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CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF RELIGIOSITY IN AMERICAN AND POLISH PROVERBS FROM A LINGUOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

**Abstract:** The purpose ascribed to this paper is to compare and contrast the corpus of selected American and Polish religion-related paremias – featuring God as a constitutive element – with a view to revealing certain distinctive features in the attitude towards religiosity in two respective linguo-cultures. Hence, principally, the God-related proverbs from both languages are analysed by the use of the semantic approach and grouped in terms of the general messages they put across in order to search for common ground and specific differences. A secondary objective to be reached is an attempt at explanation of the most apparent peculiarities bearing in mind different places of proverb origin and their specific geographical, historical, social and cultural environments.

In case of religion—but not exclusively—a paremiographical collection of the proverbs of a given nation constitutes an ethnography of the people, which if systematized can provide a profound insight into people's, among others, philosophy and beliefs, moral truths and social values. Such a universally acknowledged axiom is underscored by an English philosopher Francis Bacon who said that *The genius, wit, and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs* (Trench 2003, 46). The relation between language and culture is the most prominent postulate behind a contemporary scholarly discipline integrating linguistics and the study of culture called *Linguistic Culturology*.

The pilot empirical section of the paper is based on two unparalleled and invaluable paremiographical collections. The American religion-related proverbial texts including the component of 'God' are selected from *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992) edited by Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury, and Kelsie B. Harder. In turn, the analytical research on Polish God-related proverbs is conducted on the basis of a fairly recent and detailed paremiographical reference compiled by Danuta and Włodzimierz Masłowski in their *Wielka Księga Przystów Polskich* 'A big book of proverbs' (2008).

**Keywords:** American/Polish God-related proverbs, religiosity, contrastive paremiology, Linguistic Culturology

### ***Introduction***

The paper aims at comparing and contrasting a corpus of selected American and Polish religion-related proverbs with a view to revealing certain characteristic features in the attitude towards religiosity in the two respective linguo-cultures. Hence, primarily, its pilot analysis will provide an insight into these two nations' foremost tendencies pertaining to religion (defined briefly as a set of beliefs and rituals that claim to get a person in a proper relationship with God) and spirituality (which focuses on spiritual things and the spiritual world instead of physical/earthly things), and which are reflected in the proverb corpora of the languages in question. More precisely, an attempt will be made to select the religion-oriented proverbial texts – featuring God as a constitutive element – from both languages and group them in terms of the general messages they put across in order to search for common ground and specific differences. A secondary objective to be reached will be an attempt at explanation of these peculiarities bearing in mind the different places of origin of proverbs and their distinctive geographical, historical, social and cultural environments.

At the outset it seems necessary to explain the term *religiosity* (less frequently referred to as *religiousness*) which in its general, sociological sense applies to the numerous aspects of religious activity, dedication and belief, namely religious doctrine. However, in its narrower sense, religiosity merely means how religious people are in terms of, for example accepting certain doctrines about deities and the afterlife or behaving according to established ethical standards and norms.

Furthermore, it is also important to underscore at this point that the subject of religion is one of the main factors included in the studies of paremiologists, together with other fields such as anthropology, art, communication, culture, folklore, history, literature, philology, psychology, and sociology (see Mieder 2004: XIII). In the case of religion – but not exclusively – a paremiographical collection of the proverbs of a given community or nation constitutes an ethnography of the people, which if systematized can provide profound insights into, among other things, people's philosophy and beliefs, moral truths and social values. Such a universally acknowledged axiom is accentuated by the English philosopher Francis Bacon who said that *The ge-*

*nus, wit, and spirit of a nation are discovered in its proverbs* (Trench 2003: 46). The apparent but complex relation between language and culture is, in turn, the foremost postulate behind a new discipline called *Linguistic Culturology*, the main assumptions and achievements of which will be briefly outlined in the later section of the paper.

***The tradition of Anglo-American and Polish paremiography and paremiology***

Before discussing the general contrastive aspects of the proverb semantics it seems necessary to allude to the tradition of paremiographical achievements and paremiological studies in the languages subject to the pilot empirical research.

As emphasized by Mieder (2004: 23), the impressive Anglo-American historical proverb collections may serve as the basis for scholarly English-language research on proverbs in other countries. The substantial list of paremiographical dictionaries may be opened with *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases: A Historical Dictionary* (1929 [1969, 1993]) by George Latimer Apperson and *Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (1935 [1970, 3rd edition by F.P. Wilson]) by William George Smith. The works were soon followed by other invaluable and monumental works, such as Morris Palmer Tilley's *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1950) and Bartlett Jere Whiting's *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (1968). Then, in the 1950s Whiting's historical survey was equipped with an American component assembled by the two friends Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting which bears the title *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820–1880* (1958). Whiting continued his research on proverbs and soon published his important volume of *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (1977) and a large collection of *Modern Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings* (1989). Soon after this there appeared *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992), edited by Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury, and Kelsie B. Harder, which is the first major collection of proverbs in the English language based on oral sources rather than written ones. The impressive list of paremiographical publications may be closed with Gregory Titelman's *Dictionary of Popular Proverbs*

& *Sayings* (1996) containing various historical references from the mass media of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Out of the quantum of English paremiological studies it seems appropriate to begin with the Archbishop of Canterbury Richard Chenevix Trench and his slim 19<sup>th</sup> century volume, *On the Lessons in Proverbs* (1861) and its later edition *Proverbs and Their Lessons* (1905). Trench is regarded as a precursor whose work on proverbs in the English-speaking world is still invaluable and most readable. The scholar's popular volume was followed by Hulme's outstanding inclusive study of the proverbs from the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, titled *Proverb Lore: Being a Historical Study of the Similarities, Contrasts, Topics, Meanings, and Other Facets of Proverbs, Truisms, and Pithy Sayings, as Explained by the Peoples of Many Lands and Times* (1902). The third seminal study dedicated to international paremiology, *The Proverb* (1931), was written by an internationally-acclaimed American paremiologist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, namely Archer Taylor. His complete overview of the rich field of paremiology in this unsurpassed treatise flourished in the United States to a remarkable degree and initiated a wide interest in the subject among such renowned linguists as Alan Dundes, Wolfram Eberhard, Stuart A. Gallacher, Richard Jente, Wayland D. Hand, John G. Kunstmann, Charles Speroni, and Bartlett Jere Whiting. Taylor's classic study on the proverb genre was, in turn, reprinted fifty years later by a contemporary prominent proverb scholar Wolfgang Mieder in his work *The Proverb and An Index to 'The Proverb'* (1985). Another excellent recent study on proverbs by Mieder, titled *Proverbs: A Handbook* (2004), emphasises the Anglo-American stock of proverbs in English-language contexts, laying out this rich field to general readers of English anywhere in the world. Mieder is also the author or editor of over fifty publications on the subject, edits the journal *Proverbium, A Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, has written innumerable articles on proverbs, and is exceptionally widely cited by other proverb scholars.

The history of Polish paremiography and paremiology may be seemingly not as rich as the Anglo-American one but it is justifiable to say that meticulous research and wide-ranging collections may assuredly serve as an abundant source of knowledge for contemporary Polish proverb studies. At the beginning it is

worth enumerating two names of linguists who were the first in the history of Polish literature to collect and publish proverbs, namely, the first researcher of paremias Samuel Ryciński and his *Proverbiorum polonicorum... centuriae decem et octo (Przypowieści polskie)* 'Polish proverbs' (1618) – the first collection of Polish proverbs, and the 16<sup>th</sup> century paremiologist Grzegorz Knapski who published *Thesaurus Polono-Latino-Graecus* (1632) – a valuable publication of Polish paremiology. The next scholars worth remembering are three 19<sup>th</sup> century researchers, Kazimierz Władysław Wójcicki (*Przysłowia narodowe: z wyjaśnieniem źródła początku, oraz sposobu ich użycia, okazujące charakter, zwyczaje, i obyczaje, przesady, starożytności i wspomnienia ojczyste* 'National proverbs: with explanations of the source of the start, and the ways of use, demonstrating character, habits, and customs, superstitions, ancient and native memories') (1830), Oskar Kolberg (and his monumental work *Lud* 'People'(1867)) and Samuel Adalberg (*Księga przysłów, przypowieści i wyrażeń przysłowiowych*, 'The book of proverbs, parables and proverbial expressions'(1889-1894)). Polish literature of the subject can also boast of such precious paremiological and paremiographical collections of proverbs as *Przysłowia. Kartki z dziejów literatury i kultury polskiej* 'Proverbs. Postcards from the history of Polish literature and culture' (1895) by Aleksander Brückner, *Przysłowia polskie* 'Polish proverbs' (1933) by Jan Stanisław Bystroń, along with *Mądrej głowie dość dwie słowie* 'A word is enough to the wise' (1958-1960) and *Nowa Księga przysłów polskich* 'The new book of Polish proverbs' (1969) by Julian Krzyżanowski. Other paremiographic collections are offered by Stanisław Świrko – *Na wszystko jest przysłowie* 'A proverb for everything' (1975) (later supplemented by Dobrosława Świerczyńska in *Przysłowia są ... na wszystko* 'Proverbs are ... for everything' (2001)), Danuta Masłowska and Włodzimierz Masłowski – *Przysłowia polskie i obce* 'Polish and foreign proverbs' (2003), Czesław Pająk and Jan Pająk – *Przysłowia wschodu oraz z innych stron świata* 'Proverbs of the East and from other corners of the world' (2003), Katarzyna Kłosińska – *Słownik przysłów, czyli przysłownik* 'Dictionary of proverbs' (2004), Dobrosława and Andrzej Świerczyński – *Słownik przysłów w ośmiu językach* 'Dictionary of proverbs in eight languages' (2004) and Czesław

Pająk – *Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings. English-Polish. Polish-English* (2007).

Also, a number of valuable works on paremiology have been published by the renowned Polish linguist Jerzy Bralczyk, e.g. *Polak potrafi. Przysłowia, hasła i inne polskie zdania* ‘Poles can do it. Proverbs, slogans and other Polish sentences’ (2006), *Porzekadła na każdy dzień* ‘Sayings for each day’ (2008), *444 zdania polskie. Znane wypowiedzi, cytaty, powiedzenia* ‘444 Polish sentences. Famous speeches, quotes, sayings’ (2011), and by the most outstanding Polish lexicographer Władysław Kopaliński, e.g. *Koty w worku, czyli z dziejów pojęć i rzeczy* ‘Cats in the bag, or the history of notions and things’ (2006) and *Przygody słów i przysłów. Leksykon* ‘Adventures of words and proverbs. Lexicon’ (2007). A fairly recent and detailed paremiographical study is compiled by Danuta Masłowska and Włodzimierz Masłowski in their *Wielka księga przysłów polskich* ‘The big book of proverbs’ (2008) where one can find more than 5000 Polish proverbs of various philosophical schools, moral doctrines or life maxims dating from different historical periods.

Last, but not least, the contemporary proverb scholars who cannot escape our due attention are, among others, Grzegorz Szpila (*Krótko o przysłowiu* ‘Briefly about proverb’ (2003)), Sylwia Skuza (*Kobieta: matka, córka, panna, żona, teściowa, synowa i wdowa w przysłowiaach polskich i włoskich* ‘Woman: mother, daughter, bride, wife, mother-in-law and widow in Polish and Italian proverbs’ (2010); *Stereotypowy obraz kobiety w paremiach oraz frazeologii polskiej i włoskiej* ‘The stereotypical image of woman in Polish and Italian paremiology and phraseology’ (2012)), Franciszek Czekierda (*Kobieta w aforyzmach, przysłowiaach i powiedzeniach* ‘Woman in aphorisms, proverbs and sayings’ (2011)), Agata Rozumko (2009, 2011) and Ewa Jędrzejko (2010).<sup>1</sup>

### ***Contrastive paremiology***

To start with, in paremiography and paremiology the term *contrastive* is frequently applied synonymously with the *comparative* notion (see e.g. Mieder & Dundes, 1994: viii; Voigt, 2013: 363, 365, 366, 368). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the comparative approach is concerned with comparing the proverb

corpora of, for instance, two languages to establish their historical relatedness through diachronic research with the aim of illustrating the evolution or chronological change of a proverb text or class of proverbs. In turn, the contrastive approach intends to show in what ways the two respective languages differ on a synchronic plane.

Significantly, the beginnings of the contrastive approach are inseparably related to the rise of paremiography, which refers to the millennial scholarly practice of the collection and classification of proverbs. As a consequence, it is impossible to differentiate or separate contrastive paremiology from both contrastive paremiography or contrastive lexicography, as well as contrastive phraseology, which in turn applies to the craft of bilingual or multilingual dictionary compilation in which, besides words and phrases, proverbs and sayings were also frequently embodied.

It is important to note that contrastive paremiology is a relatively recent branch of proverb study. As noticed by Petrova (2015: 247), it arises 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.*<sup>2</sup> Here such linguistic concepts as *proverb meaning (sense), proverb synonyms, semantic equivalence, semantic variation, semantic analogy*, etc. are frequently examined among proverb scholars because adequate understanding of the meaning is crucial in their contrastive analysis. In consequence arranging, grouping and classifying proverbs into a meaningful order is of primary importance. The first to have introduced the *International Type System of Proverbs* was Matti Kuusi, where the author distinguished 13 main semantic themes under which there were 52 main classes. This gigantic cross-cultural database was later developed by his daughter Outi Lauhakangas and soon restarted as *Proverbium: International Yearbook of Proverb Scholarship* edited by Wolfgang Mieder. Regarding the single-language paremiographical collections, their texts of proverbs follow two basic classification systems and thus are arranged according to either key words or themes. Such a classification provides for dictionary users, firstly, fast and easy searching, and secondly, the possibility to conduct convenient theme-oriented analysis.

And so, in order to compare and contrast the semantics of proverbs of different languages paremiologists need to have a solid basis in the form of contrastive paremiography.<sup>3</sup> The list of major scholarly bilingual/multilingual and Anglo-American paremiographical collections is provided by Wolfgang Mieder in his *Proverbs: A Handbook* (2004: 266-275). His more recent publication, *International Bibliography of Paremiography: Collections of Proverbs, Proverbial Expressions and Comparisons, Quotations, Graffiti, Slang, and Wellerisms* (2011), contains a special chapter entitled 'International Proverb Collections', which offers as many as 215 entries of multilingual proverb dictionaries. It is also impossible to overlook Mieder's forty-year tradition of editing *Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship*, each volume of which includes articles on proverbs from around the world, reviews of books, a bibliography of recent proverb scholarship, and a list of recently (re)published proverb collections.

The register of substantial English language comparative collections is exceptionally long. Let us mention but a few, such as *The Prentice-Hall Encyclopaedia of World Proverbs* (1986) by Wolfgang Mieder, *Comparative Studies in Folklore. Asia-Europe-America* (1972) by Archer Taylor, *Racial Proverbs – A Selection of the World's Proverbs Arranged Linguistically* (1938) by Selwyn Gurney Champion and *Proverbs: A Comparative Book of English, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Russian Proverbs with a Latin Appendix* (1971) by Jerzy Gluski. A more recent, innovative and extensive 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).<sup>4</sup>

The first Polish multilingual paremiographic lexicon is offered by Dobrosława Świerczyńska and Andrzej Świerczyński – *Przysłowia w sześciu językach* 'Proverbs in six languages' (1996), later expanded with a Spanish and Italian version – *Słownik przysłów w ośmiu językach* 'Dictionary of proverbs in eight languages' (2004). Other paremiographic works from a comparative perspective that deserve to be mentioned are edited by Alina Wójcik and Ziebart Horst – *Słownik przysłów niemiecko-polski, polsko-niemiecki* 'Dictionary of proverbs: German-Polish, Polish-German' (2001), Danuta Masłowska and



Włodzimierz Masłowski – *Przysłowia polskie i obce* ‘Proverbs: Polish and foreign’ (2003), Czesław Pająk and Jan Pająk – *Przysłowia wschodu oraz z innych stron świata* ‘Proverbs from the East and other parts of the world’ (2003) and Czesław Pająk – *Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings. English-Polish. Polish-English* (2007).

In turn, the present-day Polish paremiologists who undertake cross-cultural and contrastive multilingual and bilingual analysis of proverbs are, among others, Dobrosława Świerczyńska (*Kobieta, miłość, małżeństwo. Przysłowia różnych narodów* ‘Woman, love, marriage. Proverbs of different nations’ (1994)) and Sylwia Skuza (*Kobieta: matka, córka, panna, żona, teściowa, synowa i wdowa w przysłowiaach polskich i włoskich* ‘Woman: mother, daughter, bride, wife, mother-in-law and widow in Polish and Italian proverbs’ (2010); *Stereotypowy obraz kobiety w paremiach oraz frazeologii polskiej i włoskiej* ‘The stereotypical image of women in Polish and Italian paremias and phraseology’ (2012)). Other Polish proverb scholars who deserve our notice are, among others, Agata Rozumko (‘Cross-cultural Pragmatics as a Resource for the Paremiological Study of “National Character”: A Contrastive Study of Polish and Anglo-American proverbs’ (2009)) and Ewa Jędrzejko (‘Językowo-kulturowe obrazy płci: kobieta w literaturze i przysłowiaach polskich i angielskich’ ‘Linguistic and cultural images of gender: woman in Polish and English literature and proverbs’ (2010)).

### ***Linguistic Culturology***

The term that needs to be enhanced at this point is *Linguistic Culturology* (otherwise called *Linguoculturology*)<sup>5</sup> which is a contemporary scholarly discipline integrating linguistics and the study of culture. It appeared in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the works of German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt and continued with its consequent appearance and development in Europe, the USA and other parts of the world. As a fully-grown interdisciplinary science it attracts the attention of many researchers from such fields as, among others, linguistic anthropology, semiotics, cultural studies, axiological linguistics and cognitive linguistics. The complex relationship between language and culture has been particularly extensively analysed in the last two decades by Russian researchers (see e.g. Vorobyov

(1997), Maslova (2001), Karasik & Slyshkin (2003), Alefirenko (2011)) and Bulgarian scholars (see e.g. Petrova (2003, 2010, 2014), Panchev (2005)) who successfully apply the Linguocultural approach for studying such linguistic units as, among others, paremias.

Importantly, in Linguistic Culturology proverbs are perceived as signs of specific ethnic and national cultures (see Petrova 2014: 144). Thus, it is maintained that the proverb system of a language reflects a certain way of life of a given culture and represents a set of values of the people speaking the language (see e.g. Kelly (2002), Trench (2003)). Nonetheless, there is no doubt that due to the higher degree of connectivity between people internationally, there is considerable exchange among the linguo-cultures which, in turn, facilitates the migration of proverbs and results in proverbs having a wide significance, and hence appearing in the proverb corpora of various languages. In other words, proverbs tend to transcend the ethnic and national boundaries so they become international proverbs with a universal meaning in many languages. Accordingly, such a *status quo* makes it possible to study proverbs for the purposes of cross-cultural comparison and contrast.

#### ***Religion in proverb collection and study***

It is a truism to say that proverbs about religion, its manifestation and influence on people's faith and spirituality as well as piety and morality have naturally attracted scholarly attention. They are regarded as both international expressions of wisdom and widely recognised teachings of religious faith and proper human conduct.

The English-language collection of proverbs reflecting religious beliefs of the eleven surviving major religions of the world is gathered in the broadest comparative study, by Selwyn Gurney Champion, entitled *The Eleven Religions and their Proverbial Lore* (1945). Another work that deserves due attention is Albert Kirby Griffin's *Religious Proverbs: Over 1600 Adages from 18 Faiths Worldwide* (1991), which demonstrates that the essence of religious wisdom is widely approved. Of paramount importance is also the book *Not by Bread Alone: Proverbs of the Bible* (1990) by Wolfgang Mieder, which includes 425 biblical proverbs current in the Anglo-American language.

Turning our attention to the Polish literature of the subject, it can boast of such precious collections of proverbs as, for instance, *Panu Bogu świeczka a diabłu ogarek* 'A candle for God and a candle-stub for the Devil' (2004) by Jach and Podgórski, which relates to the issue of God, religion, faith, the devil and any derivative concepts and consequences of these terms. The Polish paremiologist that is most concerned with the topic is Sylwia Skuza, who deals with various contrastive aspects of religious proverbs in her works, such as, for instance, 'Świat wiary i zabobonu przechowywany i utrwalony w jednostkach paremiologicznych włoskich i polskich' 'The world of faith and superstition stored and fixed in Italian and Polish phraseological units' (2010) or 'Elementy magii i okultyzmu utrwalone i zachowane w języku na przykładzie przysłów i związków frazeologicznych polskich i włoskich' 'Elements of magic and occultism captured and preserved on the example of Polish and Italian proverbs and phraseological units' (2013).

#### ***Comparison and contrast of American and Polish religious proverbs***

In this pilot cross-cultural analysis, the contrastive approach is applied in a broader meaning, namely there is an attempt to specify both the main similarities and differences between two sets of religion-related paremias coming from American and Polish linguo-cultures. It is to be hoped that Mieder's general plea for more *articles dealing on a crosscultural level with misogyny, stereotypes, religion, animals, etc. in proverbs* (Mieder, 2004: 81-82) will be at least partly fulfilled. Another appeal that was made by Mieder is one concerning the need for contrastive analysis of proverbs in a specific life domain, that is to say religion. In this respect let us see the author's quote (Mieder 1997: 413; 2004:145) where it is stated that *much more comparative work is needed to point out the similarities and dissimilarities of the proverbial wisdom of the various religions* and it is to be hoped that the following analysis will meet the aforementioned expectations.

Notably, in this study religious proverbs are going to be compared and contrasted with one of several new approaches to contrastive paremiology that proverb scholars have at their disposal, viz., the semantic approach.<sup>6</sup> By religion-related proverbs

are understood the proverbial texts that pertain to religion both in form/vocabulary and content/meaning. In other words, the proverbs are analysed and classified on the grounds of both their explicit relation to religion, i.e. through their wording, and implicit reference to religion, namely through their semantics, i.e. by their basic thought, explanations and messages.<sup>7</sup> Note that in cross-cultural studies the semantics of a proverb is also referred to as *cultureme* which, quoting after Petrova (2015:145), in linguistic culturology stands for the axiologically marked notion 'beyond' the proverb text. Another term for describing proverb semantics, i.e. *logeme*, was offered by, among others, Polinichenko (2004: 83-84) who uses 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.<sup>8</sup>

Predominantly, the starting point for the selection of religious proverbs may be the inclusion of lexical items belonging to the semantic cluster of religion, such as 'God', 'religion', 'heaven', 'hell', 'angel', 'devil', 'church', 'conscience', 'redemption', 'cross', 'sin', 'virtue', 'charity', 'love', 'repentance', etc. In this article all the American and Polish religion-related proverbs given to analysis include the component of 'God'. The motive for such a selection is merely the fact that proverbs with the element of 'God' in their wording constitute the largest group of those referring to religion in both reference sources.

The following analytical section is based on two unparalleled and invaluable paremiographical collections. The American proverbs belonging to the thematic field of religion are excerpted from *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992) edited by Wolfgang Mieder, Stewart A. Kingsbury, and Kelsie B. Harder. It is the first major proverb compilation in the English language which includes more than 15,000 sayings, adages, and maxims commonly used in popular speech in the United States and Canada. Some of them are uniquely American proverbs that have never before been recorded, others are traditional sayings that have found their way into American speech from classical, biblical, British, continental European, and American literature. Moreover, it is also important to mention that the dictionary offers proverbs of universal wisdom on all aspects of American life, such as weather, agriculture, geography, travel, money,

business, food, neighbours, friends, manners, government, politics, law, health, education, religion, music, song, and dance. They are listed alphabetically according to their most significant key word. In turn, the analytical discussion of Polish religion-related proverbs is conducted on the basis of a fairly recent and detailed paremiographical reference compiled by Danuta Maślowska and Włodzimierz Maślowski in their *Wielka księga przysłów polskich* 'The big book of proverbs' (2008). In this collection one can find more than 5000 Polish proverbs of various philosophical schools, moral doctrines or life maxims dating from different historical periods. Proverbs can be searched for either by alphabetical order according to the first letter of the proverbial units or by the most significant keyword provided in an index list.

Out of more than 15,000 citation slips of proverbial texts<sup>9</sup> included in *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992), forty-eight (48) American proverbs including the lexeme 'God' have been chosen. *Wielka księga przysłów polskich* 'The big book of proverbs' (2008), in turn, contains thirty-five (35) proverbs (out of 5000) – derived from the wisdom of literature in the Christian tradition – in which 'God' constitutes a constituent part. Nevertheless, it needs to be emphasised that not every single God-related proverb that appears in the dictionaries is provided in the analytical part, as the primary aim of the paper is to reveal only the set of dominant logemes of proverbs pertaining to God. By way of explanation, the principal proverbial logemes are selected in such cases when at least two proverbs, that is one from the American and one from the Polish language or two proverbs from either of two languages connote the same general message, whereas proverbs that are not included in the paper are regarded as residue cases.

A general assumption is that the body of the selected and studied God-centred proverbs in both languages may be thematically – but not restrictively – grouped into two semantic categories. The first part comprises the proverbs whose summarised and generalised basic meaning centres on conveying the importance of God and faith in people's lives and all other aspects pertaining to religion and spirituality. The other thematically close God-related proverbs are the ones that serve didactic and moralising purposes, beginning from general truths or advice,

through warnings and comments on human experience, to encouragements to act and behave in certain ways.

It also needs to be added at the start that some of the analysed proverbial texts in both languages carry an obvious sense and thus do not require any explanation; in such cases only the general main proverbial concept is highlighted. Meanwhile the cases of proverbs with ambiguous or unclear semantics, and also the ones accentuating specific differences between certain American and Polish proverbs, are provided with adequate clarification of meaning. Their basic messages are inferred from information provided on the Internet and verified with the interpretations offered by native speakers of both languages. Moreover, all the Polish proverbs are equipped, by the author of the article, with a literal translation in English provided in single quotation marks in the hope that this will help the reader to come closer to their definitions.

And so, the proverbial lore of the first thematic classification of God-related proverbs – undoubtedly created to teach the religion's beliefs – is subsumed under the single logeme pertaining to **the need for trust and faith in the Creator**, as exemplified by three American proverbs: *Trust in God and do something*; *One with God is a majority*; *He who leaves God out of his reckoning does not know how to count* and two Polish proverbs: *Uczynki dobre bywają, które do Boga zmierzają* 'These deeds are good which lead to God'; *Dobra to noga, co szuka Boga* 'This leg is good which seeks God'. Importantly, the first American proverb suggests combining faith with action/being active, the second one implies the need of belonging to God in order to feel a part of the privileged majority, the third connotes an idea of staying with God for one's own benefits, whereas both discussed Polish proverbs relate faith in God with goodness/doing good.

Next, in both languages it is stressed that those who trust God will lead – on the whole – **a better and more prosperous life**, as shown in such American proverbs as *Who trusts in God builds well*; *He is poor that God hates*; *God never sends mouths, but He sends meat*. The first two proverbs seem obvious in their semantics, yet the last one requires clarification – in its literal origin it implies that God does not create children, people do, but he does send food to feed them, and its proverbial meaning sug-

gests that God creates enough food for everyone. In turn, Polish proverbs which apparently refer to the same idea, are as follows: *Wielbić Boga trzeba, to nabędziesz chleba* 'You have to worship God, then you will gain bread'; *Kto Boga w sercu nosi, ten chleba nie prosi* 'The one who's got God in their heart, does not ask for bread'; *Bóg daleko, nędza blisko* 'When God is far away, poverty is close'; *Bogu służąc nikt nie umarł z głodu* 'If you serve God, you will not die of hunger'.

Additionally, faith in God enables us to experience **eternal Godly features** such as, among others, **goodness and love** (e.g. American *All good comes to an end except the goodness of God; God is always opening his hand*; Polish *Człęk poczciwy, choć ubogi, zawsze w oczach Boga drogi* 'An honest man, though poor, is always dear to God'; *Lepszy gorzki listek od Boga niż słodki od ludzi* 'Better bitter leaf from God than sweet from people'); **care and solicitude** (e.g. American *God builds a nest for the blind bird/God makes a nest for the blind bird; God fits the back to its burden; God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb*; Polish *Bóg łaskami człowieka obdarza, ale i ofiary żąda do ołtarza* 'God is graceful to a man, but desires payment to the altar'); **impartiality** (e.g. American *God is no respecter of persons*; Polish *Bóg daje dla wilka. Bóg daje i dla Pana* 'God gives to the wolf. God gives to the man'); **justice and forgiveness** (e.g. American *God's mill grinds slowly, but it grinds exceedingly well; God aids him who changes; God grips but does not choke*; Polish *Bóg kres życia zapisuje, dobrym sporzy, złym ujmuje* 'God decides about the end of life, gives to the good, takes from the bad'; *Bóg dla grzechów zagniewany prośbą bywa ubłagany* 'God angry at sins might be appeased by requests').

Furthermore, within the framework of the first group of God-centred proverbs there are the ones which urge us to remember about **God's superhuman power and abilities**, as demonstrated by the semantics of American proverbial texts, for example, *Man proposes, God disposes; Nothing with God is accidental; The writer makes the Almanac, but God makes the weather; God heals and the doctor takes the fee; God restores health, and the physician gets the thanks* and the Polish proverbs *Bóg zasmuci, Bóg pocieszy, bo jest panem wszystkich rzeczy* 'God grieves, God comforts, because He is the master of all things'; *Bóg zaczyna i Bóg kończy, kochających serca łączy*

'God begins and God ends, loving hearts links'; *Bóg kres życia zapisuje, dobrym sporzy, złym ujmuje* 'God decides about the end of life, gives to the good, takes from the bad'.

The specific difference concerning the first analysed thematic set of proverbs that needs to be accentuated is the fact that only within the body of Polish God-directed proverbs are there ones which urge us to remember about the **constant omnipresence of God in the physical world**, as illustrated by *Bóg jest jeden, choć wiar wiele* 'There is one God but there are many faiths'; *Kto w Boga wierzy, z tym Bóg rano i przy wieczerzy* 'If you believe in God, then God is with you in the morning and at supper'.

Turning our attention to the category of didactic and moralising God-related proverbs, a number of character traits seems to be exceptionally desirable and expected in terms of religious wisdom in both linguo-cultures. The logemes which are particularly worth mentioning because of their obvious axiological qualities and pragmatical connotations can be grouped under the following headings:

**1. diligence and dedication**, because success comes to those who make a real effort to achieve it, as in the American proverbs: *For a web begun, God sends thread; God sends every bird its food, but he does not throw it into the nest; Pray to god but keep hammering; God helps those who help themselves; God promises a safe landing, but not a calm passage* and the Polish ones: *Bóg bez pracy nic nie daje* 'God gives nothing to those who do not work'; *Bóg na to dał ręce, aby na chleb robić, a na to dał serce, aby drugich lubić* 'God gave hands to earn one's bread, and gave heart to like others';

**2. honesty**, e.g. American *An honest man is the noblest work of God*; Polish *Człtek poczciwy, choć ubogi, zawsze w oczach Boga drogi* 'An honest man, though poor, is always dear to God';

**3. respect and fondness towards parents**, e.g. American *Parents are God's most gifted ministers*; Polish *Bóg się takim brzydzi, kto się ojca wstydzi* 'God abhors the one who is ashamed of their father';

**4. goodness, for instance by helping/sharing with others**, e.g. American *The most acceptable service of God is doing good to man; Look out for others and God will look out for you*; Polish



*Bóg ci dał, żebyś dla drugiego miał* ‘God has given you so that you have for others’; *Co ubogim damy, to u Boga mamy* ‘What we give to the poor, we give to God’;

**5. non-attachment to material things**, as in the Polish proverb *Bogu i mamonie służyć razem nie można* ‘You cannot serve both God and money’, but on the other hand, **God requires gratitude in the form of payment**, as in the American proverb *God loves a cheerful giver*; and Polish *Bóg łaskami człowieka obdarza, ale i ofiary żąda do ołtarza* ‘God is graceful to a man, but desires payment to the altar’. Interestingly enough, there is one American proverb which refers to money in a rather opposite meaning, and that is *Spend and God will send* which suggests that some people make money and never want to spend it – they deprive themselves and those close to them of basic needs and some necessary pleasures;

**6. piety and obedience to God**, e.g. American *Work as if everything depended on you; pray as if everything depended on God*; Polish *Błogostawiony człowiek, który sie Pana Boga boi* ‘Blessed is the man who fears the Lord’.

It is also worth noting that within the thematic group of proverbs carrying an instructive function – but simultaneously acting as a reminder of God’s presence – there are also ones in which **the element of God is arranged by contrast with the component of the Devil**. Some of the paremias serve as a piece of advice or warning, for example the American *God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks*; and Polish *Bogu służ, a diabła nie gniewaj* ‘Serve God but do not make the Devil angry’; *Boga chwalc, diabłu sie nie kłaniaj* ‘Praise God, do not bow to the Devil’; *Bogu świeczka, a diabłu ogarek* ‘Candle to God and candle-end to the Devil’ (used in the sense that a cautious person should be insured from all sides). Others, found in both language systems, merely provide an evident comment on the opposing concepts of God and Devil, for instance, American *Where God has a church, the devil has a chapel; God made the cities, but the devil himself made the small towns* (used to mean that divine nature gave us the fields, human art built the cities); *God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks* (applied in the sense that good food may be ruined by bad cooks, as faith may be ruined by devil’s tricks) and Polish *Bóg daje szczodremu, a diabeł skąpemu* ‘God gives to the generous and the Devil to the tight-fisted’;

*Pierwsza żona od Boga, druga od ludzi, trzecia od diabła* ‘The first wife from God, the second from the people, the third from the Devil’. The moralising power of proverbs which relate to the God-Devil concept may also be visualised by the semantics of, for example, the Polish proverb *Kto się w starej babie kocha, ten dwa razy grzeszy: Pana Boga obraża i diabła cieszy* ‘The one who falls in love with an old woman, sins twice: offends God and pleases the Devil’, which aims to provide a critical remark towards somebody’s inappropriate actions.

Finally, but certainly not of lesser importance, there are proverbs which may serve as both comments on improper human behaviour and pieces of advice suggested for consideration, as in, for example, the American proverb *God puts food into clean hands*, suggesting that moral and decent life brings benefits and the Polish proverb *Boga na języku, diabła w sercu mają* ‘They often talk about God but have the Devil in their hearts’, used to apply to people who are insincere and mendacious. In turn, the implication of, for instance, the American proverb *The nearer the church, the farther from God* and its Polish analogical proverb *Im bliżej kościoła, tym dalej od Boga* may either refer to those who are most engaged in any religious system, that is its organizers and high priests, who are in danger of separating themselves from God, or might be regarded as a warning about placing too much significance on material buildings, and a reminder that God is everywhere.

### **Conclusion**

In the view of many folklorists, linguists and proverb scholars, proverbs are a literary genre which best preserves and depicts the characteristic features of a given nation. Accordingly, the purpose ascribed to the present study was to provide some initial findings – concerning the aforementioned relation between proverbs and culture – which would contribute to a better understanding of some of the characteristics of American and Polish religiosity. And a general conclusion that may be drawn from the analysed religion-related proverb corpora in the two language systems is that both nations are characterized by a strong relation between man and God, which in turn manifests a high attachment to religion, along with its philosophical and educational wisdom. Interestingly, religious feelings and the world

of faith reflected in paremiology show that in spite of the different places of origin of the individual proverbs, and also specific differences in terms of historical, social and cultural environments, both Americans and Poles tend to be comparatively deeply religious. To a great degree, such a *status quo* in the languages in question appears to act as a mirror of the past and present tendencies pertaining to religion in both countries.

As far as the United States is concerned, from the early colonial days, when some English and German settlers came in search of religious freedom, America has been profoundly influenced by religion. This influence continues in American culture, social life, and politics, which is why nowadays the majority of Americans report that religion plays a very important role in their lives, to a degree that is unique among developed countries. As reported by the *Pew Research Center* in 2014, 70.6% of the American population identify themselves as Christians, with 46.5% professing attendance at a variety of churches that could be considered Protestant, and 20.8% professing Roman Catholic beliefs.<sup>10</sup>

In Poland in past centuries, when the country was still a kingdom, the Polish gentry had the motto: “God, honour, fatherland”, where God always had the leading position as religion is said to have been a significant element of Polish consciousness and identity. At present the percentage of the population adhering to Christianity is even higher than in the US. The largest grouping is the Roman Catholic Church – with 87.5% of Poles in 2011 identifying as Roman Catholic (census conducted by the *Central Statistics Office (GUS)*).<sup>11</sup>

Even a cursory glance at a structured set of American and Polish paremiographical collections pertaining to religion leads us to discover that the category of proverbs with the lexeme ‘God’ in their wording is the most numerous in both languages. Also, a peculiar observation that may be suggested is the fact that in both linguo-cultures there are proverbs which may be subsumed under a single logeme of a profound trust in God, who is the source of true happiness, prosperity and sense of life (e.g. American *Who trusts in God builds well*; Polish *Kto Boga w sercu nosi, ten chleba nie prosi* ‘The one who’s got God in their heart, does not ask for bread’). The opposing force to God is the image of the devil, that in many proverbs is presented as the one

who uses every means and trick to seduce a poor Christian (e.g. American *God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks*; Polish *Kto się w starej babie kocha, ten dwa razy grzeszy: Pana Boga obraża i diabła cieszy* 'The one who falls in love with an old woman, sins twice: offends God and pleases the Devil').

Furthermore, a contrastive linguo-cultural approach towards God-related proverbs shows other large areas of similarity between the two proverb corpora. Specifically, many of the proverbial texts in both languages address the same generalized themes in an identical or closely related meaning. For instance, the function of both American and Polish God-related proverbs is, firstly, to preserve traditional aspects of religion and, secondly, to enforce desirable human conduct. Thus, some of them highlight the logeme of the importance of faith in God (e.g. American *One with God is a majority*; Polish *Dobra to noga, co szuka Boga* 'This leg is good which seeks God') and others remind about basic desirable human values in life (e.g. respect and fondness towards parents, as in the American *Parents are God's most gifted ministers*; Polish *Bóg się takim brzydzi, kto się ojca wstydzi* 'God abhors the one who is ashamed of their father').

Needless to say there are also certain specific differences in the messages of the individual God-related American and Polish proverbs, highlighting peculiar features of the peoples they represent and thus making each linguo-culture unique. For instance, in American God-related proverbs the special emphasis is put on combining faith with being active (e.g. *Trust in God and do something*) whereas in Polish paremias the stress is put on relating faith in God with goodness (e.g. *Uczynki dobre bywają, które do Boga zmierzają* 'These deeds are good which seek God'). The explanation that may be suggested for such a discrepancy could be the fact that the United States can clearly be seen as an individualistic country where people, regardless of their status can 'pull themselves up by their boot straps' and raise themselves from poverty – through the aforementioned action. In Poland, in turn, Christianity is, to a great extent, measured by living one's life in accordance with the divine law, i.e. the Ten Commandments, and thus much weight is put on one of the most significant human life values, namely the quality of being good. Another observation that may be formulated to differentiate both paremiological linguo-cultures concerns the fact that only the

Polish dictionary includes proverbs applied with reference to God and women (*Pierwsza żona od Boga, druga od ludzi, trzecia od diabła* 'The first wife from God, the second from the people, the third from the Devil'; *Kto się w starej babie kocha, ten dwa razy grzeszy: Pana Boga obraża i diabła cieszy* 'The one who falls in love with an old woman, sins twice: offends God and pleases the Devil'; *Dobra żona perła droga, dana od samego Boga* 'A good wife is a precious pearl, given from God'). As the given proverbial messages may imply a stereotypically unfavourable perception of women, some would venture to say that such proverbial injustice prevails in Poland, confirming that the proverbs were mostly coined by men/or male dominated societies and experiences. The United States, in turn, is undoubtedly one of the countries in which significant advancements towards gender equality have been made much earlier, which is immediately reflected and stored in the paremiographical sources.

A final remark that stems from the foregoing discussion concerns the fact that some of the proverbs in both languages allow for different interpretations depending on the situation, people and context, and thus could fit more than one proverbial logeme. In order to illustrate the point, let us take a look at the American proverb *God sends meat, and the devil sends cooks* which might be classified under the group of proverbs with a general comment on the opposing concepts of God and Devil or serve as a warning applied in the sense that good food may be ruined by bad cooks in the same way that faith may be spoiled by Devil's tricks.

All in all, the compared American and Polish proverbial units are sound evidence of the various popular trends concerning religion that have existed in the mentality of both linguo-cultures. Nevertheless, in order to provide a more comprehensive cross-cultural picture of religiosity encoded in both proverb corpora a more thorough and detailed analysis of all lexical items belonging to the semantic cluster of religion would be necessary. This is yet the subject for another, more ambitious project in the form of an extensive book-length monograph.

**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> A more detailed history of Polish paremiographical and paremiological research is provided in, among others, Skuza (2012) and Jarząbek (2012).

<sup>2</sup> The theoretical foundations of comparative and contrastive proverb studies have been discussed by Grzybek (1998) in his article *Komparative und interkulturelle Parömiologie: Methodologische Bemerkungen und empirische Befunde* 'Comparative and intercultural paremiology: methodological remarks and empirical findings'.

<sup>3</sup> The pioneering work in the field of contrastive paremiography was done by a world-famous Russian paremiologist Grigorii L. Permyakov in the study *Proverbs and sayings of the peoples in the East: a systematic collection of proverbial sentences of 200 peoples* (1978).

<sup>4</sup> A substantial list of studies which deal with contrastive aspects of proverbs in different languages is provided by Petrova (2015: 251-254).

<sup>5</sup> Note that the notion *Linguistic Culturology* (or *Linguoculturology*) came to be regarded as a working alternative to such other collocations as 'linguistic anthropology', 'cultural studies' and 'cultural linguistics'.

<sup>6</sup> Another research method of contrastive paremiology that could be adopted within the linguocultural approach is the culturematic method. For a description of the analysis, its research tools and application of the method within Anglo-American proverbs that belong to the thematic field "happiness", see Petrova (in press).

<sup>7</sup> A painstakingly rigorous and logically consistent analysis of modern American religion-related proverbs is offered by Petrova (2014) where the author studies the structure of the proverb meaning proper in terms of linguistic culturology: an indivisible unity of the proverb definition, cultureme, and message.

<sup>8</sup> As one can read in Petrova (2015: 254-255) there are many other terms that may be used for a common thought or idea contained in a single proverb, a group of proverb synonyms in the same language or in proverb equivalents in different languages and they are: *concept, thought, basic idea, denotational (direct, literal) meaning, figurative meaning*, and the *sense* of a proverb.

<sup>9</sup> Note that by proverbial texts included in *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (1992) are understood not only proverbs (the number of them equals 15,000) but also proverbial expressions, proverbial comparisons, superstitions, weather signs and wellerisms.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://downloads.hindawi.com/journals/joph/2015/605814.pdf>

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