

EWA KOZIOL-CHRZANOWSKA

WELL-KNOWN POLISH PROVERBS IN INTERNET MEMES

Abstract: The article analyzes the ways of using well-known Polish proverbs in the Internet memes. The research has been based on the lists of the Polish paremiological minima (gathered in 1998 and 2013). Proverbs taken from these lists were searched by the Google Images and, as a result, a corpus of 750 paremiological Internet memes was gathered.

The paper takes into consideration quantitative as well as qualitative aspects of paremic memes. The former shows that there is no correlation between the big number of occurrences of the given proverbs on the paremiological minimum lists and their popularity among meme creators. The latter focuses on the relations between verbal (proverbs) and graphic (drawings, photos) units joined together in memes, e.g.: combinations of a proverb and a picture, which confirms the sense of the proverb, collations in which the picture is linked to one of the lexical ingredients of the proverb and graphic forms connected with particular kinds of transformations in proverbs (e.g. the image of master Yoda from “Star Wars” changing the word order).

The results of the analysis indicate that meme creators know well the most popular of these units judging by the fact that the gathered corpus is quite big (750 examples) and covers most of the proverbs from the minimum list (62 out of 78). It can also be stated that proverbs have become a part of the new linguistic environment on the Internet, which is proved e.g. by the proverbs’ behavior according to the rules established by the Internet meme series). Some conclusions referring to the issue of the paremiological minimum have also been presented.

Keywords: Illustrations, memes, paremic Internet memes, paremiological minimum, Polish, proverbs

Introduction

Internet meme is a genre which very often refers to such aspects of culture as paintings, movies, commercials, popular quotations and many more. The presented paper focuses on one type

of them, i.e. a meme¹ which makes use of proverbs being one of the sources exploited by meme creators.

The phenomenon of using proverbs in Internet memes is significant for the following scientific perspectives:

1. in attempts to establish paremiological minima,
2. in the analysis of proverbs in the mass media,
3. in the challenge of collecting contextual proverbial data.

A paremiological minimum is understood as “a set of proverbs that all members of society know or an average adult is expected to know” (Đurčo, 2015: 183). Such minima have been gathered in the case of many languages. However, the methodological discussion is still revolving around issues such as ways of collecting data or the content of the minimum lists; the question arises if they should comprise only proper proverbs or proverbial expressions, comparisons, superstitions, etc. as well. Some scholars are even skeptical about the possibility of establishing a paremiological minimum:

A skeptical position to establish an *ideal* common paremiological minimum is held by Mokijenko. He states that the concept of a common paremiological minimum is not realistic. There exists a certain zone of familiar proverbs only, which comprise a core of national paremiology. But this core is very variable and differentiated among people. It depends on the particular social factors like age, education, origin, but also on the individual preferences of speakers, which discourages the determination of a generally valid common paremiological core (Mokijenko, 2012: 83f cited in Đurčo, 2015: 183).

Should it be assumed that the above-mentioned skeptical attitude is correct, the analysis of proverbs used in the Internet memes can be treated as one of the elements for establishing a general view on the knowledge of proverbs in the society.

A lot of attention has been devoted to the occurrence of proverbs in the mass media. This increasing interest concerns traditional proverbs as well as anti-proverbs and covers such areas as graffiti, cartoons, comic strips, films and music (Mieder, 2004: 150, 152). Some examples of such studies can be indicated in the Polish literature as well, e.g. those devoted to graffiti

(Szpila 2009, 2012), short text messages (Szpila 2006), the Internet (Ozga 2014, Piekot 2012, Szpila 2016). Internet memes – similarly to many other linguistic aspects of the mass media – can and should be investigated as well. On the one hand, the Internet provides a space for creating modern proverbs and for transformations of the traditional ones. On the other hand, it makes it possible for proverbs to spread freely: “In Europe and North America the genre of transformed proverbs is becoming more and more popular, especially due to the mass media and the Internet” (Litovkina and Mieder, 2006: 7)

One of the challenges, which scholars have to face while working on many different aspects of paremiography and paremiology, such as categorization (Lauhakangas, 2015: 65), is collecting the contextual data. As gathering speech corpora is much more difficult, time-consuming and expensive than preparing them basing on printed resources, investigating the Internet seems to be a more promising perspective. The language used on the Internet is in many respects similar to its oral representation, so the Internet can be treated as a huge spoken or semi-spoken corpus where proverbs can be observed along with their contexts. Semiotic combinations, like the Internet memes, are one of such contexts.

Research on proverbs used in the Internet memes sheds a new light on aforementioned issues. The novelty lies in the fact that proverbs can be observed in the environment that is authentic, lively and dynamic as well as original. The Internet is considered to be the only medium of communication (there is an interaction between the addressee and the addresser) in comparison with other media which only provide addressees with information (Skowronek, 2013: 239). From this perspective, observing proverbs on the Internet is similar to their analysis in the spoken corpus where the behavior of the ordinary language users and their interactions can be investigated.

The aim of this article is to check if the well-known proverbs appear in the Internet memes and to analyze the ways in which they are used. The study outlines that proverbs are copied into the memes in their canonical and transformed versions. Therefore, these transformations are not the main area of interest, since relations between the proverbs and the pictures joined together in

semiotic combinations are the most interesting phenomenon, characteristic for memes.

The research has comprised the Polish proverbs and Polish Internet memes. In order to optimize the results of the survey it seemed to be quite obvious that well-known proverbs should undergo the research. Investigating such examples lets the researcher gather a lot of memes because it can be assumed that Internet users create them mainly by using well-known proverbs. This is the reason why I decided to prepare a corpus of Internet memes containing proverbs stemming from the paremiological minima of the Polish language.

The collection of proverbs composed of the active and passive paremiological lexicon of the Polish users constitutes the paremiological minimum of the Polish language. Preparing the lists of the best-known proverbs contributes to the extension of the knowledge about how these units are used. In addition, systematic research on minimum lists provides answers to the questions regarding the disappearance of proverbs and it helps to create the collections of basic proverbs used for example in foreign language teaching (Szpila, 2002: 36).

The Polish paremiological minimum was prepared by Grzegorz Szpila who in 1998 carried out research whose results were published in 2002. He analyzed the information collected from 96 informants who were students of English Language and Literature at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow (Szpila, 2002: 37). Szpila asked his informants to list all the proverbs which they could think of in 20 minutes. It is also important to mention that the task was not clearly specified: the informants were not told what structures were treated as proverbs. The whole process of isolating the proverbs from elicited linguistic data was described by the author (Szpila, 2002: 39). The aim here is to focus on the most important issues for the given paper, i.e. the way of establishing versions of the proverbs included in the minimum list because it affects the result of research carried out on the Internet. Szpila grouped the collected proverbs in nests. The next step was to assign nests to the proverbs which are indicated as superordinate to the other variants in the *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażeń przysłowiowych polskich*² (Szpila, 2002: 39). Finally, the paremiological minimum consisted of 72 proverbs (each of

them was mentioned in the questionnaires at least eight times) (Szpila, 2002: 41, 42).

The research was repeated in 2013 (published in 2014) using the same methodological basis, but it was carried out in various cities, not only in Cracow and on a more numerous group of informants (545) (Szpila 2014: 91). As a result, the list of 254 proverbs was collected, whereas using the quantitative criteria from the previous (1998) research led to a different number of examples. In 1998 the minimum list consisted only of these proverbs which were indicated by at least 8% of informants. The research from 2013 did not have this limitation; however, the author separated in the article the examples assessing the same condition to be able to compare the results of both surveys. The result of this comparison shows that translating the results into percentages shows a big decrease in the proverbs on the minimum list – after 15 years the informants indicated 39 proverbs (72 in 1998) (Szpila 2014: 91-93).

The lists of both minima are given below.³ The first column shows the position of the given example on the minimum list gathered in 1998, the second one – in 2013. It can be noticed that 33 proverbs have no number in the column representing the results of the 2013 research, which means that they were not indicated by at least 8% of informants in 2013. At the end of the table six examples present in 2013 survey but absent in 1998 have been included.

1998	2013	Polish proverb	English equivalent	Translation /Meaning
1	15	Jak sobie pościelesz, tak się wyśpisz.	As a man makes his bed so must he lie in it.	
2	5	Lepszy wróbel w garści niż gołąb na dachu.	A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.	
3	3	Kto pod kim dołki kopie, sam w nie wpada.	He who digs a pit for others, falls in himself.	
4	8	Kto rano wstaje, temu Pan Bóg daje.	An early bird catches the worm. Early to bed and early to rise	

			makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.	
5	1	Gdzie kucharek sześć, tam nie ma co jeść.	Too many cooks spoil the broth.	
6	7	Baba z wozu, koniom lżej.		The horses have it easier when the woman leaves the carriage. /Getting rid of somebody is desirable.
7	2	Jak Kuba Bogu, tak Bóg Kubie.	No longer pipe, no longer dance.	As Jacob is for God, so God is for Jacob. /What you do to other people, they do the same to you.
8	10	W marcu jak w garncu.		March is like a pot. /The weather in March is varied.
9	19	Bez pracy nie ma kołaczy.	Diligence is the mother of success.	
10	11	Kwiecień-plecień, bo przeplata trochę zimy, trochę lata.		April is volatile: once it's winter, once it's summer.
11	16	Nosił wilk razy kilka, poniosą i wilka.	At length is the fox brought to the furrier.	
12	4	Żeby kózka nie skakała, toby nóżki nie złamała.	Better be safe than sorry.	
13	9	Prawdziwych przyjaciół poznajemy w biedzie.	A friend in need is a friend indeed.	
14	13	Czego się Jaś nie nauczy, Jan nie będzie umiał.		What little John doesn't learn, he won't know as an adult. /What you don't learn as a child you can't learn as an adult.

15	35	Kiedy luty, obuj buty.		When February comes, put on your shoes.
16	14	Nie czyń drugiemu, co tobie niemiłe.	Do as you would be done by.	
17		Dopóty dzban wodę nosi, dopóki się ucho nie urwie.	The pitcher goes often to the well but is broken last.	
18	32	Mądry Polak po szkodziu.		The Pole is wise after the accident has happened.
19	18	Darowanemu koniowi nie patrz w zęby.	Never look a gift horse in the mouth.	
20	12	Gdzie się dwóch pobije, tam trzeci korzysta.	Where two are fighting the third wins.	
21		Czego się skorupka za młodu napije, tym na starość trąci.	Just as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined.	
22		Mądrej głowie dość dwie słowie.	A word is enough to the wise.	
23	37	Nie ma tego złego, co by na dobre nie wyszło.	It is an ill wind that blows nobody good.	
24	6	Niedaleko pada jabłko od jabłoni.	Like father, like son. Like mother, like daughter. Like parents, like children. Like begets like.	
25		Nie mów hop, aż przeskoczysz.	Do not halloo till you are out of the wood.	
26	22	Nie wszystko złoto, co się świeci.	All that glitters is not gold.	
27	24	Raz na wozie, raz pod wozem.	Feast today and fast tomorrow.	

28	25	Gość w dom, Bóg w dom.		Guest at home, God at home. /Hosts should welcome and receive guests as if they were the most important people in the world.
29		Komu w drogę, temu czas.	Time to hit the road.	
30	17	Jedna jaskółka nie czyni wiosny.	One swallow does not make a summer.	
31	26	Kto wlezie między wrony, musi krakać jak i ony.	When in Rome, do as the Romans do.	
32		Mowa jest srebrem, a milczenie złotem.	Speech is silver, silence is gold-en.	
33		Nie chwal dnia przed zachodem słońca.	In the evening one may praise the evening.	
34		Cicha woda brzegi rwie.	Still waters run deep.	
35		Ten się śmieje, kto się śmieje ostatni.	He laughs best who laughs last.	
36		Kuj żelazo, póki gorące.	Strike while the iron is hot.	
37	34	Z próżnego i Salomon nie naleje.	You cannot get water out of a stone.	
38	27	Co dwie głowy to nie jedna.	Two heads are better than one.	
39		Lepiej późno niż wcale.	Better late than never.	
40	20	Gdzie diabeł nie może, tam babę pośle.	Where the devil cannot go himself, he sends a woman.	
41		Na pochyłe drzewo i kozy skaczą.		Goats jump on a leaning tree. /Weaknesses encourage people to take advantage of the situation.

42		Kruk krukowi oka nie wykole.	Crows do not pick crow's eyes.	
43		Spiesz się powoli.	More haste less speed. Make haste slowly.	
44		Panu Bogu świeczkę, a diabłu ogarek.		Light a candle for God and a candle-stub for the devil. /The situation when someone wants to satisfy two opposing sides.
45		Złej tanecznicy zawadzi i rąbek u spódnicy.	A bad workman always blames his tools.	
46		Jaki pan, taki kram.	Such carpenters, such chips.	
47		Na złodzieju czapka gore.	He that commits a fault thinks everyone speaks of it. He that has a great nose thinks everybody is speaking of it.	
48		Ziarnko do ziarnka, zrobi się miarka.	Many a little makes a mickle. Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves.	
49		Z wielkiej chmury mały deszcz.		Out of a big cloud comes heavy rain. /Expected enormous problems turn out to be less serious.
50		Co nagle, to po diable.	Haste makes waste	
51		Pokorne cielę dwie matki ssie.	Humility gets you everywhere.	
52		Kto się lubi, ten się czubi.		People who squabble like each other.
53	36	Lepszy rydz niż nic.	A little is better than none.	

			Half a loaf is better than no bread.	
54		Na dwoje babka wróżyła.	It could go one way or the other.	
55		Nie taki diabeł straszny, jak go malują.	The devil is not so black as he is painted.	
56		Przyjdzie koza do woza.		One day the goat will come to the carriage. /One day you will need my help!
57		Dzieci i ryby głosu nie mają.	Children should be seen but not heard.	
58	39	Indyk myślał i głowę mu ucięli.		The turkey was thinking and its head was cut. /There's no point in planning ahead as everything may change.
59		Każda pliszka swój ogonek chwali.	Every cook praises his own broth.	
60	31	Kłamstwo ma krótkie nogi.	Lies have short legs.	
61	29	Kocioł garnkowi przyganiał, a oba smołą.	The pot calls the kettle black.	
62		Praca ludzi wzbogaca.		Work enriches people.
63		Stara miłość nie rdzewieje.	Old love never dies.	
64		Co ma wisieć, nie utonie.	He that is born to be hanged shall never be drowned.	
65		Co się odwlecze, to nie uciecze.	What goes around, comes around.	
66		I wilk syty, i owca cała.		The wolf is no longer hungry and the sheep is still alive. /Everybody wins.

67		Jaka praca, taka płaca.	A good servant must have good wages.	
68		Kij ma dwa końce.	It is a mixed blessing.	
69		Kto późno przychodzi, sam sobie szkodzi.		Who comes late hurts himself.
70		Kto pyta, nie błądzi.		If you don't ask, you won't find out.
71		Strach ma wielkie oczy.		Fear has big eyes. /Fear makes things look twice as bad as they are.
72		Wszystkie drogi prowadzą do Rzymu	All roads lead to Rome.	
	21	Uderz w stół, a nożyce się odezwą.		When somebody knows they have done something wrong, they overreact thinking that other people know the truth and in this way it becomes apparent what they have done
	23	Wszędzie dobrze, ale w domu najlepiej.	Home sweet home.	
	28	Jak się człowiek spieszy, to się diabeł cieszy.	Haste makes waste.	
	30	Kto mieczem wojuje, od miecza ginie.	Live by the sword, die by the sword.	
	33	Czego oczy nie widzą, tego sercu nie żal.	What the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve over.	
	38	Nie wchodzi się dwa razy do tej samej rzeki.	No man ever steps in the same river twice.	

Since the aim of this paper is to investigate the usage of the well-known proverbs in the Internet memes, the first step of the research was to prepare the corpus of memes referring in their verbal form to the proverbs from the minimum list. It is important to stress the fact that this corpus consists only of the memes which included both the text and the picture (all purely textual or graphical memes were excluded). The memes were found on the Internet by the Google Images search engine. The procedure consisted of putting every single proverb from the Polish proverbial minimum in the search engine. In order to standardize the results, the quotation marks were used every time.⁴ The amount of the given results was limited; only the results from the first page were taken into consideration (the results were scrolled down till the end of the list, but the “show more results” button was not used). It should be added that two proverbs from the minimum list were searched in slightly different forms. The search of the two forms found on the minimum list gave no results and it seemed clear that the other forms are much more popular.⁵ 78 proverbs underwent the procedure, as the analyzed group consisted of the 72 proverbs gathered on the paremiological minimum list in 1998 and additional 6 proverbs which were newly indicated by the informants during the survey in 2013. The research was conducted from the end of 2015 to the beginning of 2017. As a result, a corpus of 750 memes has been gathered.

I assumed that this procedure is the most objective, as using search engines on the Internet websites containing memes restricts the results to the memes available on the particular websites. The Google Images works differently: this tool shows a lot of results which are useless for the given analysis (they do not represent memes), but on the other hand, it takes into account only those results which are “strong” enough to be presented on the list of the results. Gathering a bigger corpus of proverbial memes would probably require searching the meme websites or using the key words instead of putting the whole proverbs into the search engine.

As the functioning of the Google Images has a great impact on the results, it seems necessary to present at least the most important information about it. The search engine assigns the words to the images on the basis of some criteria. During this process

the name of the file, the alternative text,⁶ the anchor text⁷ and the textual elements adjacent to the image⁸ are taken into consideration. Google Search uses algorithms to order search engine results in a way that returns only the most relevant results at the top of the page and the less relevant results below. The more links from other websites there are, the higher the position of the searching result is. However, this is only one of many other criteria of search engine optimization used by Google. Most of them are kept secret (Bańko, 2013: 75). According to Mirosław Bańko who investigated the usefulness of the Google Images as a source of the linguistic knowledge, we should not undermine their diagnostic value. However, we should not trust them absolutely either as the factors affecting their choices are partly unknown and the results may be disturbed by programmers (Bańko, 2013: 75).

Quantitative analysis

While conducting the research on the usage of the proverbial minimum in the Internet memes quantitative as well as qualitative aspects have been taken into consideration. Quantitative research has covered the comparison of the amount of occurrences of a particular proverb in the paremiological minimum and in the corpora of memes. It should be stressed that the results are not fully representative as in the paremiological minimum the given amount of occurrences is always related to the amount of questionnaires filled in by informants (there were 96 of them in 1998 and 545 in 2013), whereas in the meme corpora there is no minimum and the meme corpora) from the quantitative perspective leads to interesting conclusions.

Both figures present the comparison of the amount of occurrences of particular proverbs in the paremiological minimum (light color) and in the Internet memes (dark color). Figure 1 shows the comparison of the amount of memes with the minimum list gathered in 1998 and figure 2 collected in 2013. The numbers on the horizontal axis represent the particular proverbs according to the above-presented list, but it should be noticed that the numbers assigned to the proverbs are different in both figures, as they represent occurrences in the research questionnaires. The smaller the ordinal number is, the more of-

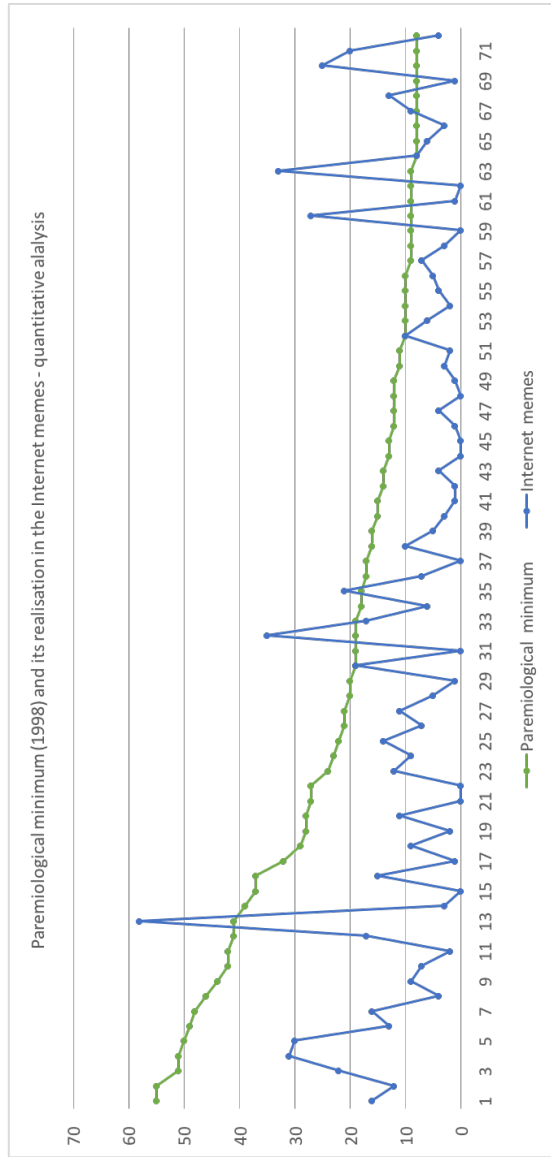


Figure 1

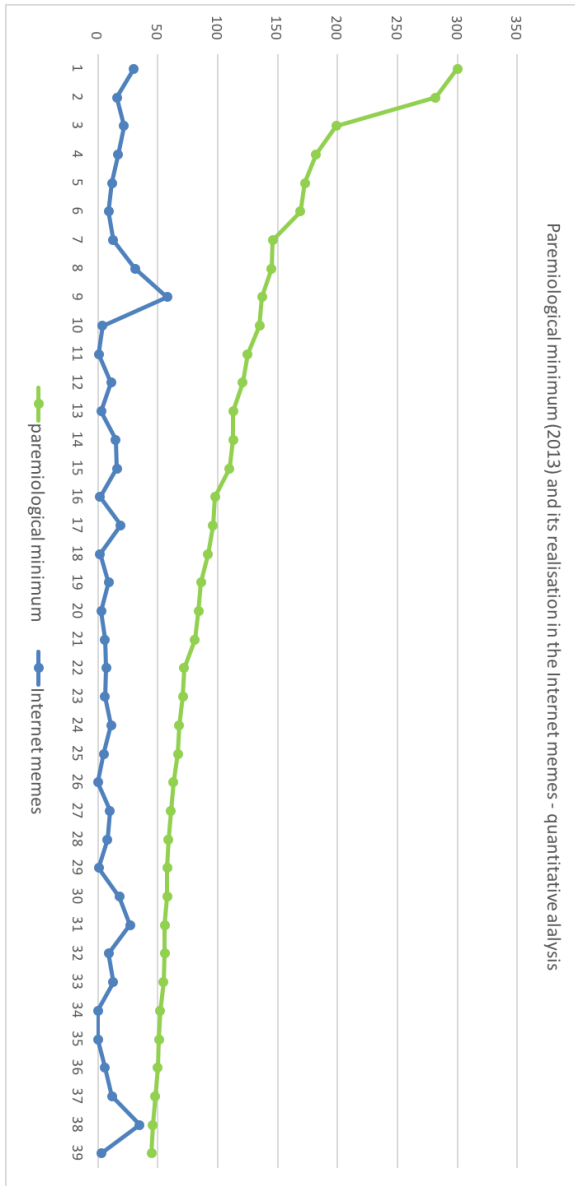


Figure 2

ten the proverb occurred in the questionnaire (proverb number one was the most popular among the informants whereas proverb number seventy-two was the least popular), e.g. *As a man makes his bed so must he lie in it* which was number 1 in 1998 and became number 15 in 2013. The vertical axis represents the amount of occurrences (from 0 to 300) of the proverbs in the questionnaires used in the paremiological minimum research (light print) and of the Internet memes containing particular proverbs (bold print).

The figures clearly show that there is no correlation between the big number of occurrences of the proverb in the paremiological minima lists and its popularity among meme creators. The popularity of proverb 1 in Figure 1 is average in the memes (16 examples containing this proverb), whereas proverb 13 is the most popular in memes (58 examples containing this proverb). Furthermore, some proverbs with quite high position in the minimum ranking have no representation in the Internet memes (e.g. numbers 15, 21, 22, 31 in Figure 1). To sum up, the results of the quantitative research show that the frequent usage of proverbs (expressed by their position on the minimum list) does not influence their usefulness for the memes creators.

Qualitative analysis

When considering the studied material from the qualitative point of view, the first conclusion is that the proverbs are used in the Internet memes in two main ways: in their canonical and transformed forms. The latter group consists of contaminations, proverbs with changed or added elements, proverbs being parts of the newly formed dialogs (where a well-known proverb became a question or an answer) and others.¹⁰ A canonical form is understood as a form identical to given one from the minimum list as well as slightly changed in a way that does not influence significantly the meaning (e.g. the inflectional change or substitution of the lexical element with its synonym). Truncated proverbs are joined to this group as well. According to Mieder (2004: 7) “[...] proverbs are often shortened to mere allusions owing to their general recognizability”. This statement lets us assume that from the

meme creator's point of view a shortened proverb is equal to the complete one. Both canonical and transformed groups are comparatively similar in the number of their elements, yet the transformed forms of proverbs are a little more popular. It confirms the statement pertaining to the presence of traditional proverbs in mass-media: "Standard proverbs in their dictionary form do appear in modern media texts, though not as frequently as their transformed variations" (Konstantinova, 2015: 278). The possible explanation of this phenomenon can be seen in the fact that transformed versions of proverbs give more possibilities of playing with their meaning by adding the pictures.

Let's start with the analysis of the **(1.0) proverbs in their canonical forms**. These memes are divided into six subcategories (from 1.1 to 1.6).

(1.1) Memes containing a **picture confirming the sense** of the proverb. The discussed group consists of the memes containing pictures illustrating a chosen interpretation of the sense of the proverb, e.g. the meme with the proverb *Too many cooks spoil the broth* (Fig. 3) joined with the photo of the lower house of the Polish Parliament. It is worth mentioning that the lower house in Poland is quite numerous and consists of 460 members. This fact is often criticized by the Polish society which raises a problem of high expenses and is generally not satisfied with the members' work.¹¹ According to the meaning of the proverb which is 'if too many people are involved in one task, the result is poor', the photo of the members of the lower house depicts the situation confirming this meaning.

An analogical mechanism of joining the picture and the proverb is illustrated in the meme *At length is the fox brought to the furrier* (Fig.4), which means 'somebody was able to harm the others for some time, but in the end he/she was punished for that'. In this example, the photo shows a police car placed on a tow car. The sense of this connection can be interpreted as follows: the police who are considered to do "bad things" to people like punishing them for breaking the traffic regulations, were treated in the same way and punished for their inappropriate behavior.

Figure 5 is another example. The picture showing two men sleeping in a very unusual and uncomfortable position is joined with the proverb *As a man makes his bed so must he lie in it*.

(1.2) Memes containing a **picture contradicting the sense** of the proverb. This group consists of few memes where the pictures very rarely contradict the meaning of the proverbs. In the following memes we can see two situations. In Figure 6 two men see an alien and consider if he is a Pole and a Catholic. If he is not, it is clear in the picture that they are not going to treat him well; yet the proverb says that hosts should welcome and receive guests as if they were the most important people in the world. The meme in Figure 7 contains the proverb which can be translated literally as *From the big cloud there is a small rain*, which means that expected enormous problems turn out to be less serious in the end. The photo refers to the non-metaphoric meaning and contradicts it by showing a huge cloud and heavy rain.

(1.3) Memes containing a **picture illustrating a lexical element** of the proverb. In some memes the pictures are not referred to the meanings of the proverbs but to their lexical elements, e.g. *In the evening one may praise the day* which is connected in some memes with the pictures of beautiful sunsets (in the Polish version the *sunset* is used instead of *evening*); *He laughs best who laughs last* – with the pictures of laughing people and animals; *He who digs a pit for others, falls in himself* – with the pictures of pits.



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7

(1.4) Memes containing a **picture without reference to the proverb**. The following meme (Fig. 8) presents a woman admiring a nice view. The proverb says: *A friend in need is a friend indeed*. It seems possible that in such cases the pictures are a kind of decoration and their role is to make the whole message more attractive and eye-catching.



Figure 8

(1.5) **False quotations.** Proverbs in their canonical versions consist of memes joining them with the portraits. It is obvious that well-known and constantly repeated proverbs were not coined by Paulo Coelho or Albert Einstein. These surprising junctions are probably made to achieve a comic result or to make the impression that the quoted words are more important. However, the last assumption should be confirmed by investigating more similar memes (there were not enough of them in the gathered corpus).

The more absurd the junction is, the funnier the result seems to be, e.g. the following memes suggest that the author of the Polish proverb which compares the variety of weather in March to a content of a pot (Fig. 9) was invented by a Brazilian author, Paulo Coelho and that a Chinese teacher or philosopher advises to *Do*

as you would be done by (Fig. 10). This group of memes can also be illustrated by the specific Polish example (Fig. 11) which shows a famous Polish actor who is the host of a TV quiz show. The show has been broadcast for over 20 years and it is associated, among others, with the jokes told by the host. The host from the meme says *At length is the fox brought to the furrier*.

(1.6) Memes containing a picture provoking the ambiguous meaning of the proverb. The example presented in Figure 12 makes use of the proverb *Two heads are better than one*. In the given meme the proverb was slightly modified, as the Polish equivalent of *are not (to nie)* is spelled as one word which is identical to the 3rd person singular form (*tonie*) of the verb *to drown (tonąć)*. The pronunciation in both situations is the same. The picture shows some heads and two of them are under water, which makes the connection between the verbal and visual parts of the meme.

Having considered the example with a modified form of the proverb, it is time to move on to the other main group of memes, consisting of **(2.0) transformed forms of proverbs** (contaminations, proverbs with changed or added elements and others). These memes are divided into two subcategories (from 2.1 to 2.2).



Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

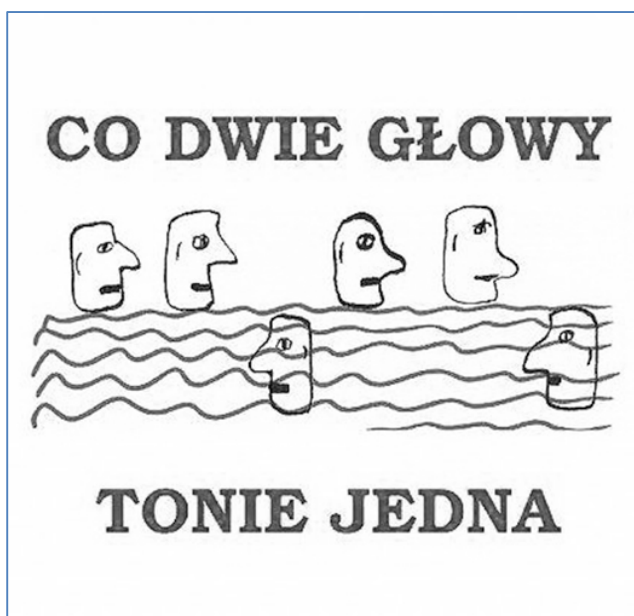


Figure 12

When the proverb is transformed, the picture in the Internet meme may illustrate the proverb, clarify or interpret it. **(2.1)** Memes containing a **picture being an illustration** of the proverb are exemplified by Figure 13. It uses the proverb *Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise* which is changed into *Early to bed and early to rise makes a man sleepy*. The picture reflects the meaning of the newly-made proverb and illustrates it.

(2.2) Memes containing a **picture being a clarification or interpretation** of the proverb are exemplified by Figure 14. *Where two are fighting the third wins* was changed into *Where two are fighting the third loses*. The photo demonstrates this kind of loss.



Figure 13



Figure 14

The proverb *Too many cooks spoil the broth* used in Figure 15 requires a more specific and detailed explanation. The literal translation of the Polish equivalent *There is nothing to eat where there are six cooks* is transformed in the meme into *Where there are six cooks five of them go to a camp*. By joining this transformation with the photo of Kim Jong-un, the supreme leader of North Korea, which is considered to be a totalitarian country, does the idea of the meme become clear and it lets addressees recognize the right meaning of the *camp*.

Figure 16 says: *We play fast pieces because the haste makes waste*. In the Polish version of this proverb *The haste makes the devil happy*, the equivalent of *waste* is *the devil is happy*. The transformed proverb sounds a little incomprehensible without the picture; the given photo of the band playing death metal, which is a kind of music associated by many people with the devil, conveys the whole message of the meme.

The last category (3.0) consists of memes containing **pictures and proverbs with specific transformations made by characters**. It can be observed that some of them, e.g. Yoda from “Star Wars”, permanently change proverbs. One of Yoda’s characteristic features is the way of speaking – he favors unusual word order (Pullum 2005), which is transferred into memes. Whenever Yoda uses a proverb, the standard word order is changed. Two proverbs get sometimes merged in one meme – the order of separate words remains natural, but the proverbs are divided into parts which are mixed together, e.g. *He who digs a pit for others, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise, but early to bed and early to rise falls in himself* (Fig. 17).

Another character who changes the proverbs in a particular way is presented in Figure 18. In the given example *One swallow does not make a summer* is used, but the word order is changed in a way that makes no sense: *One summer does not make a swallow*. It clearly illustrates the model of this kind of memes. By using the above-shown photo, meme creators change proverbs into aseman-tic clauses.



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

Another group of memes containing pictures causing particular kinds of transformations consists of those with a philoraptor. *Philoraptor* is a blend word of *philosopher* and *velociraptor* (a genus of dinosaur). It is “paired with captions depicting the dinosaur as being deeply immersed in metaphysical inquiries or unraveling quirky paradoxes” (Knowyourmeme, 2009). When a philoraptor is joined with a proverb, it behaves as usual and considers the proverb as a part of its philosophical questions or hypotheses. The philoraptor in Figure 19 asks *If it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, so is there anything really ill?*; the one in Figure 20 *If you don't ask, you won't find out so why speech is silver, silence is golden.*

The next group of Internet memes also involves a character who considers the sense of proverbs, but in a different way than in the memes with the philoraptor. They put together the photo of a man wearing glasses and the proverb treated as correct or wrong. The characteristic feature of these judgements is that they take into account “scientific” criteria in verifying their correctness. The structure order of the verbal part of the meme looks always the same: a proverb, *Correct* or *Wrong /BS* and the explanation. The proverbs and the considerations are presented in different colors. In Figure 21 we can see: *Still waters run deep. Bullshit! The sound doesn't influence the depth*; in Figure 22: *Better be safe than sorry. Correct. Eliminating the sources of tragedy prevents it.*

All the above-analyzed Internet memes containing canonical and transformed versions of proverbs are divided into groups in such a way that they allow for ordering them and drawing some conclusions. In fact, they could have been grouped differently, yet the groups would be less numerous and more difficult to analyze. However, atypical examples should not be utterly excluded from the analysis. That is the reason why it should be emphasized that the gathered corpus contains mixed examples. There is a group (1.5) named false quotations which was put in the typology among other groups starting with no. 1 (memes with proverbs in their canonical forms). However, it does not mean that there are no examples of false quotations consisting of transformed proverbs as e.g. Figure 23 is one of them: it shows a character of a judge appearing

kinds of memes, as these examples (canonical forms) were more numerous in the corpus. However, there are separate memes using this mechanism of combining the picture and the proverb, but also providing the transformation in the proverb.

To sum up, it is important to emphasize that the division of the studied material is focused on the most characteristic groups. Obviously, it would be possible to create smaller subcategories, which would be a mix of the analyzed groups, but their analysis was not the aim of this paper. Nonetheless, the specificity of this area shows that there is a need for future thorough analysis carried out on the basis of a bigger corpus of memes.



Figure 19



Figure 20



Figure 21



Figure 22



Figure 23

Conclusions

To recapitulate the main findings of the analysis it is important to recall the facts focused on the quantitative as well as qualitative points of view. The former showed that the popularity of proverbs (expressed by their position on the proverbial minimum list) does not influence their usefulness for the meme creators. Some of the proverbs from the minimum list are very popular in memes, whereas there are ten of them which have not been used in the Internet memes at all (no 15, 21, 22, 31, 37, 44, 45, 48, 59, 62 – according to the 1998 numeration). However, a corpus of 750 memes has been gathered. The quantitative perspective leads to the conclusion that well-known Polish proverbs are used in their canonical and altered forms in the Internet memes relatively often. In both cases, a few subcategories considering the relations between the pictures and the proverbs can be distinguished. Some of them exist according to the rules of popular memes series, e.g. *philosoraptor* or *Yoda*.

First of all, the results indicate that people who create the Internet memes consisting of proverbs know well the most popular of these units judging by the fact that the gathered corpus is quite big (750 examples) and covers most of the proverbs from the minimum list (62 out of 78). Meme creators use proverbs willingly as well as appropriately. The pictures and the proverbs have many various relations in memes, but in the corpora there are hardly any examples of memes proving that their creators do not understand correctly the meaning of the used proverbs.

Secondly, it can be stated that proverbs became a part of the new linguistic environment on the Internet which forms a platform of communication, creates new social communities and – to some extent – a new language. Proverbs behave in accordance with the rules established by the Internet meme series, e.g. *Yoda* changes syntax regardless of the kind of a text in the meme. It can be assumed that proverbs became an attractive material for meme creators; for the same reasons they are popular in newspaper headlines. They are short and can be even shortened into mere allusions understood by most readers. Journalists seem to enjoy playing with proverbs as they draw readers' attention (Mieder, 2004: 250) and so do meme creators.

The last conclusion refers to the issue of the paremiological minimum. As has already been mentioned, most of the examples

from the minimum list were used in the Internet memes. However, ten of them were not. What accounts for that? No congruity seems to be noticed in the omitted group of proverbs, their analysis does not lead to any generalized conclusions and they seem to be random. Nevertheless, two probable explanations can be considered. The first one regards the time distance. The paremiological minimum was established on the basis of the research carried out in 1998 and 2013, whereas the meme corpus was gathered between 2015 and 2017. In 19 years (starting from 1998) the minimum might have become less numerous or modified. This statement is also confirmed by the facts that the minimum list from 1998 consists of 72 proverbs, whereas the one from 2013 consists of 39 examples and all of the ten proverbs which have not been used in the Internet memes were the ones gathered in 1998. The other possible explanation is that proposed by Mokijenko who is skeptical about the possibility of preparing an ideal common paremiological minimum (Mokijenko, 2012: 83f cited in Āurčo, 2015: 183). The given analysis can be interpreted as the confirmation of his statement.

The aim of this paper was to find out if and how the paremiological minimum is used in the Internet memes. The answer to the first question is positive with the objection that not all the proverbs from the minimum list were used by meme creators. On the other hand, the analysis shows that meme creators use well-known Polish proverbs skillfully, showing a great variety of usage, creativity and imagination, which leads to the conclusion that the world of the Internet memes is another area of the mass media where memes have a room for development. The given analysis constitutes evidence against the statement that proverbs have little significance in modern societies.

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Notes

¹ The term *meme* is understood here as a “semiotic complex transmitted via ICT, usually in a function of the so-called Internet joke” (Kamińska 2011: 61).

² *Nowa księga przysłów i wyrażeń przysłowiowych polskich* edited by Julian Krzyżanowski consists of four volumes printed from 1969 to 1978 and is the biggest collection of Polish proverbs. The book comprises proverbs and proverbial expressions coming from the previous collections of proverbs as well as the ones elicited from the Polish literature (from the late 15th century to the early 20th century) and the data collected from sampling speakers (often in local dialects). The book is organized in an alphabetical order according to the main words of the proverbs; synonymous proverbs as well as those which are similar from the verbal perspective are joined together in variant groups. Each variant group has its main proverb (Świrko, 1978: 6–8) which was chosen to represent its group in the paremiological minimum (Szpila, 2002: 39).

³ The Polish proverbs are followed by their English equivalents. In case of no equivalent, the meaning of the proverb is provided.

⁴ The quotation marks are used in order to return only those pages that match the search terms exactly, which means that Google excludes the inflected or derivative forms as well as the results with the changed order of the words.

⁵ This change regards proverbs no. 20 (the aspect of the verb was changed) and no. 58 (the names of the days of the week were added – this change makes the proverb rhyme).

⁶ The alternative text is a word or phrase that can be inserted as an attribute in an HTML document to inform Web site viewers of the nature or contents of an image. The alt text appears in a blank box that would normally contain the image. Alt text is useful when an image link is not available because of a broken or changed URL or some other difficulties (Multimedia and graphics glossary, 2012).

⁷ The anchor text, link label, link text, or link title is the visible, clickable text in a hyperlink. The words contained in an anchor text can determine the ranking that the page will receive by search engines (Wikipedia, 2016).

⁸ E.g. titles and descriptions.

⁹ *basic amount* is understood as a starting set of results provided by the search engine (before excluding all purely textual or graphic memes).

¹⁰ Classifying the dialogs as transformations might be controversial, as some proverbs become a part of such dialogs, but are not changed, e.g. *What do you think would be the gravedigger’s reaction to the statement “He who digs a pit for others, falls in himself”?* On the other hand, there are examples of such connections in which the proverbs undergo some transformations, e.g. *How many cooks are there in Kenya? Too many because too many cooks spoil the broth.*

¹¹ In the moment of preparing the paper the latest research (Oct. 2016) showed that 60 per cent of informants were dissatisfied with the work of the lower house of the Parliament according to the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS) (Public Opinion Research Center Communicate No 143/2016: 1).

Memes:

Figure 3:

http://img7.demotyATORYfb.pl/uploads/201210/1351714555_zfbmod_600.jpg
[Accessed 7 September 2015].

Figure 4:

http://img5.dmtY.pl/uploads/1255179449_by_Bazylox_600.jpg [Accessed 9 September 2015].

Figure 5:

http://img4.dmtY.pl/uploads/201003/1268306571_by_bonzay_600.jpg [Accessed 5 September 2015].

Figure 6:

http://demotyATORY.pl/uploads/201212/1355319786_8jvr5v_600.jpg [Accessed 21 September 2015].

Figure 7:

<http://images4.bibsy.pl/98NgsthE/z-duzej-chmury-maly-deszcz.jpeg> [Accessed 1 October 2015].

Figure 8:

http://www.temysli.pl/upload/images/large/2014/11/0_0_0_1746484060.jpg
[Accessed 10 September 2015].

Figure 9:

http://fabrykamemow.pl/uimages/services/fabrykamemow/i18n/pl_PL/201203/1332513228_by_ivica83_500.jpg [Accessed 8 September 2015].

Figure 10:

<http://pl.memgenerator.pl/mem-image/nie-czyn-drugiemu-co-tobie-nie-mile-pl-ffffff> [Accessed 11 September 2015].

Figure 11:

<http://pl.memgenerator.pl/mem-image/nosil-wilk-razy-kilka-poniesli-i-wilka-pl-ffffff-2> [Accessed 9 September 2015].

Figure 12:

http://th.interia.pl/51_be3858da84850186/codwie.jpeg [Accessed 1 September 2015].

Figure 13:

<http://images03.bebzol.com/data/201410/162018-d014e34fd1a187caeb5a10594ff940e7.jpg> [Accessed 5 September 2015].

Figure 14:

<http://z1.demoty.pl/793fed04ad430a1986925ffafcb95a83712c819c/gdzie-dwoch-sie-bije> [Accessed 11 September 2015].

Figure 15:

http://pobierak.jeja.pl/images/8/d/c/145145_gdzie-kucharek-szesc.jpg [Accessed 7 September 2015].

Figure 16:

http://img3.demotywatoryfb.pl/uploads/201003/1267548086_by_banzer0_600.jpg [Accessed 9 January 2017].

Figure 17:

http://i1.memy.pl/obrazki/753a332420_kto_pod_kim_dolki_kopie_temu_pan_bog_daje.jpg [Accessed 5 September 2015].

Figure 18:

http://fabrykamemow.pl/uimages/services/fabrykamemow/i18n/pl_PL/201210/1350402422_by_mre3_500.jpg [Accessed 24 September 2015].

Figure 19:

http://i1.memy.pl/obrazki/05c9617728_jesli_nie_ma_tego_zlego_co_by_na_dobre_nie_wyszlo.jpg [Accessed 11 September 2015].

Figure 20:

http://fabrykamemow.pl/uimages/services/fabrykamemow/i18n/pl_PL/201305/1370001411_by_gucio5i6_500.jpg [Accessed 24 September 2015].

Figure 21:

http://fabrykamemow.pl/uimages/services/fabrykamemow/i18n/pl_PL/201207/1343579370_by_Chocholcia_500.jpg [Accessed 28 September 2015].

Figure 22:

http://fabrykamemow.pl/uimages/services/fabrykamemow/i18n/pl_PL/201207/1343767490_by_jowisz108_500.jpg [Accessed 9 September 2015].

Figure 23:

http://fabrykamemow.pl/uimages/services/fabrykamemow/i18n/pl_PL/201212/1355518340_by_igrek_o_500.jpg [Accessed 5 September 2015].

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Ewa Koziół-Chrzanowska
Institute of the Polish Language, Polish Academy of Sciences
al. Mickiewicza 31
31-120 Kraków
Poland
E-mail: ewa.koziol06@gmail.com; ewa.koziol-
chrzanowska@ijp-pan.krakow.pl