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Ordspråk i bruk. Användning av ordspråk i dramadialog. (Proverbs in Play. Usage of Proverbs in Drama Dialogue). By Anders Widbäck. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk, 1995. Pp. 184.

Anders Widbäck's thesis over usage of proverbs in drama dialogue is a rare experiment in the Swedish linguistic research. The main national collections are *Ordspråk och talesätt* (Proverbs and wellerisms) of Pelle Holm (1965) and *Svenska ordspråk* (Swedish proverbs) of Fredrik Ström (1981 [1929]). Widbäck also mentions Inger Lindell's *En medeltida ordspråkssamling på fornsvenska* (The collection of medieval Swedish proverbs, 2011). In order to get an idea of the former Swedish paremiology one must mainly consult the introductions of these proverb collections.

Widbäck points out that there are certain proverbs that are missing from proverb collections. In addition to censorship of coarse and obscene expressions there is a lack of irony and play with cunning connotations in old collections. Instead, there is over-representation of proverbs that include abstract concepts. In this connection it is good to be reminded – as Widbäck does – that in 18th century France there was such a craze of using proverbs in theater plays (*proverbe dramatique*) that the whole dialogue could be constructed of proverbs. This certainly had its influence in Swedish drama art.

Actually, Widbäck has a Finnish-Swedish predecessor, Rolf Pipping (active from 1930s to 1960s), who also studied proverbs in plays. Pipping was interested in how they were used for characterizing persons. Pipping was quite advanced for his time, because he already emphasized the importance of knowing the context in which a proverb is used. He also urged to differentiate between the semantic contents and pragmatic use of proverbs, which brought focus to the meaning of a proverb.

PROVERBIUM 34 (2017)

The focus of Widbäck's thesis is on the communicative functions of proverbs and on how information is disseminated through proverbs. He concentrates on the interpersonal meta-function of proverbs. The theoretical basis of the study is systemic-functional linguistics. Widbäck's source material consists of 45 Swedish plays published between 1700 and 2000. He used the corpus called Swedish drama dialogue.

Widbäck's premise is that proverbs violate standard usage of language. His analysis of the meaning of a figurative expression is fine. In the case of proverbs, we need to broaden the term figurative meaning. Sometimes there is a transfer of meaning by metaphors or metonymy and sometimes the figurative meaning comes from the connotations and from other culturally specific inferences linked with it.

There have long been difficulties with agreeing upon a common area of study among and between scholars studying proverbs and other expressions with a stable form. Most often the aim of research defines the limits of the material considered. Widbäck includes wellerisms (*ordstäv*) and sayings (*talesätt*) in dealing with proverbs. He also counts allusions in his material provided that the kernel of a proverb lies within. He devotes a chapter for the definition of a proverb. His own aim is to deal with functions of proverbs. Widbäck's material allows a diachronic perspective to proverb use and its possible change.

In my (Finnish) dissertation (2004), which was also about functions of proverbs, I concentrated on the speaker's point of view in order to be able to classify the situations. Widbäck doesn't hesitate to take both user's and listener's points of view for his subject. The drama material highlights two main functions of proverbial speech: social – which refers in the first instance to values and norms – and communicative functions when information is mediated. Proverbial information is not so much about special knowledge as written by Holm (1965): a proverb speaks about a single case but it refers to life in general.

Widbäck specifies his research question as a task to sort out, how the proverbs in Swedish drama dialogue are distributed to interpersonal speech acts. He found 14 different speech acts, in which he saw different emphasis on the type of information given (to comment, to describe, to clarify, to strengthen), how this information was given as an opinion (to affirm it, to excuse it, to

make an argument, to oppose, to rebuke, to warn) and how emotional and evaluative it was (criticizing, calming, consoling, abusing).

Commenting was the most common way to use proverbs in Swedish drama during three hundred years. Abusing and consoling was rare, but criticizing was the second common context for the use of proverbs. If I compare Widbäck's results to my observations about use of proverbs in different authentic situations, they are very similar. In my multicultural material people's need to explain, justify and get approval for their deeds and opinions was distinct. For my theory of increasing tension in social interaction and a need to decrease it Widbäck's speech act of commenting is too general or neutral (Lauhakangas 2004). Of course, sometimes it is difficult to assess the tone of commenting with a proverb when you have no clue of nonverbal communication.

Widbäck discusses how authentic conversation and dialogue in a drama differ from each other. The discussion should be continued. We have a challenge in comparing textual (social media) and oral communication.

Another difference between an authentic situation and drama is, how much the personal interests of those taking part in conversations influence the chosen speech acts. In contrast to real-life situations the playwright leads the story in the drama dialogue. In any case, a proverb brings to a discussion an elevated relevance principle. It is filled with semantic content in a condensed form. Widbäck compares a proverb to a line in a play and remarks that neither is said without an aim behind it. In this way, a drama text is comparable to authentic conversation.

A proverb is considered a ready-made lingual resource but this does not prevent it from being converted and from giving it new meanings. Even synonymous proverbs can mean different things.

Widbäck recalls Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistics. It is an approach to linguistics that considers language as a social semiotic system. According to Halliday any act of communication involves choices. Widbäck (p. 79) opposes those system linguists who claim that in bound sentences there could not be any speech acts. Namely, a proverb has its own separate function even when it is a part of a bound sentence. Widbäck

points out that with proverbs you don't merely do simple verbal acts but use combinations of them.

Widbäck has a good analysis on how the term 'interpersonal metafunction' applies to studying proverbs, how experience and social interaction and their wording work with proverb use.

In his conclusions Widbäck has an interesting approach to information and proverbs. Language using proverbs is conveying information, if it is compared to direct orders, questions or requests. But listening to a proverb means that we meet authority and feel distance.

Widbäck notices that proverbs are used almost in the same way in recent plays as in Swedish drama during three hundred years. Here are examples from the 18th and the 20th centuries:

TORBIÖRN Så tag mig i hand Jungfru Sara Lotand och ifrån den dagen är du en af mig utkorad Fru til Stollebo och til all min egendom. (Stiger fram och kysser henne.) Jag war intet för hastig nu hoppas jag.

SARA (Niger.) Åh nei kiära Juncker. (För sig sielf) Fy huru han lucktar af Tobak, men *man får intet si en gifwen häst i munnen*, har jag hört. [Oh no, my dear Lord. (To herself). Pooh, how he smells of tobacco, but *Don't look the gift horse in the mouth*, I have heard.]

Swenska sprätthöken (A comedy of Carl Gyllenborg, 1737)

DAVID Ja, det har jag också. Finns det ingenting som kan få er att skiljas?

ELIN Skulle du vilja det?

DAVID Nej, varför skulle jag vilja det? **Man vet vad man har men aldrig vad man får.** [No, why should I want it? You know what you have but you don't know what you will get.]

Natten är dagens mor (A play of Lars Norén, 1982)

Still, some differences came out. The writers of the old plays seem to include more factual arguments than later playwrights, who prefer individual and personal problems.

Widbäck's material strengthened the premise that proverbs are used both inside different age groups and from an elder person to a younger one. The results of the study show a clear de-

cline in use over time in the number of proverbs in the material. They are used most frequently in the 18th century to argue and oppose, while in the 20th century they tend to be used to criticize. He formulates a research problem for the future: Can we see the same kind of tendencies when a more comprehensive material is studied? I would also wait for this kind of research to be carried out for example using the conversations on the discussion forums of social media.

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