

CYNTHIA KÁLMÁNOVÁ

*Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs*. By Anna T. Litovkina. Komárom, Slovakia: János Selye University Press, 2017. Pp. 259.

Anna T. Litovkina's works easily prove the fact that she can confidently talk and write about proverbs, anti-proverbs and humour: she is a Hungarian folklorist who is originally from Russia, also worked in Poland and Slovakia and published more than one hundred articles on folklore and linguistics, twelve books on proverbs and she is the co-editor of eleven volumes on humour, most of them written in English.

Being part of these categories, Litovkina's most recent book is titled *Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs* and it was published in 2017. The textbook consists of two main parts, plus the Introduction and References. Firstly, in the introduction she discusses the topics of contradictory proverbs and people's doubts in the truth of proverbs; furthermore, she deals with the background of anti-proverb research and terminology. The two main parts are divided differently. The first part includes five chapters on how to use Anglo-American proverbs and anti-proverbs in the language classroom in connection with Litovkina's own experiences and she also offers various exercises to improve students' conversational and writing skills. The last two chapters address tales, fables, and stories. On the other hand, the second part of the book contains appendices.

Beside the two main sections, it is important to deal closely with the Introduction. Namely, in this part Litovkina presents an interesting contradiction. With great examples she manages to prove that while many proverbs are expressed as truthful and cannot be judged, at the same time they cannot be considered as absolute truths either. In consequence, it is easy to tell that many proverbs contradict each other: "Look before you leap. – He who hesitates is lost" (p. 10). Litovkina mentions that this particular proverb is discussed in Charles Osgood's satirical essay "*Better Safe than Sorry When It Comes to Sayings*" as a perfect example

for the case that proverbs never quite seem to fit a given situation (p. 10). While it is undeniably true that proverbs and even anti-proverbs are mostly and very often highly stereotypical, their folk wisdom and humorous prudence precisely originates from the fact that they are definitely able to fit to any kind of condition and not just to one very definite situation. Litovkina supports this thought with Wolfgang Mieder's statement saying, "Since proverbs reflect human experiences of all types, they are bound to contradict each other just as life is made up of multitude of contradictions" (p. 11-12). In the next chapter she continues this idea with Mieder's following observation, pointing out that "We can thus characterize the particular choice of proverbs in any given context by the popular proverb 'If the shoe (proverb) fits, wear (use) it'" (p. 12). However, next to proverbs, the book also deals with proverb parodies too, also known as anti-proverbs. At this point it is worth explaining some terminology: notably, what an anti-proverb is. Litovkina presents the term "*Antispruchwort*" (anti-proverb) coined by Wolfgang Mieder, which already has been widely accepted by scholars all over the world. Therefore, anti-proverbs in English are also known as *alterations, mutations, parodies, transformations, variations, wisecracks, deliberate proverb innovations, or fractured proverbs* (p.15), ergo, a usually humorous parody of a well-known proverb. It is confirmed that the popularity of anti-proverbs increased during the last decade, especially due to mass media and the Internet. Proverb parodies appear in a broad range of generic contexts, they are used in advertising or in poetry, in fables, tales, and stories; however, some proverb transformations were already used in the eighteenth century. This suggests that there is possibly no sphere of life where anti-proverbs are not yet used.

After the Introduction, where Litovkina focused on the question of proverb contradiction, as well as reviewing the background of anti-proverb history and terminology, the book divides into two parts.

Part I consists of seven chapters. The first one demonstrates various ways of how Anglo-American proverbs can be used in the language classroom. On the importance of proverbs as effective pedagogical medium Litovkina says, "First, proverbs are an important part of the American cultural heritage." She also adds

that they are easy to learn and easy to memorize, because they often contain rhyme or word-repetition (p. 43). Starting with this chapter, the main idea of the textbook becomes clear. Specifically through the following subchapters Litovkina gives concrete advice and even presents exercises in which proverbs may be used to help with the learning of grammar and syntax, phonetics, culture, plus developing vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing skills.

In the second chapter she briefly discusses her experiences in teaching courses on *Anglo-American Proverbs* and *Proverbs in an American Cultural Context* at various Hungarian universities and colleges. While this is indeed a short chapter, it is interesting to see how she tries to connect university courses on Anglo-American proverbs in an American Cultural Context. According to her, proverbs should have a major role in the teaching of American English, American culture and literature. Her experience, however, shows that university students have almost no prior knowledge of the mentioned proverbs, which was perhaps due to the lack of textbooks on this topic. While some of Mieder's books on the topic already existed, for ESL students those might have been unknown then. Thus, we get to chapter three. After the above-mentioned situation, Anna T. Litovkina decided to change this condition and through the upcoming years she provided books on the topic, all written by herself (a textbook "*A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away*" and a collection of tales, fables and stories, "*Once Upon a Proverb: Old and New Tales Shaped by Proverbs*") or in cooperation with Wolfgang Mieder (anti-proverb collections "*Twisted Wisdom: Modern Anti-Proverbs*" and "*Old Proverbs Never Die, They Just Diversify: A Collection of Anti-Proverbs*"). Also, while presenting these books she does not just describe proverbs and anti-proverbs, but gives instructions on how to use them in language classes or during university courses.

The fourth and fifth chapters introduce various activities on when proverbs and anti-proverbs are used in the language classroom. These exercises in full length can also be found in Litovkina's highly helpful book "*A Proverb a Day Keeps Boredom Away*" that contains over 450 frequently used American English proverbs and more. Besides, she points out, if the teacher is able to create a relaxed learning atmosphere, the students might trans-

form from observers into active participants. As proven in chapter six and seven, the same can happen while learning about proverbs in tales, fables, and stories. Litovkina's experience confirms that with the help of proverbs students are able to develop their skills in communication or creative writing, they can use proverbs in innovative ways and successfully learn more about the American culture, language, and literature.

The second main part of the book consists of appendices, organized into nine chapters. Part II lists a number of helpful proverb collections, such as the most frequently listed proverbs in folklore archives, in the American media, in 20<sup>th</sup> century written sources or frequently used proverb parodies, anti-proverbs in advertisement and in tales, fables, and stories created by university students. There are also final test and lesson samples included.

Taking everything into account, the relevance of "*Teaching Proverbs and Anti-Proverbs*" as a textbook resides in the fact that after some theoretical parts, it offers chapters with precise and detailed suggestions what teachers may use in a new way, while including proverbs and anti-proverbs in their curricula. In this case the book truly stays faithful to its main purpose. And although the book mainly focuses on the introduction of Anglo-American proverbs and anti-proverbs into second-language education, with the additional real-life examples and the presence of students' palpable creativity and enthusiasm on the pages makes the whole text not only educational, but easy to read and quite enjoyable.

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