed to serve the purposes of cross-cultural comparison and contrast.

### 11.3 The Beginnings: Contrastive Paremiography

This question of how the contrastive approach commenced invariably takes us to the emergence of paremiography – the millennial tradition of compiling proverb dictionaries and proverb collections in one, two or more languages. Contrastive paremiology is quite inextricable from contrastive paremiography, which was prompted by the perennial need of human beings to share their wisdom with others, to learn more about each other, to communicate with people from other cultures in more rewarding and fulfilling ways, expanding their intellectual horizon and knowledge of the world. This process ran parallel with that of the development of contrastive lexicography – the practice of compiling dictionaries in two (or more) languages, in which, besides words and phrases, proverbs and sayings were also often included. The history of compiling proverb dictionaries is probably as old as the first systems of writing that emerged in ancient Mesopotamia (Sumer, the Akkadian Empire, Assyria, Babylonia) and ancient Egypt more than five millennia ago. Some recent accounts of the history of the proverb genre (Brădeanu, 2007: 22-23; Mieder, & Dundes, 1994; Taylor, 1975: 84; vii) provide evidence pointing to some very early proverb collections and dictionaries, which date back to the dawn of human civilization. A fascinating example is a small proverb collection entitled *The Precepts of Ptah-hotep* written, according to its editor A. Smythe Palmer, about 3440 B.C. and preserved in the Papyrus Prisse, which, as the

editor claims, is "the oldest book in the world" (Trench, 2003: 157-158).<sup>157</sup> Among its examples (given in English translation) there are sentences that even today strike the reader with their exquisite beauty and shrewd, practical wisdom, e.g., *A good son is a gift of God; Keep a cheerful countenance as long as life lasts; A good listener is a good speaker; Listen with kindness if you would have a clear explanation*, etc.

The European (i.e. Western) paremiography (the latter incorporating not only the proverbs in the major European languages, but also the American, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand or any other European-based proverb tradition), has been very well documented (Mieder, 2004a: 11-13). We can see from the vast literature in the field that the Western, Eastern European and Eurasian proverb tradition, from which the new branch of contrastive paremiology has come to form a distinctive part, covers nearly three millennia – from the Archaic period of the Ancient Greece civilization to the present day (Taylor, 1975: 84-100). Proverb scholars today are particularly fortunate, as they are able to avail themselves of the fruits of the untiring work performed by Wolfgang Mieder, author of an astounding number of bibliographies on the proverb, which have been appearing regularly as separate books or in *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship* in the course of more than forty years and of which those on proverb collections and cross-cultural and contrastive studies form a substantial part. Professor Mieder's classic on the present-day state of paremiology and paremiography *Proverbs: A Handbook* (2004a: 266-275), lists all of the major bilingual and multilingual proverb dictionaries in the main Western European languages, while his recent book *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms* (Mieder, 2011) contains a special chapter entitled *International Proverb Collections*, where as many as 215 entries of multilingual proverb dictionaries are listed, the bilingual ones being covered by other sections according to the first language of their proverb entries.

Contemporary proverb scholars are well familiar with the major multilingual proverb dictionaries, among which are the pioneering work of the world-known Russian paremiologist Grigorii L. Permyakov (1978) *Пословицы и поговорки народов Востока: систематизированное собрание изречений двухсот народов* [Proverbs and sayings of the peoples in the East: a systematic collection of proverbial sentences of 200 peoples], the *Proverbia Septentrionalia. 900 Balto-Finnic proverb types with Russian, Baltic, German and Scandinavian parallels*, compiled in the early 1980s by the

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<sup>157</sup> In his Introduction to *Proverbs and Their Lessons* by the notable British philologist and paremiologist Richard Chenevix Trench, Archbishop of Dublin (Burlington: Vermont, 2003), the editor Wolfgang Mieder explains that the book was first published in 1853 with the title *On the Lessons on Proverbs*. In 1905 it was published again under the editorship of A. Smythe Palmer, D.D. with the title *Proverbs and Their Lessons*. The latter edition includes a glossary, additional notes, and appendices, from which the information about this ancient proverb collection is taken.

famous Finnish paremiologist Matti Kuusi and seven other scholars (Kuusi, 1985), the three-volume *Dictionary of European Proverbs* (Strauss, 1994) authored by Emanuel Strauss, which contains 1804 proverbs in the major European languages based on the Latin alphabet, *European Proverbs in 55 Languages with Equivalents in Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit, Chinese and Japanese*, compiled by the distinguished Hungarian paremiographer Gyula Paszolay (1997) and *The Multicultural Dictionary of Proverbs*, edited by Harold V. Cordry (1997). Another, perhaps less known but equally valuable collection in this group is *Contrastive Dictionary of Proverbs (Bulgarian, Russian, English, French, German (and Latin))*, compiled by the Bulgarian lexicographer Sergey Vlahov (1998), which contains more than 6 000 proverb sentences (equivalents and analogues), excerpted from more than 100 lexicographical sources and arranged in 642 thematic nests (clusters). This all points to a truly vast body of comparative and contrastive proverb scholarship today.

## 11.4 Contrastive Paremiology: What Is It All About?

We shouldn't have made this digression into paremiography above, if it did not have so much bearing on the problem discussed, since the actual process of compiling scholarly bilingual and multilingual proverb collections invariably involves the solution of a set of extremely complex theoretical problems that have to do with comparing the *semantics of proverbs*. Indeed, a paremiographer will not be able to match two texts in two different languages correctly, if he or she is not clear about their linguistic, functional (situational and communicative) and literary *sameness*. This comes to show that the scholarly field of contrastive paremiology arose from the practical need and desire for developing a more reliable, scholarly, rigorous methodology that can show the areas of similarity and difference in proverb sentences in different languages. Being a comparatively recent branch of proverb study, contrastive paremiology makes even greater use of the concepts that have already become common among proverb scholars, such as *proverb meaning (sense)*, *proverb synonyms*, *semantic equivalence*, *semantic variation*, *semantic analogy*, etc. One of its most recent outstanding practical realizations can be seen in *Matti Kuusi International Type System of Proverbs*, developed by Outi Lauhakangas, a gigantic cross-cultural database where a vast number of proverbs in diverse languages are arranged, grouped and classified along semantic (thematic) principles. Thousands of examples are offered in it, illustrating all possible degrees of semantic equivalence, analogy and variation (Mieder, 2004a: 16-20). This shows that the proper understanding of a proverb is of primary importance for the scholars engaged in contrastive studies.

The semantic equivalence of two or more texts can be easily seen when matching proverbs from different languages that are literally the same, e.g.:

(1) English: *Blood is thicker than water*

German: *Blut ist dicker als Wasser*

(2) English: *Ill gotten, ill spent*

French: *Choses mal acquises sont mal épandues*

(3) English: *Hurry slowly*

German: *Eile mit Weile*

Latin: *Festina lente*

(4) English: *Man proposes, God disposes,*

Latin: *Homo proponit, sed Deus disponit*

Spanish: *El hombre propone, y Dios dispone*

German: *Der Mensch denkt, Gott lenkt*

Russian: *Человек предполагает, а Господь располагает*

Bulgarian: *Човек предполага, Господ разполага*

What is being compared and contrasted in the texts above is the specific wording of one and the same direct (literal, overt) meaning and the syntactic structure of the proverb sentences. But researchers are well aware of the fact that, on the whole, most proverb texts tend to belong to the figurative type, i.e. they have less obvious, implicit, idiomatic, or metaphorical meanings. Widely-known examples of figurative proverbs across many cultures are *Strike the iron while it is hot*, i.e. act quickly when the opportunity arises; *One swallow does not make a summer*, i.e. one person is not sufficient for accomplishing something; *You can bring a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink*, i.e. coercion doesn't work, etc. When pairs of such proverbs are contrasted (e.g., *Strike the iron while it is hot* and *Дървото се превива, докато е младо* [The tree is bent while it is still young] (Bulgarian), both meaning *one should do things at the right time*), the term *semantic equivalence* will suggest a kind of sameness that very significantly differs from the much more obvious type of lexical equivalence of two or more words, or strings of words, in different languages, which have the same denotational, or dictionary meanings, as was demonstrated by the first group of literal examples above. In fact, proverb scholars have found that proverb semantics and proverbs equivalence are rather a hard nut to crack. This is, for example, how more than a century and a half ago the Victorian scholar Richard Chenevix Trench, mentioned earlier, wrestled with this tricky problem:

Sometimes the proverb does not actually in so many words repeat itself in various tongues. We have indeed exactly the same *thought*; but it takes an outward shape and embodiment, varying according to the various countries and periods in which it has been current: we have proverbs totally diverse from one another in their form and appearance, but which yet, when we look a little deeper into them, prove to be at heart one and the same, all these their differences being thus only, so to speak, variations of the same air (i.e. melody, tune – R.P.) (Trench, 2003: 62-63).

On pages 64-68 of his book *Proverbs and Their Lessons* Richard Trench goes on to quote a number of Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, Greek, Egyptian, Latin, Norwegian, Danish, English and Jewish proverbs, in their original languages and / or in English translation to illustrate the diverse linguistic and literary expressions of one and the same thought: e.g., *Call a peasant 'Brother', he'll demand to be called 'Father'* (Russian) and *Reach a peasant your finger, he'll grasp your fist* (Italian), *The river passed, God forgotten* (English), *The river passed, the saint forgotten* (Spanish) and *The river passed, the saint mocked* (Italian); two more interesting examples, given on p. 134, are the Turkish proverb *Curses, like chicken, always come home to roost* (which, oddly enough, is widely known today as a regular English proverb) and its Yoruba semantic equivalent, *Ashes always fly back in the face of him that throws them*, the thought embodied by this last pair of proverbs being, according to Trench, the law of divine retaliation.

## 11.5 New Approaches to Contrastive Paremiology: Tertium Comparationis

A century ago, most English-speaking paremiologists understood proverb equivalence as presented in the previous examples. With the development of structuralism in linguistics in 1960s and 1970s, it was Grigoriy L. Permyakov, author of *Основы структурной паремиологии* [Foundations of Structural Paremiology, 1988], who connected it with the study of proverbs. For more than two decades, structuralism exerted a powerful influence on scholars like Alexander K. Zholkovskii, Yuriy I. Levin, Nigel Barley, Alan Dundes, Matti Kuusi, Arvo Krikmann, who made further valuable contributions to contrastive paremiology and paremiography by applying ideas and methods borrowed from structural linguistics and adapting them to proverbs. This comes to show how a contemporary idea is usually preceded by the work of individual scholars, who spend years wrestling with their intuition finding it hard to verbalize due to the lack of suitable terms and methodology. Proverb scholars generally agree that in order for some specific features of a pair or a group of proverbs to be brought to the surface and made more visible, there should exist a common stable, invariable frame of reference, a certain agreed-upon criterion, according to which they can be grouped or classified, and in relation to which they can be compared and contrasted. In Trench's examples above, this frame of reference was the same *thought* or *idea*. Thus, in the last pair of proverbs, the image of the chickens that come home to roost and that of the ashes being thrown about hint at some peculiar features pertaining to two different cultural environments while expressing the same proverb *meaning* or *sense*. This frame of reference, known in linguistics as *tertium comparationis*, may also be a certain logical type (e.g., implication, comparison, the relation between one and many, or between the whole and its part / parts), or a syntactic structure (e.g., a

question, a statement, an elliptical sentence or some other sentence pattern), but it can be a selected topic or theme (e.g. family, neighbours, friends, death and dying, food, etc.), an image (e.g., the image of the fox, the horse, or the dog, as in *Every dog had his day*, *Don't teach an old dog new tricks*), a value (e.g., honesty, temperance, loyalty, courage, gratitude), an anti-value (wickedness, greed, anger, laziness, folly), a general concept (time, distance and space, language, man and woman), some human characteristic, and so forth.

An exemplary study showing how a specific topic (theme) can be used as tertium comparationis is *Proverbs on Animal Identity: Typological Memoirs* by the notable Estonian proverb scholar Arvo Krikmann (Krikmann, 2009). It presents the theoretical basis and selected examples of the author's typological classification of nearly 40 000 animal proverbs and proverbial phrases in about 60 languages. The proverb texts are distributed among larger groups (e.g., proverbs of animal identity, etc.), which are further divided into subgroups, the latter covering the proverbs with the same basic idea or thought exemplified in a sentence, which is chosen as the heading of the subgroup. For example, the idea that an animal, be it a fox, a wolf, a snake, or some other animal, may change its fur or skin, but not its identity, is represented in the sample texts below Krikmann, 2009: 226). For the sake of convenience we will omit the abbreviations of the sources placed next to the proverbs.

(5) Estonian; Livonian; Latvian; German; British; Russian; Mari; Mordvin; Komi; Turkish; Aserbaidzhan [sic]: A wolf may change its fur, but never its manners / heart / teeth.

(6) German: *Der Fuchs ändert's Haar und bleibt, was er war* [ww: The fox changes its fur and remains what it was]

British: *A fox may change his heyre but not his minde*

(7) Armenian; Persian; Aserbaidzhan [sic]; Tajik; Turkmen: A snake may change its skin, but not its mind / manners

Russian, Georgian: A snake might leave its skin, but its heart remains the same

German and Latvian: *Die Schlange wechselt wohl die Haut, aber nicht die Giftzähne*

Russian: *Скинула кожу змея, а яд при ней остался* [ww: A snake left its skin, but not its poison].

While animal imagery provides knowledge about the specific geographical environment and even type of economy of the people among whom a particular proverb has become current, when used in proverbs, fables, or folk tales, the role of such images is not to teach us biology, economic history, or environmental science (although proverbs can be extremely informative in this respect as they present a very detailed



picture of the nature and culture of their creation), but to project typical human relations, characteristics and situations.

This takes us again to the basic objective of contrastive paremiology as such, which has been predominantly engaged in the explication of the ethnic aspect of proverbs.

## 11.6 Contrastive Paremiology and the Ethnic Aspect of Proverbs

Some folklorists, literary scholars, linguists and proverb scholars follow a rather traditional, yet very typical view of proverbs. According to this view, proverbs are the genre that best preserves and depicts the typical character of a nation. In nineteenth-century Victorian England, this idea caught the attention of many scholars, some of them being Walter Kelly (2002), author of the popular book *The Proverbs of all Nations* (first published in 1859), and again Richard Chenevix Trench. The chapter entitled *Proverbs of Different Nations Compared* in Trench's book (pp. 46–68) opens with a quotation attesting to the deep conviction of its author in the existence of a national character stored in proverbs: “The genius, wit, and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs’—this is Lord Bacon’s well-worn remark; although, indeed, only well-worn because of its truth.” (Trench, 2003: 46). While this idea still continues to attract researchers from all over the world today, especially among scholars who work in the fascinating field of linguistic culturology, there are others, who maintain the more modern view that proverbs tend to transcend the ethnic and national boundaries. These latter scholars substantiate their stance by quoting numerous examples of *international* proverbs, i.e. texts, which have entered the lexicon of many languages and cultures as loan translations, or have originated simultaneously in different parts of the planet in inexplicable and most miraculous ways. Richard Trench is however no less convincing; in his attempt to portray different cultures, he offers a plethora of examples of Greek, Roman, Latin, Spanish, Italian, Arabic (of the modern Egyptians), Irish, English, Cornish, German, French, Rabbinical, Persian, Russian and other texts, in their original languages and / or in English translation, specifically selected to represent certain unique and peculiar features of the peoples they represent. Such typical proverbs, according to Trench, are for instance the Latin sentences *Conscientia, mille testes* [ee: Conscience is [like] a thousand witnesses] and *Vox populi, vox dei* [ee: The voice of the people [is] the voice of God], the Spanish proverbs *Sermon sin Agostino, olla sin tocino* [ww: A sermon without St. Augustine is like a stew without bacon] and *Matarás, y matarte han, y matarán á quien te matará* [ww: Kill, and thou shall be killed, and they shall kill him who kills thee], the Italian proverbs *Chi non può fare sua vendetta è debile, chi non vuole è vile* [ww: He who cannot revenge himself is weak, he who will not is vile] and *Aspetta tempo e loco à far tua vendetta, che la non si fa mai ben in fretta* [ww: Wait time and place to act thy revenge, for it is

never well done in a hurry], the French precept *Prends le premier conseil d'une femme, et non le second* [ww: Take the first advice of a woman, not the second], the Egyptian warning *Do no good and thou shalt find no evil*, or the Persian classics *Speech is silver, silence is golden* (p. 81) and *A stone that is fit for the wall, is not left in the way*, which, it must be noted, is also a well-known Bulgarian proverb – *Дялан камък на път се не остава*. It is noteworthy, however, that towards the end of the chapter, Trench, too, mentions the special group of *cosmopolites* (Trench, 2003: 61). These are the texts that “seem to have travelled from land to land, and to have made themselves at home equally in all”. The author then proceeds to explain that “[such texts] have commended themselves to almost all people, and *have become the portion of the common stock of the world's wisdom* (emphasis added by R. P.), in every land making for themselves a recognition and a home” (Trench, 2003: 62). Thus, without using any specialist jargon, the Victorian scholar outlines in a most revealing fashion the major object of study of the modern field of cross-cultural and contrastive paremiology: the comparing and contrasting of proverb counterparts (equivalents and analogues) in different languages.

## 11.7 Modern Contrastive Paremiology: A Short Overview

Interestingly, Wolfgang Mieder has not discussed the latter aspect of proverb study in his classic *Proverbs: A Handbook*, although he does mention two book-length studies in this vein in an earlier, very detailed and informative chapter, entitled *Modern Paremiology in Retrospect and Prospect*, which was first published in 1997 (Mieder, 2004). These studies are *Sprichwörter und Redensarten im Interkulturellen Vergleich* [Cross-cultural comparison of proverbs and other expressions], edited by Annette Sabban and Jan Wirtz (1991), and *La pratica e la grammatica: Viaggio nella linguistica del proverbio* [Practice and grammar as a way into the linguistics of proverbs], edited by Christina Vallini (1989). Is this lack of interest due to the supposed novelty of the field, or could it have resulted from the linguistic barrier (let us note that most of the publications in this field are in the still largely unknown to the Western scholars Cyrillic alphabet), which seems to continue separating the West from Eastern Europe and Eurasia? Indeed, in the same chapter, Mieder pleads for more “articles dealing on a crosscultural level with misogyny, stereotypes religion, animals, etc. in proverbs” (Mieder, 2004: 81-82). Yet, the term *contrastive* is notably missing. On the other hand, a cursory glance at the titles in Mieder's annotated updated bibliographies in *Proverbium* from more recent times and at various other sources in languages other than English shows that, fortunately, there is at present quite a strong representation of studies in this vein, mostly in Russian, but also in some other European and Eurasian languages, as well as in other Slavonic languages such as Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Serbian, etc. For example, while the theoretical foundations of comparative

and contrastive proverb studies have been discussed by Peter Grzybek (1998) in his article *Komparative und interkulturelle Parömiologie: Methodologische Bemerkungen und empirische Befunde* [Comparative and intercultural paremiology: methodological remarks and empirical findings], a growing number of scholars have been engaged in a wide range of cross-cultural bilingual and multilingual empirical research, employing and developing diverse approaches and methods – semantic, communicative, pragmatic, etc. (Bamisile, 2010; Bernjak, 2012; Brandimonte, 2011; Georgieva, 1998; Grigas, 1997; Funk, 1998; Firyn, 2012; Hakamies, 1998; Molchanova, 2004; Shayhulin, 2012; Stefanovich, 2009; Wyzkiewicz, 1998; Zhukov, 2012). We are now going to take a closer look, however brief, at some of the works in this field.

A recent research that deserves to be mentioned is Mária Dóbisová's study *Experimentelle Untersuchung der Sprichwörter vom und über das Essen in deutschen und slowakischen* [Experimental research of proverbs about eating in German and Slovak] (2003). It presents a cross-cultural experiment revealing how the specific ways in which a thematic set of proverbs in German and Slovak are interpreted by native speakers relate to their dictionary meanings. Another innovative cross-cultural work is *Punning in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian Anti-proverbs* by Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha, Péter Barta and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt (2008). This extensive study examines punning as one of the most popular techniques of proverb variation through discussing and exemplifying two of the most frequent types of puns – paronyms and homonyms – in anti-proverbs in five European languages (English, German, French, Russian and Hungarian. Regarding the arrangement of lemmas in a bilingual cross-cultural proverb dictionary, we should also mention *Речник с тълкуване на 200 български пословици и поговорки и еквивалентите им в руски език* [Dictionary with Interpretations of 200 Bulgarian proverbs and Their Equivalents in Russian] by the Bulgarian paremiologist P. Trendafilova (2006). In her detailed introduction, the author discusses the theoretical basis for the comparison of 200 Bulgarian and Russian proverbs in modern use from a semiotic perspective, relating semantic equivalence and synonymy to the situational meanings of the proverbs, which have been explicated and verified by means of conducting an enquiry. Another recent contrastive study is *English-Bulgarian Parallels in Animalistic Paremia (A Contrastive Study)*. It is authored by the Bulgarian phraseologist Rayna Holandi (Holandi, 2012). The study contrasts two sets of proverbs (English and Bulgarian) with zoonyms in their lexical content, using as *tertium comparationis* syntactic patterns, common lexical semantics, and basic notions such as slyness, richness, authority, chance, stinginess, etc., exemplified by the proverb texts. Another example in this group is the recent empirical cross-cultural study *"If There Were No Clouds, We Shouldn't Enjoy The Sun." The Crosscultural View and Multifaceted Meaning of a Proverb*, conducted by the author of this chapter (Petrova, 2013). In it, the individual interpretations of a context-free English proverb that were provided by Bulgarian students are contrasted to its dictionary meaning, the latter being presented as a set of culturemes. The

findings reveal a great wealth of semantic variation of the meaning of the proverb, which has been correctly grasped by the respondents.

Several other recent works deserve to be mentioned, which deal with contrasting certain aspects of proverbs in different languages, e.g., Spanish and Russian (Vorkachov, 1997), French and Russian (Dmitrieva, 1997), Japanese, English, Russian, Ukrainian and Russian (Pirogov, 2003), English and Bulgarian (Petrova, 2006), English, German and Russian (Voropaeva, 2007), Russian and German (Savchenko, 2010), Korean and Russian (Kim, 2010), English and Lak<sup>158</sup> (Kallaeva, 2011), Russian and Arabian (Abdu, 2011), English and Tatar (Bakirova, 2011), to name but a few. Their authors make use of specific approaches and employ a wide range of specifically created units for conducting contrastive linguocultural analyses, whose primary aim is to reveal the set of dominant cultural values and specific worldview of the people speaking the languages in question. Our list is of course very incomplete, but we hope it is quite sufficient to show that by now Professor Mieder's plea back in 1997 has already been heard and answered.

## 11.8 New Approaches to Contrastive Paremiology

The authors of the studies discussed above confronted and dealt with problems very similar to some of the problems illustrated by the examples of Richard Trench, problems concerned with defining the common frame of reference for conducting cross-cultural contrastive analyses. Indeed, their work comes to show how crucial to this type of research an adequate understanding of proverb equivalence is. But how do we define proverb equivalence?

### 11.8.1 The Semantic Approach

In more recent times, folklorist Alan Dundes, following Matti Kuusi (Dundes, 1987: 962) suggested that equivalence should be sought in proverbs which employ different images while putting across the same message, e.g., *He who is bitten by a snake fears even a rope* (English), *A scalded cat fears even cold water* (French), and *Whoever is burned on hot squash blows on the cold yogurt* (Greek). However, by *message* Dundes actually means *thought* in the sense suggested by Trench above. The common thought embodied in these examples can be formulated like this: *a painful experience makes a person overly prudent and cautious*.

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<sup>158</sup> The language spoken by a linguistic community in Dagestan.

Proverb scholars have come up with various terms for denoting the basic thought, or idea that is contained in a single proverb, a group of proverb synonyms in the same language, or in proverb equivalents or analogues in different languages. Apart from the terms *thought*, *basic idea*, *denotational (direct, literal) meaning*, *figurative meaning*, the *sense* of a proverb, etc., various other terms have been suggested for describing the semantics of proverbs for the purposes of comparing and contrasting them, the most frequent being *explanation*, and *definition*, while others are *message*, *concept*, *logeme*, *cultureme*. Let us note that while some of these terms overlap completely, others have similar or different meanings. Here are two examples of typical proverb explanations taken from the popular dictionary *The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs* (Manser, Fergusson, & Pickering, 2007): *Once something has been done, it cannot be changed, no matter how much you regret having done it* for the literal proverb *What's done can't be undone*, and *Do not support any members of your family or household who cannot earn their keep* for the figurative proverb *Keep no more cats than will catch mice*. These examples show that a dictionary explanation of a proverb does not differ from its meaning, sense, or definition. This can be seen in the two quotations of definitions below found on the Internet: *valuable projects take time* for the popular international proverb *Rome wasn't built in a day*, and *a little preventive maintenance can eliminate the need for major repairs later* for the widely-known English proverb *A stitch in time saves nine* (*The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*).

The Russian scholars P. V. Chesnokova, L. V. Savenkova, and D. Y. Polinichenko have suggested another term for describing proverb semantics – the *logeme*. They use it to designate the meaning not only of a single proverb text, but rather of the summarized, or generalized, basic meaning of a group of similar, thematically close proverbs (Polinichenko, 2004: 83-84). Thus, the English proverbs *Actions speak louder than words*, *An ounce of practice is worth a pound of precept*, *Example is better than precept*, and *Deeds will show themselves, and words will pass away* are subsumed under the single logeme *Speaking is less efficient than doing* (Polinichenko, 2004 85-86). The authors use the logeme for analyzing and classifying monolingual proverbs (e.g. Savenkova, 2002), but we are convinced that this unit can be used with even greater success in conducting cross-cultural studies, where proverbs in different languages can be described contrastively in very great detail by taking their generalized basic meaning as a starting point. This approach would most probably yield a really wide range of specific, culture-bound linguistic forms that express one and the same basic idea.

### 11.8.2 The Linguocultural Approach

Another unit that has steadily been gaining ground recently, mostly among Russian-language scholars who pursue linguocultural contrastive studies, is the (*linguo*)*cultural concept*. With this unit, scholars have been striving to bridge the gap between

linguistics, culturology, and cognitive science and this can be easily seen from one of its many definitions: “a unit of knowledge and conscience shared by a large group of people who speak the same language, with a fixed linguistic form (expression), which is marked by distinct ethnocultural specifics” (Vorkachov, 2002: 30). There continues to be rather a wide range of current definitions of the linguocultural concept and its variant – the *linguistic concept*, a clear sign that a new set of problems has been identified calling for the creation of a new discipline, whose task it should be to undertake certain solutions. This discipline – linguistic conceptology – has already emerged and even succeeded in acquiring a status almost equal to that of linguistic culturology from which it originally stemmed about a decade ago. The scholar who has been particularly instrumental in its creation and development is Professor G. S. Vorkachov (1997; 2002; 2005). Like linguistic culturology, linguistic conceptology pursues contrastive studies of *precedent texts* in two or more languages. The latter are texts that are well-known among a monolingual group of people, the proverbs and phraseological units occupying a privileged position in this class. Such texts are described as culturally meaningful and highly representative of the mentality and worldview of one particular people. Some of them, e.g., *The legend of King Arthur* or *King Lear* (for the English), or the stories of Krali Marco (for Bulgarians), as well as popular characters from folk tales, like Baba Yaga and Vasilisa the Beautiful (for the Russian people) may date back to medieval times, or be entirely fictitious, while others may be quite recent. These texts, which can be oral or written, are as a rule marked by much higher *semantic (semiotic) density* compared to others (Levin, 1984: 111; Maslova, 2001: 62; Petrova, 2006: 19, 21; Vorobyov, 1997: 56). Scholars pursuing this field of study use the term *semantic density* to designate not only the frequency of occurrences of a certain text, phrase or name in speech and writing both on the synchronic plane and diachronically, but also the degree of its grammatical, lexical and thematical elaborateness, including variability, synonymy, tendency to form derivatives, conversion, potential for intertextuality, etc. The class of precedent texts in any given culture is an invaluable national treasure that is held in esteem and loved by all. These texts are carefully guarded and handed down from one generation to the next, uniting the members of a linguistic community into one people. They are the nation’s memory and history, its heart and life.

### 11.8.3 The Cognitive Approach

The cognitive aspect of proverbs is the main object of another exemplary contrastive analysis presented in the article *Where cognitive linguistics meets paremiology: a cognitive-contrastive view of selected English and Croatian proverbs* by the Croatian linguists Gabrijela Bulijan and Tanja Gradečak-Erdelić (Bulijan, & Gradečak-Erdelić, 2013). The authors contrast three groups of proverb equivalents and analogues on fear, love and greed applying the conceptual metaphor and the blending theory to reveal

a wide range of additional areas of linguistic and culture-specific variation. Studies show that the aims, objectives and research methods of the cognitive approach are very closely related to the linguocultural approach.

#### 11.8.4 The Culturematic Method

The culturematic method should be viewed as an extension to, and a further elaboration of the linguocultural method (Petrova, 2012: 51-83). A unit that has been specifically developed for conducting linguocultural contrastive studies of proverbs is the *cultureme* (Petrova, 2003, 2006, 2013). Very briefly defined, a cultureme is axiologically marked, verbalised content, explicated through a semantic transformation of the question-answer kind and represented by a noun or noun phrase. Simple examples of culturemes are *knowledge* (+) for the proverb *Knowledge is power* and *haste* (–) for *Haste makes waste*. In order for the culturemes of figurative proverbs to be found, the researcher needs first to translate the overt (literal) meaning of the proverb into the meaning of its deep structure, i.e. the proverb definition (e.g., *All is not gold that glitters* should first be translated into *attractive appearance is rarely a sign of virtue*). The culturemes are explicated by means of asking two questions: What does this proverb affirm? and What does this proverb condemn / criticize? If we put the first question to the deep-structure meaning (definition) of the proverb above, the answer will elicit the negative cultureme *attractive but worthless persons and things* (–). The most appealing characteristic of the *culturematic method* (the research method involving the application of the cultureme), which makes it particularly convenient for conducting contrastive research, is that the semantic density of any given cultureme can be ascertained with a much greater degree of precision if applied on such axiologically marked linguistic units as proverbs. For example, if we want to compare the frequency positions (the semantic densities) of a particular cultureme (e.g. *diligence* (+), *caution and prudence* (+), or *sloth* (–)) in the proverb corpora of two different languages, we will have to find the ratio (the proportion) of all the proverbs containing this cultureme. It makes sense that the more extensive the corpora that are being contrasted are, the more reliable the data and the conclusions will be (and this involves excerpting very large numbers of proverbs). We will see that in one of the two corpora compared this cultureme is represented in a larger proportion of proverb texts, i.e. it has greater cultural weight than in the other, which would mean that the first linguoculture has taken much greater interest in this entity than the other. Applied on a large number of proverb texts, the culturematic method can thus help elicit truly reliable quantitative evidence about the hierarchical arrangement of the complete set of positive and negative culturemes contained in the proverb system. This can demonstrate very clearly in a consistent and convincing way the hierarchy of the values and anti-values of the people among whom these proverbs have originated and are current.

## 11.9 Concluding Remarks

In the foregoing presentation, an attempt has been made to present a comprehensive picture, although very general, of some of the works that have been performed so far by international proverb scholars in the still new field of contrastive proverb study. Our discussion has certainly failed to cover all the contributions in this area, since information in more languages is needed for the fulfillment of such an ambitious project. So far we have seen that contrastive studies cannot be discussed separately from cross-cultural studies because of their common main objective – the explication of culture-bound characteristics. It was also shown that they vary mostly in the units that are intended to serve both as *tertium comparationis* and as research tools that can bring out in more rigorous ways the specific variations and the difference between the proverb corpora compared. Indeed, the time has come for a comprehensive and much more extensive book-length monograph to be written, which will hopefully cover all that has been done in this field. With its focus on these most typical human achievements, culture and cognition and through uniting an ever-growing number of scholars from all over the world, who have devoted their professional lives to proverbs, the contrastive study of proverbs can open further vistas to cultural universals and cultural diversity,

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Charles Clay Doyle

## 12 Proverbs in Literature

### 12.1 Introduction

Proverbs, it could be said, are themselves little poems. Many proverbs consist of epigrammatic rhymed couplets: *A friend in need / is a friend indeed*; *When the cat's away, / the mice will play*; *Birds of a feather / flock together*; *Different strokes / for different folks*; *If you want to talk the talk, / you've got to walk the walk*; *Les morts / ont toujours tort* [ww: The dead are always wrong]; *Morgenstunde / hat Gold im Munde*. [ww: The morning hour has gold in its mouth]. Even Latin, which in Classical times did not feature rhyme as a poetic device, eventually yielded numerous rhymed proverbs; for example: *Pater qualis, / filius talis* [ee: Like father, like son]; *Qualis rex, / talis grex* [ww: As the king is, so are the commoners]; *Orimur, / morimur* [ww: We are born, [then] we die]; *Homo proponit, / Deus disponit* – with its rhyming derivatives or counterparts *Man proposes, / God disposes* and *Der Mensch denkt / und Gott lenkt*. Countless proverbs, both rhymed and unrhymed, exhibit other *sound effects* and rhetorical or stylistic devices commonly associated with literary poetry, such as alliteration, assonance, repetition, parallelism, chiasmus, antithesis, various metrical properties, word play (*a friend indeed* or *a friend in deed*), and, of course, metaphor. The great literary critic Kenneth Burke once asked, “Could the most complex and sophisticated works of art legitimately be considered somewhat as ‘proverbs writ large’?” (Burke, 1967: 296). The folklorist S. J. Sackett has suggested that the study of familiar proverbs could be used pedagogically to introduce poetry, which students so often find daunting (Sackett, 1964: 143-53).

### 12.2 Proverbs in Poetry

Proverbs themselves, of course, even if they might be regarded as folk epigrams, are not really *literature*, since they belong to the province of *oral* tradition. However, proverbs bear an especially intimate relationship with written epigrams. Since ancient times, literary epigrams have sometimes consisted of little more than a quoted proverb with a minimal comment or elaboration, often for comic or ironic effect. The *Greek Anthology* (assembled in stages during Imperial Roman and early medieval times) includes many such epigrams. One distich, attributed to the satirist Lucian (second century A.D.), responds to the ancient proverb *A beard does not make one wise*: (in translation) “If you think that to grow a beard is to acquire wisdom, a goat with a fine beard is at once a complete Plato” (Paton, 1917-39: 4:276-277). A four-line poem by Palladas of Alexandria (fifth century A.D.) explicitly quotes a proverb, then



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rebutts it: “The proverb says, ‘Even a pig would bite a bad man’; but I say that we should not say that, but ‘Even a pig would bite simple unmeddlesome men, but even a snake would be afraid to bite a bad man’” (Paton, 1917-39: 3:208-209). An anonymous epigram, framed (by its title) as “What Hector would say when wounded by the Greeks” applies the Aesopic proverb *Even a hare will insult a dead lion*: “Strike my body now after my death, for the very hares insult the body of a dead lion” (Paton, 1917-39: 5:160-161). In a Latin epigram, Martial (first century A.D.) urges one Faustinus to publish his work and “begin to live now” rather than hope for posthumous fame; the poem concludes with what was probably already a proverb: *cineri Gloria sera venit* [to ashes glory comes too late] (Martial, 1968: 1:44).

Energized by the great Erasmus’s magisterial *Adagia* (1500-1540), and deeply versed in proverbs by the prevailing education system, Renaissance Europe vastly enjoyed composing such proverb-epigrams, in both Latin and vernacular languages.<sup>159</sup> Most notable for its extent was John Heywoods’s *Epigrams upon Proverbs* (1550-1562), 600 poems finally. An example, responding to the proverb *A bird in the hand is worth ten (two) in the bush (wood)*: “Better one bird in hand, than ten in the wood / Better for Birders, but for birds not so good” (Heywood, 1906: 173). The sudden shift in perspective, playfully confuting the universality of the proverb’s message, reminds us that (contrary to what is sometimes supposed) proverbs are not necessarily regarded as sacrosanct epitomes of venerable wisdom; instead, proverbs – like the world that they mirror – are subject to vagaries and complexities in their content and their perceptions. They can be questioned, scoffed at, merrily reinterpreted, parodied, enjoyed. Thence their usefulness when artistically placed in literary contexts!

The same sort of reversal in point of view seen in the *bird* epigram by Heywood occurs in an epigram by the late-twentieth-century poet Shel Silverstein, meditating on the proverb *The early bird gets the worm*:

Oh, if you’re a bird, be an early bird  
And catch the worm for your breakfast plate.  
If you’re a bird, be an early early bird—  
But if you’re a worm, sleep late. (Silverstein, 1974: 30)

Between the sixteenth and the twenty-first century, hundreds of proverb-epigrams have appeared, some anonymous, some by known authors, major or minor. A number

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<sup>159</sup> Erasmus’s compilation first appeared in 1500 as a modest *Adagiorum collectanea*, then in ever-expanding editions, now titled *Adagiorum chiliades* [thousands of proverbs], from 1508 through Erasmus’s death in 1536, with the final and largest published in his posthumous *Opera Omnia* of 1540. Erasmus glossed his thousands of classical Greek adages with Latin commentaries of varying lengths (from a few lines to several pages), introducing scholars and school boys to a wealth of ‘reborn’ proverbs, many of which then emerged in neo-Latin and vernacular forms. Erasmus not only enriched the fund of European proverbs; in large measure he established the scholarly study of proverbs.

of them are represented in Janet Sobieski and Wolfgang Mieder's collection *"So Many Heads, So Many Wits": An Anthology of English Proverb Poetry* (2005). Mieder has commented on several of the short proverb-poems appearing in the anthology, many of them epigrams, under such headings as *Poems with Proverb Titles*, *Poems with Unchanged Proverbs*, *Poems Containing Personalized Proverbs*, *Poems with Proverb Allusions*, and *Poems with Proverbs Changed into Anti-Proverbs* (Mieder, 2010: 263-289; also Mieder, 1993: 71-88).

Besides epigrams, proverb-poems may be divided roughly into two groups. One group consists of poems built out of a multiplicity of proverbs, varied or modified as necessary to fit the chosen meter and rhyme scheme. The conglomerated result is supposed to yield a coherent poetic statement, although any plot or theme is usually secondary to the display of proverbial profuseness. Examples include an 85-line didactic poem in Middle English, from the fourteenth century, commonly referred to as *Proverbs of Good Counsel* (Furnivall, 1869: 68-70), and, from fifteenth-century France, the thirty-six lines of François Villon's *Ballade des proverbes*, each line of which begins with the adverb *tant* [so much or as much as], followed by a proverb or a concept related to a proverb (Villon, 1951: 127-128). Then there was John Heywood's sprawling *Dialogue of Proverbs* (1546-1562), the 2,754 lines of which actually endeavored to include "all the prouerbes in the englishe tongue," the dialog and narrative loosely centered on the subject of marriage. The Elizabethan Michael Drayton wrote a sonnet, *To Proverb* (published in 1600), that begins, "As Loue and I, late Harbour'd in one Inne, / With Prouerbs thus each other intertaine"; there follow five agonistic exchanges of proverbs between the speaker and *Love*, the dialog concluding, "And hauing thus a while each other thwarted, / Fooles as we met, so fooles againe we parted" (Drayton, 1953: 1:17; *Fools will be fools still* is a proverb). In an anonymous seventeenth-century poem, its 42 lines titled simply *Song* (1656) – a later, slightly longer, version titled *A Ballad of Old Proverbs* – a young man pleads with a maid to "grant me my desire, / For I'm thrown as the old Proverb goes, / Out of the frying-pan into the fire...." In 1680 the young woman's reply was appended: "The Youngmans Careless Wooing; and the Witty Maids Replication; All Done out of Old English Proverbs" (Doyle, 2012: 89-100). A more modern example, a truly deft and witty one, is *A Proverbial Tragedy* by Arthur Guiterman, first published in *Life* magazine in 1911; its sixteen lines tell of a journey by three *proverbial* companions:

The Rolling Stone and the Turning Worm  
 And the Cat that Looked at a King,  
 Set forth on the Road that Leads to Rome—  
 For Youth will have its Fling.  
 The Goose will lay the Golden Eggs,  
 The Dog must have his Day,  
 And Nobody locks the Stable Door  
 Till the Horse is stol'n away.

But the Rolling Stone, that was never known  
 To Look before the Leap,  
 Plunged down the hill to the Waters Still  
 That run so dark, so deep;  
 And the leaves were stirred by the Early Bird  
 Who sought his breakfast where  
 He marked the squirm of the Turning Worm—  
 And the Cat was Killed by Care!<sup>160</sup>

An idiosyncratic variant of the multiple-proverb-poem is Carl Sandburg's ambitious pair *Good Morning, America* (1928), which occupies seventeen pages in the *Complete Poems* of 1970, and *The People, Yes* (1936), which occupies 178 pages. Each poem contains a free-verse montage of proverbs, proverbial phrases, idioms, colloquialisms, anecdotes, and other kinds of folk speech, resulting in a panoramic and rhapsodic sense of the ingenuity, wisdom, colorfulness, and untutored eloquence of the American *people*; these lines, for example, come from *The People, Yes*:

behold the proverbs of a people, a nation:  
 Give 'em the works. Fix it, there's always  
 a way. Be hard boiled. The good die young.  
 Be a square shooter. Be good; if you can't  
 be good be careful. When they put you in  
 that six foot bungalow, that wooden kimono,  
 you're through and that's that. (Sandburg, 1970: 328)

The other, more numerous, group of proverb-poems consists of works that are longer than most epigrams, and often more *serious* in their intent or effect, that employ one or just a few key proverbs to focus on a central idea, incident, or mood. Perhaps the most basic of such poems (and among the oldest) are versified fables told to illustrate themes that are embodied by individual proverbs (though in some cases the proverb itself may have derived from a version of the fable, rather than the reverse). Socrates, according to Plato, versified some of Aesop's fables. Greek and Latin verse fables by Babrius and Phaedrus, respectively – both in the first century A.D. – are among the earliest Aesopic texts on record. The famous *Fables* of Jean de La Fontaine (1668 et seq.) followed the tradition. One of those fables in French verse, “L'alouette et ses petits, avec le maître d'un champ” [The Lark, Her Chicks, and the Landowner] begins – unlike its counterpart by Babrius – with a proverb: “*Ne t'attends qu'à toi seul*”, *c'est un commun proverbe* [“Don't count on others” is a common proverb], which the fable

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**160** The proverbs and proverbial sayings that are here quoted or alluded to (in sequence): A rolling stone gathers no moss; Even a worm will turn; A cat may look at a king; All roads lead to Rome; Youth will have its fling; Don't kill the goose that lays the golden eggs; Every dog has its day; There's no use locking the stable door after the horse is stolen; Look before you leap; Still waters run deep; Tremble (Shake) like a leaf; The early bird gets the worm; Care killed the cat.

illustrates with a wise mother bird's recognition that when the farmer intends to summon first his friends and then his kinsmen to help him mow the field, there is no need for the birds to move their nest – but when he resolves to do the mowing himself, then they must take flight promptly (La Fontaine, 1962: 128-30).

In 1974 Wolfgang Mieder, the great historian and bibliographer of proverbs and proverb scholarship, seeking to explain the “concentration of literary proverb studies on prose and drama with an unfortunate neglect of lyrical poetry,” surmised that “dramatic and prose writings” may be “more suitable for proverbial integration than lyrical poetry” (Mieder, 1974: 890). Recent scholarship (including Mieder's own) has, at least partly, remedied the perceived neglect, and called into doubt the surmise about the inhospitality of lyric poetry to the use of proverbs. For instance, the sonnets and eclogues of Edmund Spenser – who, of all poets, used proverbs most skillfully and most extensively – have been examined for their proverb use with considerable subtlety by several scholars (see Doyle, 2007: 1:330-338, and the references there). Like some other types of Elizabethan sonnets, the Spenserian sonnet ends with a free-standing couplet, which will sometimes quote or allude to a proverb, as if to clinch or sum up an argument developed in the three linked quatrains, or to offer a correlative from the larger world outside the recounted situation in the poem, or occasionally to effect a reversal or cast an ironic light on the foregoing matter – or on the proverb itself. In sonnet 37 of the *Amoretti* sequence, the persona initially praises his lady's “golden tresses,” which then become a “net of gold”; the poem ends unhappily with the explicit paraphrase of a proverb: “Fondnesse it were for any being free, / to couet fetters, though they golden bee” (Spenser, 1912: 568; the proverb is *No man loves his fetters though made of gold*). Sonnet 11 concludes with the disconsolate lover calling into the question the veracity of the proverbs *All wars end in peace* and *Great pains quickly find ease*; he laments, “All paine hath end and euery war hath peace, / but mine no price nor prayer may surcease” (Spenser, 1912: 564; for discussion of those and other proverb-sonnets, see Doyle, 2007: 1:331-333).

As for the use of proverbs in other poetic genres: Again, Edmund Spenser stands foremost. In his great unfinished epic *The Faerie Queene* (said to be the longest poem in the English language), the poet's subtle and extensive use of proverbs has received considerable notice (Doyle, 2007: 1:333-336). Indeed, the entire action of the first book of the poem – and therefore of the whole poem – commences with an outright rebuttal of the proverb *Where fire is, smoke will appear*; the wise female companion of a young knight bluntly warns him, “Oft fire is without smoke, and perill without show” (1.1.12; Spenser, 1912: 5). The allegory emphasizes the danger of attempting to ascertain spiritual or even physical realities on the basis of superficial signs.

Much less attention has been paid to proverbs in other literary epics of the Renaissance, such as the *Os Lusíadas* by the Portuguese Luís Vaz de Camões or *La Gerusalemme liberata* by the Italian Torquato Tasso or *Paradise Lost* by the Englishman John Milton.



In general, though, for their use of proverbs, Renaissance poets have been studied widely and well during recent decades; so have poets from the Middle Ages and the twentieth century (less so, with notable exceptions, for poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). An example of an insightful study of a twentieth-century poem is Wolfgang Mieder's explication of Robert Frost's famous *Mending Wall* (1914), which begins, "Something there is that doesn't love a wall" (Mieder, 2004: 69-78; also, at greater length, Mieder, 2005: 210-243). The poem reports a dialog between a seemingly urbane rural property owner, busy mending a wall, and his rustically stubborn neighbor, who keeps insisting, proverbially, *Good fences make good neighbors*. The poem's contemplation of the proverb – its nuances and ramifications – becomes a comment on very modern issues of boundaries and definitions, of limits and linkages in property, personal space, social classes, regions, generations, ideas – the often competing necessities of mending (or erecting) such *walls* and allowing them to crumble. Mieder comments, "The 'fence' proverb ... is a perfect metaphor for what keeps people apart or together. It is a folkloristic sign for the divergencies and convergencies of life ..." (Mieder, 2004: 74). Mieder's discussion, by focusing on the proverb, not only illuminates complexities and depths in the poem's artistry but also examines the various possible (sometimes conflicting) ways to interpret or apply the proverb itself, and explains the proverb's burgeoning popularity in the twentieth century, which has been at least partly attributable to its appearance in Frost's poem.

The desideratum of studying proverbs in literature, then, is not merely to identify the *occurrence* of proverbs in poems, plays, stories, or novels (however valuable that activity of itself can be) but rather to examine the *artistry* of proverb use in literary contexts. As early as 1939 the great proverb scholar B. J. Whiting, evidently with some frustration about the current state of affairs, exclaimed that "the excerpting of proverbs from the works of a particular author should not be undertaken unless a special purpose is clearly held in view" (Whiting, 1939: 64). There is some irony in Whiting's declaration, in that the pioneering dictionary of proverbs compiled by him in collaboration with Archer Taylor, published in 1958, consists largely of items "excerpted" from "a variety of American authors whose works were published between 1820 and 1880" (Taylor & Whiting, 1958: vii). Of course, a dictionary of proverbs is a special purpose. Otherwise, though, a multitude of studies prior to the late twentieth century merely extracted proverbs from published works, mostly sub-canonical works by regional writers, in lists that suggested nothing more sophisticated than the mere existence of individual proverbs at specific times and places. Even there, the evidence can be suspect: Literary writers are certainly free to present characters or narrators who employ archaic or non-local expressions – sometimes as stylistic features of characterization, sometimes out of the author's ignorance about his material.

More recent compilations of proverbs in the works of given authors typically – or at best – will include an examination of the actual *function* of proverbs as employed artistically in the authors' creations. Examples are the numerous studies by Wolfgang Mieder of proverbs in the works of individual authors, among them Carl Sandburg

(Mieder, 1971: 160-168; Mieder, 1973: 15-36; also Bryan & Mieder, 2003: 14-49), George Bernard Shaw (Mieder in collaboration with George Bryan; Bryan & Mieder, 1994), Eugene O'Neill (Bryan & Mieder, 1995), Charles Dickens (Bryan & Mieder, 1997), and Bertolt Brecht (Mieder, 1998b; Mieder 1999: 247-277). The opportunities for more such studies are practically limitless, if not in the form of published monographs then as journal articles or post-graduate theses or student essays—and not necessarily devoted to the corpus of an author but rather to individual literary works.

### 12.3 Proverbs in Prose Fiction

An exemplary scholar of the use of proverbs in prose fiction is Frank de Caro, who has subtly examined E. M. Forster's 1924 novel *Passage to India*, Graham Green's 1940 novel *The Power and the Glory*, and each of four short stories: Katherine Mansfield's *Bliss* (1918), Ruth Suckow's *A Start in Life* (1924), J. F. Powers's *The Valiant Woman* (1947), and Flannery O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* (1953) (de Caro & Jordan, 2004: 100-116). The best known of those short stories is *A Good Man Is Hard to Find*, a work routinely assigned to introductory literature classes (in America, at least). The story tells of an automobile journey in the American South, with a middle-class father, a mother, three young children, and a shabbily genteel and addled grandmother. Straying from the main route, they encounter a homicidal maniac known only as The Misfit, recently escaped from prison, whereupon the family is systematically murdered. The proverb that furnishes the title of the story had been uttered previously, during a vapid conversation between the grandmother and the proprietor of a roadside restaurant, and in her dying moments the grandmother pleadingly exclaims to The Misfit, who now, in her uncertain eyes, resembles her son, "I just know you're a good man." De Caro explains,

Although the reader finds it impossible to find a good man in this plainly evil man, the grandmother finds it pathetically easy to do so, and an absurd contrast is created between the reader's perspective and that of the main character, the grandmother. [¶] The proverb/title comes to have a sort of dual usage. On the one hand, it can be taken at face value. The reader can agree with the minor character who earlier in the story utters the proverb as a judgment: indeed a good man is hard to find, if the people in the story are to be taken as representative of humanity. On the other hand, O'Connor plays with the proverb, contradicting it, showing how easy it can be to find a good man if one refuses to face up to the reality of evil... Just as the straightforward use of the proverb is countered by the ironic twisting, so are the horrifying events contradicted by the hilarity which pervades the narrative. (de Caro & Jordan, 2004: 115)

Responding to de Caro, another commentator has suggested a further ironic twist to the use of the proverb in the story:

By discerning The Misfit's "goodness," the grandmother, foolish and desperate as she may appear in worldly terms, *rejects* the Manichaen notion of "the reality of evil." Exceeding mere forgiveness, she declines to pass judgment on a child of God, who creates only good. Although readers of the story may find it (to use de Caro's phrasing) impossible to do, the grandmother triumphantly accomplishes that rare Christian act of loving the unlovable, accepting The Misfit as a "good man." (Doyle, 2012: 164)

So we see how complex can be the use of one seemingly simple proverb in a short story that, at first glance, could be mistaken for a mere comical slice of *Southern gothic* life.

Longer literary works like novels, of course, are less likely to revolve about a single key proverb. On the larger scale, much can often be learned about the development of themes and characters and attitudes by close attentiveness to the way the narrative voice and the individual characters use or adapt or misuse proverbs. As noted previously, so many of the early surveys of proverbs in novels had concentrated on minor works by minor authors, with little or no analysis. Some major novelists and their works have received attention – for instance, Charles Dickens (see Mieder, 1998a: 179-199, and works cited there; also Bryan and Mieder, 1997). Most notably, the character Sam Weller's famous use of his eponymous *wellerisms* (a phenomenon that certainly existed centuries earlier than Dickens's time) helps reveal his eccentric personality, his *character*. Also noteworthy are Kevin McKenna's several studies of proverb use by Russian novelists: Leo Tolstoy, Vladimir Nabokov, Boris Pasternak, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn (McKenna, 2013: 19-81 and 101-122). Wolfgang Mieder has examined the uses of proverbs in Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (2013: 171-226). The function of Nigerian proverbs in the novels of Chinua Achebe has received considerable scholarly attention (for example, by Adeeko, 1998).

However, a survey of Mieder and Bryan's *Proverbs in World Literature: A Bibliography* (1996) and some later bibliographies suggest that several central canonical writers of fiction have been hardly glanced at for their use of proverbs, among them: Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, George Meredith, Robert Lewis Stevenson, Rudyard Kipling, Virginia Woolf, H. G. Wells, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack London, Kate Chopin, John Steinbeck, Sinclair Lewis, Willa Cather, Thomas Wolfe, Henry Miller, Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, Norman Mailer, J. D. Salinger, Ivan Turgenev, Jorge Luis Borges, Stendahl (Marie-Henry Beyle), Alexander Dumas, Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, Jules Verne, Andre Gide, Anatole France, Albert Camus, Herman Hesse. Many others have been mentioned only briefly or tangentially.

As for extended fictional narratives that are not exactly novels, both François Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532 et seq.) and Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote* (1605-1615) have been scrutinized by several proverb scholars (see the bibliography by Mieder and Bryan, 1996: 222 and 63-67). In contrast, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Voltaire's *Candide* (1759) have received little attention or none.

Nothing has been noticed about the famous American writer O. Henry (pen name of William Sydney Porter), who proverbially entitled one of his stories *The Proof of*

*the Pudding* (1910; the full proverb is *The proof of the pudding is in the eating*). That choice of a title suggests a handy subject for research or student writing: narratives (and other literary works) with proverbs or allusions to proverbs as their titles, like O'Connor's *A Good Man Is Hard to Find* or her story *The Life You Save May Be Your Own*. Allusions are more common than full proverbs, since most titles do not take the form of complete sentences.

## 12.4 Proverbs in Plays

Detailed and subtle examinations of how proverbs are used in literary works will continue to be in demand, regardless of the genre. Drama is an especially fertile field for investigation, since (generally speaking) a play consists solely of the speech of characters, who – whether in conversations, orations, or soliloquies – can exhibit their eloquence, their wisdom, their folly, their foibles, and their quirks by their utterance or adaptation or misuse or misunderstanding of proverbs.

Elizabethan plays have provided the basis for much of our knowledge of what English proverbs existed in early times. B. J. Whiting published *Proverbs in the Earlier English Drama* in 1938. In 1950 M. P. Tilley's crucially important *Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* included a special *Shakespeare Index* (803-808). During the 1950s and early 1960s Archer Taylor presented a series of articles extracting the proverbs used by the Elizabethan playwrights John Marston, Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, and Thomas Middleton (Taylor, 1960a: 193-216; 1957a: 25-36; 1957b: 39-59; 1960b: 77-100; 1959: 79-89). Partly on the basis of those earlier collections, R. W. Dent has compiled separate dictionaries: *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language: An Index* (1981) and *Proverbial Language In English Drama Exclusive of Shakespeare, 1495-1616: An Index* (1984).

As for studies that closely analyze the ways in which playwrights have used proverbs, it is not surprising that William Shakespeare occupies the first position. One conspicuous user of proverbs among Shakespeare's characters is Polonius in *Hamlet*. His lengthy advice to his impatiently embarking son is full of proverbs and other commonplaces; taken out of context, the speech can sound patriarchally sage, but in its context it becomes tedious, trite, and downright foolish—like the speaker himself. The voluble, convivial, and cowardly Sir John Falstaff, in *Henry IV, Part 1*, is also characterized partly by his blustering proverbial pronouncements. In *King Lear* the tragedy hurtles forward (or downward) from the king's petulant threat to his daughter, in the opening scene, that *Nothing will come of nothing*, with Lear's fool then spouting proverbs at a manic pace. In *Romeo and Juliet* the young lovers know more about how to speak beautiful language than about the realities and conflicts of the real world—but more of the proverbs in their play are uttered by Juliet's scatter-brained Nurse and Romeo's madcap friend Mercutio, including the mysterious wellerisms *Shake, quoth*

*the dove-house* (by the Nurse) and *Dun's the mouse, the constable's own word* (by Mercutio).

Otherwise, besides the mere notation of the occurrence of proverbs, the plays of Elizabethan dramatists have gone largely unexamined: Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Dekker, George Chapman, Ben Jonson, John Webster, Cyril Tourneur, Francis Beaumont, John Fletcher, Thomas Middleton, John Marston, Philip Massinger, John Ford, James Shirley. The same is true of English playwrights from the Restoration period: among the prominent ones, John Dryden, William Congreve, William Wycherley, George Ethridge, Aphra Behn.

At the end of the eighteenth century in France arose the popular *proverb play* or (in French) *proverbe dramatique* or simply *proverbe*, in which the play's title will state a proverb, and then the dialogue and action will proceed to illustrate or assess the wisdom of the proverb. The most prominent authors of *proverbes* were Louis Carmontelle, Michel-Théodore Leclercq, and Alfred de Musset (Shaw, 1959: 56-76; Gipson, 2007: 153-166). The French sub-genre was anticipated by minor English plays of the Tudor era, which likewise use proverbs as titles, such as Ulpian Fulwell's *Like Will to Like, Quoth the Devil to the Collier* (1568), and William Wager's *Enough Is as Good as a Feast* (c1571). In Wager's play, the prolog announces the strategy:

Our title is *Inough is as good as a feast*,  
Which Rhethorically we shall amplyfye  
So that it shall appeer bothe to moste and least  
That our meaning is but honestie,  
Yet now and then we wil dally merily.  
So shall we please them that of mirth be desirous:  
For we play not to please them that be curious. (Wager, c1570: sig. A3<sup>r</sup>)

Even Shakespeare's so-called *problem plays* *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, address, in complex ways, the proverbs pointed to in their titles. George Bryan has listed numerous other plays with proverb titles from the sixteenth century and later (Bryan, 2002: 65-74). *Proverb plays* probably owed much to the standard academic exercises during the Renaissance and eighteenth century, in which students were required to compose discourses based on assigned proverbs (Neuss, 1984: 1-18).

Much more remains to be said about proverbs in the works of the ancient Greek and Roman dramatists. The plays of Lope de Vega, Jean-Baptiste Moliere, Friedrich Schiller, George Bernard Shaw, Henrik Ibsen, Eugene O'Neill, and Bertolt Brecht have received a fair amount of scholarly attention for their use of proverbs – those of other playwrights just a little or none at all: Pierre Corneille, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Anton Chekhov, August Strindberg, John Millington Synge, Luigi Pirandello, Samuel Beckett, Noël Coward, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Eugène Ionesco, William Inge, Harold Pinter, Jean Anouilh, Lillian Hellman, Edward Albee, John Osborne, Jean Genet, Tom Stoppard, Derek Walcott, Václav Havel, Neil Simon.

## 12.5 Proverbs in Other Kinds of Literature

Pondering the use of proverbs in kinds of literature other than poetry, prose fiction, and drama raises the question of what, exactly, the term *literature* refers to. Should the category include personal essays? Historical and philosophical writing? Sermons and religious tractates? The verses of popular songs, operas, and stage musicals? The scripts of motion pictures (which are, after all, the most popular form a dramatic art in our time)? Radio and television programs? Speeches of statesmen and other public figures? Political and social commentary like newspaper editorials or *thought pieces* in magazines? News reporting? Letters? Folklore itself – especially items that may have been bent in the direction of accommodating literary tastes, like the Grimm brothers' *Märchen* or Bishop Thomas Percy's English and Scottish ballads?

Few will object to Mieder and Bryan's prominent inclusion, in *Proverbs in World Literature: A Bibliography* (1996), of such writers as Plato, Cicero, Erasmus, Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Immanuel Kant, Benjamin Franklin, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, or even Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin, Winston Churchill, and Adolph Hitler. Some of those writers, however, are *literary* in very different senses from the canonical poets, novelists, and playwrights – and from one another. Surely there is also much more to be said about proverbs in the non-fiction prose works of the following major writers, among others – works that have been largely neglected by proverb scholars: Baldassare Castiglione, Niccolo Machiavelli, William Tyndale, Jean Calvin, John Harington, Richard Hooker, Robert Burton, Thomas Browne, Isaac Walton, John Locke, Bento Spinoza, Gottfried Leibniz, Joseph Addison, Samuel Johnson, Thomas Jefferson, Adam Smith, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Jeremy Bentham, Matthew Arnold, Charles Lamb, Thomas DeQuincey, Thomas Carlyle, John Ruskin, John Stuart Mill, Henry Adams, William James, Arthur Schopenhauer, Søren Kierkegaard, Sigmund Freud, Karl Jung, G. K. Chesterton, H. L. Mencken, Max Beerbohm, Jacques Barzun, Bertrand Russell, James Baldwin. Again, some of those writers' works are more *literary*, in a conventional sense, than others. For example, the *essay* is a well-recognized literary genre. It is often deemed to have been invented (and the term coined, in this special usage) by Montaigne in his famous *Essais* of 1580 (on the general subject of proverbs in Montaigne's essays, see Schmarje, 1973). An essay (in the literary sense) is a comparatively brief, often informal prose monolog on almost any subject, serious or lighthearted.

Near its beginning, Montaigne's essay *Du Pédantisme* [Of Pedantry] features the sober proverb, current in several languages, *The greatest scholars are not the wisest men*. In the essay, however, the pedants are ridiculed as *false* scholars, ignorant schoolmasters – even false pedants. Montaigne (whose first language, incidentally, was Latin) quotes the proverb not in French but in Latin, as a proper scholar, or a proper pedant, might. However, the proverb as quoted appears in ridiculously incorrect Latin: "Magis magnos clericos non sunt magis magnos sapientes" (Montaigne, 1974: 1:141-142). That is exactly how the proverb was uttered by Rabelais's ignorant

pedant Frère Jean in *Gargantua*! So, the proverb is not simply *there* in Montaigne's essay, to amplify the prose or lend a bit of authority to the discourse. Rather, in its context, the proverb calls for an active interpretation by the reader, involving several complex layers of irony. As Roger Abrahams and Barbara Babcock have said regarding another literary work, "the proverb has ironically become part of a complex literary internal cross-reference system which assumes a comprehensive experience of Western literature" (Abrahams & Babcock, 1977: 426).

Francis Bacon, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Ralph Waldo Emerson, G. K. Chesterton, George Orwell, Max Beerbohm, and James Baldwin are other foremost practitioners of the essay as a literary form. It could be argued that some entries among the thousands in Erasmus's early-sixteenth-century *Adagia* were, in effect, essays: for instance, his famous anti-war manifesto occasioned by the proverb *Dulce bellum inexpertis* [War is sweet to those who have not experienced it], and the wryly querulous discussion of his own tribulations as a proverb scholar by way of commenting on the adage *Herculei labores* [the labors of Hercules]. The leisurely discursiveness and relaxed style that tend to characterize the genre have made essays especially hospitable to the use of proverbs.

For purposes of persuasion, writers of political speeches and other polemics have found proverbs useful for connecting the argument in progress with the traditional wisdom that proverbs so often express, wisdom implicitly shared between the writer (or speaker) and the readers (or audience). Sages, humorists, and politicians have used proverbs in hopes of sounding wise or folksy—among them such figures as Benjamin Franklin in his *Poor Richard* persona, Josh Billings (pen name of Henry Wheeling Shaw), Anne Landers (pen name of Eppie Lederer) and her twin sister and rival advice-columnist *Dear Abby* (pen name of Pauline Phillips), and the U.S. president Ronald Reagan. Other writers employ proverbs in a fashion that might be called merely decorative.

## 12.6 Conclusion

The range of uses of proverbs in literature is manifold. Of course, in oral discourse – even in casual conversations – proverbs can also have a considerable range of uses, as, moment by moment, we endeavor to *characterize* ourselves, to create and project advantageous personae. It is a tradition that goes back to the Renaissance and beyond: the fashioning (or refashioning) of an identity, a *self* (Greenblatt, 1980). Like other aspects of language, proverbs are continually being used in that quasi-literary manner. We resemble the famous character in Moliere's play, who was delighted to discover that he could speak fluent *Prose*. We may not think of ourselves as sounding especially *literary*; however, like the great writers of our heritage, we can all speak Proverbs, and proverbs are the poetry of the people.

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## 13 Proverbs in Mass Media

### 13.1 Introduction

The present chapter explores various aspects of application of proverbs in the English language media texts which is predetermined by the specifics of the mass media discourse. In modern mass media the proverb proves to be a tool of choice for conveying different attitudes and views. The primary resource data include English and American newspapers and magazines, an American TV series, and popular English language songs.

### 13.2 Proverbs in the Media Discourse: General Remarks

The importance of the mass media in the modern societies is indisputable. For many people they serve as the firsthand source of information and, thus, understanding of the world. Their influence is so overwhelming, it is next to impossible to stay unaffected.

The mass media aimed at reaching a wide audience by mass communication encompass a range of broadcast (TV, radio, cinema, recorded music), print (newspapers and magazines), digital (Internet), and outdoor (billboards, placards etc.) vehicles. Thus, media discourse is a multidisciplinary field dealing with a number of overlapping discourses. The mass media include both technical means of transmitting information and people involved in the process (Константинова, 2008: 23). As scholars point out, the key features of the verbal language of human interaction converge and alter in their particular way in the language of mass communication (Володина, 2004: 11).

The task of any author conveying some piece of information through a mass medium is to affect a vast audience. In this respect all the media, print press in the first place, rely heavily on the language used for the stated purpose. Beyond doubt, information delivered to their recipients must not only be of interest and some use to them but also be presented in some special manner as to make it appealing and noticed. The success of a print piece, be it a newspaper editorial or a magazine interview, is in many ways predetermined by the effective choice of linguistic means. It is a bit different case with broadcast media, for they mainly employ visual and/or audio channels of communication. This, however, does not diminish the importance of the language content. The authors of media texts use language freely, creatively, even boldly sometimes. It comes as no surprise that in modern media discourse proverbs



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are one of the preferred tools for conveying a myriad of attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and such.

Apart from influencing the audience, media authors are challenged to transmit substantial pieces of information as succinctly as possible. As tokens of culture and *miniature theories* (Honeck, 1997: 103) paremias are capable of successfully handling the task. Proverbs serve as contextual cues in discourse, and, therefore, can affect the meaning of the message and its perception. Studies show that application of proverbs is a significant feature of modern mass media discourse (Константинова, 2008). No wonder this field has presented some scholarly interest to paremiologists around the world. It is not our task to review these many researches: Prof. Wolfgang Mieder's most comprehensive bibliography will give an idea of what has been done in the realm of application of proverbs in the media discourse in different European languages (Mieder, 2009).

Let it be once again stressed that modern media texts are permeated with proverbs. Both old proverbs and modern ones, i.e. those with no reference earlier than 1990 (Mieder, 2012: 138), make their frequent appearance in media discourse. Mieder, an outstanding proverb scholar based in Vermont, USA, stated it as a must for paremiologists to "look at which traditional proverbs survive today and which have actually been coined in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries". Media texts can serve as a plentiful and fruitful material for this kind of research (Mieder, 2004: 150). Here are a couple of examples of modern proverbs employed in media texts:

Meredith: You're operating?

Richard: I am. A Whipple.

Meredith: That's big.

Richard: I say, *go big... or go home*. ("I Like You So Much Better When You're Naked" 6-12/ "Grey's Anatomy")

Oprah Winfrey: During the campaign, how did you handle all the jokes about your husband being "not very smart"? Did it hurt?

Laura Bush: It made me mad, actually—though I didn't hear that many of the jokes because we were campaigning every day. <...>

Oprah: But did the jokes hurt?

Laura: Yes. Coming to terms with the jokes doesn't mean that your feelings aren't hurt or that you aren't miffed, but you learn to take it with a grain of salt.

Oprah: I don't know if you take it with a grain of salt, or with a whole box of salt!

Laura: It does make you feel like things are unfair. But you just know that happens. As they say, *if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen*. (interview with Laura Bush/ O, The Oprah magazine)

Such media discourses as television, popular music, cinematography, and advertising, which is part and parcel of modern mass media, are distinguished as having originated and started the circulation of many modern paremias, as: *Diamonds are*

a girl's best friends (the Broadway musical *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*)<sup>161</sup>, *We're not in Kansas anymore* (the movie *The Wizard of Oz*)<sup>162</sup>, *Knowing is half the battle* (G. I. Joe cartoon TV series)<sup>163</sup>, *Diamonds are forever* (the *DeBeers* advertising catchphrase)<sup>164</sup>. As for the film discourse, certain proverbs (in some cases modified) have even become a kind of hallmark for some motion pictures. Here are just to name a few: *A boy's best friend is his mother* (< *A dog is a man's best friend*) (Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins)/ *Psycho*)<sup>165</sup>, *Carpe diem. Seize the day* (John Keating (Robin Williams)/ *Dead Poets Society*)<sup>166</sup>, *Life will find a way* (< *Love will find a way*) (Dr. Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum)/ *The Lost world: Jurassic Park*)<sup>167</sup>, *After all, tomorrow is another day!* (Scarlett O'Hara (Vivien Leigh)/ *Gone with the Wind*)<sup>168</sup>.

### 13.3 Traditional Proverbs in Mass Media

Proverbs belong to the realm of linguistic and cultural knowledge shared by a nation (or nations, in case of internationally disseminated paremias). In this respect, the employment of proverbs in discourse can be treated as quotation, calling upon for authority and traditional views of the majority. Standard proverbs in their dictionary form do appear in modern media texts, though not as frequently as their transformed variations. Proverbs are autonomous utterances having no bonds with the originating context (i.e. context of the very first use) and no known (or, rather, generally known) author. Proverbs are, metaphorically speaking, in the custody of the people; therefore, by employing one in discourse we can be said to be quoting *folk speech*. So, one of the issues concerning the standard use of proverbs in the mass media is the way these folklore utterances are placed in discourse. Numerous scholars are engaged in the study of introductory proverb formulas (see Yankah, 1986). In some languages these are set phrases obligatorily used in discourse as a reference to folk culture and tradition. Such introductory formulas frequently occur in the Anglo-American mass media, as well. Their use, however, is not predetermined by cultural tradition but rather pragmatic factors, i.e. the goals and intentions of the author.

In some mass media texts, proverbs are employed as solid statements of apparent truth with no commentary from the author. Such application is consistent with O.

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161 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentlemen\\_Prefer\\_Blondes\\_\(musical\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gentlemen_Prefer_Blondes_(musical))

162 [http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie\\_scripts/m/muppets-wizard-of-oz-script.html](http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/m/muppets-wizard-of-oz-script.html)

163 [http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie\\_scripts/a2/gi-joe-rise-of-cobra-script.html](http://www.script-o-rama.com/movie_scripts/a2/gi-joe-rise-of-cobra-script.html)

164 <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/a-diamond-is-forever.html>

165 [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054215/quotes?ref\\_=tt\\_ql\\_3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0054215/quotes?ref_=tt_ql_3)

166 [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097165/quotes?ref\\_=tt\\_ql\\_3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097165/quotes?ref_=tt_ql_3)

167 <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0119567/quotes>

168 [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031381/quotes?ref\\_=tt\\_ql\\_3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0031381/quotes?ref_=tt_ql_3)

Arewa and A. Dundes's theory according to which a person using a proverb is but "the instrument through which the proverb speaks to the audience" (Arewa & Dundes, 1964: 70). Here is an example from the O. Winfrey's interview with the American R'n'B singer Mary J. Blige:

Oprah: Has your transformation compelled you toward a greater responsibility in your artistry and lyrics? <...>

Mary: <...> After the "No More Drama" album, people came up to me and said, "You saved me. You talked me out of an abusive relationship". <...> A lot of people hate me for this. People say things like "Mary, I liked it better when you were singing them sad songs. <...> You need to pick up a pack of cigarettes and come back down with us". It blows my mind – then again, not really. They just want someone to waddle with them in their environment.

Oprah: *Misery loves company*. People identify with the rawness and pain in your music. <...> They have an expectation about you based upon themselves. (interview with Mary J. Blige/ O, The Oprah magazine)

Such cases of *bare* proverbs are scarce in media texts, which is, in my opinion, a testimony to the fact that application of proverbs in the language of the mass media is a highly innovative and creative process, a sort of *exercise in quotation* (Yankah, 1986). In general, referring to someone else's words in discourse presupposes a certain attitude (agreement or disagreement) to what is being stated. In a small number of cases media authors, however, introduce a proverb as an epitome of some situation, presenting it as a conventional opinion, and, thereby, remain impartial to what is being said:

*Great minds, it is said, think alike*. Which must make the Observer's Andrew Rawnsley and the Sunday Telegraph's Matthew d'Ancona the wisest of the wise. (*The Sunday Columnists / The Guardian* 19/01/2004)

In other cases, the traditional folk view expressed in a proverb is either supported by the speakers and, thus, sounds as their own:

Oprah: I've read that you no longer want people to dress like you. What do you mean by that?

Madonna: I mean just that. In the beginning of my career, I was consumed with fashion and the way I looked.

Oprah: Aren't you still?

Madonna: I think about clothes all the time – you see the boots and pants I'm wearing. But who cares? *You know as well as I do that clothes don't make the woman*. <...> (interview with Madonna/ O, The Oprah magazine),

or is claimed to be shared with the audience:

*We all know that death is a great leveler* and that Princess Diana and Fred West are dead, but that is the only connection between them as far as I am aware. (*More than a laughing matter / The Guardian* 8/06/2000)

Proverbs are indeed handy vehicles to address the audience. By applying these folklore dicta, media authors can feel safe as they rely on common knowledge and share the same ground with the intended recipients. Thus, the sense of belonging and intimacy can be easily achieved. Consider the following examples:

*Sorry, but it's true – no pain, no gain.* If you want to get fit and lose weight, you need to sweat. (*Just for kicks* / *The Guardian* 4/10/2003);

In America, the Beg, Borrow or Steal website is a runaway hit, with women signing up for as little as £12 a month to hire goodies by the likes of Prada, Fendi and Burberry <...> Although more than 700 bags are available on the US site, many are the more basic offerings from the heavyweight fashion houses. *But beggars can't be choosers, girls*, and if you can't afford to live out the Carrie Bradshaw Fendi bag dream (i.e. owning the real thing), at least you could soon have the option to rent. (*Snippets* / *The Guardian* 30/07/2004).

In the majority of cases media authors distinctly express their attitude to proverb wisdom. By commenting on it, they either support it:

*Home is where the heart is, to be sure.* But home may also be where the money is these days, as Americans put away their dancing shoes and come back home again. At least, that is what publishers of the elite home-design magazines are betting on. (*Elite Magazines Compete for a Place at Home* / *The New York Times* 5/11/1990);

or contest it:

Opening voice-over: In general, people can be categorized in one of two ways. Those who love surprises and those who don't. I don't. I've never met a surgeon that enjoys a surprise, because as surgeons, we like to be in the know. <...> *My point is this: whoever said "What you don't know can't hurt you", was a complete and total moron.* Because for most people I know, not knowing is the worst feeling in the world <...> (*Into You Like a Train* 2-6/ *Grey's Anatomy*);

*First things first. Look before you leap. A stitch in time saves nine. Don't put the cart before the horse. Worthy mottoes, all of them, brimming with wisdom. But sometimes such thinking can suck the life out of a project before you even get started".* ("Parlor Doors, Outdoors" / "The New York Times" 21/08/2005);

or contradict it:

They say *death is a great leveler. They're wrong.* Inequality pursues us after life too. Consider Ground Zero. While international attention has shifted to Afghanistan, the vast project of body-part retrieval in Lower Manhattan is probably the most exorbitant expenditure on the dead in our lifetime, and yet remains almost entirely exempt from criticism or debate. (*The Hierarchy of Death* / *The Guardian* 28/11/2001)

### 13.4 Modification of Proverbs in Mass Media

Along with standard proverbs encapsulating pieces of folk wisdom, media authors increasingly resort to creative use of these cultural and linguistic gems, which produces sometimes remarkable modifications offering fresh views and different interpretations.

The need for alterations and the quest for something new are perhaps in the human nature. The phenomenon of proverb modification has been observed and attended to by scholars for quite a while now. Recent decades have proved it to gain momentum both in English and Russian mass media. Likewise, the process is widely studied in many other major European languages.

As for Anglo-American media discourse, it can be stated that creative use of proverbs yielding all sorts of nonce modifications is far more predominant than their standard use. Traditional proverbs do occur in the media, but the scale of the modification phenomenon is so extensive that it can be considered a universal method of affecting the audience. Constant changes in life lead to changes in opinions, ideologies, and morals. This inevitably and naturally reflects in the paremiological lore of the language.

The dynamic development which the mass media has gone through at the turn of the twenty-first century has dramatically triggered the aforementioned phenomenon of proverb modification. The modern media can virtually reach vast audiences in all corners of the world, in no time, with messages intended to communicate new cognitive content and, thus, encapsulating new, i.e. non-standard, approaches and views. On the whole, such creative transformations broaden the linguistic boundaries of a given culture, demonstrate novel ways of thinking, and, more importantly, introduce new directions for action. Proverbs can be adapted to any socio-cultural context, and, therefore, frequently modified, immediately come in view of broad audiences with the help of any of the existent mass media.

According to my study the process of proverb modification is predetermined by cognitive and pragmatic factors. These transformations occur due to the necessity to name the yet unnamed, to convey new (or in some cases renewed) cognitive content. The creative use of proverbs enables authors to fulfill the following pragmatic tasks, all of which are indispensable to the principal goal of affecting the mass audience:

- 1) attention grabbing;
- 2) expressing evaluations/attitudes;
- 3) creating stylistic effect, i.e. enhancing expressiveness and emotionality (Константинова, 2008: 87).

Of all the wealth of proverb transformations in the mass media, it is possible to distinguish four groups on the principle of stylistic and aesthetic effects achieved thereby:

1. *Hapaxes, or nonce proverbs* (Greek *hápax eirēménon* – (something) said (only) once). This group is composed of modified proverbs that are (1) context bound, i.e. to interpret them you need originating context, and/or (2) often lack imagery and, therefore, have little aesthetic value and impact potential. Consider the following examples:

Macho man decides: *don't get even – get mad* (headline)

Tony Blair is evidently upset by the leaking of a memo in which he appeared to demand help at question time.

So yesterday we met the new prime minister, Mr. Mucho Macho Man. When asked the formula question – what his engagements were for the day – he snarled like a home football fan trapped in the visitors' enclosure. "This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others," he barked. "You got a problem with that?" (Naturally he didn't say the last bit. But he sounded as if he should. William Hague can count himself lucky that his ear lobes are still intact). (< *Don't get mad, get even*) (*The Guardian* 18/05/2000)

*Home ain't where his heart is* anymore

He may hang his hat behind our bedroom door

But he don't lay his head down to love me like before

*Home ain't where his heart is* anymore. (< *Home is where the heart is*) ("Home Ain't Where His Heart Is"/ Shania Twain)<sup>169</sup>.

Izzie: Um, I feel like we should say stuff. Denny, do you want to say stuff?

Denny: Kiss me. Right here. (*they kiss*) Izzie, that *kiss was worth a 1,000 words*.

Izzie: A picture. *A picture is worth a 1,000 word*. (17 seconds 2-25/ *Grey's Anatomy*).

2. *Authorial expressions created on the basis of standard proverbs existing in the language*. Such modifications can be seen as the signs of authors' ingenuity and great literary potential. A deeper look at these expressions reveals the way both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors work together in the process of applying proverbs. The worldview of the author, i.e. his/her ideas, opinions, judgments receive such linguistic embodiment which being built from the elements of preformed linguistic material (standard proverbs) appears so creative, original and novel! Here are several examples:

It's like being tired but you just can't sleep

Your bed is obsolete

*It's like finding out the best things in life are free*

*After you already paid*. (< *The best things in life are free*) (*Don't look back / Mxpx*)<sup>170</sup>;

Patient: Oh, I'm not his wife. What's that saying — uh, *they won't buy the cow if you give 'em the milk for free*? Yeah, *we're working on eight years of free milk*" (< *Why buy a cow when you can get milk for free*) (*Tainted Obligation* 6-4/ *Grey's Anatomy*);

169 <http://www.metrolyrics.com/home-aint-where-his-heart-is-anymore-lyrics-shania-twain.html>

170 <http://www.metrolyrics.com/dont-look-back-lyrics-mxpx.html>



(3) *We must call the political tune...*

*...even if that means paying the piper* (headline) (< *He who pays the piper calls the tune*) (*The Observer* 3/02/2002).

The third and the fourth group of modifications are made up of anti-proverbs and pseudo-proverbs, which are amazing instances of creativity and succinctly formulated modern wisdom. They frequently occur in the English language media and, thus, constitute a salient feature of the mass media discourse.

3. *Anti-proverbs* – that are in fact new proverbs per se created on the basis of traditional ones – are profusely and successfully studied all around the world, major European languages being considered. Anti-proverbs use the elements of traditional paremias but express some different idea. Their meaning is clear irrespective of the originating context. Should you visit Forbes magazine website, for instance, and you will learn a succinctly put strategy of efficient career making, which also happens to be an anti-proverb teaching modern prudence: *Snooze, you lose; schmooze, you win* (< *If you snooze, you lose*). In his song *Second mouse* the American country singer Tim O'Brien resorts to one more astute observation: *"It's the early bird that catches the worm, but it's the second mouse that gets the cheese"* (< *The early bird catches the worm*). Film directors and screen writers frequently share their life philosophy through the characters they create. In W. Allen's comedy drama *The Purple Rose of Cairo* (1985) this is also done with the help of a somewhat careless anti-proverb *Life's too short to spend time thinking about life* (< *Life's short*). These are just few of the innumerable examples found in modern Anglo-American media!

4. *Pseudo-proverbs*. The phenomenon of creating proverb-like formations is quite spread in contemporary English language media. Although these formations are *not* proverbs, they are built on the basis of paremic structural-semantic models typically with traditional stylistic markers, and express some general ideas often similar to those conveyed by real proverbs. Let us consider some examples:

*You can kill the protestor, but you can't kill the protest* ◀ *You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy* (song title/ *Anti-flag*);  
*Every song has its play* ◀ *Every dog has his day* (album title/ Gilbert O'Sullivan);  
*Hand fits giving, so do it* ◀ *If the cap fits, wear it* (*Sky Fits Heaven*/ Madonna);  
*Sleep with a snake, you get bit* ◀ *If you lie down with dogs, you'll get up with fleas* (*Grey's Anatomy*).

Another aspect of creative application of proverbs in the mass media worthy of attention is their multiple use. The phenomenon goes back to the Middle Ages and is tightly connected with iconographic art. In his significant textbook on proverbs Prof. W. Mieder distinguishes a group of poems written wholly in proverbial language, featuring, for instance, Carl Sanberg's famous *Good Morning*,

*America* (Mieder, 2004: 225). An anthology of English proverb poetry came out in 2005, which included lyric poems and song lyrics composed by such outstanding authors as R. Frost, E. Dickinson, A. Bierce, B. Dylan, P. McCartney (15<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries) (Mieder & Sobieski, 2005). The same tendency of bringing multiple proverbs together in one small stretch of text is discussed in the articles by A. L. Macfie and F. Macfie on Turkish poetry (13<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) (Macfie & Macfie, 1989; Macfie & Macfie, 2001). The phenomenon has not yet been thoroughly studied. It is possible, however, to distinguish two types of multiple use of proverbs in the mass media, *proverb clusters* and *proverb collages*.

*Proverb clustering* consists in insertion of two or more proverbs (standard or modified) into a non-proverb context. Thus, a blend of proverb and non-proverb texts emerges, as in the song *Innocent* by Clan of Xymox<sup>171</sup>:

And it's cold in here when you're all in tears  
Your vision is in black and white, you feel so afraid  
You fail to show your better half, it's such a shame  
*Tomorrow's dream never comes*, it remains in shades  
Remains in shades

*Sticks and stones break my bones* and it hurts too much  
*Easy come and easy go*, in love and war all seems fair  
But it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all  
Now I am holding ground  
Now I am safe and sound

But it's the last straw that breaks my back and life's too short  
*Handsome is as handsome does* and there's so much more  
*A change is good as rest* they say and all that glitters is not gold  
Now I am holding ground  
Now I am safe and sound

No way I found love sane and sound  
And it's cold in here when you're all in tears  
Those endless nights of intrigues make it all too clear  
In this dark world and wide I am innocent  
I am innocent. (Cf. *Tomorrow never comes*; *Sticks and stones may break my bones*, but words will never hurt me; *Easy come, easy go*; *All is fair in love and war*; *It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all*; *It's the last straw that breaks the camel's back*; *Handsome is as handsome does*; *A change is as good as a rest*; *All that glitters is not gold*).

Other remarkable examples of proverb clustering can be found in a whole set of magazine feature interviews conducted by Oprah Winfrey. The media mogul and experienced interviewer winds up her every interview with some high-profile respondent

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171 <http://www.lyricstime.com/clan-of-xymox-innocent-lyrics.html>

with one and the same question *What do you know for sure?* It is noteworthy that in every interview the respondents use proverbs in their reply, and occasionally build proverb chains to formulate their thoughts, as does the famous American actress Bette Midler:

That laughter feels really good. That there's a lot of conscious, tangible evil afoot in the world. That the planet will always go on. That you can find peace in nature. That music has great charm and is a great communicator. That dancing is good for the soul. That beauty is very healing and great for the spirit. That *you gotta eat a little dirt before you die*. That *payback is a bitch*. And that no matter who you are, *there is no free lunch*. (< *You have to eat a peck of dirt before you die; Payback is a bitch; There is no such a thing as a free lunch*).

Proverb clustering is a favorite tool in the American ABC medical drama *Grey's Anatomy* as well. Opening and closing voice-over narrations frequently play with proverb clusters. Here is one such example of grouping thematic proverbs that help to present the dilemma the main characters are facing in the episode:

Opening voice-over: As doctors, we're trained to be skeptical, because our patients lie to us all the time. The rule is, every patient is a liar until proven honest. Lying is bad. Or so we are told, constantly from birth – *honesty is the best policy, the truth shall set you free*, I chopped down the cherry tree, whatever. The fact is, lying is a necessity. We lie to ourselves because the truth, *the truth freaking hurts*. (< *Honesty is the best policy; The truth shall set you free; The truth hurts*). (*Tell Me Sweet Little Lies* 2-14/ *Grey's Anatomy*)

*Proverb collages* are entire texts or their structural parts composed of proverbs (standard or modified) and/or sometimes other easily recognized elements, like familiar quotations, proper names, phraseologisms. Stretches of narrator's speech can be occasionally inserted as well. In this type of multiple use of proverbs paremias serve as ready-made material for constructing discourse. Proverb collages are typically found in popular song discourse related to poetic discourse known for this phenomenon since the Middle Ages. Consider the song *My Best Was Never Good Enough*<sup>172</sup> by the famous American songwriter and performer Bruce Springsteen:

*Every cloud has a silver lining, every dog has his day*  
She said, 'Now don't say nothin'  
if you don't have something nice to say'.  
*The tough, now they get going, when the going gets tough*  
But for you my best was never good enough

'Now don't try for a home run, baby  
If you can get the job done with a hit'

<sup>172</sup> [http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/bruce\\_springsteen/my\\_best\\_was\\_never\\_good\\_enough.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/bruce_springsteen/my_best_was_never_good_enough.html)

Remember, 'A quitter never wins and a winner never quits'  
 'The sun don't shine on a sleepin' dog's ass'  
 And all the rest of that stuff  
 But for you my best was never good enough

'If God gives you nothin' but lemons, then you make some lemonade'  
 'The early bird catches the fuckin' worm,  
 Rome wasn't built in a day'

'Now life's like a box of chocolates,  
 You never know what you're going to get'  
 'Stupid is as stupid does and all the rest of that shit'  
 Come'on pretty baby, call my bluff  
 'Cause for you my best was never good enough.  
 (< Every cloud has a silver lining; Every dog has his day; The tough get going when the going gets tough; A quitter never wins, a winner never quits; The sun doesn't shine on a sleeping dog's ass; If life gives you lemons, make lemonade; The early bird catches the worm; Rome wasn't built in a day; Life is like a box of chocolates: you never know what you're going to get; Stupid is as stupid does).

Another brilliant proverb collage was created by a female reader of *The New York Times* as her response to an earlier article, and constitutes her letter-to-the editor with the allusive title *The Futile Pursuit of Happiness*<sup>173</sup>:

What? Is Daniel Gilbert saying *money can't buy happiness; time heals all wounds; it's the little things that count; look before you leap; act in haste, regret at leisure* (Jon Gertner, Sept. 7)? Good lord, what will psychologists think of next? *A stitch in time saves nine?* (*The New York Times* September 21, 2003).

### 13.5 The Role of Proverbs on the Structural Level of Media Texts

Proverbs are syntactically complete sentences laden with semantic value, so another important aspect of applying paremias in media texts is their performance on the structural and semantic levels. Of special significance is the role proverbs play in the structuring of texts, be it a newspaper or a magazine article, a TV show episode or a popular song. First, I shall look at their role on the structural level of different media texts.

One of the strong positions of a text is its title. It is a well-established tradition to use proverbs as titles of media texts. Paremias appear in the titles of motion pictures

<sup>173</sup> This earlier article by the same title presented the results of a series of experiments conducted by the Harvard Psychology professor Daniel Gilbert and team, who studied how we predict what will make us happy or unhappy and also how we feel after the actual experience. <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/09/07/magazine/the-futile-pursuit-of-happiness.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

(*Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) (< *Every cloud has a silver lining*), *Fools Rush In* (1997) (< *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread*), *All's Faire in Love* (2011) (< *All is fair in love and war*), *Money Talks* (1997) and TV series (*There Is No 'I' in a Team* / *Grey's Anatomy*, *Necessity Is a Mother* / *Beverly Hills* (< *Necessity is the mother of invention*), *Out of Mind*, *Out of Sight* / *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (< *Out of sight, out of mind*), *All Roads Lead to Fitz* / *Scandal* (< *All roads lead to Rome*)). Countless examples of proverb titles are found in print press *Who pays the piper?* (< *Who pays the piper, calls the tune*) (*The Guardian* August 37, 2001), *A Cultural Reluctance to Spare the Rod; Newcomers Say Americans Spoil Children* (< *Spare the rod and spoil the child*) (*The New York Times* February 29, 2006), *Power corrupts, and how!* (< *Power corrupts*) (*The Observer* May 1, 2005) and popular songs: *You Only Live Twice* (Nancy Sinatra) (< *You only live once*), *What Goes Around Comes Around* (Justin Timberlake), *Practice Makes Perfect* (Billie Holiday).

Proverbs prove to be efficient tools for fulfilling the main tasks of the title. Apart from the general function of identifying a work of art, they brilliantly help arouse curiosity of the audience, convey meaning, and provide a summary of the whole text (Gill, 2008: 22-23).

Of all the media discourses considered here popular music is unsurpassed in the scope of the application of proverbs in titles. In some song titles proverbs appear in their standard form, as, for instance, in Elton John's *Like Father Like Son*, B. B. King's *Tomorrow Is Another Day*, or Garbage's *Silence Is Golden*. Applying a non-modified paremia in the title of a song makes it indefinite and, thus, addressed at virtually unlimited number of listeners. In such cases proverb titles depend on other recurrent elements of the song, mainly refrains, to serve as interpretative clues for the audience. More often than not, though, proverbs undergo changes in song titles, which is a natural phenomenon predetermined by the contents peculiarities and compositional characteristics of the song. The most frequently employed modification devices are truncation (*When in Rome* (< *When in Rome, do as the Romans do*)/ Billy Joel, *None But the Brave* (< *None but the brave deserve the fair*)/ Bruce Springsteen, *If Wishes Were Horses* (< *If wishes were horses, beggars would ride*)/ Bryan Adams) and application of proverb imagery (*Eye of the Beholder* (< *Beauty lies in the eye of the beholder*) / Metallica, *Spilt Milk* (< *There is no use crying over the spilt milk*)/ *Public Announcement*, *Thorn and a Wild Rose* (< *Every rose has a thorn*) / *The Allman Brothers Band*). More intricate cases include different instances of allusions *All My Roads* (< *All roads lead to Rome*) / Collin Raye, *When the Piper Calls* (< *Who pays the piper, calls the tune*) / *China Crisis*, word play *Jack of All Parades* (< *Jack of all trades, master of none*)/ Elvis Costello, *Bitter They Are, Harder They Fall* (< *The bigger they come, the harder they fall*) / Elvis Presley, and anti-proverbs *You Are What You Love* (< *You are what you eat*) / Jenny Lewis, *Men Will Be Boys* (< *Boys will be boys*) / Guy Clark, *Someday Never Comes* (< *Tomorrow never comes*) / Brandie Carlile.

For the illustration of the role proverbs play in the structuring of the TV series discourse I shall consider the afore mentioned ABC medical drama *Grey's Anatomy*, the

first seasons of which are especially marked by profuse application of proverbs that appear on the local structural level (within the framework of a single episode) and the global structural level (within the framework of a narrative arc). The local discursive elements featuring paremias include episode titles, opening and closing voice-overs, characters' dialogues.

Of considerable interest is the way proverbs function in voice-over narrations. Being an audio-visual system, the film frequently relies on the use of voice-over technique which serves as a unique way of conveying meaning and establishing special relations with the viewers. Therefore, the voice-over narration is not only a significant structural element of the TV series discourse but it also contributes to building its cognitive and content planes. What is being voiced by the invisible narrator in each *Grey's Anatomy* episode is laden with interpretational value. These opening and closing narrations are perhaps the most crucial parts of the whole episode. When proverbs are employed in them, they help focus the attention of the audience on the information necessary to interpret the meaning of the events and, thus, deduce the message. The episode entitled *The Heart of the Matter* (4-4) explores the problem of forgiveness or, rather, the ability to forgive. The opening narration contains allusions to two popular proverbs *Nothing is certain but death and taxes* and *To err is human / People make mistakes* that help establish the theme of the episode:

Opening voice-over: In life, *only one thing is certain, apart from death and taxes*. No matter how hard you try, no matter how good your intentions, *you are going to make mistakes*. You're going to hurt people. You're going to get hurt. And if you ever want to recover... there's really only one thing you can say.

Character's voice: I forgive you.

The closing voice-over narration summarizes all the events by opposing the traditional proverb providing a seemingly useful piece of advice – *Forgive and forget*. As the invisible narrator proceeds, it becomes clear that it is sometimes impossible in real life to forgive the ones who hurt us:

Closing voice-over: *Forgive and forget*. That's what they say. It's good advice, but it's not very practical. When someone hurts us, we want to hurt them back. When someone wrongs us, we want to be right. Without forgiveness, old scores are never settled... old wounds never heal. And the most we can hope for, is that one day we'll be lucky enough to forget.

In the dialogues of the *Grey's Anatomy* characters proverbs serve as eloquent means of expressing attitudes, i.e. emotional perception of people and events, as in a conversation between two rivaling interns fresh out of med school:

Karev: 4B's got post-op pneumonia. Let's start antibiotics.

Nurse: Are you sure that's the right diagnosis?

Karev: Well I don't know, I'm only an intern. Here's an idea, why don't you go spend four years in med school and let me know if it's the right diagnosis. She's short of breath, she's got fever, she's post-op. Start the antibiotics. (*walks over to Meredith*) God I hate nurses. I'm Alex. I'm with Jeremy, you're with the Nazi, right?

Meredith: She may not have pneumonia, you know. She could be splinting, or have a PE.

Karev: Like I said, I hate nurses.

Meredith: What did you just say? Did you just call me a nurse?

Karev: Well, *if the white cap fits...* (*A Hard Day's Night 1-1/ Grey's Anatomy*)

Interviewing is considered today as an entertainment rather than information vehicle (Altheide, 2001: 411). This transformation is believed to be caused by “the media logic that has developed since the early days of print journalism”. The main thesis behind this assumption is that a major reason for interviewing being so relevant nowadays is its shift “from an information orientation to an impact orientation that is more characteristic of our media culture” (Altheide, 2001:411). As ubiquitous as proverbs are they play a special role in the structural organization of the interview discourse. I shall start my analysis of the role Anglo-American proverbs play in the interview discourse structural organization with looking at their functioning in adjacency pairs. In a conventional interview communicants orient to the strict question-answer format. In Oprah Winfrey interviews I studied proverbs are used both as questions:

Oprah: *Do you think all people are created equal?*

Jamie Foxx: No. If that were true, there'd be no poverty, no shortcomings... We're all energy. Some people are stronger forces than others. (< *All men are created equal*) (interview with Jamie Foxx/ *O, The Oprah magazine*);

and answers:

Julia Roberts: <...> I've had people call me with numbers, and I say, “I can't even tell by the tone of your voice whether this is good or bad news”. You just have to let it go.

Oprah: And you have?

Julia Roberts: *Whatever happens is going to happen*, whether you're sitting by the phone anxious and worried about it or not. (< *What's going to happen will happen/ Whatever happens, happens*) (interview with Julia Roberts/ *O, The Oprah magazine*)

In several of Oprah's interviews, proverbs are used in prefaced questions, which help prepare both the interviewee and the audience for the next question, to herald new topics for discussion, thus providing their smooth switch:

Oprah: <...> You've been quoted as saying that *fame and money are great, but they don't bring you happiness*. What does?

Venus: My family. Laughter. Being able to decide what I want to do. My health. (< *Money can't buy happiness*) (interview with Venus Williams/ *O, The Oprah magazine*)

Celebrity profile interviews as compared with canonical news interviews are notable for the use of continuers, i.e. utterances complementing the question-answer pair and situating “their producer as the intended, and attentive, primary recipient of the talk being produced by an interlocutor” (Hutchby, 2005: 214). In each particular case they fulfill different pragmatic functions, e.g. passing judgments, or evaluating what is being said, as in the conversation with Salma Hayek:

Oprah: <...>So you didn't question whether you could or couldn't – it just was?

Salma: I wanted to do films, and at that time in Mexico, a film industry didn't really exist. So where do you go to do movies? You go to the mecca. I also was afraid I was a very bad actress, because I'd become famous very fast and was making money for people. <...> I never wanted to be a famous bad actress! I had a panic that people would think, She's good only because everyone knows her.

Oprah: *Girl, that's deep! Many would've settled for being a big fish in a not-so-small pond. (< Better a big fish in a little pond than a little fish in a big pond)* (interview with Salma Hayek/ *O, The Oprah magazine*)

### 13.6 The Role of Proverbs on the Semantic Level of Media Texts

It would not be an overestimation to say that newspaper journalists are keen on applying proverbs in their writings. The topics of their articles are indeed multifarious. Political and financial reviews along with sport reports or life and style stories feature all possible proverbs – old and modern, standard and modified. In Oprah Winfrey's magazine interviews, for instance, proverbs support the topics discussed by the famous journalist and her respondents. They include the 9/11 tragedy, personal growth and success stories, life lessons, women's problems, just to name a few. Here is an allusive use of the caution-giving proverb *Beware of a silent dog and silent water* in the talk with Madleine Albright:

Oprah: Could we have protected ourselves against the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks?

Madeline: I don't know the answer to that. What most Americans don't know is that we have prevented a lot of terrorist incidents before this one. *There's always the dog that doesn't bark that you don't know about.* We need to be very careful not to get so into the blame game that we forget those who died. The challenge is to draw lessons from the past and move forward without spending time finger-pointing. (interview with Madeline Albright/ *O, The Oprah magazine*)

As for popular music discourse, proverbs play a significant role in disclosing the themes of songs. These include love songs and songs addressing social issues. Profuse application of proverbs in both is tightly linked with the task to entertain and affect the listeners' feelings and emotions. Consider the following examples:

“And I believe in helping everybody,  
But when it comes to all them foreign loans,



I think we oughta remember that charity begins at home.  
 Yes it starts right now in (America, America) <...>” (America, I Believe in You/ Charlie Daniels)<sup>174</sup>;

“Just look him in the eye and simply shout:  
 Enough is enough  
 I can’t go on, I can’t go on no more no  
 Enough is enough  
 I want him out, I want him out that door now  
 Enough is enough  
 Enough is enough  
 That’s enough”.<sup>175</sup> (No More Tears/Enough is Enough/ Barbra Streisand and Donna Summer)

Some media reveal how widespread in real communication proverbs are. Print interviews, magazine and newspaper articles are live, i.e. non-fictitious, speech. As some of the examples reveal, playful application of proverbs proves to be not only a tool of choice in professional media writing but also in everyday speech that happens to appear or to be quoted in the mass media. This fact is indicative of the universality of the phenomenon and the critical approach to proverb *wisdom* giving way to reconsideration of old notions and expounding fresh ones.

Media texts serve as a wonderful platform for conveying opinions and judgments with the help of proverbs and about proverbs themselves. Journalists, screen writers, interviewees share their views on the role proverbs play in life. Broadly speaking, these reflections are a mere evidence of how (and to what effect) proverb pragmatic forces are applied in actuality. In the exemplary article *Cutting hospital corners* (*The Guardian* September 29, 1999) the author dwells on the problem of contradictory proverbs adding his layman’s everyday observations to a great many scholarly studies:

Many proverbs are less axiomatic than they sound. People who murmur sagely that *many hands make light work* will, when it suits them, announce with equal certainty that *too many cooks spoil the broth*. *He who hesitates is lost*, and yet *fools rush in where angels fear to tread*.

Here’s a typical example of how the swindle works. The project to rebuild University College Hospital, London, will “save” £160m in capital costs by using PFI, but for the next 30 years the hospital trust will have to shell out almost £30m a year to the developers. In other words, the taxpayer is obliged to pay nearly £900m for something that would otherwise have cost £160m. And, at the end of those 30 years, the hospital will belong to the private consortium. As I have suggested before, it’s like taking out a mortgage from a loan shark to buy a house which you already own – and then discovering, 25 years down the line, that the property has been repossessed by the lender anyway.

The end of the article is permeated with proverbial allusions, too:

<sup>174</sup> [http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/c/charlie\\_daniels/america\\_i\\_believe\\_in\\_you.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/c/charlie_daniels/america_i_believe_in_you.html)

<sup>175</sup> <http://www.songlyrics.com/barbra-streisand/no-more-tears-enough-is-enough-with-donna-summer-lyrics/>

Perhaps such analogies don't mean much to Gordon Brown, who has two handsome residences – 11 Downing Street and Dorneywood – provided free of charge. So let us put it in the sort of language which this connoisseur of proverbs ought to understand: *when the PFI goes a-borrowing, our children go a-sorrowing*. Or, if you prefer, *there's no such thing as the never-never* – merely a delayed day of reckoning. (< *He who goes a-borrowing, goes a-sorrowing; There is no such thing as a free lunch*).

Another article from the *Guardian* discusses the way proverb authority is exploited in the society:

Most people are brought up by parents who hope to waylay our inherent shallowness with platitudes such as “*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder*”, “*A cat may look at a king*” and other unlikely bollocks. Given the option, and whatever the circumstances, the majority of us will elect to boff a gorgeous person over a wart-covered hog. <...> But I will concede that, once one knows a person well, it is easier and quite correct that we see beyond their physical appearance. (*All the men I've never slept with* / *The Guardian* December 20, 2003)

Here is one more brilliant example of applying several synonymous proverbs to express philosophical reflections that constitute the message of a *Grey's Anatomy* episode. The starting point for these ideas in the opening voice-over narration is the popular dictum *Never leave that 'til tomorrow, which you can do today* also serving as a leitmotif for all the happenings in the episode:

A couple hundred years ago Benjamin Franklin shared with the world the secret of his success. *Never leave that 'til tomorrow, which you can do today*. This is the man who discovered electricity; you'd think we'd pay more attention to what he had to say. I don't know why we put things off, but if I had to guess it has a lot to do with fear. Fear of failure, fear of pain, fear of rejection. Sometimes the fear of just making a decision. Because... What if you're wrong? What if you make a mistake you can't undo? <...>

At the end of the episode the narrator reveals her interpretation of the popular proverb informed by her practical observations. We-narration is used in this case proving this understanding to be shared by many people, the viewers included:

“*The early bird catches the worm*”. “*A stitch in time saves nine*”. “*He who hesitates is lost*”. We can't pretend we haven't been told. We've all heard the proverbs, heard the philosophers, heard our grandparents warning us about *wasted time*; heard the damn poets urging us to *seize the day*. Still, sometimes we have to see for ourselves. We have to make our own mistakes. We have to learn our own lessons. We have to sweep today's possibility under tomorrow's rug until we can't anymore. Until we finally understand for ourselves what Benjamin Franklin meant. That knowing is better than wondering. That waking is better than sleeping. And that even the biggest failure, even the worst most intractable mistake, beats the hell out of not trying. (< *Time wasted is time lost*) (*If Tomorrow Never Comes* 1-6/ *Grey's Anatomy*)

Thus, closing the present chapter, I can conclude that the mass media discourse proves to be a really fascinating realm for proverb scholars. Paremias categorize reality by capturing some typical, i.e. recurrent, situations and, therefore, are unique

ready-made linguistic vehicles for representing similar ones. By doing so, they describe, interpret the world and help express various attitudes. The abundance of these folklore dictums, especially their creative transformations, in media texts testifies to their ubiquity and inexhaustible potential in handling all sorts of pragmatic tasks serving the goal of influencing the mass audience. Much is yet to be explored in this paremilogical field, and it is my hope that the approaches and results offered here can be of help in new scholarly endeavors.

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## 14 Proverbs and Foreign Language Teaching

### 14.1 Introduction

This chapter intends to provide answers to the following questions: (1) Why should proverbs play a part in foreign language teaching? (2) Which proverbs should be taught and learnt? (3) How can the teaching of proverbs be best accomplished? At the same time, it will offer an overview of current issues in phraseodidactic research and will, in addition, attempt to compile a proverb minimum (or optimum) found in the appendix. The chapter draws on the results of a survey on the knowledge of proverbs conducted among advanced learners of English. It focuses specifically on English and German, but the ideas presented can easily be adapted to the teaching of other languages.

### 14.2 Proverbs in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching

#### 14.2.1 On the Significance of Including Proverbs into Foreign Language Teaching

The task of foreign language teaching is to enable students to communicate in a language that is not their mother tongue. This means providing them with the most useful lexical and grammatical material and the necessary communicative strategies to apply their knowledge adequately. The characteristic features of language use in the target language should therefore form the point of departure. Research has established that phraseology is fundamental to the way language is used (Biber & Conrad, 1999; Moon, 1998; Wray, 2002, 2008; Schmitt, 2004; Granger & Meunier, 2008; Meunier & Granger, 2008). Phraseology includes a set of fixed polylexemic linguistic units which are characterized by semantic and syntactic stability and to a great extent by idiomaticity (Fiedler, 2007: 28), such as formulae, phrasal verbs, proverbial sayings, similes, binomials, and proverbs. Proverbs are considered here to be a part of the phrasicon of a language, and a subtype of phraseology. Knowledge of them is necessary for native and non-native speakers of a language to communicate effectively.

Despite the pervasiveness of proverbs in oral and written communication there is no accepted consensus about their role in foreign language teaching. On the one hand, as the time that teachers have at their disposal in language classes is limited, it seems to be a sheer luxury to teach proverbs in a context in which the pronunciation of words and grammatical structures still causes problems. If the importance of phraseological units is acknowledged at all, it might be reasonable to prioritize subtypes



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such as collocations or phrasal verbs over proverbs, because these may constitute a serious problem for language production and have to be mastered as an active language skill. On the other hand, textlinguistic research and discourse analysis have revealed that proverbs realize a large number of referential, communicative and textual functions and that they are also used in academic discourse (Gläser, 1990). It is due to the progress in phraseodidactics and its interconnectedness with other disciplines that the majority of researchers today agree on including proverbs in foreign language teaching (e.g. Mieder, 2004d; Hallsteinsdóttir, 2011; Nuessel, 2003; Lennon, 1998; Baur & Chlosta, 1996).

The important role that phraseology plays in communication, foreign language learning and teaching is also acknowledged by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)*, which aims to provide a common basis for the development of curricula, teaching materials and levels of proficiency for foreign language learning in Europe. The knowledge and appropriate use of proverbs are considered to be a relevant part of a learner's lexical competence (5.2.1.1 of the *CEFR*) as well as a key factor for the development of pupils' sociolinguistic competence:

These fixed formulae, which both incorporate and reinforce common attitudes, make a significant contribution to popular culture. They are frequently used, or perhaps more often referred to or played upon, for instance in newspaper headlines. A knowledge of this accumulated folk wisdom, expressed in language assumed to be known to all, is a significant component of the linguistic aspect of sociocultural competence.

The following subgroups and examples of the so-called expression of folk wisdom are mentioned:

proverbs, e.g. *a stitch in time saves nine*

idioms, e.g. *a sprat to catch a mackerel*

familiar quotations, e.g. *a man's a man for a' that*

expressions of:

belief, such as – weathersaws, e.g. *Fine before seven, rain by eleven*

attitudes, such as – clichés, e.g. *It takes all sorts to make a world*

values, e.g. *It's not cricket*. (*CEFR* p. 120)

The English draft forms the basis of this important document and, strangely enough, the German translation tries to find examples that take the English ones as its means of orientation. In this way, *Gleich getan, ist viel gespart* – obviously a translation of the English *A stitch in time saves nine*, but unknown in German – is given as an example of a proverb, where a commonly used German proverb would have been expected. Other drawbacks of this document are the heterogeneous use of terms (for example, *fixed phrase* [p. 111], *stock phrase* [p. 35, 86], *fixed formulae* [p. 120], *expression of folk wisdom* [p. 120], *frequently used 'routines' and patterns* [p. 29] are used interchangeably to denote the same subject) and the fact that the *CEFR* does not address the question of which phraseological units (including proverbs) are to be taught on which

levels, i.e., that it does not tackle the problem of a phraseological (and paremiological) minimum (Pirttisaari, 2006). Further phraseodidactic research will thus have to place particular emphasis on these aspects (Konecny et al., 2013). In the following we examine in more detail why proverbs should be taught and learnt, and identify motivational, linguistic, cultural and epistemological reasons.

#### 14.2.2 The Motivational Potential of Proverbs

B. Wotjak (1996: 7) mentions the strong interest that learners have in proverbs. This can mainly be attributed to their colourful authenticity and the insight they provide into a language community's culture and history. In addition, proverbs are popular because of their stylistic features (e.g. alliteration, rhyme, rhythm, parallelism) (chapter 1 of this Handbook). Therefore, proverbs can present great motivational potential because students are challenged by being obliged to analyse their linguistic content and to understand their often figurative meaning in a given situational context. As the *CEFR* quote above indicates (and as chapter 15 about anti-proverbs in this book will show in more detail), proverbs are often modified or alluded to. Those creative uses, as language play in general, evokes humour and intellectual joy, which stimulates learners and helps to enliven lessons.

#### 14.2.3 Proverbs as a Basis for Language Learning and Teaching

Proverbs are a ubiquitous phenomenon, an integral part of authentic language use. This seems to be especially true for the situations and genres that the major part of our language learners, school and university students, are faced with. Pop music is rich in proverbs (Mieder, 1989; Lenk, 2001); so are films (Winick, 2003); funny proverbs are used as status updates on *Facebook*, and manipulated proverbs are popular in genres of youth culture (e.g. T-shirt slogans, flyers, false logos). The inclusion of proverbs in the curriculum gives learners the chance to apply the linguistic knowledge they have acquired outside the classroom and offers teachers the opportunity to make their pupils familiar with vocabulary, grammatical patterns and phonetic rules on the basis of the material that is in the focus of their interests. One might call this the linguistic reason or the language competence argument. Proverbs are a substantial constituent of language overall and they illustrate important functions in discourse. Litovkina (2000: vii) argues as follows (see also Hanzén, 2007: 8-10):

The person who does not acquire competence in using proverbs will be limited in conversation, will have difficulty comprehending a wide variety of printed matter, radio television, songs etc., and will not understand proverb parodies which presuppose a familiarity with a stock proverb. Furthermore proverbs are ideally suited to pedagogical purposes because they are easy to learn

(...) They contain frequently used vocabulary and exemplify the entire gamut of grammatical and syntactic structures.

A large number of researchers have argued in this direction and provided material for several languages taking proverbs and other types of phraseological units as a starting point for second language classes<sup>176</sup> (e.g. Litovkina, 2000; Abadi, 2000; Wilson, 2004; Hessky & Ettinger, 1997; Bardósi, Ettinger & Stölting, 2003; Lattey & Hieke, 1990; Nuessel, 1982; Wotjak & Richter, 1988).

#### 14.2.4 Proverbs and Figurative Language

Another factor that makes the significance of proverbs for foreign language teaching evident is its extensive reliance on figurative speech. The majority of proverbs are metaphorical or involve some kind of metaphor (Norrick, 1985). Examples are proverbs such as *Too many cooks spoil the broth* and *Make hay while the sun shines*. As Lakoff & Johnson (1980: 5) put it, “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another”. Metaphors involve a transfer from one (usually relatively concrete) cognitive domain to another (typically more abstract one) based on a relationship of similarity or analogy. They enable us to describe the world because we grasp new concepts with the help of already existing categories. This “epistemological function of metaphor” (Nuessel, 2003: 402) is central to our cognitive development. Proverbs can also be metonymic as they are based on an objectively existing relationship between two entities. In *Two heads are better than one* and *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*, for example, the two parts of the human body are used on the basis of a *pars pro toto* relationship. Both metaphor and metonymy are important because they fulfil crucial functions in discourse. The metaphors and metonymies we find in proverbs are not freely created, but pre-fabricated. The decoding processes, however, are similar. Therefore, the inclusion of proverbs and the discussion of their nature in foreign language learning can help students to develop the ability to further understand figurative language.

#### 14.2.5 Proverbs as a Mirror of Culture

Proverbs provide insight into culture in a number of ways. As they are inherited from generation to generation they preserve traditional (and sometimes outdated) views and values, behaviour, experiences, and working methods (e.g. *Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise*; *Spare the rod and spoil the child*; *A*

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<sup>176</sup> The terms second language, foreign language, and L2 are used synonymously in this chapter.

woman's place is in the home). Simultaneously, modern proverbs (e.g. *What you see is what you get*; *Garbage in, garbage out*; *A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle*) reflect life in the age of computers as well as the changing position of women in society. In addition, culture-boundedness can be seen in the positive or negative connotations of particular proverbial elements. For example, *dog* is mainly used in a derogatory sense in English (e.g. *Every dog has its day*) and *heart* is commonly considered the seat of feelings (e.g. *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*).

Proverbs not only give insight into former ways of thinking, judging and working, but some of them also provide insights into previous stages of a language. Examples in English are *He who hesitates is lost* and *Manners maketh the man*. In this way, the incorporation of proverbs creates a tremendous opportunity to integrate literary-cultural with linguistic education (Awramiuk, 2011).

The idea that proverbs reflect the culture of a speech community does not mean, however, that there is a 1:1-relation between the content of proverbs and the worldview of a nation. As Mieder (2007: 402) argues, “[c]are must be taken when looking at proverbs as expressing aspects of a certain worldview or mentality of a people that no stereotypical conclusions about a so-called ‘national character’ are drawn.”

In fact, proverbs often contain national stereotypes and racial prejudice and their potential as disseminators of those views should not be underestimated. As Mieder (1993) shows, the proverb-like formula *Only a dead Indian is a good Indian* not only served as a defamatory slogan about native Americans, but became a productive model for slurs against other ethnic groups. It is, however, questionable whether this is a reason to ignore them. They should instead be addressed and challenged within the language curriculum as proverbs that include stereotypes have potential in terms of character-education. Their appropriate treatment in the language classroom can help raise awareness and cultivate an open and critical mind (Popovic, 2004).

A cultural perspective on proverbs should also include their use. It has been widely acknowledged that there are a number of culture-bound differences and peculiarities with regard to this. For example, in China proverbs are more often used than in other countries, and signal an author's high level of education and experience (You Ting, 2010: 151; Günthner, 1990), which is why they permeate even academic works. Such cultural differences and traditions have to be taken into consideration in foreign language teaching. As regards English, the dominance of this language as a means of international communication should be born in mind. The use of a foreign language is not restricted to the application of vocabulary and grammar, as textual conventions and rhetorical traditions that exist in the speech community are of importance as well. As contrastive discourse analyses have revealed, metaphor plays a central role in English academic prose (Thielmann, 2009), and humorous introductions are characteristic for scientific presentations (Reershemius, 2012). Proverbs can play an important part in the realisation of both these textual functions and should be considered in this context at least in advanced stages of foreign language classes.



### 14.2.6 Proverbs and Fluency

As mentioned before, phraseology (including proverbs) is a substantial constituent of language. Data about their proportion in communication vary and depend on register and genre. Erman and Warren (2000) found that as much as 58.6% of spoken discourse and 52.3% of written language was prefabricated. Howarth (1998) in his study on academic writing found that between 31 and 40% was made up of phraseological units (collocations and idioms). Phraseology serves to facilitate language use by providing a processing advantage and as a number of studies have revealed, the use of prefabricated phrases and sentences decreases processing efforts in speech production and improve learners' fluency (e.g. Wray, 2002; Conklin & Schmitt, 2008). Pawley & Snyder (1983: 208), introducing the term *institutionalized sentence stem* for holistically stored sequences, were among the first to describe this:

Indeed, we believe that memorized sentences and phrases are the normal building blocks of fluent spoken discourse, and at the same time, that they provide models for the creation of many (partly) new sequences which are memorable and in their turn enter the stock of familiar usages.

Their list of examples includes a number of proverbs, such as *You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink; A stitch in time saves nine; Think twice before you +verb phrase [e.g. leap]*). Their knowledge is advantageous to foreign language learners both in receptive and productive language use. It aids comprehension because it makes the incoming language flow predictive, and eases processing loads in speech production as the speaker is able to concentrate on passages which are produced creatively (Lennon, 1998: 18).

## 14.3 Towards a Proverb Optimum

### 14.3.1 Selection Criteria

In foreign language instruction it is important to teach the most well-known and current material. This is true for both simple or complex word lexemes and for sentence-like expressions such as proverbs. "It is the proverbs that are in use today that ought to be taught," writes Mieder (2004d: 147). Therefore, it is of utmost importance to find the current and most frequently used proverbs as a base for teaching.

According to Grzybek & Chłosta (2009), studies aimed at compiling a paremiological minimum can be subdivided into frequency-oriented approaches, which are based on the analysis of written and spoken texts, and knowledge-oriented methods, which are based on testing a particular number of subjects. Corpora, which are now generally used in language studies in order to check theoretical hypotheses, provide

problems for phraseologists and paremiologists. A number of studies conducted for several languages have shown that the average frequency of well-known phraseological units including proverbs, is very low in corpora (Moon, 1998, Colson, 2007). “[T]here are often wide discrepancies between implicit native-speaker knowledge of idioms, catchphrases, proverbs and other word-combinations and their frequency of occurrence in large-scale computer corpora” (Cowie, 2003: 73). Corpus analysis can therefore not be the only method for finding a proverb optimum for foreign language learners. One of the first paremiologists to conduct research with regard to the second approach was G.L. Permiakov (1982, 1985), who published a list of 300 commonly used Russian proverbs. So-called paremiological minima (or proverb minima) have meanwhile been established for several languages (Čermák, 2003; Ďurčo, 2004; Hessky & Ettinger, 1997; Kacjan, 2013).

With regard to the English language, a precise proverb minimum is still a desideratum. However, a number of researchers have done important preparatory work in this field. Litovkina’s (2000) book includes exercises to practise and apply 450 Anglo-American proverbs. Mieder (2004d: 129f.) presents a list of 75 proverbs that “are certainly used with high frequency in the United States”. Lau’s (1996) study on US-proverbs and their relation to American values includes a list of 188 American proverbs with their number of occurrences in Lexis/Nexi, a corpus of US and overseas newspapers, magazines and journals. On the basis of empirical research (proverb generation tasks and proverb familiarity tests with college students in four regions of the USA), Haas (2008) presents a list of 313 commonly known and used English proverbs. Using these collections in combination with the author’s own proverb collection (Fiedler 2007: 90)<sup>177</sup> and the *Collins COBUILD Idioms Dictionary* (2002)<sup>178</sup> as sources, a list of 100 commonly used English proverbs has been compiled (see Appendix 1).

A decisive factor for the inclusion of a proverb into this list was its use in a ‘marked’ or innovative way (Fiedler, 2007). Those marked uses include different types of modifications of proverbs (exchange, reordering or addition of constituents), the creation of deliberate ambiguity (of *phraseological puns* – Naciscione, 2010), combinations of proverbs (or accumulation – Partington, 2009: 1808), their overuse, non-verbal presentation and other techniques. These uses are a type of ludic linguistic behaviour or *language play* (Crystal, 1998). The following newspaper headlines and text passages illustrate this:

<sup>177</sup> The author’s corpus has been built up primarily during a period of 25 years of intensive but unsystematic collecting of items from newspapers, literary and academic texts, conversation, television and radio programmes.

<sup>178</sup> This dictionary is based on the *Bank of English* corpus comprising over 450 million words. It covers both British and American phraseology and includes labels for the most frequent phraseological units.

*Hillary, not curiosity, killed the cat*<sup>179</sup>

*Why writers want to swap pens for swords*<sup>180</sup>

*The sequester chickens have come home to roost or they would have if they could get clearance to take off.*<sup>181</sup>

The use of a proverb in such a marked way (as well as the existence of so-called anti-proverbs – see chapter 15) can be considered proof of its currency. The authors presuppose that the reader/listener detects the phraseological base form, i.e. the proverb in its ordinary form (Naciscione, 2010: 47). Otherwise the intended effect would not be brought about. For all the 100 proverbs listed in the appendix, marked uses have been found.

The 100 expressions presented in Appendix 1 fulfil the following conditions for items in a paremiological minimum: Firstly, they correspond to the definition of proverbs presented in chapter 1 of this Handbook;<sup>182</sup> secondly, they are familiar to and widely used by native speakers (Haas, 2008; column 4); thirdly, they are considered to be relevant to the English language and culture, according to the research of leading paremiologists (e.g. Mieder, 2004d; Litovkina, 2000; column 2); fourthly, they occur relatively frequently in corpora (CCID, column 5); and finally, they are used in the media (Lau, 1996; columns 3 and 6). The 100 items therefore present the proverbs a user of English is likely to encounter in oral and written communication, so that it will be useful for a learner of this language to know them and their meaning, at least in terms of receptive use. The question of whether the 100 proverbs presented in Appendix 1 constitute an individual learner's paremiological optimum is difficult to answer as it depends on a large number of factors, such as age, personality, learning context, native language, degree of language proficiency, purpose of learning the foreign language and others.

<sup>179</sup> *Sunday Independent* (11 November 2007) (Hillary Clinton was accused of having killed a cat

<sup>180</sup> *Irish Independent* (10 November 2007) (article on the strike launched by the Writers' Guild of America)

<sup>181</sup> *The Colbert Report* (23 April 2013) (Flights were cancelled and delayed in the USA due to budget cuts, called the Sequester)

<sup>182</sup> Some of the items in the various lists had to be excluded, as they represent other subtypes of phraseological units, such as binomials (e.g. *penny-wise and pound-foolish* in Mieder's list), catch-phrases (e.g. *Life is like a box of chocolates ...* in Haas's list), and phrasal idioms (e.g. *kill two birds with one stone* in Haas's list).

### 14.3.2 A Questionnaire Study

#### 14.3.2.1 The Knowledge of Proverbs Among Advanced Learners of English

Due to their metaphorical contents and connotations proverbs are problematic for even fluent language learners. We have acquired the phraseological competence in our native language over the course of many years as a result of immersion in the cultural context in which the language is rooted (Prodromou, 2007: 23), and it is hardly possible to gain this competence in a foreign language.

To gain further insight into the state of knowledge of phraseology and especially proverbs and to find how their acquisition can be improved a survey among German university students of English was conducted (160 respondents; level of proficiency: B2/C1). In the first part of the questionnaire students were asked to paraphrase the meaning of eight English proverbs and, if possible, to note where or how they had learnt them. From these, four were presented non-verbally and had to be identified first from caricatures and a photograph (see appendix 2), which is cognitively and linguistically challenging for language learners. The results of this first part of the survey are presented in Table 14.1.

As Table 14.1 shows, the knowledge of the eight English proverbs – which are all considered to be part of the proverb minimum for English – was relatively poor. Only two of them (I *The early bird catches the worm* and III *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*) were known by the majority of students. Two proverbs (IV *Waste not, want not* and VIII *The chickens come home to roost*) were known by only 4 and 2 students respectively.

Those students who had spent a period of at least one term in an English-speaking country achieved better results, as in 4 out of the 8 proverbs they scored higher. As expected, older students knew more proverbs than younger ones. However, for the knowledge of some of the proverbs the year of studying does not seem to be as influential as a stay abroad.

The majority of respondents were not able to indicate where and how they had learnt a particular proverb, but those who provided information on this gave the following situations as sources: media (television/films/Internet/pop songs; 11 respondents), friends (e.g. “A friend told me about a couple of things that happened and ended: that was the last straw”/“my host mother in the UK always said so”; 9 respondents), linguistics seminar (7 r.), literature (e.g. “read it in a book”; 7 r.), school (4 r.), and family (4 r.).

**Table 14.1:** Correct paraphrases (%) of proverbs (presented in the given form [V-VIII] or in pictures – Appendix 2 – [I-IV])

	Proverb	all students (= 160)	students having been abroad <sup>183</sup> (= 48)	students in year 3 and above (= 47)
I	<i>The early bird catches the worm</i>	85.15	91.8	81.45
II	<i>The pen is mightier than the sword</i>	11.7	6.7	6.3
III	<i>An apple a day keeps the doctor away</i>	64.8	70.8	66.6
IV	<i>Waste not, want not</i>	2.5	0	5.9
V	<i>A stitch in time saves nine</i>	37.0	33.3	41.2
VI	<i>The last straw</i> <sup>184</sup>	11.1	16.8	22.6
VII	<i>Absence makes the heart grow fonder</i>	44.4	66.7	58.8
VIII	<i>The chickens come home to roost</i>	1.25	0	2.6

#### 14.3.2.2 Mother Tongue Influences

Irujo (1986) found that advanced learners of English rely on their first language to comprehend and produce second language idioms. The survey confirms these findings for the apprehension of proverbs. It reveals that L1 transfer plays an important role in learners' processing of L2 proverbs and that this transfer can be positive and negative. The two best known proverbs are I and III, which can be attributed to the fact that, due to the impact of English, both are well known as German proverbs as well. *Der frühe Vogel fängt den Wurm* is the popular German loan translation of the English proverb *The early bird catches the worm* (Mieder 2004a); *An apple a day keeps the doctor away* can be found in various German translations (Fiedler 2012a: 75) as well as in the English original (Mieder 2004c).

Negative transfer can be seen in the relatively large number of wrong answers for some of the little known proverbs. For *the last straw*, for example, no less than 45.1% of the paraphrases given were wrong, comprising "the last chance / hope / possibility / the only help / the only thing that helps / if nothing else works / the last thing you can cling to". Obviously, they go back to the German literal counterpart *der letzte*

<sup>183</sup> Including stays for at least 6 months.

<sup>184</sup> This word-group unit was included because it is a short version of the proverb *The last straw breaks the camel's back* (Mieder et al., 1992: 567).

*Strohthalm (an den man sich klammert)* (with the meaning ‘to clutch at any straw’), which might be called a false friend.

### 14.3.2.3 The Role of Context

The second part of the survey referred to the role that context can play when proverbs are processed. The relatively little known proverbs II, IV, and V-VIII were now once more presented embedded in authentic texts (see Appendix 2). The survey reveals that the students, who again were asked to paraphrase the meaning of the proverbs, scored significantly higher in this part (see Table 14.2 and Figure 14.1).

**Table 14.2:** Correct paraphrases (%) for proverbs embedded in texts

	Proverb	Results (context-isolated)	Results (embedded)
II	<i>The pen is mightier than the sword</i>	11.7	74.1
IV	<i>Waste not, want not</i>	2.5	39.6
V	<i>A stitch in time saves nine</i>	37.0	77.6
VI	<i>The last straw</i>	11.1	42.6
VII	<i>Absence makes the heart grow fonder</i>	44.4	84.5
VIII	<i>The chickens come home to roost</i>	1.25	30.9

The use of context (to be understood here as the immediate co-text, the words and phrases used together with the proverb) can be seen as a strategy to arrive at the meaning of an unknown unit (Cooper, 1999). This is obvious especially in the case of the proverb *The pen is mightier than the sword*. The high score for this proverb can be attributed to its self-explanatory character and its use in a report that illustrates it (see Appendix 2). The explicit phrase *to reduce violence in America* that is used in connection with the proverb will have been understood by all students. Even in the case of a little known and opaque proverb, *the chickens come home to roost*, a suitable context made more than a quarter of the students infer the correct meaning.

Nevertheless, context should not be overestimated. In none of the examples was it possible to reach a 100% score for an embedded proverb. Reasons for this might be that students were not able to understand all lexical items in the given texts or that they lacked the socio-cultural background knowledge to interpret the textual situation adequately.

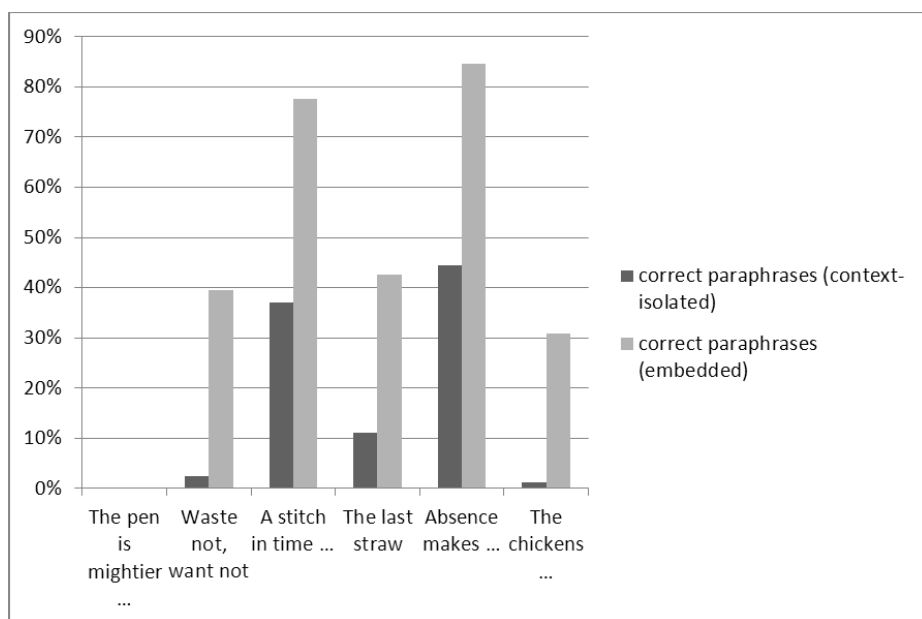


Figure 14.1: Correct paraphrases (context-isolated and embedded)

### 14.3.3 Some Implications for the Learning and Teaching of Proverbs

The questionnaire study presented in 3.2. threw some light on the knowledge of proverbs among advanced learners of English and on the way they processed them. Despite the limited number of participants and the relatively small number of proverbs tested the survey leads us to valid conclusions regarding the teaching of proverbs.

#### 14.3.3.1 Teaching Proverbs in an Appropriate Context

One of the main results of the questionnaire study is that the meaning of proverbs is best apprehended in actual contexts of use. Proverbs need to be acquired in living performance (Mechling, 2004: 122). As Mieder (1996: 597) points out, “[p]roverbs in collections are almost meaningless or dead.” They refer to social situations and can be seen as strategies for dealing with them. For this reason, we should not divorce them from their contexts. Corpora enable us to provide suitable contexts. An example is given in appendix 2, where *The chickens come home to roost* is used in an authentic context, a spoken radio commentary. The socio-cultural background knowledge is easily activated by means of Internet sources (Wikipedia *Moscow theatre hostage crisis*, July1, 2013). More recent examples include the austerity program introduced in

the USA in March 2013 known as Sequester. When it led to a number of problems in the economy, several newspapers made use of the proverb in their reports (3.1).

Students' analyses of those texts can form an ideal starting point in advanced language classes. As Nuessel (2003: 399) argues, "[t]he real linguistic task starts when the language learner attempts to learn when and how to apply the proverb to a concrete communicative situation". As the examples above show, modified proverbs should not be excluded from teaching materials and they give a good impression of the creative use of proverbs in present-day media.

The insight that proverbs and phraseology should be taught and acquired on the basis of authentic texts is very much in line with the three-step teaching model for phraseology in general ("phraseologischer Dreischritt") which was introduced by Kühn (1992). The first step ("Erkennen") is the *identification* of the proverb in a text. Learners have to be enabled to realise that a string of words is meant in a figurative sense. The second step ("Entschlüsseln"), the *decoding process*, includes that learners *understand* the meaning of a unit, which should therefore be presented in a typical context and genre. The third step ("Gebrauchen") is the *use* of a phrase or proverb. Lüger (1997: 98f.) proposes an extension of the model with a fourth step between steps two and three, which aims at consolidation: The use of a unit should be prepared and facilitated by suitable exercises.

The phase of identifying proverbs will be facilitated by students' knowledge of the formal characteristics of proverbs (such as rhyme, rhythm, formulaic pattern – chapter 1 of this Handbook) and their metaphorical contents. The sentences *Don't count your chickens before they are hatched* and *Make hay while the sun shines* cannot be interpreted as ordinary propositions referring to animals or farming. As we have seen in the survey, metaphorical proverbs possess various degrees of transparency, and the existence of an equivalent in one's mother tongue can be important. In general, with regard to English, the identification of proverbs is not likely to cause severe problems. In the survey described above a considerable number of students were able to mark a proverb as something well-known, but they were not able to give its meaning (e.g. "I have heard it in pop songs, but I don't know what it means" for *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*). The dominant role of English in popular culture might be the reason why people are to a certain extent familiar with a number of proverbs and phrases in this language without really understanding or knowing them.

#### 14.3.3.2 Sources of Reference

In order to understand proverbs, special dictionaries that are based on word usage in corpora have proven to be very helpful, as they contain examples excerpted from the corpora, like the *Collins Cobuild Idiom Dictionary*. As proverbs do not occur frequently in corpora (3.1.), however, not all of those that are considered as belonging to the paremiological minimum can be found in dictionaries. For example, *Waste not, want not* (known by only 2.3% of the respondents in our survey) is not included in the *CCID*.



In cases like these on-line resources can be recommended, such as, for English, *The Phrase Finder* ([www.phrases.uk.com](http://www.phrases.uk.com)). Here a query about *Waste not, want not* results in the following information:

Waste not...

Posted by ESC on May 10, 2000

In Reply to: Phrase posted by sherri novak on May 09, 2000

: Where and when and by whom did the phrase “waste not want not” start?

“Waste not, want not. The less we waste, the less we lack in the future. The proverb has been traced back to 1772, and is first cited in the United States in the 1932 ‘Topper Takes a Trip’ by T. Smith...” From the “Random House Dictionary of Popular Proverbs and Sayings” by Gregory Y. Titelman (Random House, New York, 1996).

Re: Waste not... ESC 05/10/00

“A Dictionary of American Proverbs” by Wolfgang Mieder & others (Oxford University Press, New York, 1992) cites the 1932 use of the phrase. It also has “1. Those who waste will want. (recorded distribution) [...]”

In addition, students can be encouraged to join forums for debate on phraseology. As the following passages show, in the case of *Waste not, want not* this turns out to be helpful, as the information given by users includes synonyms for some of the words as well as on the structure of the proverb:

**What exactly does the term “waste not want not” mean?**

CLIVE H: The term “waste not want not” probably originates in Yorkshire and means exactly what it says, never wasting anything results in never wanting anything.[...]

D\_r\_siva: [...] If we don’t waste what we have, we’ll still have it in the future and will not lack (want) it.

Snowflake...: If you waste stuff, later on you will find yourself without stuff and therefore “want”. So if you don’t waste, you are conservative and won’t want things later. I don’t see how it relates to food, though.

Mandy\_01: If you don’t waste what you have now, you won’t be in want (needy, lacking, poor) later.

Maxwell: If you don’t waste food then you’ll have less reason to want it later. I personally think ‘waste not, need not’ is more effective.

Kevin: It means if you don’t waste things, you will never lack (want) for things that you need.

Merlin: it means If you don’t waste things, you are less likely to end up lacking.

(<http://de.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20081121140038AAMLiQ6>, July1, 2013)

### 14.3.3.3 Receptive and Productive Knowledge

Kühn's third step, Use or Application, leads us to the principal question of whether the productive use of proverbs should be considered an aim of foreign language teaching at all. Several authors have expressed their hesitancy towards it because it might be seen as an inappropriate penetration into the native speaker's domain (Dobrovolskij & Ljubimova, 1993; Lüger, 2004: 158). O'Keeffe et al. (2007: 80) mention the "status as the 'badge of membership' of the speech communities from which they spring" that idioms have "because of their cultural resonance". This is certainly true for proverbs as well with their long traditions and cultural roots and so their use might be interpreted as an excessive identification with the target language community.

With regard to the productive use of proverbs, language learners' aims have to be taken into consideration. For those who have the desire to become members of the native-speaker culture, the productive use of frequent proverbs can be important. It will enable new immigrants to communicate effectively with Anglo-American native speakers, as Mieder (1994: 312) argues. Proverbs are often used to establish and solidify relationships, create humour and to confront problems in communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). The shared knowledge of a proverb can help to achieve interpersonal harmony between speakers.

For the majority of foreign language learners, however, the principle will be that "receptive mastery is more important than productive repertoire" (O'Keeffe et al., 2007: 76; see also Baur & Chlosta, 1996: 23; Lüger, 2004: 157; Ettinger, 2007). As explained in 3.2.1., phraseological units including proverbs are stumbling blocks for non-native speakers. Prodromou (2007) has shown that non-native speakers are often not granted the same rights concerning the use of phraseology as native speakers. What is seen as creative play in native speaker conversations is often regarded as an error in non-native speakers' talk. The specialist literature includes more than a few examples of stylistic blunders with sayings and proverbs (e.g. Wotjak, 1996). They are probably what the authors of the *CEFR* had in mind when they described the "sociolinguistic appropriateness" of a B2-level speaker in the following way: "Can sustain relationships with native speakers without unintentionally amusing or irritating them or requiring them to behave other than they would with a native speaker." (Wotjak, 1996: 123)

Against the background of this field of tension – that, on the one hand, non-native speakers want to be expressive and creative though using a foreign language and, on the other hand, the observation that the use of phraseology often presents a minefield – the strategy of metacommunicative signalling is worthwhile considering. Proverbs are often accompanied by expressions such as *so to speak*, *as the proverb goes*, *as they say* or *we say*. In this way speakers control and support the receiver's comprehension by marking their linguistic choices as something special, something that cannot be understood literally (Fiedler, 2007: 87-89; Čermák, 2004). Compare the following examples:

*The grass is always greener over here.*

*“The grass is always greener on the other side”, as the old saying goes. But here in Ireland it happens to be true. We’ve definitely got green grass. At least 40 shades of it. (Leipziger Volkszeitung 4/5 December 1999)*

*One more big payday with Petty and that would be it for me. I was **what they call** over the hill. (B. Dylan Chronicles, 2004: 148)*

Metacommunicative signals like these are highly recommended in intercultural communication, when the speaker is not sure of the stylistic adequacy of a proverb (Dobrovolskij & Ljubimova, 1993). Students have to be made aware of the fact that an additional cultural *hedge* such as, *as you might say in English* or *isn’t this a situation where you say ...* can avoid embarrassment and unwelcome reactions.

#### 14.3.3.4 The Contrastive Perspective

Phraseological equivalence presents an intensively studied field (Korhonen, 2007; Dobrovolskij, 2011), and a number of authors have recently stressed the complexity of the issue by outlining different approaches of contrastive idiom research (Farø, 2006; Menado-Blanco, 2010). The present chapter of this handbook does not focus on equivalence as an abstract property used to describe the aimed-at quality of a target text in the translation (Koller, 2004), but instead is concerned with the existence of equivalents, i.e. of proverbs that can be regarded as identical or at least corresponding, and which serve as substitutes in two languages. The contrastive perspective is helpful in making students aware of the similarities and differences that exist between proverbs in a foreign language and their mother tongue.

Altogether four types of correspondence between L1 and L2 proverbs can be distinguished: *Total* equivalence, *partial* equivalence, *zero-equivalence* and *pseudo-equivalence*. The reason for the existence of corresponding proverbs can be found in language contact and common sources. Examples of the former can be easily found due to the growing influence of English on European languages (Mieder, 2004a-c, 2010; Fiedler, 2006, 2010, 2012b; Rozumko, 2012b). With regard to common sources, identical or similar proverbs can be traced back to mythological stories, classical literary works (e.g., Shakespeare, Dante, Cervantes), folk narrations, fables and legends (Pirainen, 2010: 12; 2012). Among those internationally known loan translations are *One hand washes the other*, *One swallow does not make a summer* and *All’s well that ends well*. Equivalents are not restricted to European languages, however. Paczolay’s 1997 work registers equivalents of *Like father, like son* and *Walls have ears* in 46 languages each, including Chinese and Japanese and Arabic, Persian, Chinese, and Japanese respectively.

Taking the 100 English proverbs in Appendix 1 as a basis, equivalents for more than 40% can be found for German. However, as the inverted commas with the word *total* above serve to indicate, full equivalence, i.e. total correspondence in all possible parameters, does not seem realistic in two languages. As a number of researchers have

convincingly shown (e.g. Gehweiler, 2006; Dobrovol'skij, 2002), superficially equivalent phraseological units, including proverbs, can differ with respect to frequency and register, and can have different variants and prefer different external arguments.

The group of partial equivalents encompasses proverbs with minor structural and/or lexical differences. The biblical warning “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16: 18) is known with the indefinite or definite article in English (*Pride comes before a fall*) and only with the definite article in German (*Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall*). The English proverb *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush* is known in German with the same imagery basis, but different constituents, as *Lieber den Spatz in der Hand als die Taube auf dem Dach* [ww: Better a sparrow in the hand than a pigeon on the roof]. For the foreign language learner and user those minor grammatical and lexical differences can cause central problems as structural stability can be a decisive precondition of the proverbial character of an expression.

A further constellation is the lack of equivalents, i.e. the situation that a proverb in one language has no correspondent proverb in the other. For example, the English *Every dog has its day* has no counterpart in German. As mentioned above, in a situation where one language exercises dominant influence on other languages such a constellation is often a starting point for loan processes.

Finally, there is the occurrence of pseudo-equivalents, which are normally termed false friends (*faux amis*). They have identical constituents and are based on the same image, but carry different meanings. In the questionnaire study *the last straw* turned out to be one for the students. The complete proverb *The last straw breaks the camel's back*, which is rarely used today, would certainly not have caused problems. The popular reduction *the last straw*, however, made the participants remember the German expression with identical constituents, *der letzte Strohalm*, which is a false friend (see 3.2.2.).

Students should know about these different types of equivalents to be alert to potential pitfalls. Here again it is on the level of the text that subtle differences become obvious and should be discussed. From a pragmatic point of view, the knowledge of equivalents and proverb parallels seems to be especially important, as their use might be a way for non-native speakers to be expressive and creative without entering the social space of another speech community or *merely aping native speakers*. It can be very useful for learners to know about the existence and correct wording of a proverb that they know from their native language and are therefore able to use adequately in the foreign language (Vajičková, 2000). In combination with the metacommunicative techniques described above (*There is a proverb in my language ...*) this might be a strategy to use colourful language, bring one's own culture and identity into the discourse and create a cooperative atmosphere by finding something that people have in common. The learner's individual proverb optimum should include some of those expressions, although they do not necessarily constitute the proverb minimum

described above. For the two languages this chapter is focused on, this means that the following English proverbs are useful to know for German learners:

*Constant dropping wears away the stone* (German: *Steter Tropfen höhlt den Stein*)

*A burnt child dreads the fire* (German: *Ein gebranntes Kind scheut das Feuer*)

*The apple doesn't fall far from the tree* (German: *Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm*)

*In wine is truth* (German: *Im Wein ist Wahrheit*)

*Coming events cast their shadows before* (German: *Große Ereignisse werfen ihre Schatten voraus*).

An important aim of foreign language teaching is to enable students to continue their acquisition as part of their individual studies. As phraseological units and proverbs are ubiquitous phenomena, as we said in 1.1., they present an ideal subject for autonomous learning. Students should be encouraged to keep notebooks containing proverbs that they encounter outside the classroom (Irujo, 1993: 217) or to use worksheets, models of which Ettinger (2001) and Lüger (2004) prepared for French. In addition, several researchers (e.g. Ettinger, 2001; Bergerová [no year]) show didactic perspectives in combination with modern media (web-concordancer, Internet, CD-ROM) (see also Konecny et al., 2013).

## 14.4 Final Remarks

The findings to emerge from this study can be summarized in the following theses:

- Proverbs should be incorporated into foreign language teaching as they present a ubiquitous phenomenon that the learner encounters in authentic communication. In addition, the inclusion of proverbs motivates learners, helps to develop the ability of understanding figurative language, provides an insight into foreign cultures and supports natural and fluent communication by providing a processing advantage.
- Proverbs should be taught and learnt in context under consideration of their multiple functions in various text types of oral and written communication.
- Students should be taught those proverbs that they are likely to find in authentic communication. A collection of the most frequently used proverbs, i.e. a proverb minimum or optimum is therefore a desideratum. A proposal for English based on previous studies has been made here (see Appendix 1).
- The contrastive perspective should be considered in proverb teaching and learning because comparative studies help to find cross-linguistic differences. Since the learner's first language is a key factor in proverb processing and use in a foreign language, as a number of studies have found, proverb equivalents in L1 and L2 should be a special focus of instruction.

- Autonomous learning is an integral part of proverb acquisition.

A final point is that the interest in phraseology and paremiology should not be restricted to practical language classes. Phraseology is an expanding area of research that has become an internationally recognized discipline in linguistics. As a subject at the intersection of lexicology and syntax with strong pragmatic and semantic implications it should also be taught as part of the linguistics program at universities, above all, in teacher training courses. Phraseology seminars can achieve a twofold aim: first, to introduce students to the most important theoretical concepts (defining criteria, classification, main approaches of research) and, second, to enlarge their individual stock of phraseological units including proverbs.

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## Appendix 1

Introduction: The 100 entries in this list are alphabetized according to the first noun in each proverb. If no noun occurs, the first autosemantic word is taken as a key word. The proverbs are arranged in the form of a table with reference to the sources mentioned in chapter 3.1 of this paper so that readers can make their own choices with regard to the criteria they find significant. For those who pay particular attention to the frequency of proverbs in a corpus, for example, items (14), (17) and (80) might be essential, although they are not listed in the classical collection by Lau (1996); for those who focus on the use of proverbs in the media will consider Lau's list to be the most important. The references in the last column indicate books in which examples of the particular proverbs in a modified version are given. The sources are some of Mieder's articles on proverbs in the media, Litovkina & Mieder's collection of anti-proverbs, and textbooks on phraseology by the author of this chapter. *CR* stands for *The Colbert Report*, an American satirical TV program that is known for its playful use of proverbs.

15 proverbs (**in bold letters**) fulfil all the five selection criteria described in 3.1, and 55 four out of five. The field with the number in front of these 70 items has been highlighted in bold.

	Proverb	Mieder (2004)	Lau (1996)	Haas (2008)	CCID (XX stands for high frequency)	Examples
1	<i>Absence</i> makes the heart grow fonder	X	263	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 81)
2	<i>Actions</i> speak louder than words		1970	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 83)
3	An <i>apple</i> a day keeps the doctor away	X		X		Fiedler (2012: 75)
4	<i>Beauty</i> is in the eye of the beholder	X		X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 100)
5	<i>Beauty</i> is only skin-deep.	X		X		Mieder (2005: 218)
6	Early to <i>bed</i> and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise	X	35	X		Mieder (2004d: 178)
7	<b><i>Beggars</i> can't be choosers</b>	X	33	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 102/103)
8	<b><i>A bird</i> in the hand is worth two in the bush</b>	X	201	X	X	Fiedler (2007: 85)

9	<b>Birds of a feather flock together</b>	X	267	X	X	Fiedler (2012: 40)
10	<b>The early <i>bird</i> catches the worm</b>	X	91	X	X	Fiedler (2012: 48)
11	<i>Blood</i> is thicker than water		410	X	X	Mieder (2004d: 253)
12	Don't judge a <i>book</i> by its cover	X		X	X	Mieder (2005: 203)
13	If it ain't <i>broke</i> , don't fix it				XX	(CR 25 June 2012)
14	<b>New brooms sweep clean</b>	X	125	X	X	Mieder (2005: 223)
15	<i>Business</i> before pleasure	X	91	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 111)
16	You cannot have your <i>cake</i> and eat it too	X		X	XX	Fiedler (2007: 83)
17	When the <i>cat's</i> away, the mice will play			X	X	Mieder (2005:184)
18	<i>Charity</i> begins at home		1163	X	X	Fiedler (2007: 112)
19	<i>Chickens</i> come home to roost	X	585	X		Fiedler (2007: 79)
20	Don't count your <i>chickens</i> before they are hatched	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 127)
21	<b>Every <i>cloud</i> has a silver lining</b>	X	425	X	X	Fiedler (2007: 94)
22	<b>Easy <i>come</i>, easy go</b>	X	1220	X	X	Fiedler (2007: 108)
23	First <i>come</i> , first served	X	13,050	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 148)
24	Two's <i>company</i> and three is a crowd		93	X		Fiedler (2007: 92)
25	<b>Too many <i>cooks</i> spoil the broth</b>	X	173	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 313/314)
26	<i>Curiosity</i> killed the cat	X		X	X	Mieder (2004d: 240)
27	Every <i>dog</i> has its day		550	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 140)
28	Let sleeping <i>dogs</i> lie	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 198)
29	You can't teach an old <i>dog</i> new tricks	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 347)

30	Don't put all your <i>eggs</i> in one basket	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 131)
31	All's well that <i>ends</i> well	X	879	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 90)
32	The <i>end</i> justifies the means		1,882	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 281/282)
33	The <i>exception</i> proves the rule		912	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 282)
34	Like <i>father</i> , like son	X	1,593	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 203)
35	Fine <i>feathers</i> make fine birds		7	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 148)
36	<b>A fool and his money are soon parted</b>	X	79	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 61)
37	<i>Forewarned</i> is forearmed		520	X	X	<i>Forewarned is Disarmed</i> (Song-text <i>Napalm Death</i> ); <i>Forewarned is Not Forwarned</i> (Title of an essay by A. Huxley 1931)
38	A <i>friend</i> in need is a friend indeed	X		X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 64)
39	<i>Garbage</i> in, garbage out				X	Mieder (2005: 212)
40	Don't look a <i>gift horse</i> in the mouth	X		X	X	Mieder (2004d: 243)
41	All that glitters is not <i>gold</i>	X	251	X		Fiedler (2012: 22)
42	The <i>grass</i> is always greener on the other side of the fence	X		X	X	Fiedler (2012: 37)
43	Many <i>hands</i> make light work	X	62	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 214)
44	Make <i>hay</i> while the sun shines	X		X	X	Fiedler (2007: 91)
45	<i>Handsome</i> is as hand-some does		85	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 159)
46	<i>Haste</i> makes waste	X		X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 160)
47	Two <i>heads</i> are better than one	X		X		Fiedler (2007: 82)

48	If you can't stand the <i>heat</i> , get out of the kitchen			X	X	Mieder (2005: 206)
49	He who <i>hesitates</i> is lost	X		X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 162)
50	<i>History</i> repeats itself		3,713	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 160)
51	<i>Honesty</i> is the best policy	X	714	X		Mieder (2005: 226)
52	You can lead a <i>horse</i> to water, but you can't make him drink	X		X	X	Fiedler (2012: 57)
53	Strike while the <i>iron</i> is hot	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 272)
54	It isn't over until the fat lady sings			X	X	VP Gore, <i>it's over! The fat lady is fixen to sing!</i> <i>Herald Tribune</i> (14 Dec 2000, on the Florida recount)
55	Better <i>late</i> than never	X	3,493	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 106)
56	A <i>leopard</i> does not change its spots			X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 287)
57	He who <i>laughs</i> last, laughs best	X		X	X	Mieder (2005: 218)
58	<i>Live</i> and let live	X	1,949	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 204)
59	A drowning <i>man</i> will clutch at a straw		3	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 61)
60	One <i>man's</i> meat is another man's poison			X	X	Mieder (2004: 245)
61	<i>Misery</i> loves company	X	858	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 219)
62	<i>Money</i> talks	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 227)
63	The <i>pen</i> is mightier than the sword			X		Mieder (2005: 187)
64	A <i>penny</i> saved is a penny earned	X	264	X		Mieder (2004: 248)

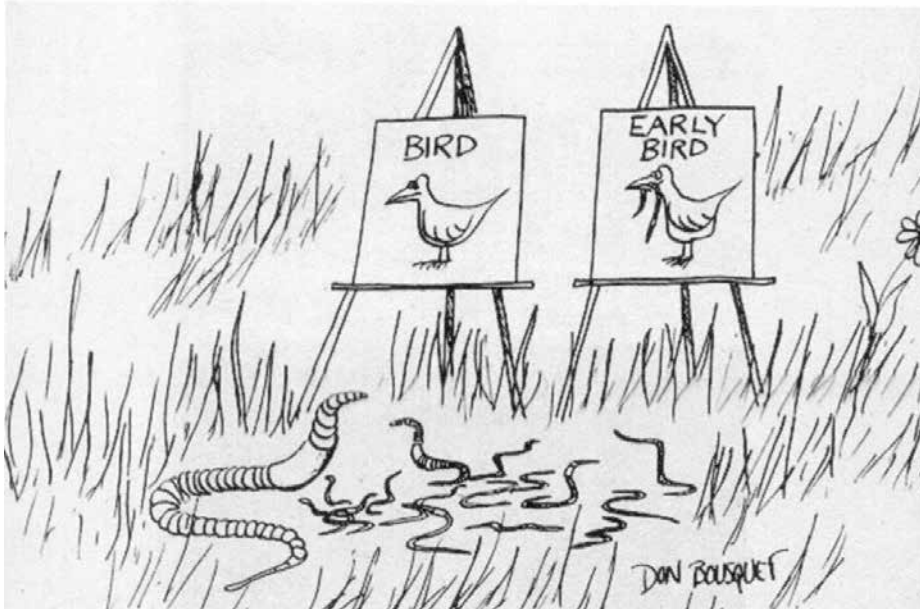
65	In for a <i>penny</i> , in for a pound		92	X	X	<i>In for a Penny, In for \$2.98 Trillion</i> (Huffington Post 1 Apr 2009)
66	<i>People</i> who live in glass houses should not throw stones		37	X	X	CR (14 Feb 2012)
67	No <i>news</i> is good news			X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 238)
68	An <i>ounce</i> of prevention is worth a pound of cure	X	668	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 96)
69	A watched <i>pot</i> never boils	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 78)
70	The <i>pot</i> calls the kettle black		39	X	X	CR (16 Apr 2012)
71	<i>Practice</i> makes perfect	X	1,406	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 262)
72	<i>Practise</i> what you preach			X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 262)
73	<i>Pride</i> goes before a fall		34	X		CR (25 March 2013)
74	The <i>proof</i> of the pudding is in the eating		352	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 292)
75	<b>It never rains, but it pours / When it rains, it pours</b>	X	147	X	X	Fiedler (2012: 71)
76	When in <i>Rome</i> , do as the Romans do	X	383	X		Fiedler (2012: 49)
77	<i>Rome</i> was not built in a day		122	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 265)
78	Easier <i>said</i> than done	X		X	XX	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 136)
79	What's <i>sauce</i> for the goose is sauce for the gander		613	X	X	CR (28 March 2013)
80	<i>Seeing</i> is believing		1,767	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 268)
81	If the <i>shoe</i> /cap fits, wear it	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 176)
82	<b>Out of sight, out of mind</b>	X	2,902	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 256)
83	There's many a <i>slip</i> between the cup and the lip		45	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 300)

84	<b>Where there's <i>smoke</i>, there's fire</b>	X	429	X	X	Mieder (2005: 169)
85	<i>Speech</i> is silver, silence is golden		930	X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 271)
86	<b>A <i>stitch</i> in time saves nine</b>	X	122	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 77)
87	<b>A rolling <i>stone</i> gathers no moss</b>	X	51	X	X	Mieder (2005: 173)
88	That's the last <i>straw</i> (that breaks the camel's back)				X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 286)
89	One <i>swallow</i> doesn't make a summer		146	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 252)
90	It takes two to <i>tango</i>	X		X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 187)
91	<i>Time</i> is money	X	3,770	X		CR (14 March 2012)
92	<i>Time</i> will tell		14,226	X		Mieder/Litovkina (2006: 309/310)
93	Never put off till <i>tomorrow</i> what you can do today	X		X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 234)
94	<i>Variety</i> is the spice of life		390	X	X	Mieder (2005: 193)
95	<i>Waste</i> not, want not	X		X		Mieder (2005: 220)
96	<b>Still <i>waters</i> run deep</b>	X	135	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 272)
97	There's more than one way to skin a cat		18	X	X	Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 296)
98	Where there's a <i>will</i> , there's a way		1,015	X	X	Mieder (2004: 239)
99	All <i>work</i> and no play makes Jack a dull boy			X		Fiedler (2007: 75/76)
100	Two <i>wrongs</i> don't make a right	X		X		Litovkina/Mieder (2006: 321)



## Appendix 2

Examples of non-verbally presented proverbs and of proverbs embedded in context  
(The pictures were found in Mieder [2005: 191; 187])





*[...] He sent his troops into Chechnya in 1999 after a series of explosions in Russia that the authorities blamed on Chechen rebels. – ehm – However, throughout this crisis he had not even discussed this prime demand of the Chechen hostage takers that Russia would draw out its forces from Chechnya. [...] Putin himself has been portraying this operation or this Chechen take-over in Moscow as part of the world-wide terror activities. So in the short term perhaps – ehm – ehm – a climb in popularity for Wladimir Putin, but what this incident has done is to focus attention on the situation in Chechnya and on the fact that after years of having said that he is dealing with it the problem remains and came home to roost in the very middle of Moscow to me. (spoken report: CNN, November 2, 2002)*

## The Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword



*Area professors unite and create proposals to quell brutality in its many forms*

(Dec. 2, 2004) GENEVA, N.Y.--The professors gathered from Finger Lakes area colleges have dubbed themselves Group of Seven. Should they achieve their goal--reducing violence in America--they may become known as "The Magnificent Seven."

Started by Marvin Bram, professor emeritus of history and Hobart and William Smith Colleges, Group of Seven can be thought of as a combination think tank and book club, only without the books. In their stead are seven papers, drafts of which are written by individual members, that concentrate on remedies for violence. The group plans to meet and discuss one draft a month, with everyone giving feedback to improve the recommendations therein. The first meeting is scheduled for Thursday, Dec. 9.

Anna T. Litovkina

## 15 Anti-proverbs

### 15.1 Introduction

This chapter gives a definition of the anti-proverb and terminology, discusses its occurrence, treats proverbs most popular for variation and proverbs with international distribution, addresses different mechanisms of proverb variation and topics emerging in anti-proverbs, and last but not least reviews the background of anti-proverb research. The vast majority of the anti-proverbs quoted in this chapter are in English, and were taken primarily from American and British written sources<sup>185</sup>. In some additional cases, anti-proverbs from other languages (Russian, French, German, and Hungarian) might also be quoted<sup>186</sup>.

### 15.2 Terminology

Proverbs have never been considered sacrosanct; on the contrary, they have frequently been used as satirical, ironic or humorous comments on a given situation. For centuries, they have provided a framework for endless transformation. In the last few decades, they have been perverted and parodied so extensively that their variations have been sometimes heard more often than their original forms. Wolfgang Mieder has coined the term *Antispruchwort* (anti-proverb) for such deliberate proverb innovations (also known in English as *alterations*, *mutations*, *parodies*, *transformations*, *variations*, *wisecracks*, *deliberate proverb innovations*, or *fractured proverbs*) and has published several collections of anti-proverbs in both German (see Mieder,

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**185** All the texts of Anglo-American anti-proverbs quoted here can also be found in two collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs compiled by Wolfgang Mieder and Anna T. Litovkina (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999).

**186** German-language anti-proverbs quoted in the chapter come from collections compiled by Wolfgang Mieder (1982a, 1985, 1989a, 1998) and Erika Gossler (2005), as well as from an unpublished collection of anti-proverbs from the Internet compiled by Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt in 2005–2006. The French examples are quoted from Péter Barta's corpus of over 1,800 French anti-proverbs, the vast majority of which include items from the Internet, as well as from a tiny collection of French anti-proverbs (Mignaval 2004). The Russian texts can be found with references to their sources (primarily, the Internet) in two anti-proverb collections compiled by Harry Walter and Valerij Mokienko (see Walter & Mokienko, 2001, 2005). Hungarian anti-proverbs quoted here were recorded by Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha and come from their corpus of over 7,000 Hungarian anti-proverbs, some of which have already been published (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005a, 2005b, 2006).

1982a, 1985, 1989a, 1998) and English (see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder, 2003; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999). Wolfgang Mieder's term *Antisprichwort* has been widely accepted by proverb scholars all over the world as a general label for such innovative alterations of and reactions to traditional proverbs: *anti-proverb* (English), *anti(-)proverbe* (French), *антипоговорка* (Russian), and *anti(-)proverbium* (Hungarian) (see the general discussion of the genre of anti-proverbs in T. Litovkina 2007b; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 1–54; Mieder, 2004, 2007). Besides the term *anti-proverb*, many other terms<sup>187</sup> exist in different languages for such phenomena, e.g.:

German: *verballhornte Parömien*, *Sprichwortparodien*, *verdrehte Weisheiten*, “entstellte” *Sprichwörter*, *sprichwörtliche Verfremdungen*.

French: *faux proverbe*, *perverbe*, *proverbe déformé*, *proverbe dérivé*, *proverbe détourné*, *proverbe modifié*, *proverbe perverti*, *proverbe tordu*, *pseudo-proverbe*.

Russian: *трансформа*, *поговорочная “переделка”*, *прикол*.

Hungarian: *szokásmondás-közhely*, *közmondás-paródia*, *közmondás tréfás ferdítése*, *(el)ferdített közmondás*, *közmondás-persziflázs*, *kvázi-közmondás*.

Some anti-proverbs question the truth of a proverb through employing antonyms (*An exception disproves the rule* (< *An exception proves the rule*), transforming the proverb into its opposite (*A friend that isn't in need is a friend indeed* (< *A friend in need is a friend indeed*); *Crime pays – be a lawyer* (< *Crime doesn't pay*) or posing a naive question (*Still waters run deep – but how can they run if they are still?* (< *Still waters run deep*); *If love is blind, how can there be love at first sight?* (< *Love is blind*). The vast majority of anti-proverbs, however, put the proverbial wisdom only partially into question, primarily by relating it to a particular context or thought in which the traditional wording does not fit (*Money isn't everything – but it's way ahead of what's in second place* (< *Money isn't everything*).

Anti-proverbs may contain revealing social comments (*American money talks in just about every foreign country* (*Money talks*); *A condom a day keeps AIDS away* (< *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*), but they may also be based on mere wordplay or puns, and they may very often be generated solely for the goal of deriving play forms (*A fool and his monkey are soon parted* (< *A fool and his money are soon parted*)).

<sup>187</sup> The terms from the German language have been supplied by Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, and those from the French by Péter Barta.

### 15.3 Occurrence of Anti-proverbs

Like traditional gems of wisdom, anti-proverbs appear in a broad range of generic contexts, from personal letters to philosophical journals, from public lectures and sermons to songs, from science fiction to comics and cartoons (Mieder, 1989b, 2007). Anti-proverbs are also found in great abundance on the Internet (Mieder, 2007; for a detailed discussion of the use of Hungarian anti-proverbs on the Internet, see Vargha, 2005; for a discussion of the use of Bulgarian anti-proverbs on the Internet, see Hrisztova-Gotthardt, 2006, 2007), in advertising slogans (Forgács, 1997a; Mieder, 1989b, 2007), in the titles of books and articles, and in magazine and newspaper headlines. They are commonly quoted in collections of puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams and graffiti (see the lists of bibliography in T. Litovkina, 2005: 211–228; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 349–357; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999: 246–254). There is no sphere of life where anti-proverbs are not used.

But the anti-proverb is not a new genre born in the era of mass media and the Internet (Mieder, 2007); rather, it can be traced back to the distant past. Proverb alterations are as old as proverbs themselves: they flourished in classical times and in all subsequent eras. Thus, in the eighteenth century the traditional wisdom of many proverbial gems was questioned by a number of philosophers, writers and poets (to name just a few: G. C. Lichtenberg, I. Kant, F. Schiller, Goethe, Voltaire), who created and inspired many proverb transformations.

The vast majority of anti-proverbs are the products of the playfulness of a solitary author; they do not catch on, and thus will be found in just one source. There are some texts, however, which appear in many sources, exactly in the same form (for more, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: XV–XVI). For some anti-proverbs numerous variants have been found. The difference may lie in the use of an article, conjunction, or punctuation mark, or in the substitution of one more or less synonymous term for another. Let us view the variants of the proverb *To err is human, to forgive divine* below: *To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer*; *To err is human, but to really foul things up requires a computer*; *To err is human, but it takes a computer to completely fuck things up*; *To err is human, but to really screw things up you need a computer* (for more, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: XVI–XVII). Some anti-proverbs have even become proverbial in themselves and have been frequently included in recent proverb collections, for example, *A new broom sweeps clean, but the old one knows the corners* (< *A new broom sweeps clean*); *Absence makes the heart grow fonder – for somebody else* (< *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*).

## 15.4 Proverbs Most Popular for Variation

Typically, an anti-proverb will elicit humour only if the traditional proverb upon which it is based is also known, thus allowing the reader or listener to perceive the incongruity (violation of expectation) between the two expressions. Otherwise, the innovative strategy of communication based on the juxtaposition of the old and new proverb is lost. The juxtaposition of the traditional proverb text with an innovative variation forces the reader or listener into a more critical thought process. Whereas the old proverbs acted as preconceived rules, the modern anti-proverbs are intended to activate us into overcoming the naive acceptance of traditional wisdom.

Below the reader will find the list of the ten most frequently transformed Anglo-American proverbs, followed by the lists of German, French and Hungarian proverbs most frequently parodied. Each proverb is followed by a number in parentheses indicating the number of anti-proverbs that has been located for it. Proverbs other than Anglo-American are followed by their translations into English (given in [ ] brackets).

The ten most frequently transformed Anglo-American proverbs from T. Litovkina and Mieder's second anti-proverb collection (see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 12) are found below:

*Old soldiers never die (, they simply fade away).* (79)

*If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.* (65)

*Money talks.* (65)

*An apple a day keeps the doctor away.* (63)

*A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.* (49)

*Never [Don't] put off till [until] tomorrow what you can do today.* (48)

*A fool and his money are soon parted.* (47)

*Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.* (46)

*To err is human (, to forgive divine).* (45)

*Opportunity knocks but once.* (43) (for the list of 54 Anglo-American proverbs that have generated over twenty anti-proverbs in their corpus of Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 12–13)

Proverbs most popular for alteration in the German language are from Mieder's anti-proverb collection (1998: IX–X) and were translated into English by Melita Aleksa Varga:

*Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde.* [ww: The morning hour has gold in its mouth.] (76)

*Lügen haben kurze Beine.* [ee: Lies have short legs.] (75)

*Im Wein ist (liegt) Wahrheit.* [ee: The truth is (lies) in wine.] (65)

*Wer andern eine Grube gräbt, fällt selbst hinein.* [ee: Who digs a hole for another, falls into it himself.] (62)

*Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold.* [ee: Talking is silver, being silent is gold.] (61)

*Der Klügere gibt nach.* [ww: The wiser gives in.] (59)

*Der Zweck heiligt die Mittel.* [ww: The goal hallows the means.] (54)

*Man soll den Tag nicht vor dem Abend loben.* [ww: One should not praise the day before the evening.] (52)

*Alter schützt vor Torheit nicht.* [ww: Old age does not protect from foolishness.] (51)

*Wo ein Wille ist, ist auch ein Weg.* [ee: Where there is a will, there is a way.] (51)

The list of ten proverbs most frequently transformed in the French language compiled and translated into English by Péter Barta is given below:<sup>188</sup>

*Qui vole un œuf vole un bœuf.* [ee: He that steals an egg will steal an ox.] (34)

*Pierre qui roule n'amasse pas mousse.* [ee: A rolling stone gathers no moss.] (30)

*Rien ne sert de courir, il faut [mieux vaut] partir à point.* [ww: It is no use running, you must [it is better to] start on time.] (22)

*Tant va la cruche à l'eau qu'à la fin elle se casse [brise].* [ee: So often the pitcher goes to water till it breaks.] (22)

*La musique adoucit les mœurs.* [ww: Music softens morals.] (22)

*Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop.* (21) [ww: Chase away the natural and it returns at a gallop.]

*L'argent ne fait pas le bonheur.* [ee: Money does not buy happiness.] (20)

*Noël au balcon, Pâques aux tisons.* [ww: (If it's warm enough to spend) Christmas at the balcony, (you'll spend) Easter at the firebrands.] (20)

*À bon chat bon rat.* [ww: To a good cat, a good rat.] (18)

*Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu'on peut faire le jour même* [ww: You mustn't put off to tomorrow what you can do on that very day.] (variant: *Ne remets pas à demain ce que tu peux faire aujourd'hui [le jour même].*). [ee: Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today [on that very day].] (18)

*L'habit ne fait pas le moine.* [ww: Clothes do not make a monk.] (18)

*À vaincre sans péril on triomphe sans gloire.* [ww: If you win without risk, you triumph without glory.] (18)

Let us demonstrate here the list of the ten most frequently transformed proverbs in T. Litovkina and Vargha's corpus of over 7,000 Hungarian anti-proverbs (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005b: 16–17):

*Addig jár a korsó a kútra, (a)míg el nem török.* [ee: The pitcher goes to the well until it breaks.] (178)

<sup>188</sup> The list (first published in T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta, et al., 2007: 52) is based on Peter Barta's corpus of over 1,800 French anti-proverbs, which were primarily located in the Internet, as well as in Mignaval's collection of anti-proverbs (2004).



- (A)ki korán kel, aranyat lel. [ww: He who gets up early finds gold.] (153)  
 Aki másnak vermet ás, maga esik bele. [ww: He who digs a pit for another falls into it himself.] (149)  
 Jobb ma egy veréb, mint holnap egy túzok. [ww: Better a sparrow today than a bustard tomorrow.] (88)  
 A hazug embert [a hazugot] könnyebb [hamarabb; előbb] utolérni [utolérik], mint a sánta kutyát. [ww: A liar is caught sooner than a lame dog.] (88)  
 Amit ma megtehetsz, ne halaszd holnapra. [ww: What you can do today do not put off until tomorrow.] (82)  
 Ajándék lónak ne nézd a fogát. [ww: Do not look at the teeth of a gift horse.] (76)  
 Kicsi a bors, de erős. [ww: Peppercorn is small but strong.] (75)  
 Ahány ház, annyi szokás. [ww: As many houses as many customs.] (66)  
 Aki a virágot szereti, rossz ember nem lehet. [ww: He who loves flowers can't be a bad man.] (65)

## 15.5 Anti-proverbs with International Distribution

When translated from one language to another, an anti-proverb more often than not will lose its message: the puns, parodies or wordplay characteristic of one language will seldom carry over successfully into another. Nevertheless, there are cases in which an internationally spread proverb inspires parallel anti-proverbs in two or more languages. This often represents a convincing example of the polygenesis of similar or even identical anti-proverbs. Here are some examples (they were first quoted in T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 9–10<sup>189</sup>):

English: *Don't do today what you can put off until tomorrow; Never do today what can be done tomorrow.*

Hungarian: *Amit holnap is megtehetsz, ne tedd meg ma!; Amit ma megtehetsz, azt holnap is megteheted. < Amit ma megtehetsz, ne halaszd holnapra.*

Russian: *Не делай сегодня то, что можно сделать завтра. < Не откладывай на завтра то, что можно сделать сегодня.*

German: *Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht erst morgen. < Was du heute kannst besorgen, das verschiebe nicht auf morgen.*

French: *Pourquoi remettre à demain ce qu'on peut faire la semaine prochaine < Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu'on peut faire le jour même.; Il faut savoir remettre à plus tard pour avoir le temps d'accomplir aujourd'hui ce qu'on aurait dû faire hier. < Il ne faut pas remettre au lendemain ce qu'on peut faire le jour même.*

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189 The texts of French anti-proverbs were supplied by Péter Barta.

English: *To err is human – to totally muck things up needs a computer.*

Hungarian: *Tévedni emberi dolog, de igazán összekutyulni valamit csak számítógéppel lehet.* < *Tévedni emberi dolog.*

Russian: *Человеку свойственно ошибаться, но с помощью компьютера это ему удается намного лучше.* < *Человеку свойственно ошибаться.*

German: *Irren ist menschlich, aber für das totale Chaos braucht man einen Computer.* < *Irren ist menschlich.*

French: *L'erreur est humaine, mais un véritable désastre nécessite un ordinateur.* < *L'erreur est humaine.*

English: *"Everyone makes mistakes," said the hedgehog after trying to mount the hair-brush.* < *To err is human.*

Hungarian: *Tévedni emberi dolog, szólt a sündisznó és lemászott a gyökérkefééről.* < *Tévedni emberi dolog.*

Russian: *„Как обманчива внешность“, – сказал еж, слезая со щетки.* < *Внешность обманчива.*

German: *„Irren ist menschlich,“ sagte der Igel, da sprang er von der Haarbürste.* < *Irren ist menschlich.*

French: *Tout le monde peut se tromper, dit le hérisson (confus) en descendant d'une [de la] brosse (à chaussure/à habits/à cheveux).* < *Tout le monde peut se tromper.*

## 15.6 Types of Proverb Alterations

Although proverb transformations arise in a variety of forms, several types stand out. There are a number of mechanisms of proverb variation (which are by no means mutually exclusive), e.g., replacing a single word; substituting two or more words; changing the second part of the proverb; adding a tail to the original text; adding literal interpretations; punning; word-repetition; melding two proverbs; word-order

reversal; etc. The most common mechanisms will be demonstrated separately here, with some representative examples.<sup>190</sup>

Very popular are such proverb parodies that pervert the basic meaning of a proverb by simply replacing a single word: *He who hesitates is constipated* (< *He who hesitates is lost.*). The authors of our anti-proverbs very often try to find a word phonologically similar to the one from the original proverb, as in the following examples: *Matrimony is the root of all evil* (< *Money is the root of all evil.*); *Hair today, gone tomorrow* (< *Here today, gone tomorrow.*). Of particular interest are such proverb transformations in which only one letter of the alphabet is changed, added or omitted: *A good beginning is half the bottle* (< *A good beginning is half the battle.*); *The best things in life are fee* (< *The best things in life are free.*); *Strike while the irony is hot* (< *Strike while the iron is hot.*).

Another characteristic mechanism of proverb parody is the substitution of two words which appeared to the coiners of our examples not fitting their own observations of human life. As Mieder (1989b: 241) points out, proverbs that possess binary structures (Dundes, 1975) have become especially popular formulas on which to base multiple proverb variations, as for example *One X is worth a thousand Y's*, *Where there's X, there's Y*, *One man's X is another man's Y*, *An X a day keeps the Y away*, *A(n) X in the hand is worth Y in the bush*, *An ounce of X is worth a pound of Y* and *Different X's for different Y's*. Many anti-proverbs are based on linguistic structures that remain the same even as slight verbal changes introduce dramatically new images and ideas. The proverb *One man's meat is another man's poison*, which is among the most popular proverbs for this kind of variation, is simply reduced to the pattern *One man's X is another man's Y*, and X and Y can be substituted by whatever variables are necessary in the context. To illustrate it, let us refer to the three examples below: *One man's Claire is another man's affair*; *One man's drive is another man's funeral*; *One man's Jill is another man's thrill*. Typical proverb parodies of this sort based on the proverb *An apple a day keeps the doctor away* are *A joint a day keeps reality away*; *A laugh a day keeps the psychiatrist away*; *An effort a day keeps failure away*. Other examples of this

**190** For detailed analysis of techniques of variation in Anglo-American anti-proverbs; see T. Litovkina, 2005: 29–86, 2006a, 2007a; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 17–26; for types of proverb variation in the Hungarian language, see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2012; Vargha, 2004; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007b; for various techniques in proverb alteration in the Hungarian and English languages, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2005: 158–176; for types of proverb variation in the French language, see, Barta, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b; for analysis of proverb alteration in Dutch anti-proverbs, see Prędotą 1994, 1995, 2002, 2007; for various techniques in proverb alteration in the Russian and English languages, see T. Litovkina 2006b; for the types of alteration and humour devices most frequently employed in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs, see Barta, T. Litovkina, Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Barta, T. Litovkina et al., 2007; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Barta et al., 2008; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Vargha et al., 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta et al., 2007, 2008; Vargha, T. Litovkina, Barta et al., 2007; etc.

mechanism of proverb alteration include: *Widows rush in where spinsters fear to tread* (< *Fools rush in where angels fear to tread*); *A soft drink turneth away company* (< *A soft answer turneth away wrath.*). Again, phonologically similar words are very often chosen for this purpose, as for example in the proverb alterations below: *Taste makes waist* (< *Haste makes waste.*); *A brain is no stronger than its weakest think* (< *A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.*).

Very frequent are such anti-proverbs in which the second part of the proverb is entirely changed. One of the most popular proverbs for this type of variation in T. Litovkina and Mieder's anti-proverb collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (2006) is *If at first you don't succeed, try, try again* which has generated the second largest number of parodies (65). Here are only three of them: *If at first you don't succeed, blame it on your wife*; *If at first you don't succeed, do it the way your wife told you*; *If at first you don't succeed – you are fired*. Proverbs often exploited for this type of alteration are also: *Behind every successful man there is a woman*; *Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise*; *Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we may die*; and *People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones*. Examples reworking these proverbs include: *Behind every successful man is a woman complaining she has nothing to wear*; *Early to bed, early to rise doesn't make a girl a friend of the guys*; *Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you may not be able to afford it*; *People who live in glass houses should screw in the basement*.

Many proverb transformations keep the actual text of the proverb without any change, adding new words, or a tail to it. Evan Esar calls this type of twisted proverbs "the extended proverb" (Esar, 1952: 201). It is amazing with what ease some proverbs (e.g., *Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives*) have been extended into a great number of twists of this kind: *Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives – and it's none of its business*; *Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives, but it has its suspicions*; *Half the world doesn't know how the other half lives on the husband's salary*. The extended type of proverb variation and parody can also be clearly shown through wellerisms. Wellerisms, named for Charles Dickens' character Samuel Weller, are particularly common in the USA, Great Britain and Ireland (Carson Williams, 2002, 2007; Mieder, 1982b, 1989b: 223–238; Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994). This proverbial formulation is normally 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. The meaning of the proverb is usually distorted by being placed into striking juxtaposition with the third part of the wellerism. In this way a wellerism often parodies the traditional wisdom of proverbs by showing the disparity between the wisdom of the proverb and actual reality (Mieder 1989b: 225). Observe, for example: "*Out of sight, out of mind,*" said the warden as the escaped lunatic disappeared over the hill (Out of sight, out of mind.); "*Tough luck,*" said the egg in the monastery, "*out of the frying pan into the friar.*" (< *Out of the frying pan into the fire.*).

According to Shirley Arora, metaphor is one of the most effective indicators of proverbiality (Arora, 1984: 12). Metaphor is one of the most common devices (among personification, hyperbole, etc.) which helps to achieve figurativeness in proverbs.<sup>191</sup> It belongs to the most powerful markers of proverbiality,<sup>192</sup> and it is exactly this vivid imagery of many proverbs which makes them so appealing to us. Thus, metaphorical proverbs are remarkably common and typically used metaphorically. In numerous anti-proverbs in our material, however, the meaning of a metaphorical proverb is narrowed by putting it in a context in which it is to be interpreted literally, i.e., the literal-metaphorical relationship is exploited, to wit the following proverb transformations: *When one door shuts, another opens...which means that you live in a drafty house* (When one door shuts, another opens.); *"No friend like a bosom friend," as the man said when he pulled out a louse* (< *No friend like a bosom friend.*); *A bird in hand is probably contaminated with salmonella* (< *A bird in hand is worth two in the bush.*).

While talking about various forms of proverb alteration, we have to mention one of the most popular humorous techniques created through puns.<sup>193</sup> Numerous proverbs in our material have provided good models for exploiting ambiguity through the use of a single word that is polysemous (i.e., having two meanings) or two words that are homonymous (i.e., having identical graphemic and phonemic representation), thus creating comic surprise with unforeseen links between words or ideas. According to Victor Raskin:

For many speakers, the mere exposure to a homonymous or polysemous word or phrase constitutes an irresistible temptation to make a joke. ... It is the easy availability of puns which makes them a cheap and somewhat despicable type of humor for many individuals and social groups. However, the same factor prevents them from disappearing, and every new generation goes through many cycles of discovering the puns, getting tired of them, rejecting them and eventually rediscovering them again. (Raskin, 1985: 116)

**191** Tóthné Litovkina's research (1998) has shown that 68.2% of the 151 best-known American proverbs from the Folklore Archives at University of California at Berkeley lend themselves to figurative interpretation. By contrast, out of the 102 proverbs from five randomly selected pages from "A Dictionary of American Proverbs" (see Mieder 1992), 49% of proverbs have imagery that would lend itself to figurative interpretation.

**192** Such markers can be: certain grammatical or syntactical features (e.g., omission of the article is a conspicuous and frequent cue in Spanish and Danish proverbs), semantic markers (e.g., metaphor, parallelism, paradox, irony), lexical markers (e.g., archaic or old-fashioned words; quantifiers such as "never", "always", "everybody", etc.), phonic markers (e.g., rhyme, alliteration, meter), etc. (see Arora, 1984).

**193** For a detailed discussion of categories of puns, as well as punning in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 55–86, 2006b, 2009a, 2009b; for the comparative analysis of punning in Russian and Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina 2006a; for a comparative study of punning in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs, see Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Barta, et al., 2008; T. Litovkina, Barta, Hrisztova-Gotthardt, et al., 2008a; T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta, et al., 2008.

Certain ambiguous words have become real favorites of punsters in our material, as the word *will* in the proverb *Where there's a will, there's a way*: *Where there's a will, there's an inheritance tax*; *Where there's a will – there's a delay*; *Where there's a will there's a wait*; *Where there's a will there's a won't*. In the following three anti-proverbs the word *lie* (deceive) is opposed to the *lie* (be found, exist): *Figures don't lie – except on the beach* (< *Figures don't lie.*); *As you have made your bed, why lie about it?* (< *As you have made your bed, lie in it.*); *Truth lies at the bottom of a well, but if it lies, how can it be the truth?* (< *Truth lies at the bottom of a well.*). The list of polysemous or homonymous words employed in our anti-proverbs could be extended beyond the limits of patience: *time*, *shot*, *rod*, *blood*, *miss*, *bridge*, and *port* are only a few of them. Some examples include: *"How time flies," as the monkey said when it threw the clock at the missionary* (< *Time flies.*); *Blood will tell: nobody criticizes your faults quicker than your relatives* (< *Blood will tell.*); *Any port in a storm – preferably expensive port* (< *Any port in a storm.*).

One meaning of an ambiguous word may be risqué or indecorous. Anti-proverbs of this type, which combine a sexual meaning with a non-sexual one, present examples of double entendre in its strictest sense. The humor of many proverb parodies is based upon the incongruous use of the vulgar or taboo word, as well as on the contrast between an innocent text of a proverb and the sexually-loaded reinterpretation of it: *A cock in the hand is worth two in the pants* (< *A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.*); *Buggers can't be choosers* (Beggars can't be choosers.). In order to understand the numerous puns quoted in this chapter and in the collections of Anglo-American anti-proverbs it is essential to know an array of slang terms and euphemisms for sex organs (e.g., *bush* for female genitalia or pubic hair; *cock*, *meat*, *rod*, *prick* or *yard* for *penis*; *balls* for *testicles*), for masturbation (*jack off*, *pull off*, *in the hand*), for ejaculation (*come*, *shoot*), for sexual intercourse (*to go to bed*, *to screw*), for homosexual male (*fairy*, *gay*, *queer*, *bugger*), and so on.

Word-repetition is a very common device not only in proverbs<sup>194</sup> but in anti-proverbs as well. The following examples represent such word duplication: *The man who lives by bread alone, lives alone* (< *Man doesn't live by bread alone.*); *Opportunity knocks but last night a knock spoiled my opportunity* (< *Opportunity knocks but once.*). The use of triplication and quadruplication is less often encountered among our examples than simple duplication: *"Every little helps," said Mr. Little and took the six little Littles out to help him saw a pile of wood* (< *Every little helps.*); such proliferation normally occurs when the original text of the proverb itself also contains

<sup>194</sup> Word-repetition is very common in American proverbs and has been found in about a quarter of American proverbs (see Tôthné Litovkina, 1994, 1998), e.g., *Do as I say, not as I do*; *A penny saved is a penny earned*; *Fools' names and fools' faces often appear in public places*; *A friend in need is a friend indeed*; for more on repetition figures in American proverbs, see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2005: 94–95; Norrick, 1991.

duplication: *There's no fool like an old fool who marries a young fool* (< *There's no fool like an old fool.*).

The mixing of two proverbs (contamination) is also a very popular technique in our material. In about half of the cases of this technique, the beginning of one proverb is combined with the ending of another proverb, without any further change: *A penny saved gathers no moss* (< *A penny saved is a penny earned; A rolling stone gathers no moss.*); *Necessity is the mother of strange bedfellows* (< *Necessity is the mother of invention; Politics makes strange bedfellows.*). Other examples of proverb contamination are: *Behind every successful man is a fish with a bicycle* (< *Behind every successful man there is a woman; A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.*); *A sleeping dog never bites* (< *Let sleeping dogs lie; A barking dog never bites.*); *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.*).

Word-order reversal is also a relatively common technique of proverb transformation in our corpus: *Better never than late* (< *Better late than never.*); *Happiness can't buy money* (< *Money can't buy happiness.*); *The hand that rules the cradle rocks the world* (< *The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.*).

As opposed to the frequent change of the second part of proverbs, the change of their first part is relatively rare: *A patient without health insurance keeps the doctor away* (< *An apple a day keeps the doctor away.*). Similarly, in contrast to the frequent expansion of proverb texts, it is quite rare to drop off part of a proverb (e.g., to omit (the last) word(s) of the source proverb). We can call these proverbs *truncated* or *clipped*: *Familiarity breeds* (< *Familiarity breeds contempt.*); *Beauty is only skin* (< *Beauty is only skin deep.*).

Many proverb alterations simultaneously employ several methods of variation discussed before. The following example of a sexual proverb parody illustrates the variety of forms that proverbial variation can assume: *One orgasm in the bush is worth two in the hand* (One bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.). This anti-proverb displays the word-order reversal (*bush* and *hand*), double entendre (while *bush* is here a euphemism for the vagina or pubic hair, *in the hand* implies masturbation), and the replacement of *bird* by *orgasm*.

In the vast majority of the proverb transformations in our corpus, the structure of the original proverb is maintained. Sometimes, however, the authors of proverb alterations, in order to fit their modern needs, twist a proverb so dramatically that only a few words survive from the original text – or until the structure of the parent proverb is completely rearranged. Consider examples such as: *The only golden thing that some women dislike is silence* (< *Silence is golden.*); *The noblest of all animals is the dog, and the noblest of all dogs is the hotdog. It feeds the hand that bites it* (< *Don't bite the hand that feeds you.*). As Mieder (1993c: 121) states, "Mere proverb allusions run the risk of not being understood, even if they refer to very common proverbs. Nevertheless, such lack of communication is rather rare among native speakers..." Indeed, the person who does not acquire competence in using proverbs will not understand anti-proverbs, which presuppose a familiarity with traditional proverbs. However,

parodies like the ones above might be completely unrecognizable to a foreigner. This is one more reason why anyone wishing to communicate or read in a language should have an active knowledge of its most popular proverbs. Like proverbs, anti-proverbs can provide an especially effective pedagogical medium for the teacher of a foreign or native language (for more on incorporation of anti-proverbs in the language classroom, see Forgács, 1997b; T. Litovkina 2004, 2005: 120–141; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 36–45; Tóthné Litovkina, 1996, 1998, 1999c; Walter, 2001).

## 15.7 Themes Treated in Proverb Transformations

There is hardly a topic that anti-proverbs do not address. As Mieder states, “Just as proverbs continue to comment on all levels and occurrences in our daily life, so do anti-proverbs react by means of alienating and shocking linguistic strategies to everything that surrounds us” (Mieder, 1989b: 244). Among the themes treated in Anglo-American proverb alterations are sexuality, women, professions and occupations, money, love, marriage, divorce, friendship, education and learning, alcohol and drugs, children and parents, taxes, God and religion, telephones, cars and computers (for a more detailed analysis of themes treated in Anglo-American proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 87–119; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 17–26).

Numerous texts of anti-proverbs are sexually oriented (for more on techniques of creating sexual proverb parodies and themes in sexual proverb variation, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 87–99, 2011c; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 26–29; Tóthné Litovkina 1999a, 1999b). Plenty of proverb parodies relate to sexual intercourse: *People who live in glass houses should screw in the basement* (< *People who live in glass houses should not throw stones*). Many anti-proverbs depict or speak of kissing: *A kiss is as good as a smile* (< *A miss is as good as a mile*.). One common subject of anti-proverbs is oral-genital intercourse (fellatio and cunnilingus): *Cunnilingus is next to godliness* (< *Cleanliness is next to godliness*.); *Sucking a cock every day keeps the doctor away* (< *An apple a day keeps the doctor away*.). Orgasm is a pervasive theme in a number of proverb alterations: *Christmas comes, but once a year's enough* (< *Christmas comes once a year*.). Female or male body parts, particularly vagina, breasts, testicles, penis, and anus are mentioned or alluded to in a number of alterations: *The penis is mightier than the sword* (< *The pen is mightier than the sword*.). A striking proportion of anti-proverbs refers to adultery: *Love thy neighbor, but make sure her husband is away* (< *Love thy neighbor as thyself*.). Numerous anti-proverbs from our material conjure up images of homosexuality: *One man's meat is another man's perversion* (< *One man's meat is another man's poison*.). Proverb transformations discuss a number of other sexual themes, e.g., the contraceptive pills, condoms, sexually transmitted diseases, bigamy, pornography, erection, libido, chastity, masturbation, sexual relations with animals, sexual orgies and three-person sexual liaisons, conception and birth etc.



Like traditional Anglo-American proverbs in general (e.g., *Women and dogs cause too much strife*; *Women are the devil's net*; *Women are the root of all evil*), many proverb parodies in our corpus are antifeminist and demeaning to women. Hostility toward women is very prominent in the following transformations that rework one of the most widespread anti-feminist proverbs in the English language, *A woman's place is in the house: The male was made to lie and roam, but woman's place is in the home*. There are many anti-proverbs reducing women to the status of sex objects: *Behind every good moan – there's a woman* (< *Behind every good man – there's a woman*.); *The breasts on the other side of the fence look greener* (< *The grass on the other side of the fence looks greener*.). Other stereotyping proverb transformations portray women as promiscuous or lustful: *The way to a man's heart may be through his stomach, but a pretty girl can always find a detour* (< *The way to a man's heart is through his stomach*.). A number of anti-proverbs depict women as stupid, talkative and stubborn: *Where there's a woman, there's a way – and she usually gets it* (< *Where there's a will, there's a way*.); *Woman's work is never done, probably because she can't get off the telephone long enough to do it* (< *Woman's work is never done*.). Many additional anti-proverbs portray females as vain and materialistic: *Blondes prefer gentlemen with money* (< *Gentlemen prefer blondes*.); *Man proposes and the girl weighs his pocketbook and decides* (< *Man proposes, God disposes*.). The overwhelming majority of Anglo-American anti-proverbs depicting women in a role deal with women as wives. One of the most deep-rooted stereotypes is that of the quarrelsome, stupid, demanding, manipulating, nosy and bossy woman: *A man's castle is his home, and his wife has the keys to all the rooms* (< *A man's home is his castle*.); *The early bird gets up to serve his wife breakfast in bed* (< *The early bird gets the worm*.); *'Tis better to have loved and lost than to marry and be bossed* (< *'Tis better to have loved and lost than to have never loved at all*.). Another object of ridicule in our corpus is the omnipotent mother-in-law, who is uniformly depicted as a man's enemy: *No man is a hero to his mother-in-law* (< *No man is a hero to his wallet*.); *When mother-in-law comes in at the door, love flies out the window* (< *When poverty comes in at the door, love flies out the window*.). The figures of spinster and widow are also frequently ridiculed in our material. Unlike the male bachelor, the female spinster is treated as a person who is unhappy and unfulfilled; similarly, widows are more admirable than spinsters because the former were once married and more likely to marry again: *Spinsters live longer than married women because where there's hope there's life* (< *Where there's life there's hope*.) (for more on women in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 100–106; 2011b; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 29–31).

There is a wide range of professions and occupations depicted in our material (for more on professions and occupations addressed in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 107–112; T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 31–33). Without any doubt, the lawyer is the most popular target of humor in our anti-proverbs (for more on lawyers treated in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2005: 107–112, 2011a: 82–96). The greatest anger and irritation are directed at the cost of lawsuits,

the high income of lawyers, and their greed: *Crime pays – be a lawyer* (< *Crime doesn't pay.*); *Practice makes perfect, but with lawyers it is more likely to make them rich* (< *Practice makes perfect.*). The havoc created by an ignorant lawyer is a common theme. Just observe the examples reworking the popular proverbs *Ignorance of the law is no excuse* and *Necessity knows no law*: *Ignorance of the law excuses no man – from practicing it*; *Necessity knows no law, and neither does the average lawyer*. Politicians receive almost the same treatment as lawyers; their portrait is also very unflattering: *In politics the choice is constantly between two evils* (< *Between two evils choose the least.*); *Politics makes strange bad fellows* (< *Politics makes strange bad fellows.*). Qualities most often ridiculed in politicians are corruption and dishonesty: *A politician is known by the promises he doesn't keep* (< *A man is known by the company he keeps.*); *Figures don't lie, except political figures* (< *Figures don't lie.*) (for more on the figure of politician in Anglo-American anti-proverbs, see T. Litovkina, 2013). After lawyers and politicians, doctors are among the most frequent targets for fun in our material. The most irritable qualities in doctors – ignorance and greediness – are identical to those in lawyers. In the two examples below, lawyers and doctors are even brought together: *The lawyer agrees with the doctor that the best things in life are fees* (< *The best things in life are free.*); *Advice is cheap...except when you consult a doctor or lawyer or tax accountant* (< *Advice is cheap.*).

## 15.8 Background of Research

Although the collection and the study of anti-proverbs nationally and internationally have begun a while ago, both pursuits are becoming increasingly popular in the field of paremiology and paremiography. Indeed, just thirty-one years have passed since the first collection of German anti-proverbs was published (Mieder, 1982a). The first such collection in the English language, the book *Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs*, written by Wolfgang Mieder in cooperation with Anna Tóthné Litovkina, was published only 14 years ago (see Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999<sup>195</sup>).

In Europe and North America the genre of transformed proverbs is becoming more and more popular, especially due to the mass media and the Internet. In fact, one may easily believe that the Century of the Anti-Proverb is now in progress. Consider the following catalogue of anti-proverb collections that have seen print, as well as panels on anti-proverbs presented at conferences, during the last decade. In the course of 2005,

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<sup>195</sup> The compilation contains 320 well-known Anglo-American proverbs, their meanings, references to some of the standard proverb dictionaries, and more than 3,000 transformations. The twisted proverbs were located in dozens of books and articles on puns, one-liners, toasts, wisecracks, quotations, aphorisms, maxims, quips, epigrams and graffiti. About 75 illustrations from the mass media are also included.

four anti-proverb collections were published, including the first two to appear in Hungarian („*Viccében él a nemzet*”. *Magyar közmondás-paródiák* [“The Nation Lives in Its Jokes”: Hungarian Proverb Parodies] (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005b)<sup>196</sup> and „*Éhes diák pakkal álmodik*”. *Egyetemisták közmondás-elváltoztatásai* [“A Hungry Student Dreams about a Parcel”: Twisted Proverbs of Students] (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005a)<sup>197</sup> by Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha). Also, a collection of Russian anti-proverbs and aphorisms (*Антипословицы русского народа* by Harry Walter and Valerij Mokienko, see Walter & Mokienko, 2005) was published in St. Petersburg, and a new German collection (*Besser Arm dran als Bein ab: Anti-Sprichwörter und ihresgleichen* by Erika Gossler, see Gossler, 2005) saw print in Vienna.

The year 2006 began with the publication of a new collection of Russian anti-proverbs (*Прикольный словарь (антипословицы и антипоговорки)* by Harry Walter and Valerij Mokienko (see Walter & Mokienko, 2006), as well as the appearance of the second collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs, titled *Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs* by Anna T. Litovkina and Wolfgang Mieder (see T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006<sup>198</sup>).

In the course of 2006 two conferences held in Hungary featured panels on anti-proverbs: the XVI. Hungarian Congress of Applied Linguistics *Nyelvi modernizáció – Szaknyelv, fordítás, terminológia* [Language Modernization – Professional Language, Translation, Terminology] held at Szent István University (Gödöllő, Hungary, April 10–12, 2006); the International Conference *Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Phraseology* held at the Pannonian University of Veszprém (Veszprém, Hungary, June 9–11, 2006) (for more on the panels, see T. Litovkina, 2007b: 3–16).

In 2007 a special issue of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* on *Anti-Proverbs in Contemporary Societies* saw print in Budapest. The issue, co-edited by Anna T. Litovkina

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**196** The book contains about 1,500 anti-proverbs based on 324 original Hungarian proverbs. While the vast majority of the sources came from the Internet, recent Hungarian newspapers, fiction, and advertisements, some texts were recorded orally.

**197** The collection contains over 1,700 proverb parodies based on 287 Hungarian proverbs. The sources were collected by Anna T. Litovkina’s students attending her classes on socio-linguistics and folklore at Illyés Gyula College of Education, University of Pécs (Szekszárd) from their friends, relatives, etc. in 2004–2005; some were created by them.

**198** The second collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs includes over 5,000 texts based on 580 traditional Anglo-American proverbs, providing also a much longer and detailed introduction than the first compilation.

and Carl Lindahl, and published in four languages (English, German, French and Russian) contains 10 articles and 12 reviews by 16 contributors<sup>199</sup>.

Clearly, anti-proverb research has been experiencing a boom in the last three decades. Moreover, this new field has become a gold mine not only for individual paremiologists and paremiographers, but particularly for researchers working in pairs, based on the principle expressed in the proverb *Two heads are better than one* (especially if they are anti-proverbialists' heads).

Thus, German-born Wolfgang Mieder and Russian-born Anna T. Litovkina have assembled two compilations of Anglo-American anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder & Tothné Litovkina, 1999), and they have also co-authored a monograph, one chapter of which focuses on Hungarian and Anglo-American anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2005: 150–176).

A productive anti-proverb collaboration in the field of Russian anti-proverbs has occurred between V. M. Mokienko from Russia and Harry Walter from Germany (Walter & Mokienko, 2005, 2006).

Anna T. Litovkina and Katalin Vargha from Hungary have undertaken a number of anti-proverb projects together. One of them was to collect Hungarian anti-proverbs. Now their corpus of anti-proverbs includes over 7,000 examples, some of which have

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**199** This issue grew principally from two panels on anti-proverb research presented in Hungary in 2006 and additional contributions written especially for this issue (for more, see the introduction to the volume, T. Litovkina, 2007b: 7–9). The core conference presentations expanded for this publication include Dóra Boronkai's analysis of the preliminary results of a sociolinguistic survey assessing how age, sex and education influence appreciation of humor in Hungarian anti-proverbs. For this issue the paper was reworked with the help of Anna T. Litovkina (Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007), Péter Barta's study on proverb blending in French anti-proverbs (Barta, 2006b, the paper has been translated into French for this special issue (Barta, 2007b), and Katalin Vargha's discussion of a sociolinguistic survey of popular views of anti-proverbs and their functions in Hungary (for this issue the study was reworked with the help of Anna T. Litovkina (Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a). In preparation for publication, two additional works were prepared by individual scholars from Hungary – Péter Barta's examination of French anti-proverbs on food and drinks (Barta, 2007a), and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt's treatment of Bulgarian proverbs from the Internet (Hrisztova-Gotthardt, 2007). Also, four co-authors residing in Hungary (Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha, Péter Barta, and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt) pooled their resources to produce an additional article on the most frequent types of alteration in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta, et al., 2007). In addition, four articles by internationally known anti-proverb researchers from beyond Hungary's borders were brought into the mix to round out the coverage, so that this special issue of *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* could represent not only the best Hungarian but the best international anti-proverb research as well: Wolfgang Mieder (Mieder, 2007) provided an essay on anti-proverbs and mass communication; Harry Walter and V. M. Mokienko submitted a contribution on Russian anti-proverbs and their lexicographic description (Walter & Mokienko, 2007); Stanisław Prędoła offered an exploration of Dutch anti-proverbs from the Internet (Prędoła, 2007), and Fionnuala Carson Williams contributed a study on proverbs in wellerisms (Carson Williams, 2007).

already been published in anti-proverb collections (see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). Vargha and T. Litovkina have also written a number of co-authored articles analyzing various types of transformation and humour devices in Hungarian anti-proverbs (T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2009, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007b). The co-authors have also conducted a survey exploring popular views of proverbs and anti-proverbs in contemporary Hungarian society (for a more detailed analysis of the results of their survey, see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a).<sup>200</sup>

Anna T. Litovkina and Dóra Boronkai from Hungary have conducted socio-linguistic surveys in the USA and Hungary (see Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007, 2009, 2010; T. Litovkina & Boronkai, 2009, 2011; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012). The main purpose of the surveys was to employ the methods of correlational and quantitative sociolinguistics to assess how age and sex (in case of Hungarian respondents, educational level as well) influence the appreciation of humor in anti-proverbs.<sup>201</sup> Following T. Litovkina and Boronkai's line of research, Bulgaria-born researcher residing in Hungary, Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Melita Aleksa Varga from Croatia and Anna T. Litovkina have analyzed the reception of humour of anti-proverbs in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (see Aleksa, Hrisztova-Gotthardt & T. Litovkina, 2009, 2010; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Aleksa & T. Litovkina, 2009).

Apart from the productive partnerships already mentioned, other scholarly teams have recently formed to conduct various anti-proverb projects (in particular,

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**200** Each participant in the survey received a questionnaire containing 30 questions. The task of the informants was to respond to 14 questions concerning the use of proverbs and ten touching upon anti-proverbs. Additionally, the questionnaire contained questions concerning respondents' gender, age, educational level, profession, place of residence (county), and type of residence (city/town, village) at birth and at present. This survey focused on three major questions. First, the authors' aim was to establish the lists of the proverbs most popular for variation. Their second goal was to discover our subjects' thoughts about the use of anti-proverbs, as well as about their views of the people who use them. Thirdly, they compared what people say about their own usage of anti-proverbs against what they think about the ways in which other people use them (for more, see T. Litovkina & Vargha 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a).

**201** Each participant in the survey received a list of anti-proverbs (which were identified as "proverb transformations" in English, or "közmondás-paródiák" [proverb parodies] in Hungarian). The task of respondents was to read the anti-proverbs and to evaluate each item according to its "rate of funniness," from 0 to 10 (0 = the least funny, 10 = the most funny). Additionally, participants were asked to provide minimal personal background information: their sex, age, etc. The survey focused on three major questions. First, how do sex and age (in Hungarian survey one more variable was added, educational level) influence the overall response to the questionnaires? The second goal was to consider the ways in which differences of the variables discussed in the survey influenced responses to the thematic categories treated in the anti-proverbs, particularly sexuality, obscenity, males, females, and family. Finally, the aim of the authors was also to establish and analyze the lists of the most funny and least funny anti-proverbs (for more, see Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007, 2009, 2010; T. Litovkina & Boronkai, 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012).

comparative studies concentrating on anti-proverbs in different languages and social and cultural contexts). Thus, a group residing in Hungary, consisting of Anna T. Litovkina, Katalin Vargha, Péter Barta and Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, has been working on the types of alteration and humour devices most frequently employed in Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs (see Barta, T. Litovkina, Hrisztova-Gotthardt et al., 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, T. Litovkina, Vargha et al., 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha, Barta et al., 2007, 2008; Vargha, T. Litovkina, Barta et al., 2007; etc.).

Naturally, many other important questions connected with anti-proverbs could have been touched here as well, but it would have stretched the length of the chapter past the limits of patience.

## 15.9 Summary

As the numerous examples quoted in the chapter show, anti-proverbs respect nobody. Nothing is too valuable or sacrosanct to avoid exposure to proverbial ridicule. Anti-proverbs may contain elements not only of funniness, but also of offensiveness, hostility, and aggression directed toward various social groups, including women, homosexuals, people of different professions, and so on. The sensitive and controversial topics of anti-proverbs may make them “one man’s meat and another man’s poison”, affirming the truth of what William Shakespeare tells us in “Love’s Labour’s Lost” (V, 2):

A jest’s prosperity lies in the ear  
Of him that hears it, never in the tongue  
Of him that makes it...

As it was pointed out in the introduction to their second collection of Anglo-American anti-proverbs:

In fact, the “anti” component in the term “anti-proverb” is not directed against the concept of “proverb” as such. Proverbs and their wisdom continue to be of much value and relevance in modern society. But some so-called anti-proverbs have become new proverbs with their own wisdom that is perfectly appropriate for the modern age (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006: 5).

Since proverbs are considered by many of us sacrosanct, their reinterpretation in innovative ways can create humor. We laugh at some anti-proverbs because they skew our expectations about traditional values, order, and rules. We are, however, sometimes struck by the absurdity of some situations portrayed in proverb parodies, especially when they rely purely upon linguistic tricks employed for the sole purpose of making punning possible. Very often, however, anti-proverbs move beyond the realm

of fun and wordplay to commenting on important aspects of society, e.g., AIDS, education, politics, work, love, sex, money, air-pollution, etc. As Mieder points out, “In this respect even the anti-proverbs become moralistic if not didactic statements to a degree...” (Mieder, 1989b: 243). As Mieder states elsewhere:

These alterations of existing proverbs might be mere humorous wordplay, but more often than not such anti-proverbs represent a critical reaction to the worldview expressed in seemingly antiquated proverbs....The juxtaposition of the traditional proverb text with an innovative variation forces the reader into a more critical thought process. Whereas the old proverbs acted as pre-conceived rules, the modern anti-proverbs are intended to activate us into overcoming the naive acceptance of traditional wisdom (Mieder, 1993c: 90).

The great abundance of anti-proverbs presented here, as well as the anti-proverbs being created daily in the contemporary world, definitely show that the proverb continues to be used as an effective means of communication in our modern society (Mieder, 1989b: 223). And even if one finds some of the transformations displayed here to be obscene, vulgar, flat, nevertheless, they are the proof of human creativity, and thus, like traditional proverbs, must be collected and studied by proverb scholars. As a linguist and a folklorist, I am fully in agreement with Walter and Mokienko (2005: 4), who stress that modern paremiologists and paremiographers must not only collect and publish traditional and new proverbs, but also collect and publish their transformations and discover their functions and interpret their meanings in the modern world and its communicative processes.

## 15.10 Implications for Further Research

Anti-proverbs are, like proverbs themselves, both the most pervasive and the most elusive of expressions. In everyday life, they are so common that we seldom remember the first time that we heard them. The average American may have heard variants of such twisted sayings as *Money isn't everything – but it's way ahead of what's in second place* (Money isn't everything.) hundreds of times, but a paremiologist searching for an example of that expression may have to wait many months to record it *in vivo*. Yet written anti-proverbs are all too easy to collect: currently, omnipresent lists of them circulate on the Internet and in vernacular published collections. The same situation has obtained with the parent form, the proverb, for millennia. Classical and medieval scribes have left us long lists of proverbs: orators and preachers would memorize them and have to ready to mind for application in their speeches and sermons. Yet no one today knows just how and when they were used.

In attempting to bring the study of proverbs as textual phenomena into harmony with the understanding of proverbs as living speech acts, we once more follow the lead of Wolfgang Mieder, who states:

(...) it would be a mistake to reduce the phenomenon of anti-proverbs to a mere linguistic or phraseological matter. There is a definite folkloric element involved in all of this that should be part of the discussion. It is not enough to identify hundreds of anti-proverbs and place them into collections organized according to the original proverbs followed by the altered texts or thematically by the subjects and meanings of the anti-proverbs. Scholars must also interpret the use and function of anti-proverbs in oral and written contexts and reflect upon the significance of this preoccupation with anti-proverbs by the folk themselves. (Mieder, 2007: 18)

A rich understanding of anti-proverbs requires a concerted melding of diverse approaches: the lexicographer's expertise at assembling long lists from written sources, the linguist's skill of deciphering and explicating the grammatical and phonological strategies as work in the transformations, the sociologist's strengths of statistical analysis applied to the various populations and sub-groups that use anti-proverbs, the comparativist's expertise at assessing cultural differences, and the folklorist's focus on ways in which proverbs live in everyday oral discourse.

It goes without saying that the all-important initial goal for paremiographers in the field of anti-proverbs is collecting and publishing anti-proverbs in any culture where they flourish, by following the example of Wolfgang Mieder (T. Litovkina & Mieder, 2006; Mieder, 1982a, 1985, 1989a, 1998, 2003; Mieder & Tóthné Litovkina, 1999). I refer to the languages already reasonably well represented by in current collections (English, German, and Russian), as well as to those in which published research has only just begun (e.g., French and Hungarian), and to many other tongues in which anti-proverbs exist but are not yet represented in scholarship.

Another equally exciting goal for future research entails conducting cultural-historical analyses of individual proverbs, tracing their various appearances in the form of anti-proverbs. Models for such studies are readily available in a number of Wolfgang Mieder's publications (see Mieder 1993a, 1993b, and many other of his articles and books).

A third important task is to compare and contrast the most common types of proverb transformation in languages other than those discussed in numerous publications (English, German, French, Russian, Hungarian and Dutch).

Since proverbial language is said to reflect the system of values and conventions of a country, it would be useful not only to discuss basic attitudes presented in anti-proverbs of separate languages (some analysis of different topics in separate languages, in particular, English, Russian and French, has already been done separately by Péter Barta, Anna T. Litovkina and Harry Walter<sup>202</sup>), but also to conduct

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**202** Thus, for Anglo-American sexual anti-proverbs, see Tóthné Litovkina, 1999a, 1999b; T. Litovkina, 2005: 87–99, 2011c; for Anglo-American anti-proverbs about women, see T. Litovkina 2005: 100–106, 2011b; for Anglo-American anti-proverbs about different professions and occupations, see T. Litovkina 2005: 107–114; 2011a, 2013; for French anti-proverbs about food and drinks, see Barta, 2007a; for Russian anti-proverbs about women, see Walter, 2004a, 2004b.



cross-cultural studies of topics most frequently treated in anti-proverbs from different languages, in different countries.

Following Wolfgang Mieder and Fionnuala Carson Williams's research on proverbs in wellerisms (Carson Williams, 2002, 2007; Mieder, 1982b, 1989b: 223–238; Mieder & Kingsbury, 1994), it would be an interesting task to examine what proverbs turn up in wellerisms in many other cultures and languages.

It is also apparent that there are some anti-proverbs with international distribution. Some of such examples have been already quoted above. Thus, a very exciting task for the future is to identify anti-proverbs identical in different languages. A very important goal for further research would be analyzing the processes of creativity involved in coining and performing anti-proverbs. Methods of folklore fieldwork and cognitive linguistics would be crucial for such studies.

A detailed analysis of the functions of anti-proverbs is also needed. Thus, an important task for the future is to conduct further socio-linguistics surveys the main goals of which would be exploring popular views on anti-proverbs and their functions in contemporary societies (similar to the study conducted by Katalin Vargha and Anna T. Litovkina in Hungary, the preliminary results of which have been already reported, see T. Litovkina & Vargha, 2009; T. Litovkina, Vargha, & Boronkai, 2012; Vargha & T. Litovkina, 2007a).

Last but not least, another possible future task for researchers could be to extend Aleksa, Boronkai, Hrisztova-Gotthardt and T. Litovkina's methods of evaluating the funniness of anti-proverbs to cultures other than Hungary, the USA, Germany, Austria and Switzerland (see Aleksa, Hrisztova-Gotthardt & T. Litovkina, 2009, 2010; Boronkai & T. Litovkina, 2007, 2009, 2010; Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Aleksa & T. Litovkina, 2009; T. Litovkina & Boronkai, 2009, 2011; T. Litovkina, Vargha & Boronkai, 2012). Along with analyzing the results of surveys conducted in each country separately, it would be interesting to do comparative analysis and to investigate how the cultures correspond, and how they differ, in humor perception.

The work summarized in this chapter also poses many other possibilities for future research. Some of the tasks described above (in particular the ones concentrating on different languages and different cultural backgrounds, or involving broader and more interdisciplinary research projects, e.g., sociological, psychological, textual) require scholarly teamwork. I encourage scholars of varied languages and cultural backgrounds, representing different scholarly disciplines, to join the team of enthusiastic anti-proverbialists in our anti-proverb scholarship.

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# Glossary of Key Terms Appearing in the Book

**Anti-proverb:** An intentionally changed (distorted, twisted, parodied) proverb with a new meaning and often a humorous or satirical effect, including the possibility of becoming a new proverb.

**Aphorism:** A literary form like the proverb in its straightforward memorable formulation as in *Art is long, life short*.

**Asyndetic coordination:** The linking of conjoins without the use of coordinators.

**Binomial:** Fixed combination of two words linked by a conjunction, usually by and, and occasionally by or (e.g. law and order, sooner or later, live and learn, sink or swim, by and by.); the combination of three words (trinominals) can also be found (e.g. *Tom, Dick and Harry; lock, stock, and barrel*).

**Catch-phrase:** (also called ‘winged words’) Popular phrase that is connected with a person (for example, a politician, entertainer, literary character) who used it and made it famous (e.g. *Speak softly and carry a big stick* –Theodore Roosevelt).

**Categorization:** Categorization is a bit more than mechanical classification according to different themes. Proverbs can be classified in many ways and ordering things tells always about your preferences. Categorization refers to a more scientific approach than classification for popular proverb collections. It means that the one who categorizes proverbs has deep knowledge of this genre of folklore and language. These professionals have generally massive material to categorize and basic concepts and/or a theory structuring their plan. Categorization is based on (ethnologic, linguistic, social psychological) concepts and knowledge in advance of the material to be categorized.

**Citation:** A larger text sample that contains the search word.

**Classical theory of features:** The members of the category all share the same features; all category members have an equal status, and sharp and rigid boundaries, in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Applying it to proverbs, all proverbs have the same features.

**Clefting:** Re-arranging the basic word order of an unmarked sentence, and fronting constituents, such as nouns, adverbs, and adjectives, to sentence initial position.

**Cliché:** Sentence like proverb in terms of forming a complete utterance, but lacking its traditionality and imagery: The cliché expresses a trite observation as in *Boys*

*will be boys*. In paremiology, analytical clichés, which can have only a concrete and direct overall meaning (regardless of the possible presence of figures and tropes on the lexical level) and which do not ask for some extended interpretation, are distinguished from synthetic clichés, which are assumed to have an extended (transferred, figurative) overall meaning.

**Cognitive Concept:** Cognitive concepts are the cognitive (mental) structures in the mind which represent the outer world mentally and therefore structure our thoughts (and linguistic actions).

**Collocation:** The frequent and habitual co-occurrence of words in a language (e.g. *a hard frost* [*\*a strong frost*], *gain experience* [*\*make experience*]).

**Collocation analysis:** Automatic method that calculates which words co-occur more often than would be expected by chance. There are several different algorithms for collocation analysis.

**Comparative approach:** This approach aims at showing and discussing the similarities between pairs of proverbs or groups of proverb texts in one language, but more often in two or more languages. In the latter case it is often used interchangeably with the term *crosscultural study of proverbs*.

**Conceptual Metaphor Theory:** Revolutionary thesis by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (see *Metaphors we live by*). Due to this thesis “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system [...] is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 3;.)<sup>203</sup>. This new cognitivist approach is centred on the “metaphorical concept“, usually abbreviated as MC.

**Concordance:** List of words used in a text, with their immediate contexts. A concordance can be used to show language patterns.

**Connotation:** Connotation or connotative meaning is additional, or secondary, meaning of a word or an expression, which accompanies its basic (denotative, referential) meaning and adds personal or emotional associations like for instance appraisal or assessment. The connotative meaning of a language utterance is only explicable in context.

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<sup>203</sup> Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1992). *Metaphors We Live By*. Edition 9 [print.]. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. of Chicago Press.



**Contrastive approach:** Comparing proverbs in two or more languages synchronically or panchronically. This approach aims at explicating the differences between a pair of proverbs, or a selection of proverb texts in two or more languages in relation to a common frame of reference or agreed-upon criterion (*tertium comparationis*).

**Core set of proverbs:** Sample of proverbs which is designated for paremiological experiments and is based on the expert's analysis of dictionaries, proverb collections, texts and direct long term observation of spoken communication.

**Corpus:** A collection of written or spoken texts; the corpus data is digitalized i.e. machine readable and saved on a computer. In addition to the text data itself, corpora can also contain metadata, which describe the data, and linguistic annotations (see Lemnitzer & Zinsmeister, 2010: 8)<sup>204</sup>.

**Counter-proverb:** An overt negation or sententious-sounding rebuttal of a proverb, and explicit denial of the proverb's asserted truth, with the chance of becoming a proverb in its own right, like e.g. *Flattery will get you everywhere* (versus the older *Flattery will get you nowhere*).

**Cultureme:** An axiologically marked entity or content, explicated through a semantic transformation of the question-answer kind, e.g.: What does this linguistic item affirm (i.e., praise, recommend, approve of, justify, etc.) / deny (i.e., condemn, criticize, disapprove of, ridicule, etc.)? A cultureme is represented by a noun or a noun phrase. Concerning proverbs, simple examples of culturemes are *knowledge* (+) for the proverb *Knowledge is power* and *haste* (–) for *Haste makes waste*.

**Elocutio:** The term has originally been used in classical rhetoric for describing the style or manner of speaking, especially in public. In linguistics, elocution refers to the manner of composing a text according to the intention and situation.

**Empirical paremiology:** Research of knowledge and familiarity of proverbs based on demographic research, psycholinguistic experiments and an extensive analysis of huge corpora. Whereas earlier research in this direction focused predominantly on the question of proverb minima, i.e. on the question which proverbs are known by “all” members of a given culture or society, contemporary empirical paremiology, in a broader understanding of this concept, studies which proverbs of a given culture are known in which verbal form(s) by which members of the given society, and which

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<sup>204</sup> Lemnitzer, L. & Zinsmeister, H. (2010). *Korpuslinguistik: Eine Einführung*. 2. durchges. und aktualisierte Aufl. (Narr Studienbücher). Tübingen: Narr.

collective overlaps and intersections exist with regard to proverb knowledge and familiarity.

**Entailment relationships between metaphors:** “The metaphorical concepts *Time is money*, *Time is a resource*, and *Time is a valuable commodity* form a single system based on subcategorization, since in our society money is a limited resource and limited resources are valuable commodities (...). *Time is money* entails that *Time is a limited resource*, which entails that *Time is a valuable commodity*” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1992: 9, )<sup>205</sup>.

**Epigram:** A short poem, often featuring some ironic or surprising turn (*a wasp with a sting*). Typically, as the term implies, an epigram is imagined by the reader to be written – in contrast to a lyric poem, imagined to be sung (as to the accompaniment of a lyre).

**Epistemology:** The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion (Oxford Dictionary)<sup>206</sup>.

**False friend:** Words and expressions that seem similar in two languages, but have different meanings.

**Formula (also called routine formula):** Conventionalized utterance used in recurrent situations (e.g. *Many happy returns of the day*; *Fair nough*).

**Generalised proverb type:** Some group titles in Matti Kuusi’s international type-system of proverbs are like proverbs themselves. Generalised proverb types can also be called moulds of proverbs. The word ‘mould’ refers to the process of creating new proverbs or anti-proverbs. The question is about an attractive and effective structure or pair of words that produces several new innovations. This is not a new phenomenon but a central way for people to develop expressions.

**Hapax/nonce proverb:** A modified proverb that is context bound and/or often lacks imagery and has little aesthetic value and impact potential.

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<sup>205</sup> Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (1992). *Metaphors We Live By*. Edition 9 [print]. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. of Chicago Press.

<sup>206</sup> <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/epistemology>.

**Homonyms:** Words having identical graphemic and phonemic representation, but have different meanings, e.g. *cut* (to separate with or as if with an instrument) and *cut* (a wound made by cutting).

**Illocutionary act:** In pragmatics, the term stands for the actual purpose of a speech act or in other words, for the intention of the speaker to perform a communicative effect on the reader/listener.

**Incongruity:** Violation of expectation.

**KWIC (Key Word In Context):** One line of a computer-generated concordance. The search word is in the centre and some context words are shown left and right.

**L1 (First Language / Language 1):** A person's native language.

**L2 (Second Language / Language 2):** A person's second language.

**Lingua franca:** Any language that is widely used as a means of communication among speakers of other languages, for example, Latin in the Middle Ages, Russian in Eastern Europe, or English throughout the world today.

**Linguistic concept:** A discrete unit of cognition and the mental lexicon, expressed in the lexemes and gramemes of the natural languages. When human beings think, they use concepts. Concepts underlie notions.

**Linguocultural concept:** A unit of knowledge and conscience shared by a large group of people who speak the same language, which has a fixed linguistic form (expression) and is marked by distinct ethnocultural specifics.

**Loan translation:** The direct translation of a word or expression like a proverb and its acceptance from the original language into the target language.

**Logeme:** The summarized, generalized basic meaning of a group of similar, thematically close proverbs. For example, the English proverbs *Actions speak louder than words*, *An ounce of practice is worth a pound of precept*, *Example is better than precept*, and *Deeds will show themselves, and words will pass away* are subsumed under the single logeme *Speaking is less efficient than doing*.

**Maxim:** Like the proverb in forming a complete utterance, but lacking its traditional-ity and imagery. The maxim states a rule for conduct as in *Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today*.

**Metacommunication:** Communication about communication; the use of words and wordgroups (e.g. *proverbial*; *so to speak*) or typographic means (e.g. inverted commas; italics) to mark or introduce linguistic units (such as proverbs) in order to guarantee communicative adequacy.

**Meta-language:** Language about language, the language which is spoken about being called an 'object language'. Meta-language is an important issue for paremiology, particularly when a proverb's meaning is to be described.

**Ornatus:** Ornatus is a technical rhetorical term, meaning *rhetorical decoration*. It refers to the intentional deviation from the (conventional) norms by using rhetorical figures and tropes.

**Outer access structure:** Structure specified for accessing the dictionary articles in a word (lemma) list, with regard to proverb dictionaries, to find a proverb or keyword article in the proverb or keyword list of a dictionary depending on the arrangement of proverbs.

**Parataxis:** This term refers to the linking of constructions of the same grammatical and semantic level through juxtaposition or punctuation, instead of using formal, either coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) or subordinating conjunctions (*although, because, since, unless*).

**Paremiological competence:** The active and the passive knowledge of proverbs by an individual in a paremiological experiment.

**Paremiological experiment:** Prescriptive (passive) or descriptive (active) test to examine the paremiological competence of informants.

**Paremiological minimum:** 1. A set of proverbs that all members of society know; 2. A set of proverbs that an average adult is expected to know or is to be familiar with; 3. A set of proverbs based on empirical sociolinguistic research that a specific group of informants knows or is familiar with.

**Paremiological optimum:** A correlated set of the best known proverbs among speakers and the most frequent proverbs in huge corpora.

**Paremiological performance:** The active and the passive overall knowledge of proverbs by all informants who took part in a paremiological experiment.

**Paremiology:** The study of proverbs.

**Perlocutionary act:** In pragmatics, the term stands for obtaining an effect, which goes beyond the illocutionary act, e.g. persuasion, making angry or insecure, hurting, consoling, praising etc.

**Phrasal verb:** A combination of a verb and (particle(s) or preposition(s). It forms a single unit of meaning (e.g. *put up with* = ‘tolerate’).

**Phraseodidactics:** Discipline dealing with the teaching of phraseological units in language instruction.

**Phraseology:** (1) Set of phraseological units (phrasicon); (2) Field of study investigating these units.

**Phrasicon:** The set of phraseological units in the lexicon of a language community.

**Polygenesis:** Assumption that expressions have not only one, but multiple origins. More precisely, that at least a few proverbs might have originated independently from each other in a number of languages at different times and places.

**Pragmatics:** Subfield of linguistics that examines the usage of utterances in concrete communicative situations and describes which kinds of speech acts are performed by a speaker. As a semiotic dimension pragmatics focuses on the relation of signs to interpreters. More specifically, pragmatics is that portion of semiotic which deals with the origin, uses, and effects of signs within the behavior in which they occur.

**Polysemous word:** A word having two or more meanings.

**Prototype theory:** Members of the category are different, with fuzzy boundaries, better and worse examples, and prototype effects. Applied to proverbs, not all proverbs share the same features, there are better and worse examples for proverbs.

**Proverb citation:** One type of lexicographic examples, authentic excerpted text extracts containing proverbs, exemplifying their meaning and usage, supplied with an abbreviation of the citation source.

**Proverb clustering:** Insertion of two or more proverbs (standard or modified) into a non-proverb context, resulting in a blend of proverb and non-proverb texts.

**Proverb collage:** An entire text or its structural part(s) composed of proverbs (standard or modified) and/or sometimes other easily recognized elements, like familiar quotations, proper names, phraseologisms.

**Proverb concept** (usually abbreviated as PC): According to Lewandowska (Lewandowska, 2008)<sup>207</sup> *proverb concepts* are cognitive concepts, comparable to Lakoff & Johnson's *metaphorical concepts*. These PCs not only pre-structure our thoughts and actions like metaphors do, but at the same time they put linguistically catchy words into our mouth.

**Proverb equivalence:** Sameness of the lexis, structure and meaning of pairs or groups of proverbs in two or more languages, e.g., *Hurry slowly* (English), *Eile mit Weile* [Hurry slowly] (German), *Festina lente* [Hurry slowly] (Latin).

**Proverb keyword:** First or most meaningful component of proverbs, generally the first noun, adjective or adverb.

**Proverb modification:** Creative deformation of a proverb affecting its structure and/or semantics.

**Proverb-poem:** A poem that has as a principal focus on one or more proverbs, quoted or alluded to, which the reader is assumed to be familiar with.

**Proverb system:** The entire body of proverbs in a language. As members of a system the proverbs in a language display systemic relations, e.g., syntagmatic, paradigmatic, synonymy, antonymy, etc.

**Proverb type:** The concept referring to the Matti Kuusi international classification of proverbs, where it presupposes a concrete proverb title or a cluster of proverbs having the common idea, and including proverb variants.

**Proverbial comparison:** Fixed traditional phrase with *as*, *like* or *than*, e.g. *as brown as a berry*, *like a house afire* and *older than the hills*.

**Proverbial phrase:** A traditional, characteristically figurative form, which cannot stand on its own, for example *to kick over the traces*, which lacks a subject.

**Proverbial simile:** see Simile

**Proverbiality:** Having the necessary characteristics of a proverb, that is, currency and traditionality, as well as numerous structural (formula, parallelism) and poetic (alliteration, rhyme) markers.

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<sup>207</sup> Lewandowska, A. (2008). Sprichwort-Gebrauch heute. Ein interkulturell-kontrastiver Vergleich von Sprichwörtern anhand polnischer und deutscher Printmedien. Bern: Peter Lang.

**Pseudo-proverb:** A proverb-like statement invented to resemble a proverb (having traditional stylistic markers and based on a paremic structural-semantic model) that may, if repeated over time, become a new proverb.

**Semantics:** A semiotic dimension which concentrates on the relations of signs to the objects to which the signs are applicable, dealing with the signification of signs in all modes of signifying. Paremiological semantics focuses on the study of how proverb meaning is generated and how it can be described.

**Semiotics:** A branch of science which studies signs, or sign systems, and the processes of sign generation (semiosis) and usage. The discipline of semiotics is usually subdivided into the three semiotic dimensions of pragmatics, syntactics, and semantics. Semiotic paremiology studies the proverb in (at least one of) these aspects from a semiotic perspective, in its semiotic aspects.

**Sign:** The representation of an object, or a notion (concept), that implies a connection between itself and that object. A sign tends to be regarded either as being part of a sign system, in which a sign is different in at least one aspect from all other signs of that system, or as the result of some sign generating process. In addition to *simple* signs, one also speaks of super-signs, i.e. complex signs, or sign complexes. In addition to the denotative function of a sign it may also be seen to include/generate (additional) connotative meaning structures. In paremiology, a proverb may be seen to be a super-sign, generated on the basis of more than one *simple* sign, and it may also be seen as one complex sign.

**Simile** (also called stereotyped comparison): Set phrase that compares something to something else, using the words *like* or *and* (e.g. *as clear as crystal, sleep like a log*).

**Slogan:** Non-traditional formulaic unit created to promote a product or idea as in Nike's advertising slogan *Just do it* or Obama's campaign slogan *Yes, we can*.

**Speech act:** An utterance which has some performative function in language and communication. Often, a distinction is made between direct speech acts, when a speaker utters a sentence and means exactly and literally what s/he says, and indirect speech acts, when a speaker also utters a sentence, and means what s/he says, but additionally means something more, or something different instead. More precisely, it is when the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and non-linguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer.

**Standard use of proverbs:** Application of a proverb in its dictionary form.

**Stylistics:** Subfield of linguistics, the study of linguistic styles, the way of writing/speaking and the conventions of language use. The contemporary stylistics describes style as a function- and situation oriented language use.

**Syndetic coordination:** The explicit linking of conjoins using coordinators such as *and*, *or*, and *but*.

**Syntactics:** A semiotic dimension which is directed towards the formal relations of signs to one another and which studies the way in which signs of various classes are combined to form compound signs. Syntactics thus is broader than the linguistic study of syntax, and it may concentrate both on the formation of complex super signs and on the combination of a given sign with other signs. Paremiological syntactics may comprise both the study of the syntactical formation of proverbs as super signs from individual signs, or of the relation of proverbs as (super) signs with other (proverbial) signs.

**Syntactic parallelism:** A rhetorical device used for the purpose of emphasis or foregrounding. It involves the contiguous juxtaposition of syntactically parallel elements of the proverb text – individual lexical items, phrases, clauses, or sentences – for the purpose of suggesting analogical relationships or comparisons.

**Tertium comparationis:** A common, invariable frame of reference or agreed-upon criterion in relation to which linguistic items are compared or contrasted, e.g., syntactic pattern, logical type, image, main idea, proverb meaning, general concept, logeme, cultureme, etc.

**Topicalisation:** Clefting a constituent element into sentence initial position, leaving a gap in the main clause, that it is interpreted as filling (Gregory & Michaelis 2001:1665)<sup>208</sup>.

**Traditionality:** Having achieved the status of being known and used over a period of time, usually in variants and different contexts.

**Variants of proverbs:** Specific verbal variations, belonging to one and the same given proverb type.

**Wellerism:** A type of proverb–international in its occurrence and many centuries old – that consists of a very short saying (a cliché, proverb, or other brief quotation)

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<sup>208</sup> Gregory, M. L. and Michaelis, L.A. (2001). Topicalization and Left Dislocation: A Functional Opposition Revisited. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 1665-1706.



followed by the designation of a figure to whom the saying is speciously attributed (often *the old woman* or *the devil* or *the monkey*) and then, frequently, by a brief statement of an action or circumstance in which the designated speaker utters the attributed saying. A wellerism is usually intended humorously. Example: “*Two heads are better than one,*” as *the cabbage-head* said to *the lawyer*. The name derives from the character Sam Weller in Charles Dickens’ novel *The Pickwick Papers*.

**Winged word:** see Catch phrase.

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