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"IF THERE WERE NO CLOUDS, WE SHOULDN'T ENJOY THE SUN": THE CROSSCULTURAL VIEW AND MULTI-FACETED MEANING OF A PROVERB

Abstract: This study discusses an experiment with the semantics of the English proverb "If there were no clouds, we shouldn't enjoy the sun." The individual interpretations of this proverb by thirty six Bulgarian bachelor students fluent in English are compared with the definition(s) of the proverb and its linguocultural semantic analysis involving the application of the cultureme. The findings reveal a large area of semantic overlap between the proverb meaning and its perception by non-English respondents.

Keywords: rhetoric, ethics, semantics, associations, cultureme, proverb meaning, imagery, linguistic culturology

Ethics and rhetoric in Europe have since classical times been following two distinct lines of development, although there have also been times when they would work jointly. When composing their speeches, Roman orators as a rule used rhetorical devices to put across their ethical or political messages in a more persuasive way. As regards the ethical value of political communication, the eminent European rhetorician Quintilian viewed this aspect of public life in the same way as Cicero did before him: he was convinced that only good and knowledgeable persons could and should become writers and orators and that only persons of wisdom and integrity should be entrusted with the task of shaping public opinion and acting as leaders of the community (Quintilian 1982: 36, 702, 704). Proverbs have always been among the tools most frequently used by orators in speeches meant to persuade the audience into thinking and acting in the desired ways. For practically millennia they have served in instilling ethical norms, wisdom and common sense in both young and old, rich and poor, rulers and ruled, educated and uneducated, citizens of advanced societies and tribal communities alike (cf. Whiting 1994: 34–35). But proverbs have found their way not only in public speaking; they were also widely used

by lawyers, as a teaching aid in schools and universities, as well as in sermons in the church (Bradbury 2002: 264–65). In everyday life, these short, pithy sentences have helped people see through the illusions in life and assess soberly the situations they find themselves in. Proverbs are indeed among people's best friends.

But how have proverbs made their way into the spoken languages of today? Many of these concise, witty, miniature texts we hear circulating freely in oral use date back to early antiquity, while others are of more recent origin. Linguistic culturology claims that the proverb genre belongs to the group of *precedent texts*, which make up the very core of linguocultures (Karaulov 2007: 16)[1]. When the first collections of such texts began to be compiled, proverbs would often be grouped together with folk narratives, fables, parables, poems, myths and legends, riddles, gnomic verses, nursery rhymes, legal codes, and various other folk and literary genres (cf. Paxton & Fairfield 1980: xi; Mieder 2004: xii). Like the lexicons of languages, the larger part of the proverbs making up the paremiological corpora of the linguocultures known to us today are certainly of native stock, but there may also be numerous borrowings from other languages in the form of calques and literary translations as well as excerpts and quotes from authoritative philosophical, literary, or religious works transformed into folk wisdom. A good example is the Bible, which has become the source of several hundred proverbs in English (cf. Mieder 1990), Bulgarian (Trendafilova 2004 and 2006; Petrova 2006) and, certainly, other languages. Interestingly, the ancient proverb genre continues to thrive in our era of global communication and the Internet: we are now almost on a daily basis witnessing the rise of new sayings in the English language like 'Garbage in, garbage out,' 'There is no such thing as a free lunch,' or 'Repeating a lie doesn't make it true,' all coined over the last century or so (cf. Dictionary of Modern Proverbs), and this state of affairs probably holds good for other languages too.

But are these archaic and sometimes enigmatic sentences losing their appeal among the younger generation today? An experiment I carried out in 2002 showed that Bulgarian students are still interested in the proverb genre. The respondents (forty bachelor students fluent in English) were asked to list out all the English and Bulgarian proverbs they knew. The results showed that they were best familiar with 'A friend in need is a friend indeed', 'All's well that ends well', 'It's no use crying over spilt milk', 'Every cloud has a

silver lining', 'Better late than never', 'An apple a day keeps the doctor away', 'Love is blind' and several others (Petrova 2002b). They may have acquired these sayings during their English classes at school, at the English courses they had attended, or from personal reading and communication. In the nineteen years of teaching Anglophone Area Studies I have often resorted to using English proverbs, especially when trying to illustrate some cultural traits typical of the English people, and have repeatedly found how appealing they are to our students. This prompted the inclusion in my book *Anglophone Area Studies: An Introduction,* of a chapter about the English character with a selection of proverb illustrations (Petrova 2010). Everyday practice shows that in teaching English or disciplines related to Anglophone culture, these 'old, generationally tested gems of wisdom,' as the world's leading proverb scholar Wolfgang Mieder has so fittingly termed the proverb genre, continue to be a 'gold mine' that provides teachers and researchers with a practically inexhaustible range of opportunities (Wilson 2004, Nuessel 2003: 396, 404–8).

In May of 2012 I carried out another experiment involving the English proverb 'If there were no clouds, we shouldn't enjoy the sun', which I gave as a written assignment to the thirty six Bulgarian students taking my class in Academic Writing in English. The respondents were instructed to give their own interpretations of the proverb in the form of a composition of two pages. This not very popular English proverb can be found in Ridout and Witting's collection *English Proverbs Explained* (1981), in the second edition of *Facts and File Dictionary of Proverbs* compiled by Manser, Fergusson, and Pickering (2007), and in Kunin's *English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary* (1984). Being well familiar with the tricky problem of the ambiguity and the semantic indefiniteness of proverbs (discussed in great depth by Arvo Krikmann (Krikmann 2009) and many other proverb scholars), the compilers of some of the more recent proverb dictionaries and collections have wisely abstained from providing 'fixed' definitions or explanations of the items included, although some may offer (occasional) short illustrations from literary texts with the proverbs used in literary contexts. In the case of this proverb, Ridout and Witting's dictionary (Ridout and Witting 1981) offers the following definition and a note about its usage: 'We can have too much of a good thing; and happier times seem all the happier if they are interrupted now and again by

gloomy spells … sometimes basely used as an excuse for accepting poverty, overwork and hardships,' while Manser, Fergusson, and Pickering's dictionary (Manser, Fergusson, and Pickering 2007) offers the synonymous definition 'we cannot fully appreciate the good things in life unless they are interspersed with bad times', and a literary illustration.

I chose this proverb for a written assignment because of its appealing imagery and its simple main idea, which the students could easily illustrate with examples from their own personal experience. As with many other figurative proverbs, through using familiar images this proverb sums up a dialectical law of life: the good things we receive can be appreciated only when contrasted with the negative aspects of the human condition, which ultimately makes misery a necessary ingredient of life. Its practical message as a strategy for dealing with a specific situation, to use Kenneth Burke's apt characterization (Burke 1941), is that instead of shunning from the occasional spells of bad luck that beset us, we should accept them with gratitude, knowing that, in the long run, they will help us see and enjoy the good things we have fully and with a clean conscience.

In paremiology and paremiography, culling primary data with the help of questionnaires has long established itself as a reliable research method. Proverb scholars resort to using interviews and questionnaires with various purposes in mind such as checking proverb meaning, compiling paremiological minima, summarizing popular attitudes to certain concepts, comparing popular views expressed in proverbs, eliciting proverb definitions, and so on. Such experiments may involve asking a set of questions about a proverb or a proverb group, posing an 'open answer' question, using a combination of both, or other similar arrangements (cf. Arora 1994, Doctor 2005, Honeck 1997, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett 1973, Permyakov 1971 and 1985, Lyudmilla Petrova 2007, Mieder 1985 and 1993, etc.). Recently, the questionnaire method has been used successfully in phraseology by Elisabeth Piirainen, who conducted extensive research to establish the meaning, origin and dissemination of a large number of idioms current in all European languages and beyond the boundaries of the European continent (Piirainen 2012). We find a detailed account of one such experiment in an article of 1997 by Wolfgang Mieder, describing how the meaning of the ethnic slur 'No tickee, no washee' was found. This experiment was conducted in 1995 with students of the University of California

in Berkeley, who were asked to fill in a one-page questionnaire designed by Alan Dundes about its origin, meaning and usage of this proverb. The answers, discussed in Mieder (1997: 160–189) show that part of the respondents do not perceive this sentence as a derogatory expression, but as a regular metaphor meaning simply 'something is necessary for the exchange of something else.' This example comes to prove once again that the meaning of a proverb and its perception are not written in stone, but vary with time and some other factors. But let us also add, that the questionnaire method should elicit 'valid' results when used with respondents that belong to the same linguoculture as that of the proverb(s), while when used with non-native speakers, one may expect that their answers will deviate from those of the former group.

In this paper, I will try to show that when viewed from a linguocultural perspective, the English proverb 'If there were no clouds, we shouldn't enjoy the sun' reveals additional layers of meaning, which, while being synonymous with the dictionary definitions quoted earlier, significantly broaden and complement them; these meanings can be explicated with the help of the culturematic analysis, which I am going to demonstrate later. I will also show that when comparing the results of this analysis with the students' interpretations of the proverb, we can obtain good evidence of their level of Anglophone linguocultural competence, firsthand knowledge of their own culture specific attitudes, views and personal experience, and solid proof of the universal, 'species-wide significance' (Honeck 1997: 35) of the proverb under study.

The culturematic analysis belongs to the research methods of linguistic culturology, a scholarly field that has been developing over the last decade and a half at the intersection of linguistics and culturology. Linguistic culturology attaches special importance to phraseology and the proverb genre, regarding them as the domains of language that provide us with truthful and detailed representation of a people's character, way of life, prevailing values and mentality, or, in a word, of a people's specific culture (Telia 1996; Maslova 2001; Dobrovolskij 1997; Vorobyov 1997; Dmitrieva 1997; V. I. Karassik 1994 and 2002; A. V. Karassik 2001; Vorkachov 1997 and 2002; Palashevskaya 2001; Savenkova 2002; Hrolenko 2004; Kushneruk 2005; Petrova 1996, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, 2006 and 2012; Nedkova 2010). In much the same way, some proverb scholars that do not claim any relationship with linguistic culturology

tend to view the proverb lore of a people as a storehouse of its specific generational knowledge and *Weltanschauung* and as a tool for teaching specific behavioural rules and practical wisdom to the folk (cf. Romanska 1976, Kolessov 1989, Tarlanov 1993). There are of course other scholars who make the equally valid claim that proverbs represent not specific, but universal values and attitudes common to all people regardless of their nationality (e.g., Whiting 1994: 43). On this issue I take a middle road. I have done extensive research proving that a great deal can be learned from the proverbs in a language about the prevailing cultural traits of the people who speak this language and about their specific conditions of life, but also that some of these traits may be shared by people from other cultures as well (Petrova 2006). In this study, we will be interested in one typical characteristic of proverbs, namely, that they perform their pragmatic functions of advising, ridiculing, amusing, criticizing, warning, etc., through attaching positive or negative evaluations to certain entities. The axiological nature of proverbs takes us very close to explaining their culture specific role. My work on English and Bulgarian proverbs over the years confirms that all true proverbs are, overtly or implicitly, axiologically 'charged,' which is to say, culture specific, as long as it is agreed that culture ultimately means a system of values (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010: 7–10; Maslova 2001: 22; Pivoev 2011: 5. 8, 14−24). Each proverb has one (and, very rarely, more than one) main cultureme (the main entity to which it attaches positive or negative evaluation) and each conveys a specific lesson, or message, that focuses on this cultureme. For example, the proverb 'Who hesitates is lost' focuses on indeterminacy, evaluating it negatively. This entity can be brought to the surface through applying a technique I call *linguocultural method* (demonstrated in detail in Petrova 1996, 2002a, 2002b, 2004, and 2006); it is analogous to the technique used in school for finding the different parts of the sentence and involves asking a question similar to the 'who' or 'what' questions for finding the subject or the object of a sentence, and eliciting the needed answer, which may sometimes need to undergo some kind of semantic transformation (e.g., paraphrasing, nominalization, contraction, turning a literal into a figurative meaning, etc.). This method is demonstrated in examples (1), (2), and (3) below:

(1) A friend in need is a friend indeed.

Question for establishing the cultureme: What does this proverb approve of / disapprove of? – It approves of true friendship.

Question for establishing the message and checking the positive or negative sign of the cultureme: What does it teach us to do / to be (not to do / not to be)? – It teaches us to be true friends.

The cultureme of this proverb is 'true friendship' and it is positive, hence its full name: 'true friendship (+)'.

(2) Familiarity breeds contempt.

Question for establishing the cultureme: What does this proverb approve of / disapprove of? – It disapproves of familiarity.

Question for establishing the message and the sign of the cultureme: What does it teach us to do / to be (not to do / not to be)? – It teaches us not to behave in an intrusive way, not to trespass another person's privacy.

The cultureme of this proverb is 'familiarity (–)'.

Proverbs (1) and (2) above belong to the literal type, and in this are similar to maxims, aphorisms or sententiae. Our third example is a figurative (metaphorical) proverb.

(3) Many commanders sink the ship.

Question for establishing the cultureme: What does this proverb approve of / disapprove of? – It disapproves of bad management.

Question for establishing the message and the sign of the cultureme: What does it teach us to do / to be (not to do / not to be)? – It teaches us not to let too many people take charge of a situation.

The cultureme of this proverb is 'bad management (–)'.

Let it be stressed that although further and more detailed answers can be given to the questions above, they would all be synonymous.

In English (as well as in Bulgarian), the partly or wholly figurative (metaphorical) type of proverb seems to be by far much more common than the literal type, a fact that has been proved empirically in Petrova's dissertation (2006), where the ratio of the figurative English and Bulgarian proverbs to the non-figurative ones in the

English and Bulgarian corpora under study is the same: ca. 75% to 25%. In the last example above, instead of being verbally stated, the idea of bad management is expressed with the help of images. The surface structure of this proverb (the phrases *surface* and *deep structure* are not to be confused with Chomsky's terms in syntax), which serves as a vehicle of its deep structure (or definition), depicts a hypothetical situation – a ship and many commanders in charge of it instead of only one, the result being the sinking of the vessel. The deep structure, or definition, of this proverb is 'Too many persons in charge, where only one is needed, are sure to ruin an undertaking.' It is obtained via semantic transformation consisting in translating the literal meaning into an implicit, figurative meaning (for an in-depth discussion of this very complex process see Honeck 1997). On hearing this proverb, the native speaker would automatically link it to this definition and to no other and to some similar situations of poor management drawn from his own personal experience, simultaneously picturing to himself the images in the proverb: the sea, the ship, the many captains on board the vessel scurrying about, shouting commands and confusing the sailors, while it is sinking beneath the waves.

The proverb 'If there were no clouds, we shouldn't enjoy the sun' belongs to the figurative type. By applying to it the linguocultural method, we find its cultureme – 'misery and suffering (+)', and its message – 'people should value misery and suffering in life and try to see in them their best teachers.' But if it undergoes culturematic analysis, as will be shown later, still further, richer, and more refined extensions of this meaning will be discovered.

The culturematic analysis is an extension of the linguocultural method (for a detailed explanation of this analysis see Petrova 2010b, 2012). In essence, it takes into account the supposition that while the raison d'être of the proverb is its deep structure (definition), summarized in the proverb cultureme and its message, its surface structure (i.e., the sum of individual meanings of the sentence constituents) is no less culturally significant: the axiologically marked concepts and images denoted by the sentence constituents are seen as equally culture specific, and so are the associations invoked by them. For example, the images of the clouds and the sun in this proverb are also important in that they give us valuable knowledge of the climate of its place of origin (presumably not equatorial Africa), while the associations they invoke in the mind of

the user or recipient – e.g., light, warmth, profusion, abundance, luck, love, enthusiasm, optimism, and joy, contrasted with darkness, rain, cold, lack, want, pain, disillusionment, despondency, worry, misery, poverty, toil, suffering, death, etc. – also add significantly to this knowledge: the constellation of such associative meanings acquires a life of its own, which cannot and should not be reduced to the abstract moral of the proverb. Thus, the whole rich interplay of associative meanings that fill the space between the literal meaning of the proverb and its definition bridges the gap between the concrete and the abstract and makes the proverb lesson easier to perceive.

This kind of analysis should begin with parsing the proverb sentence into its immediate constituents. From them, the axiologically marked collocations should be singled out and the non-nominal ones of them should undergo nominalization (i.e. transformation into noun phrases or nominal clauses); next, to each should be attached a positive (plus) or a negative (minus) sign, and, if there are images, as is the case with this proverb, each should be translated into its cluster of figurative meanings. To these must be added the nominalized proverb message. The result will be the sum total of all culturemes, which completely exhausts the cultural content of the proverb, as shown in example (4) below:

 (4) If there were no clouds, we should not enjoy the sun.

i. clouds (–)

ii. a sky overcast with clouds (–)

iii. misery and suffering (unhappiness, pain, hardship, bad luck) (–)

iv. the sun (+)

v. happiness (joy, abundance, love, luck, ease, success, hope) (+)

vi. enjoying the sun (+)

vii. feeling happy (+)

viii. inability to see the sun (–)

ix. something bad that stands in the way of happiness (–)

x. the need for suffering, which enables us to appreciate the good things in life (+)

xi. misery and suffering (unhappiness, pain, hardship, bad luck) (+)

Like the perception of a poetical work, because the associations evoked by the clouds and the sun in this proverb arise from each recipient's mental powers of imagination, they can never be exactly the same and will vary from person to person. The last two culturemes (x. and xi.) are the nominalized proverb message, which is fully synonymous with the dictionary definitions given earlier, and the main cultureme of the proverb. We can see how this kind of analysis explicates a whole rich spectrum of culturally determined attitudes to the natural images and to the host of associations they evoke, turning the proverb into a vivid fragment of the multifaceted physical and cultural life of the people that have created it and among whom it has acquired currency.

The experiment

The thirty six Bulgarian students of both sexes taking part in the experiment are aged 19 through 24 and are fairly fluent in English: prior to the experiment they each passed successfully an entrance examination in English at the intermediate level, covered two to four disciplines in English, and studied, or were completing, a course in Anglophone Area Studies course that is taught in two consecutive semesters. Before discussing the answers, I will list these excerpts from the compositions, which best summarize each writer's personal perception of the proverb. In order to provide context, I will list whole excerpts instead of single words or phrases. For the sake of authenticity the exact wording will be given; let us stress that no attempt has been made to correct errors.

Answers

1.   Every single person knows, and has been through this, to have 'clouds' in his life, and every single one of us knows how amazing fills [sic], and how joyful the 'sun' is after that. Some people have never had even one cloud up their heads [sic] … they don't really appreciate anything in their lives … One should appreciate the 'clouds' in their life as much as the 'sun'. And people can wait for a storm to pass, just to see a little glim [sic] of sunlight in their lifes [sic].

2.   If there were no problems, we cannot realize how nice is life [sic] when we overcome these problems.

3.   We would not know what is [sic] bad if there was no good. If we never lived in such a society [communism] we would never know the sweetness of the power to be heard and to live in democracy and to have the constitutional right of choice.

4.   How can a person learn to deal with the consequences of his actions if there weren't any 'clouds'. How can we explain to our children which deeds and action are right if a bad deed did not exist? This proverb tells us that we shouldn't act as if the world has come to an end when something bad happens. … If I haven't done [sic] a single mistake, how can I know to do my work right? … Only a sick person can appreciate the treasure that health is. … This is a model that nature follows, this is a model that God created.

5.   All the misfortunes that have happened to me have a reason for entering my life. Not only do we learn from our mistakes but we try not to repeat them. … Life without losses and bad luck is not a complete life. One cannot be happy all the time; if that is the case, they are either crazy or on drugs! … The bad things are always followed by happy ones [sic]. This English proverb is concerned more with the spiritual side of life. … we cannot be happy all the time, but but if we simply try to be better people and to remember that life goes on, we will feel the happy side of life.

6.   We all appreciate something when we have lost it. … But it is possible to enjoy the sun when there are clouds. … We shouldn't wait for the clouds to come to appreciate the sun. We should enjoy it while we have it. Losing some things some time [sic] can be the best thing that can happen to you as then you realize what is really important to you. [The student gives an example with people from countries with sunny climates who take sunshine for granted – R.P.].

7.   Grasp the moment's pleasure, but don't count too much on it. Know that luck is fleeting.

8.   If we don't know sadness how can we define what happiness is? … What is life without death? Without it life becomes meaningless. One thing without its opposite is meaningless. … joy and sorrow, evil and good, right and wrong are a natural part of life and even though we are sometimes sad, or do bad things, it is this

that makes us so very human. It is by suffering that we learn to enjoy what is good and pleasurable.

9.   Why [sic] should we feel the joy of being alive if there were no difficulties in our lives? Would life be interesting?

10. This proverb can be understood in two different ways. One way is that a person feels a lot more satisfaction out of accomplishing something difficult rather than something easy to do. If there were no hurdles along the path of completing whatever the task may be and if one can see his goal clearly from the very beginning then in the end one won't feel as much satisfaction as when he actually had to work hard for the same results. 2) When one gets too much of something with time he can get sick of it. One should treasure even a smallest [sic] thing because even a food that one hates may save him from starvation…

11. Sun is the joy of life, the jocund dance of the little boy or girl laughing and playing in the field. Clouds – we shiver from [sic] the thought of anguish, misfortune and fear itself. We 'enjoy the sun' when we see it, but we forget that without the 'clouds', the tiny miserable moments in our existence, the 'sun' would burn us. Life is a mixture of laughter and sorrow, one cannot have the one without the other, it is like the sun and the moon, the cat and the mouse, God and the devil. … If there was no pain, how could we value the 'gain'? If we did not have any clouds, … who or what would keep the balance on earth? The sun and the clouds are like 'compare' and 'contrast'. Our mission on earth is to develop every day… – this can only be achieved through happiness and misfortune. I believe that there is a strong eternal connection between good and bad in life.

12. If we had such clear starry nights people would be nocturnal. … Since most rain comes from clouds, the natural plant life on earth would die out and the planet would be reduced to an arid, lifeless desert.

13. It is the end of the world. We would have only one season and that would be summer. The English proverb gives me the idea and impression of an evolution of humanity, a new chapter in our future. So it has a good side to it, apart from the Armaggedon caused by climate changes. One thing at the expense of another.

14. [T]he ability to improve after every failure or disappointment. Everything happens for a reason and we should embrace even the hardships with enough positive energy and courage. Be happy with what you have and what you are now.

15. There must be ups and downs in our life because that is how we appreciate what we have. … Sometimes it is good to fall down so when we get back to our feet [sic] we could know how to enjoy the sun.

16. This proverb shows how really important for people is [sic] to see the simplest things and to look in a different perspective. After every problem comes a resolution.

17. Humans don't value the things until they lose them. How can we define good without evil? How can we describe God's work if there was no Devil?

18. You understand how valuable a person was when he is gone. [A story follows about a terminally ill young person, who knows the value of life. – R.P.] It is necessary for something bad to happen to us to realize how valuable life is.

19. A proverb of paradox meaning that the world would be a boring place and people would have no stimulation [sic] to develop themselves, the human race, and the civilization on the whole [sic]. Why should we be happy if there is nothing bad which we have surpassed [sic] to achieve this happiness? Happiness must be deserved.

20. People are always complaining. But people can appreciate the good things only in moments of sadness. To see how beautiful love is, you must know what it is to have a broken heart. Even the kids get happier when they get punished for having done mischief like breaking a glass or having a low grade at school. If there is no rain, there will be no rainbows.

21. The clouds give us water to drink. If there were no clouds, it would be very boring.

22. The clouds are the ugly part of the sun. The clouds illustrate the different people. We all should accept the clouds, the different people – if there was no sun, we shouldn't enjoy the clouds. Seeing something ugly makes you appreciate the beautiful world.

23. We grow up so fast without having the chance to understand the world and tell the difference between good and bad. It is part of our nature to feel miserable for what others have and not be happy with what we have. We start to appreciate something or someone only after we lose him/her. People are blind for what they have but after a moment of sadness we see the different world [sic].

24. We often forget to enjoy the little things in our lives, especially born [sic] rights (like freedom) – we don't pay much attention go them. The sun symbolizes these things and the clouds symbolize the darkness. In a strange way the existence of the clouds is like a reminder to us to enjoy the 'light of hope'. Without the sun there would be no life on the planet, ergo we should never stop enjoy [sic] it.

25. We won't be able to appreciate and enjoy our lives if there weren't our troubles and problems in them [sic]. [If you have everything you want,] the moment will come when you get bored and tired of it all. There should be some bad at all [sic], so that we appreciate the good, some black so that the white looks more white … Being young forever is also an interesting concept. Imagine staying 25 years young when your wife grows to be 85 and your children 60 is no fun. Or you live forever. … Then unique things like the first kiss, the first love, first girlfriend, first child – would you be able to enjoy them? You will be so sick of it all.

26. When a husband loses his wife only then does he start thinking about the time he wasted working instead of being with her. The English proverb is about the little things in our life which you should learn to appreciate before losing them.

27. When the summer is hot we look for cooler places. An artist would sit on a bench in the park and look at the clouds in the sky with a brush in his hand – they will make his drawing more beautiful. Photographs too prefer cloudy weather for taking pictures. I remember on board the plane once the sky was covered with big mountains of white clouds. Everyone should enjoy the clouds and also the sun beams [sic], letting it [sic] into your room to brighten your day.

28. If there were no clouds there would be no rain and no life. But believing that there is something over [sic] the clouds can make you

happy. Sometimes our lives are like a sky, sometimes cloudy, sometimes sunny. We all have to achieve [sic] something to receive happiness. If there were no clouds, we won't have anything to fight for. Remember, everything happens for a reason.

29. If we get used to too much joy, we will forget the sorrow and the pain. When you are happy, don't make plans, when you are mad, don't take decisions. Happiness is expensive. Every person's sky is what he makes it. I too had bad moments but took note of them and grew stronger because of them. I am grateful I had my friends to offer me raincoats and umbrellas when it was cloudy. … You shouldn't run [away] when you see them [the clouds] but face them with a smile on your face and friends by your side.

30. Thanks to the bad things that happen to us we appreciate every sweet moment. The clouds are the pain, the grey, the sorrow. We know, well, clouds in love, at home, even at school. But we dream of a shower [on] a hot day. Money is sun, when earned by hard work, for a poor person who won a green card and went to live in the USA. The clouds in this person's life made him what he is now – rich and happy, with wife and two children.

31. This proverb contains the essence that is part of every single one of us on this planet and makes us human beings. It describes a very simple law in life … if someone has gone through some bad things in life he will appreciate all the good things he experiences. The bad things give us something good and this is knowledge and wisdom that they some day are just bad memories from which we could learn. Could there be peace without war and happiness without suffering ? That could make our life dearer. A proverb of the contrast that exists in life.

32. The sun is the reason for the people to feel happy and to be in a good mood. There are many cloudy countries where people feel sad and depressed. At the same time people fom warmer countries are complaining that it is too hot. For that reason it is best there [sic] to be clouds sometimes in order to be glad [sic] when the sun appears. Losing something sometimes might be the best thing that can happen to you and to realize what is really important in life – it is a lesson that everybody should learn.

33. The proverb … can be deciphered as "If there is no bad, there will not be any good as well [sic]" … without a certain negative quality we will not feel, know or enjoy any positive quality. This is false because not having clouds is much better. … What more can a person want than a place with no wars, no corruption, no selfishness, no disputes [presumably meaning strife, discord – R.P.], no criminals. But it is also possible that without the clouds we would stop appreciating the sun, hence we could stop enjoying it. This means that the world can be empty in emotions, deeds, and sensations. Such a world will be extremely boring.

34. We do not value how precious is [sic] something for us until we lose it. We take them [sic] for granted. The proverb proves the connection between people and nature. The balance of nature couldn't be more perfect. It teaches us to see into ordinary and simple things and find in them their beauty and necessity [sic].

35. [This is a proverb] about our world of opposites and dualism. The problems and the good moments in life cannot exist one without the other. Darkness is lack of light. We wouldn'be able to make [sic] the difference between them if both of them didn't exist. The clouds illustrate [sic] the problems we have and the sun, the joy, love, the moments when we feel mentally satisfied. Also, people need variety. We become a little wiser with every mistake we have made. The clouds are a necessary part of life. Problems and happiness are a natural part of our life.

36. The clouds are those obstacles and challenges that motivate people because the will to succeed or fail lies within the individual jurisdiction. No matter how sunny, with or without clouds, life's a challenge. In every black cloud there is always a silver lining.

Discussion

We see that the figurative meaning of the proverb is wholly or partly missing in five of the thirty six answers, in which the words are taken in their literal senses (cf. nos. 12, 13, 21, 27, and, partially, 32). The remaining thirty one respondents have fully grasped the metaphorical meaning of the proverb images and have provided interpretations.

The first list below presents the sum of 78 figurative meanings of the word *clouds*. They are numbered in the order they appear in

the list of excerpts above. The repetitions within an individual answer are not counted, i.e., only one example is listed when there are two or more identical examples given by the same respondent.:

1. problems; 2. [something that is] bad; 3. communism; 4. a bad deed; 5. making a mistake; 6. being sick; 7. something bad; 8. mistakes; 9. losses; 10. bad luck; 11. the loss of something [presumably good and valuable]; 12. sadness; 13. death; 14. evil; 15. wrong; 16. doing bad things; 17. suffering; 18. difficulties; 19. something difficult; 20. hard work; 21. anguish; 22. misfortune; 23. fear; 24. the devil; 25. the tiny miserable moments in our existence; 26. pain; 27. misfortune; 28. bad (n); 29. failure; 30. disappointment; 31. hardships; 33. the downs [in one's life]; 34. falling down; 35. problems; 36. being terminally ill; 37. something bad happening to us; 38. bad (n); 39. moments of sadness; 40. having a broken heart; 41. rain (fig.); 42. the ugly part of the sun (fig.); 43. the different (i.e. the bad) people; 44. something ugly; 45. bad (n); 46. feeling miserable for what others have (i.e. being envious); 47. not being happy with what we have; 48. losing someone [a significant other]; 49. a moment of sadness; 50. darkness; 51. trouble; 52. problems; 53. bad (n); 54. black (n); 55. a husband losing his wife; 56. working hard for something; 57. sorrow; 58. pain; 59. clouds (fig.); 60. pain; 61. grey; 62. sorrow; 63. hard work; 64. bad things in life; 65. bad memories; 66. war; 67. suffering; 68. losing something [valuable to you]; 69. bad (n); 70. a negative quality; 71. wars; 72. corruption; 73. selfishness; 74. disputes [i.e. strife, discord]; 75. criminals; 76. losing something precious; 77. problems; 78. obstacles.

The second list comprises the sum of 82 figurative meanings of the words *sun* in the way thirty-two of the respondents (including answer no. 32) have interpreted this image. Again, all repeated identical words or phrases within one individual answer are left out:

1. life being nice; 2. good (n); 3. the sweetness of the power to be heard; 4. living in democracy; 5. having the constitutional right of choice; 6. right deeds and actions; 7. doing one's work right; 8. health as a treasure; 9. being happy; 10. happy things [i.e. happy states]; 11. happy side of life; 12. a moment's pleasure; 13. luck; 14. life; 15. joy; 16. good (n); 17. right (n); 18. what is pleasurable; 19. the joy of being alive; 20. satisfaction; 21. something easy to do; 22. getting something; 23. the joy of life; 24. the jocund dance of the

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little boy or girl laughing and playing in the field; 25. laughter; 26. God; 27. gain; 28. happiness; 29. good (n); 30. the ability to improve; 31. the 'ups' in one's life; 32. getting up on one's feet (fig.); 33. the resolution to a problem; 34. the things one has; 35. good (n); 36. God's work; 37. having someone by one's side; 38. life; 39. being happy: 39. good things; 40. rainbows (fig.); 41. good (n); 42. positive aspects of life; 43. the little things in life; 43. some [civil] rights one is entitled to; 44. freedom; 45. 'light of hope'; 46. having everything you want; 47. the good; 48. white (n) / whiter; 49. being young forever; 50. staying twenty five years young forever; 51. living forever; 52. the first kiss; 52. the first love; 53. first girlfriend; 54. the first child; 55. the little things in our life; 56. something beyond the clouds can make you happy; 57. a life which is sunny (fig.); 58. happiness; 59. joy; 60. being happy; 61. happiness; 62. every sweet moment; 63. love; 64. money; 65. a green card; 66. living in the USA; 67. being rich; 68. being happy; 69. having a wife and two children; 70. the good things one experiences; 71. something good; 72. knowledge; 73. wisdom; 74. good (n); 75. some positive quality; 76. something precious we have; 77. good moments in life; 78. joy; 79. love; 80. the moments when we feel mentally satisfied; 81. sunny life (fig.); 82. silver lining (fig., i.e. hope).

The final list below comprises the 64 sentences (some of them slightly edited) showing how thirty three of the thirty six respondents (all except nos. 12, 13 and 27) have perceived and articulated the proverb message:

1. One should appreciate the 'clouds' in their life as much as the 'sun'; 2. People should wait for a storm (fig.) to pass; 3. We need problems to appreciate the positive things in life; 4. Living in communism helps us appreciate the value of democracy; 5. A person learns to deal with the consequences of his actions; 6. We shouldn't act as if the world has come to an end when something bad happens; 7. We learn to appreciate the treasure that health is; 8. This contrast is a model that nature follows; 9. This contrast is a model that God created; 10. We learn from our mistakes and that misfortunes have a reason for entering one's life; 11. We try not to repeat our mistakes; 12. We should try to be better people and to remember that life goes on; 13. We should learn to enjoy the [good] things we have while we have them; 14. A loss helps us realize what is

really important to us; 15. Grasp the moment's pleasure as luck is fleeting; 16. By suffering we learn to enjoy what is good and pleasurable. 17. Difficulties make life interesting; 18. Satisfaction comes with accomplishing something difficult; 19. One learns to treasure even the smallest thing; 20. Pain helps us learn the value of gain; 21. [The alternation of] happiness and misfortune help us develop every day, which is our mission on earth; 22. One good thing [can be had] at the expense of another; 23. The ups and downs in our lives help us appreciate what we have; 24. [We learn that] after a problem comes its resolution; 25. [Our confrontation with] evil and the Devil help(s) us value good and God's work; 26. Losing someone makes us value him/her more; 27. Being ill makes us value the treasure that health is; 28. Happiness must be deserved, e.g., by overcoming something bad; 29. Having a broken heart makes you see how beautiful love is; 30. Kids get happy when punished for having done mischief; 31. Clouds [understood figuratively] save us from boredom; 32. Seeing something ugly [such as different people, meaning bad people] makes you appreciate the beautiful world; 33. We learn the difference between good and bad; 34. Losses make us appreciate what we have; 35. Sadness opens our eyes and we see the different world [i.e., the bright side of life]; 36. We learn to enjoy the rights we take for granted, liker freedom; 37. Clouds [fig.] are a reminder to us to enjoy 'the light of hope'; 38. Troubles and problems help us appreciate and enjoy life; 39. They save us from boredom; 40. Some bad is needed in order for us to see what is good, and black makes white even whiter; 41. When you have lost your wife, you realize how much she meant to you; 42. One must learn to appreciate the little things in life before losing them; 43. If there were no clouds [fig.], we won't have anything to fight for; 44. We learn that everything happens for a reason; 45. [We learn that] happiness is expensive; 46. The bad moments I had made me stronger; 47. Don't run away from your 'clouds', but face them with a smile on your friend and friends by your side; 48. Thanks to the bad things that happen to us we appreciate every sweet moment; 49. By getting a green card, going to live in the USA and working hard there one can earn a contented life [with money and a family of wife and two children]; 50. The bad things in life help one appreciate all the good things one experiences; 51. The bad things give us something good and this is knowledge and wisdom that they some day are just bad memories from which we could learn; 52. War makes peace dearer;

53. Happiness is appreciated through suffering; 54. Losing something sometimes might be the best thing that can happen to you to realize what is really important in life; 55. If there is no bad, there will not be any good; 56. Without a certain negative quality we will not feel, know or enjoy any positive quality; 57. Clouds [fig.] enrich life with emotions, deeds and sensations; 58. They save the world from boredom; 59. The proverb teaches us to appreciate the precious things in our life instead of taking them for granted; 60. It teaches us to see into ordinary and simple things and find in them their beauty and necessity; 61. We wouldn't be able to tell the difference between the problems and the good moments in life if both of them didn't exist; 62.We become a little wiser with every mistake we have made; 63. Obstacles and challenges motivate our will to succeed; 64. We learn that in every black cloud [fig.] there is a silver lining [fig.].

Let us now compare the first list above with no. iii. *Suffering and misery (unhappiness, pain, hardship, bad luck) (–)* from the culturematic analysis. The comparison shows a very rich and diverse spectrum of interpretations of the 'clouds' image. Some are found in more than one answer: *bad* is found in 14 answers, and *problems* – in 4 answers. On the whole, the larger part (46) of the 78 answers are closely synonymous to those in our analysis (nos. 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 39, 45, 49, 51, 52, 53, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 67, 69, 70, 76, 77, and 78). But there also interpretations that, although not contradictory in meaning to *suffering and misery (unhappiness, pain, hardship, bad luck) (–),* are different in that they seem to be more distantly related to them. Among them are *fear, darkness, wars, corruption, living in communism, criminals, obstacles, death, having a broken heart, being terminally ill, feeling envious, not being happy with what one has, the devil, evil, wrong, doing bad things, bad people, something ugly, the ugly part of the sun, bad memories, mistakes, selfishness, strife, darkness, rain, grey, black.*

Next, we shall compare the second list above with no. v. *happiness (joy, abundance, love, luck, ease, success, hope) (+)* from the culturematic analysis. Of the 82 answers, 47 provide interpretations that are fairly synonymous with the 'sun' image (nos. 1, 9, 10, 11, 2, 13, 15, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27. 28, 31, 34, 39, 40, 42, 43,

45, 46, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 68, 70, 71, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 81, and 82). Among them, *happy / happiness* is found nine times, and *joy / joyous* or *(jocund)* – six times. But there are also other, more distantly related interpretations in this group. These are abstract concepts such as *good* (four times), *right*, *knowledge, wisdom, God, and God's work*, and others such as *right deeds and actions, doing one's work right, love* (twice), *life* (twice), *health*, and *having a companion. Getting up on one's feet* and *solving a problem successfully* are also associated with the sun image. There are also several socio-political associations, e.g. *democracy, the constitutional freedom of choice, civil rights, the right to be heard*, as well as answers related to the American Dream *(going to the USA with a green card, becoming rich, having a wife and two children).*

Lastly, let us compare the message in our definition, x. *the need for suffering that enables us to appreciate the good things in life (+)*, with the 64 interpretations of the students. 26 are largely synonymous (nos. 1, 3, 13, 14, 16, 19, 23, 26, 34, 35, 37, 38, 40, 41, 42, 47, 48, 50, 53, 54, 56, 59, 60, 61, and 63), but 36 (2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 39, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 51, 52, 55, 57, 58, 62, and 63) provide rather different although not contradicting interpretations: *the bad, the ugly, the bad people* and *the Devil,* for instance, are seen as a means to appreciating good and goodness; *mistakes, obstacles* and *difficulties* are seen as stimuli for personal growth; according to some respondents *problems* and *losses*, interestingly, add excitement to life and are even a welcome break from boredom; *just punishments* are found to be enjoyed by [some] children, while *contrast* is seen as a natural aspect of Creation.

Conclusion

We can see that almost all of the thirty-six respondents (except three) have grasped the message of the English metaphorical proverb correctly: in terms of semantics, their interpretations do not contradict the dictionary definitions of the proverb or the synonymous culturematic analysis. Similarly, the interpretations of the images provided by the respondents (except the four students who have focused on its literal, or weather, aspect) almost wholly coincide with the ones explicated by the culturematic analysis. This may serve as good evidence of their level of Anglophone linguocultural competence. The experiment thus confirms that a foreign metaphor-

ical proverb can be perfectly intelligible to representatives of a culture that is very different from that of the proverb, provided they are sufficiently mature and experienced and fairly fluent in the language of the proverb. This experiment, then, shows that under certain conditions some proverbs do have a wider, crosscultural appeal.

A further reflection is also prompted by the findings of this experiment, which is related to the additional interpretations based on each student's individual mindset and sociocultural experience and then 'superimposed' onto the English text. We saw that while not contradicting the general proverb meaning, these diverse interpretations represent a truly wide gamut of entirely new, original and highly personal ways of seeing one and the same (proverb) 'reality'. We should then perhaps be right to suppose that these additional perceptions will in turn reflect back on the meaning of the English proverb "If there were no clouds, we shouldn't enjoy the sun," enriching it significantly.

Finally, this experiment shows that some proverbs do behave like autosemantic texts, which do not need contexts in order for their meaning to be perceived. This is not to say that proverbs are not used in discourse or that their meanings are not actualized in contexts. They indeed are, but learners of a foreign language may sometimes have no other recourse to certain proverbs, but dictionaries and collections, where they are listed without any explanations. Interestingly enough, some of these entries can still be understood. This is because like other literary works, e.g., tales, fables, or folk and fairy tales, the semantics of such highly generalized proverb sentences seems to be transparent. As we have seen, both the figurative images and the lesson of some proverbs, whether directly or metaphorically stated, can be immediately perceived and related to the personal experience of the listener or reader.

Notes

[1] The term *precedent text* is a key term in linguistic culturology. It was first coined by the Russian scholar Yuriy Karaulov in the latter half of the 1980s. The precedent texts are well known and emotionally appealing to generations of people that belong to a particular linguoculture. They represent this culture and are among the texts most often recalled and referred to by the authors writing in this language.

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