

Review article

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Anna T. Litovkina, Hrisztalina Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Péter Barta, Katalin Vargha, Wolfgang Mieder. *Anti-Proverbs in Five Languages: Structural Features and Verbal Humor Devices*. Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021. 257 p. ISBN 978-3-030-89061-2 ISBN 978-3-030-89062-9 (eBook) <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89062-9>

Phraseology has enjoyed considerable boom within linguistics over the last few decades (Sinner 2021:236). Many scholars include proverbs into the phraseological systems of language, though there are those who consider them as units of a separate fund, as folklore texts; the third group of researchers discuss them as having both linguistic, textual and logical features. We define proverbs as the most complicated language sign (phraseologism with the structure of a sentence) with textual characteristics and pragmatic functions, possessing the special generalized meaning, deductive function and in actualized form used as an indirect speech act in the everyday communication (Абакумова 2012, Abakumova, Korostenski 2020). As Carsten Sinner and Encarna Tabares point out, the “studies aimed at unravelling the intricacies of phraseologisms between two or more languages are still scarce” (Sinner 2021:236).

In this background the contribution of the authors of this book is of much interest. This book contains comparative analysis of English, German, French, Russian, and Hungarian anti-proverbs, based on well-known original proverbs in the proverbial funds of the given languages. The authors pay much attention to transformations and modifications that occur on the surface level and are connected with grammatical and phonetical changes, as well as the changes in the semantics, stylistics, pragmatics and func-

tioning of the anti-proverbs that convey different types of verbal humour. The differences they brought out give opportunity to make certain general if not universal conclusions.

Part 1 of the book (chapters 1-5) is devoted to discussion of anti-proverbs' emergence as a result of alternations of most popular and internationally known proverbs. The types of proverbs alterations are singled out. The most attention is given to three basic types: addition, omission, and substitution, with some examples illustrating them and their subgroups (Chapter 2,3,4). Chapter 5 is devoted to blending of proverbs.

Dealing with the formal alternations of traditional proverbs (transformations in grammar, morphology and phonology) they single out and discuss the following issues: 1) the components that are changed (sound, word, clause or punctuation); 2) the quantity of items that may appear; 3) the location of the changed items (at the beginning/inside/ at the end of a word or sentence/ at multiple place).

The analysis of omission and addition has shown some trends: 1) omission is less common than addition, as it prevents from identification of original proverb, and addition of clauses is popular way to parody. In case of clause omission, the first part will usually remain.

When examining substitution, the trends are the following: 1) word order reversal happens most with nouns; 2) the consonants change more often than vowels; 3) the sound change occurs more frequently at the beginning of the word; 4) in case of clauses it is mostly the second part that is substituted.

Blended proverbs prefer to retain the 1st part of the proverb utterance rather than the 2nd. Mechanisms of variation in proverbs are often combined in various ways. Proverbs blending is considered by the authors as a qualified case of *intertextuality* (cf. Norrick 1989:117) as it refers to several original phraseological units at the same time. The comparative study showed: twin blending in Hungarian and in English are less common than in other languages; the French prefer original proverbs with large number of words.

Part II covers the problems of description and analysis of anti-proverbs and verbal humour. Proverbs have a "broad" meaning, which is concretized only in a given speech situation or

context. Besides their traditional didactic function, they convey certain pragmatic values that are realized in the given speech situation: they can be used to express warning, persuasion, consolation, confirmation, and so on.

Proverbs often serve as a basis for language play and pun, that is how many anti-proverbs are born. The authors pay most attention to three main types of punning: paronomasia, polysemy, homonymy and homophony in anti-proverbs.

Grammatical, lexical, semantic, and pragmatic features of proverbs create certain expectations. The transformed form of anti-proverb does not fulfill these expectations, it continues or ends the utterance in a surprising, twisted way, often by a language play.

Paronomasia turned to be the most common pun in anti-proverbs. In each of the languages examined some proverbs were found which have a number of paronymic modifications based on the same word. The study shows that different languages use similar procedures in this field: substituting a word, adding, substituting or omitting one or two sounds, replacing one sound with two, and vice versa; reversing the order of sounds within the word.

Polysemy, homonymy and homophony analysis showed no difference between the five languages under study. The data revealed that some proverbs or the key words inside the proverbs are more suitable for this type of word-play. In the case of homophony, languages with phonetic and non-phonetic writing form two groups: German, Russian, Hungarian vs English and French. No parody was found based on homography. Anti-proverbs based on homonymy, polysemy and homophony are less frequent than those based on paronomasia.

Besides those three well-known types of pun, several special types were found out by the authors based on the data of five languages. They are the following: 1) word boundaries (popular in French, rare in German); 2) splitting a word into two or three parts; 3) merging two or three words and moving the word boundaries while keeping a number of words (“linking pun”); 4) play on proper nouns (the change of a common noun on a proper noun is very common in proverbs); 5) play with foreign languages (mother tongue is mixed with one foreign language,

now mostly English); 6) double pun (affects several elements of the anti-proverb, mostly based on paronomasia).

Then the authors turn to some other types of linguistic humor that can be observed in anti-proverbs (Chapter 7). Here they focus their attention on such tropes and stylistic devices as repetition, rhyme, metaphor, onomatopoeia. As their analysis has shown, repetitive element (identical or phonetically similar word or sound) can be repeated twice, three times or even more. It can be an addition or part of the original proverb. Repetitive puns are both mnemonic and stylistic tools, based on homonymy and paronomasia. The authors claim that the metaphorical nature of proverbs is particularly suitable for parody. Countless twisting achieves the humorous effect by a literal interpretation of metaphorical proverbs. The study showed that rhymed and non-rhymed original proverbs can form rhymed and non-rhymed anti-proverbs.

When summarizing the results of the study (Chapter 8), the authors stress that parody is only effective if one recognizes the original proverb behind it. If the original proverb is not recognized the twisting is not successful, and it is not possible to speak of the anti-proverb as a result. Although an opinion exists that proverbs are old-fashioned “fossilized texts” and express the out of date wisdom, the authors convincingly state that they are adapted to the modern use of language, mentality and context of each age.

One cannot deny that anti-proverbs alter and distort traditional texts. But in linguistic aspect their transformations are very significant as they show “the extent to which a proverb can be mutilated so that it can be identified and a new superstructure can be erected on the “ruins” (Lendvai 2001:765). Making the formal approach only there is no much difference between the traditional variants of the proverb and antiproverbs (cf. Kozintsev 2014, Krikmann 2015).

Though most of the data in the 5 languages fixed in the book show the linguistic means of play on words, anti-proverbs very often move beyond the fun to comment on the important problems and aspects of society, for example, AIDs, education, politics, love, sex, money etc. As an example, the contrastive analysis of Russian and English proverbs and anti-proverbs with

gender components was given in publications (Kiriukhina, Abakumova 2019). And in this respect, as great paremiologist W. Mieder points out, “even the anti-proverbs become moralistic if not didactic statements to a degree” (Mieder 1989a:243). As A. Litovkina and W. Mieder put it, “the ‘anti’ component is not directed against the concept of “proverb” as such. Proverbs and their wisdom continue to be of much value in modern society. But some anti-proverbs have become new proverbs with their own wisdom that is perfectly appropriate for the modern age” (Litovkina, Mieder 2006:5). Here are some examples: *Absence makes the heart grow wander* (*cf. Absence makes the heart grow fonder*); *Do unto others before they do unto you* (*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*); *Expedience is the best teacher* (*Experience is the best teacher*); *Better late than pregnant* (*Better late than never*), *Home is where the mortgage is* (*Home is where the heart is*), *If at first you don't succeed, try reading the instructions* (*If at first you don't succeed, try, try again*) (The Dictionary of Modern Proverbs 2012).

The authors presented and analyzed the great abundance of Anglo-American, German, French, Russian and Hungarian anti-proverbs and claim that many of new anti-proverbs are being created daily. This fact proves that proverbs continue their life in the language and are still used as effective means of communication in modern society. “And even if some of them seem obscene, vulgar or flat, they prove human creativity, and must be collected and studied, as well as their transformations (Walter, Mokienko 2005:4).

The work summarized in this book poses many possibilities for future research. Besides already mentioned aspects of anti-proverbs' study there is one very promising: interplay between the modified proverb and the visual element (in modern media, Internet, photos, meme template). The start was given in publication (Hrisztova-Gotthardt, Aleksa Varga, T. Litovkina, and Vargha 2020).

In conclusion, I should point out that The contributions of the book reviewed here are very significant as they open the way to new research in the field of contrastive paremiology and anti-proverbs in particular. It is a precious contribution providing

a lot of important information and material for the study of anti-proverbs and proverbs as a part of phraseology in general.

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